



Psychological disorders related to laughter and humor are a complex and still little explored subject, which raises fascinating questions about the boundaries between normal and pathological in the expression of these universal behaviors. While laughter is generally considered a sign of mental health and well-being, there are situations where it can become problematic, inappropriate, or even symptomatic of an underlying disorder.

Among the disorders most frequently associated with disruptions of laughter and humor, we find certain neurological conditions like Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis or strokes. These pathologies can lead to involuntary, uncontrollable laughs unrelated to the emotional context, known as spasmodic or pathological laughs.

For example, a patient with Parkinson's disease may be seized by sudden and prolonged fits of laughter for no apparent reason, which may cause embarrassment and misunderstanding for them and their surroundings.

These pathological laughs often result from lesions or dysfunctions in the brain circuits involved in emotional regulation and motor control, such as the prefrontal cortex or the basal ganglia. They can also be triggered by certain medications used to treat these diseases, like levodopa in Parkinson's disease.

A 65-year-old man with Parkinson's disease reports that since he started a new dopaminergic treatment, he is subject to episodes of uncontrollable laughter that can last several minutes, without being able to stop them. These episodes often occur at inopportune times, like during serious conversations with his relatives, which creates misunderstanding and distress in him and his family.

Mood disorders, like depression or bipolar disorders, can also be accompanied by disruptions of laughter and humor. In depression, there is often a marked decrease in reactivity to laughter and a loss of interest in humorous situations, which can be perceived as bland, annoying, or even hurtful.

A patient suffering from severe depression confides that she can no longer bear to hear her colleagues laugh and joke during coffee breaks, as it painfully reminds her of how disconnected she feels from any form of joy and lightness.

Conversely, in the manic phases of bipolar disorders, one can observe an exacerbation of humor and laughter, often associated with disinhibition, irritability and inappropriate behaviors. People in a manic phase may chain jokes and puns recklessly, without considering the social context or the reactions of their surroundings.

A man suffering from bipolar disorder says that during his manic episodes, he becomes "the life of the party", chaining risqué jokes and antics to make everyone laugh. But this frantic and unfiltered humor often ends up making his interlocutors uncomfortable and gets him into relational and professional trouble.

Some anxiety disorders, like social phobias or obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), can also interfere with the expression and perception of laughter and humor. People suffering from social phobia may develop intense anxiety at the idea of laughing in public, fearing to attract attention to them or to be judged negatively.

A young woman suffering from severe social phobia explains that she dreads above all situations where she might be expected to laugh, like comedy shows or evenings with friends. She worries that her laughter may be perceived as strange, too loud, or inappropriate, and so prefers to refrain from laughing in the presence of others.

In OCD, obsessions and compulsions may sometimes take a humorous turn, with intrusive thoughts or rituals focused on absurd themes or puns. But this obsessive humor is rarely a source of pleasure or relief, and can instead reinforce anxiety and distress.

A patient suffering from OCD reports that he is constantly assailed by absurd and disturbing humorous thoughts, like risqué puns or mental images of threatening clowns. Despite the apparently "funny" nature of these obsessions, they are experienced as a true mental torture that exhausts him and prevents him from focusing on anything else.

Finally, certain personality disorders, like histrionic personality or antisocial personality, can manifest through excessive or inappropriate use of humor and laughter. People with a histrionic personality can use humor in a theatrical and exaggerated way to draw attention to them and to get approval from others, while people with an antisocial personality can use humor in an aggressive and sarcastic way to hurt or manipulate others.

A woman with a histrionic personality is described by her relatives as "always playing the clown", multiplying jokes and antics to be the center of attention. But behind this humorous facade often lurks a great insecurity and an insatiable need for social validation.

Faced with these various disorders, the role of the Laughter Therapist is not to diagnose or propose a medical or psychological treatment, which are within the competence of mental health professionals. But it is essential to be aware of these issues in order to adapt their practice in an enlightened and benevolent way.

For example, when encountering a person with pathological laughs linked to a neurological disease, the Laughter Therapist will make sure to create a safe and non-judgmental space where these laughs can be greeted with gentleness and understanding. They may suggest breathing and relaxation exercises to help the person better manage these involuntary manifestations, while encouraging them to discuss it with their treating physician.

Similarly, when dealing with a person suffering from depression or anxiety, the Laughter Therapist will be careful not to impose laughter in a forced or artificial way, but to invite the person to gradually reconnect with their sensations of pleasure and joy, at their own pace and according to their abilities. They may suggest gradual and adapted exercises, starting with smiles and soft laughter and progressing to more expressive forms if the person feels ready.

Beyond these specific adaptations, the Laughter Therapist can play a valuable role in helping people suffering from psychological disorders reconnect with authentic and liberating laughter, a source of improved well-being and resilience. By creating safe and kind laughter spaces, by normalizing and downplaying laughter related difficulties, they can contribute to destigmatizing these disorders and support people in their journey toward overall well-being.

A participant in a laughter workshop, who has been followed for several years for an anxiety disorder, testifies: "At the beginning, I was very afraid to let go and laugh in a group. But over the sessions, thanks to the benevolence and attentiveness of the Laughter Therapist, I was able to relax and gradually let go. Today, even though my anxiety is still there, I feel lighter and more confident. Laughter has become a valuable resource for me, a tool to tame my fears and reconnect to the joy of living."

Understanding psychological disorders related to laughter and humor is therefore essential for any Laughter Therapist who wishes to carry out their profession with ethics, discernment and humanity. By being attentive to each person's specific difficulties, by adapting their practice in a refined and respectful way, they can become a true ally on the journey of healing and self-fulfillment, whatever the disorder may be.

Key points to remember:

- Psychological disorders related to laughter and humor are a complex and little explored subject, which raises questions about the boundaries between normal and pathological.
- Certain neurological conditions (Parkinson's, multiple sclerosis, strokes) can lead to involuntary and uncontrollable laughs, known as spasmodic or pathological laughs.
- Mood disorders (depression, bipolar disorders) may be accompanied by a decrease or an exacerbation of laughter and humor.
- Anxiety disorders (social phobias, OCD) may interfere with the expression and perception of laughter and humor.
- Some personality disorders (histrionic, antisocial) can be manifested by excessive or inappropriate use of humor and laughter.
- The role of the Laughter Therapist is to be aware of these issues to adapt their practice in an enlightened and benevolent way, without giving diagnosis or proposing medical or psychological treatment.
- The Laughter Therapist can help people suffering from psychological disorders reconnect with authentic and liberating laughter, a source of well-being and resilience, by creating safe and benevolent laughter spaces.
- Understanding psychological disorders related to laughter and humor is essential to practice the profession of Laughter Therapist with ethical, discernment and humanity, by being attentive to each one's specific difficulties.