When the Mind Jokes, the Unconscious Speaks: Gen Z's Tragic Humor and The Therapeutic Promise of Freudian Psychoanalysis

By

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Abstract

The current thesis will examine the role of humor, its unconscious connotations, and the therapeutic promise of Freudian psychoanalysis to address humor and to bring about more thorough healing. The thesis focuses on Generation Z and considers the therapeutic opportunities presented by their use of humor to face adversity. This thesis focuses on the specific release mechanism humor holds and the origin that drives the release. In addition, this work analyzes psychoanalytic mechanisms that can unveil the truth behind the humorous defense. Through careful analysis of past and present literature on Freudian psychoanalytic theory and the philosophy and psychology of humor, this thesis demonstrates that humor is an essential key to unlocking the unconscious mind and, therefore, offers, in a therapeutic context, profound insight into a client's inner processes and turmoil. This research suggests that Freudian psychoanalysis offers a beneficial approach to healing Generation Z's tragic humor by paying attention to the unconscious processes.

Keywords: Humor, Psychoanalysis, Catharsis, Generation Z, The Unconscious

Table of Contents

Introduction……5

Literature Review……...5

Background on Humor and Generation Z…….....5

Psychoanalytic Approach to the Humor Employed by Generation Z …….....14

Rationale, Research Purpose, and Question…….....25

Present Analysis…….....26

The Deeper Meaning and Origin of Humor…….26

a. The Structure and Process of Humor Within the Unconscious…….28
b. Revisiting Childhood: Humor's Psychoanalytical Origin…….31
c. Trauma's Improper Cognitive Integration…….....34

Using Freudian Psychoanalysis to Uncover the Comic Façade……35

a. Free Association……...36
b. Dream Interpretation……38
c. Resistance Interpretation…….....39
d. Transference Analysis and Interpretation…….41
e. The Therapeutic Promise of Freudian Psychoanalysis…….42

Critical Reflections and Limitations……...43

Conclusion…….....44

References……...45

When the Mind Jokes, the Unconscious Speaks: Gen Z's Tragic Humor and The Therapeutic Promise of Freudian Psychoanalysis

Trauma has clothed itself as humor through Generation Z's choice to highlight personal trauma humorously (Xu, p.1, 2020). Individuals using humor to address adversity is an imperative defense mechanism that would be beneficial to address through the lens of Freudian psychoanalytic therapy. An analyst might use Generation Z's humorous approach to trauma to facilitate more profound psychological freedom from their distress. Despite substantial past theoretical literature focused on using humor to cope, research has been paused since the 20th century, leaving a lack of literature that (i) revisits humor as an emotional release connected to trauma and (ii) directly examines humor used by Gen Z individuals, and (iii) providing a potentially positive therapeutic opportunity within psychoanalytic contexts. This thesis will address these gaps in a 21st-century context, discussing how Freudian psychoanalysis would be a beneficial treatment for addressing this coping mechanism. To make this case, the thesis will examine the specific release mechanism humor holds and how it has the potential to play a crucial role in creating more profound psychological liberation from trauma and pain.

Literature Review

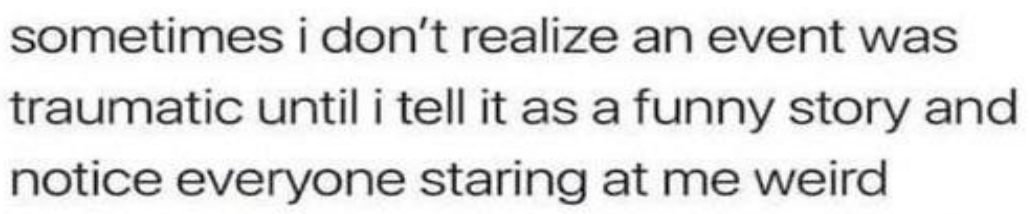
This thesis will address the nature of humor *solely* referencing trauma and the therapeutic promise Freudian psychoanalysis holds to address this humor, specifically within the context of Generation Z. To begin the approach to this topic, it is imperative first to distinguish between "humor" and "comedy." When discussing humor, an individual may immediately think of how it fits under the umbrella of comedy; however, there is an important difference between the two, and this paper discusses humor and not comedy. In

a video-recorded interview, the famous comedian Dick Gregory discusses this difference. He states, “Humor is what we all do; comedy is professional people who get paid” (Visionary Project, 50-:54, 2010). Those who engage in comedy create something intentional with a specific planned approach to ensure it is funny enough to make people laugh and get the job done. For example, imagine being at a dinner party, and the guest of honor cracks a joke to engage the room and elevate his appearance.

On the other hand, humor is about spontaneity and illuminating thoughts where you do not need laughter or a crowd to accompany it; a mere smile is enough, and “it completes its course with a single person. Another person’s participation has nothing new to it” (Freud, p.284, 1963). To be humorous is to have an amusing quality where you are not a comedian but can be a comic for a fleeting moment, evoking laughter through a spontaneous comment or cracking smiles at a joke. Nothing is attempted consciously within this action because the humorous person’s activity is unconscious[1] and ignorant of his delivery (Bergson, p.16, 1911).

Figure 1

Tweet that Addresses Humors Detached Delivery



Moreover, there is no deliberation or planned attempt to be amusing; it just *happens to be funny*, yet it reveals a place of disturbance or discomfort. Therefore, humor is key to the

[1] Not conscious material that effects behaviors and emotions

endeavors of this analysis because the trauma[2] is unveiling itself unconsciously through jokes, illuminating the mental instability and offering a quick release from the prisons of our mind, being the agent of psychological liberation (Mindess, p.80, 1971). For these reasons, the following will focus on the unconscious basis for *humor*, not comedy.

This thesis focuses on Generation Z, a generation that uses a surplus of humor to address trauma/pain. Before discussing this generation, it is vital to note that this thesis discusses *those within* Generation Z who *have* experienced trauma and pain, and the related humor attached; it does not focus on all of Generation Z or all jokes. Generation Z is operationalized as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, ranging from 13 to 28 years of age. This thesis considers Generation Z in two chunks: ages 13-18 and 19-28 to account for developmental variation and differences concerning humor. Despite developmental variation, every age in this generation is well integrated into Jean Piaget's (1958) formal operational stage, where the individual can grasp complex metaphor, reason, and symbolic thinking, beginning at age 11 (p.272). One can infer how this makes all Generation Z able to stay attuned to the complex layers of irony that can fall into humor.

They all understand humor, but the two chunks of Gen Z all *experience it differently,* with the *same underlying cause* of unconscious truth emerging; they are in the same room, using different doors. For example, when looking at Erik Erikson's (1950) stages of development, ages 13-18 fall into his "Identity vs. Role Confusion" and ages 19-28 fall into his "intimacy vs. isolation" (Cramer et al., p.1, 2019; Erikson, p.227-229). Within identity vs role confusion, an individual is exploring themselves, and is in a transitional phase where one is in the depths of puberty, grappling with a solid image of

[2] Any disturbing event that challenges or disrupts an individual's positive view of themselves or of the world as a safe, predictable place (American Psychological Association, p.1, 2018a).

their identity. Arguably, inside one's identity is one's resilience and who one is in correspondence to one's surrounding experience. Therefore, humor can become a primary part of this chunk of Gen Z (13 to 18) due to their desire to avoid role confusion and keep their view of themselves high and strong. Moreover, one could say that when experiencing trauma, it can threaten their healthy development of identity through maladaptive internalization of events and experiencing, and to accommodate, instead of addressing the trauma in fear of disruption of self, it is shoved aside, and humor is used to express the hidden (unconscious) feelings and situation related to trauma and the pain associated.

Moving on to the second chunk of Generation Z: ages 19-28. These individuals are experiencing intimacy or isolation during this period of life, where they are either developing close relationships and feeling understood, or struggling to connect with others and feel isolated. Suppose an individual feels ostracized and does not have an inner circle. In that case, one can assume this is very distressing, especially if you see countless others not having this problem around you. In this scenario, a case may be made that human connection is the core of the human condition and a foundational piece of what helps us create a sense of self through the purpose of vulnerability with others. When experiencing trauma, if one is experiencing isolation, this can be a painful reality, having no one to turn to, which can create a negative impact on one's self-esteem. Instead of addressing these negative feelings and the trauma that caused them, it is shoved aside, and humor is used to address the hidden, unconscious feelings instead. Even if someone is within intimacy in this stage and experiences trauma, humor can act as a bridge and buffer: a way to maintain these connections that subsides the fear of losing this intimacy if they share something more intense, out of their daily discussions.

This thesis approaches humor primarily through a neurotypical lens and the perspective of heterosexual, cisgender, white, and socioeconomically stable individuals within Gen Z. However, it is recognized that everyone in this generation has different cognitive, psychosocial, and cultural experiences, and it would be fatuous to generalize the *experience* of humor to one type of individual. As an example, those on the autism spectrum may engage with humor or metaphor differently, due to different experiences of cognitive development, their variation of communication styles, and interpretation of figurative language. This thesis does not pathologize these differences but views them as an alternative to using and understanding humor. For example, it is widely known that *some* individuals with autism have heightened sensitivity to structure while *some* have difficulty expressing affect appropriately (Baron-Cohen, p.1, 2017; Ferguson et al., p.4, 2023). Either way, humor carries the same function as an expression of the unconscious. First, it is possible to consider that humor can align with one's desire for comfort with predictable patterns and structure by having their humor symbolize unconscious desires for control or safety, primarily if a traumatic situation occurs that throws off the individual's structure or inner locus of control[3]. Next, for those who may have trouble expressing emotion effectively, humor can be seen as a vital way to safely express affect tied to trauma, which is difficult to verbalize. Lastly, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, and sexual orientation all play a significant role in the experience of humor. These individuals may be using humor for a variety of niche subjective traumatic or painful experiences that cannot be generalized to every person in Gen Z. For example, addressing trauma or pain of/from oppression, or using it as a community builder to escape

[3] The amount of control one believes they have over their life events and the leading causes of such events (Botha & Dahmann, p.1, 2024).

marginalization that may have occurred at some point (Juni & Katz, p.1, 2001; Meyer, p.2, 2003). The contextual variables concerning niche humor to these sensitive topics and populations are considered; however, at the core of these topics and experience is the same desire to address a serious, hurtful topic and emotions attached in a lighthearted manner. No matter who you are as a person within Generation Z, there is an underlying phenomenon, regardless of all the factors addressed, when the mind jokes, the unconscious speaks.

In 2021, Stanford University conducted a study where Gen Z adolescents would improvise jokes in response to disturbing images instead of expressing their emotions (Zellner, p.1, 2021). Within Zellner's study (2021), a participant stated, "I use humor to soften the effect that particular [disturbing] things have on me" (p.1). Making traumatic events more emotionally digestible helps Generation Z desensitize and destigmatize personal turmoil because "it is much easier to face serious topics when you are also joking about them," writes Susan Prigozen (Xu, p.1, 2020), a Gen Z writer for *Gazette-Mail*. Although Generation Z uses humor to address trauma, this approach to emotional turmoil is not practical. Humorous remarks within a social interaction typically occur much faster than conversations involving explicit emotional discussion (Kahneman, p.114, 2011). Moreover, Generation Z uses easier mechanisms (humor) rather than delving into the emotional connotations of their distress. Before continuing, it would be erroneous to say that Generation Z is the only generation using humor to cope. It would not be inconceivable to say that previous generations certainly had their fair share, bringing a false light to the cruel world around them. However, Generation Z's humorous coping is unique compared to previous generations, and it is all they know.

Generation Z grew up entirely in the rise and boom of the internet, and there has never been a time when they did not have access to it. Claire Heupel (2022), a senior at Lincoln High School, expresses in her school's newsletter, *The Statesman:*

> "Trending videos on platforms like YouTube [and TikTok] have made it so that Gen Zers can always see what other Gen Zers find funny. Thus, it has formed a new ability to create a distinct type of humor that is too specific for other generations to understand if they did not view the same content" (p.1).

This is not to say that other generations are not using present-day social media apps. Still, it is about the niche community and that constant need for connection and vulnerability through entertainment, where one can infer that only Generation Z understands due to never experiencing life any other way. This niche community has been fostered by unconscious priming attached to expressing their trauma through humor, which starts with the internet but then bleeds into outside life. It seems that Generation Z has been conditioned to find humor to be an acceptable way to address the trauma that still lets them detach, yet feel a sense of community with others who also struggle and use a similar coping mechanism.

This social norm of humor is a quick cycle, faster than a deeper emotional conversation or topic. Significantly, algorithms and individuals' social media feeds are likewise immediate. For example, "the minuscule time slot allotted for TikTok videos makes it essential that creators amuse straightforwardly to gain viewers' attention" (Heupel, p.1, 2022). Due to the level of engagement on a post, creators will know that the public likes their videos. Therefore, when posting a video with tragic humor related to life events, attention can skyrocket; they will continue to present their issues quickly and

effectively, reinforcing the viewer's interest in humor instead of a serious conversation. This cycle will continue to repeat as they are exposed to an algorithmic sequence that makes them feel connected and able to spill their vulnerabilities without getting to the root. As the behavioral economist Daniel Kahneman (2011) observed, thinking is either fast, based on emotion, or slow, in deliberation (p.114). The relatable content will hit all the right spots emotionally, fostering humor and helping others feel less alone. It keeps Generation Z expressing their sad reality through dark humor in the media and bleeds into life, creating the norm.

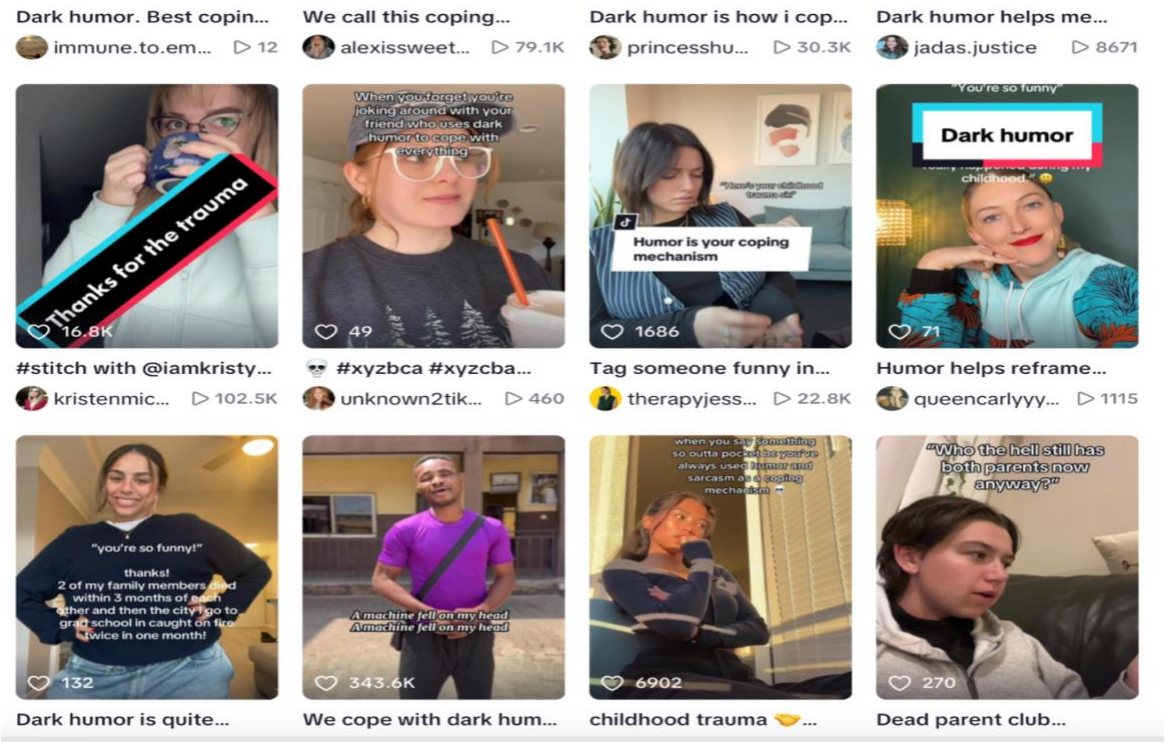
Social media has been a valuable space for Generation Z, making humor a prominent coping mechanism and fostering community. However, the information presented to the individual creates a cognitive media effect where the exposure influences their mental process or the product of the processes (Potter, p.33, 2017). This occurs through the intricate sense-plan act algorithms within Generation Z's favorite apps. This sequence "gather[s] data, analyze[s] it, and then carry[s] out the required actions based on the intention of the outcome of data" (Parson, p. 144, 2022). Through this, the algorithm quickly learns how users interact with content and decides what it delivers next based on input gathering. This happens through cross-site tracking and cookies while the user is active. Cookies are small chunks of data that can "monitor your path, gather information for related ad targeting, and collect personal information" (Parson, p. 281, 2022).

Regarding the algorithmic structure, cookies are key to obtaining the correct information when *sensing* the person's vulnerabilities, inner consciousness, and interests. For example, when an individual scrolls on their phone, it gathers the person's interaction levels with certain things, senses this information, and analyzes it to produce information

aligned with the person's interest based on interaction. From this data, cross-site tracking can occur within third-party breaches within the browser. This "type of tracking uses your data and creates profiles of your habits" (Parson, p. 282, 2022).

Figure 2

Tik Tok Algorithm Addressing Tragic Humor



Moreover, the more content about dark humor, the more it will circulate, getting into the right hands, keeping the viewer interested, and unconsciously influencing them to engage in it frequently outside of the media as a primary form of addressing trauma. It can be assumed that the media's algorithm is priming individuals to be desensitized to their problems through constantly viewing and engaging in relatable humor attached to traumatic experiences.

Psychoanalytic Approach to the Humor Employed by Generation Z

Because humor—unlike deliberate, comedic remarks—is an expression of unconscious trauma, psychoanalytic theory is in a good position to make sense of this coping strategy and to detail the appropriate response within a practical, therapeutic setting. From a psychoanalytic perspective, humor can be used as a defense mechanism to ease tension or anxiety instead of conquering the distressful event and emotions. Defense mechanisms are "unconscious thoughts or behaviors to protect individuals [ego] during moments when stress is intense [and] self-esteem is threatened" (Grande, p.1, 2023). According to Sigmund Freud's theory (1915b), the unconscious comprises traumatic memories and painful emotions, the repression[5] of which allows the ego, or our conscious mental activity, to have harmony (p.141). By engaging in a humorous defense, an individual unconsciously protects their Ego from uncomfortable present experiences by acknowledging the event yet dissociating themselves from the feelings attached, not allowing complete processing and acceptance. Psychoanalytic theory helps us see that humor has a more profound connotation, yet effect, allowing individuals to distance themselves from potentially harmful situations and emotions.

We have spoken about humor relating to the ego, but jokes also relate to the unconscious mind. Humor can "break us free from the roots of our minds, inviting us to enjoy the exhilaration of escape" (Mindess, p.22, 1971). Gen Z may be able to escape momentarily, but in the long term, they are just running themselves. Humor's dissociative nature should be regarded as an agent for self-discovery due to the revealing unconscious connotations jokes hold. The unconscious screams, yet it only comes out as a whisper in

[5] Distressing thoughts, feelings, or emotions that are pushed (repressed) out of consciousness

the form of a humorous remark: “the main characteristic of the joke is that of liberating pleasure [purges] inhibitions… releasing pleasure from sources that have undergone repression” (Freud, p. 164, 1963). When using humor about trauma, an individual arbitrarily links the Ego with the repressed feelings, letting the joke say what must be said without saying it, telling us something we have known all along (Freud, p.11, 1963). This action catalyzes understanding of what is under the surface of one’s humorous façade.

With all the mention of Freudian theories, it is crucial to holistically address Freudian psychoanalysis and its origins to provide a deeper understanding of how humor is viewed and can be engaged with therapeutically. Therefore, to begin, psychoanalysis requires the repressed (unconscious) to become conscious and was initially used as “a method of treating nervous patients medically” (Freud, p.9, 1966). As we progress as a field, psychoanalysis has been applied to many different emotional and mental problems due to the core goal being a more profound understanding of how an individual thinks or feels (American Psychological Association, p.1, 2022). A few core aspects of psychoanalysis are catharsis[6], interpretation[7], and analysis[8]. Interpretation and analysis can go hand in hand or separately, as well as come before or after catharsis occurs in a client. Moreover, the analyst will help uncover and facilitate critical thinking about repressed memories, emotions, thoughts, or feelings. Even though the analyst is the catalyst for change, “the result depends on [the client] conduct, understanding, adaptability and perseverance” (Freud & Strachey, p.9, 1966). A heavy load of emotions and information goes on in sessions. However, when a client is aware and motivated, it will be easier to

[6] A purgation of emotions (Lear, p.1, 1988),
[7] Understanding the significance of the findings from the analysis
[8] Identifying patterns through breaking down information methodically

accept the significance or relevance revealed. Therefore, psychoanalysis focuses on unveiling unconscious processes, which is key to promoting understanding and motivation to heal from humor and its surrounding trauma.

When encountering humor from Gen Z, the following types of psychoanalytic interpretation, analysis, and skills will be imperative to uncover the façade humor brings: dream interpretation, interpretation intervention, transference analysis, countertransference analysis, free association, and technical neutrality[9]. According to Bergson (1911), "comic absurdity is of the same nature as that of dreams" (p.186). An analyst can look at the parallels between what is joked about and what is dreamt since dreams reflect waking life and humor reflects life's problems (Freud, p.110, 1963). Once a client cathartically releases a joke, dissecting it personally and out loud to the client will be crucial. The analyst, being mindful of their moment-to-moment emotional reaction to the material, can decrease the risk of countertransference[10]. Dissecting the joke's context, what specific words were used, body language during and after, and most importantly, the content will be vital in fostering introspection within the client because the trauma will be clothed in the words and presentation of the joke. This serves as a catalyst for an analyst to analyze and interpret any parallels to transference within the joke content, regarded as "unconscious repetition in the here and now of pathogenic conflicts from the past, considered the primary source of change" (Sharma & Spiro, p.1, 2023).

Along with intervening with said skills in a meticulous yet confrontational way, an analyst should also let the client engage in free association to foster the analysis. Free

[9] The following techniques are not randomly selected; they are foundational Freudian methods to bypass ego defenses and uncover the repressed

[10] when the analyst's emotions and personal troubles get in the way of a neutral, safe, and non-judgmental space for the client (Sharma & Spiro, p.1, 2023)

association can be used when an analyst allows the client to speak freely about what they think about the joke, letting any unconscious parapraxis (Freudian slips) about their feelings reveal themselves from the repressed (Lothane, pp.416-434, 2018). In these moments of psychoanalytic technique, the analyst needs to ensure technical neutrality is present, which is where their engagement is entirely impartial yet nonjudgmental, while not swaying the client to come to certain conclusions while they are in the processing phases of these mechanisms (Kernberg, p.1, 2016). With this approach and the mentioned techniques, an analyst can eventually unveil and present a hypothesized idea of what repressed experiences are coming to the surface (through humor) and help the client conquer them for more profound liberation and freedom from their trauma and pain.

Outside of the mentioned techniques, catharsis is a primary aspect of psychoanalysis that is beneficial in the therapeutic process toward liberation. However, in psychoanalytic techniques, catharsis has become less prevalent over time. To begin, Catharsis originated from Aristotle[11], who believed that watching pity and fear in Greek drama allows one to experience a "purification of [these] emotions that allows us to express [them] without the pain that accompanies them in real life" (Aristotle, p.25, 2013). Within this process, one's negative emotions are activated and purged in three different stages: E1, the pre-engagement of the emotional state; E2, the emotional state during the tragic narrative and cathartic release of pity and fear; E3, the post-cathartic emotional state (Nanay, p.1, 2018). Stage E1 can be best described as a neutral state before pity and fear are triggered, and then the process is similar to the medical analogy of taking laxatives (Nanay, p.1, 2018). The method of Aristotelian catharsis derived from a dissociated yet

[11] Greek Philosopher

connected state to the trauma, pity, and fear experienced because one was experiencing it through the lens of a Greek Tragedy. This can be described as vicarious sadness or fear, feeling your pain due to experiencing someone else's pain. This is different from self-centered sadness or fear, which is feeling your pain due to a direct experience or feeling of a tragic situation. When experiencing catharsis, someone is experiencing a very similar

> "Relief felt after self-centered [pity and] fear, but without having to undergo self-centered [pity or] fear. It is a way of experiencing relief "on the cheap"—without really paying for it. Thus, we feel relief when transitioning from E2 to E3, but the emotions in E2 are not wholly unpleasant" (Nanay, p.1, 2018).

This Aristotelian account of catharsis inspired Sigmund Freud and his mentor, Josef Breuer, to consider how catharsis might work in a therapeutic setting (Leung, pp.1-4, 2017). Freud and Breuer brought cathartic therapy into the psychological field and focused on the release of repressed symptoms (emotions) that stemmed from associated and unconscious experiences of trauma (Littrell, p.71, 1998; Turri, p.369, 2014). For example, Freud (1920) believed that the unconscious always finds a way to be conscious (p.13), and (vicarious) catharsis could be seen as a way this occurred, because it brought the repressed to a conscious light, but "on the cheap" or without the full consciousness or understanding of what is arising limiting the pain that would come with it.

Even though we can see Freud's method as one that aims at something analogous to catharsis, he explicitly disregards it in his mature theoretical writings. He labels it "a symptomatic treatment rather than an actual analysis of the central issue within the individual" (Leung, p.3, 2017). This disregard is due to it not aligning with the purpose and goals of psychoanalysis, which is using interpretation and analysis of the *core problem, not*

symptoms, to lead the client to deeper introspection and healing of trauma. Catharsis is "essential to the process… [but] feelings must not only be expressed but understood; catharsis alone is not enough" (Nichols & Efran, p. 48, 1985). Moreover, an individual was purging these traces of the unconscious dissociatively, only releasing the emotional energy (symptom). This led them to have *an aspect* of their pain *still repressed* and not analyzed. It was erroneous to state that releasing negative emotions was beneficial without addressing or analyzing the underlying cause.

Shifting back to the 21st century, humor can fall into this catharsis method within Gen Z. However, (humor's) catharsis should be seen in psychoanalysis as a starting point rather than the end goal to ensure the underlying cause is addressed. Instead of catharsis as the treatment outcome, catharsis should facilitate psychoanalytic treatment, leading to interpretation and analysis, which then leads to liberation from trauma and pain. Thus, through humor, Gen Z purges unconscious emotions, thoughts, memories, or feelings that have not *wholly* integrated into consciousness, creating a safe "avenue for reducing tension, shaking off anxiety, overcoming stagnation, and transcending all immoral bonds" (Mindess, p.71, 1971). Expressing trauma through humor is from a vicarious point of view, similar to the cathartic experience and release from watching pity and fear in a Greek Tragedy. The person dissociates from the situation, experiencing vicarious catharsis, leaving the genuine complex emotions untouched, making their trauma easy to mention. It is like individuals watch a scary movie through their fingers; they technically see but do not experience the impact. Like watching Greek Tragedy, humor works similarly by joking about something painful, as if it is someone else's story, removing yourself and the experience. Moreover, the inward imperfections Gen Z is hiding with their humorous

remarks are partly released and reveal hidden aspects of their outward culture and experience. Therefore, considering inspection through the mentioned psychoanalytic mechanisms would be beneficial[12].

Humor's positive catharsis opens a door to a beneficial starting point. However, the gap in research that is being addressed in this thesis leaves individuals thinking the opposite, fostering polarization and improper utilization. For example, in 2021, multiple interviews were conducted by Dylan Zellner, a dispatch reporter, around high schools in the US about Gen Z and their use of humor to cope with trauma. These interviews were targeted at teachers who were asked to share their observations, and one psychology teacher stated, "I think humor can be counterproductive… it is used to ignore the stressor you are having to deal with completely" (p.1). The decision to reference a teacher and not a clinician or professor is purposeful, even though some may argue its strength. However, this person being simply a psychology teacher is what makes their observation so valuable. First, they engage with Gen Z daily and see how humor unfolds as a coping mechanism. In addition, it's important to note their knowledge of psychology is cursory- they are not a clinician, nor hold multiple advanced degrees. This is precisely what points out the gap that is driving this thesis: if those who are responsible for teaching cursory psychology courses view humor as harmful or dismissive, it suggests a larger systemic issue in how the psychosocial field has communicated- or failed to communicate- about humor, along with highlights the little 21st century attention that has been put on humor as a deeper function

[12] The unconscious cannot be purged directly since it is beyond awareness. However, humor becomes purged (cathartically) through a process due to the symbolic nature, the partly conscious recognition (conscious awareness that they are making a joke about something traumatic), and emotional release. Therefore, psychoanalytic work is important regarding humor, because it will bring the person's vicarious catharsis to a point of whole conscious understanding rather than just half.

with therapeutic potential for healing. This leaves individuals, such as the above teacher, to assume it is harmful when it is the opposite. For example, a study by Sarink (2023) and his colleagues is one of the slim pieces of literature (empirically) addressing humorous remarks and their cathartic nature, leading to liberation[13] from trauma and the pain involved.

This was done in discussion and showed a positive statistical significance[14]. This study focused on anxiety and depression in adolescents. Sarink and their colleagues (2023) had participants engage in a pretest-posttest model where they obtained a baseline of anxiety and depression (pre-test), had participants engage in naturally inclined humor about the self, and obtained their anxiety and depression levels after engagement (post-test). It concentrated on the holistic ideal of human disturbance, and how to help ourselves, we exaggerate "the importance of the seriousness of things… [and the person] rips up the exaggerations by humor" (Montes & Sarink, p.1, 2023). This is crucial due to its parallels with Freud's (1963) idea that joking is merely someone's ability to find exaggeration, and within that is a hidden similarity that could reveal the truth (p.7). Within this study, improvement in anxiety was found ($p=0.01$), and depression had an effect size of 41% lower with humor than without, with a reported significantly lower post-test score of anxiety and depression levels (Montes & Sarink, 2023). A 0.01 significance level (p) means there is only a 1% chance the results are due to random luck, which shows the data results are empirically strong since it is unlikely due to a fluke. Therefore, the improvement of

[13] Through the internal process of having the repressed become conscious, an individuals insight grows through a sense of agency and the ability to engage with their world in a less conflicting and self sabotaging way

[14] When data shows a strong enough relationship between two things where it is unlikely to happen due to chance

anxiety when humor was involved created a significance of 1%, meaning it had a positive impact on anxiety levels, decreasing it. Effect size shows if it matters in the real world, outside of empirical testing. Thus, looking at depression, using humor explains 41% of the change, meaning depression levels were 41% lower when humor was used (anything 30 %+ is considered a moderate to substantial impact in psychology). This overall significance can be related to an individual cathartically releasing their hidden feelings attached to their distress, rather than storing it all inside.

Humor not only decreases distress through catharsis, but it can also provide insight to the analyst and client on inner unconscious experiences and similarities due to the "intimate connection between all mental happenings" (Freud, p.13, 1963). Humor may momentarily dissociate the client from their trauma; however, Freud (1920) suggested that the unconscious always finds a way to be conscious (p.13): "Emotions are said to build up pressure and seek escape through other substitute channels" (Nichols & Efran, p.1, 1985), and humor's cathartic release should be critical to the gears of the unconscious. One might begin to see how, if a psychoanalyst takes the distance created and the emotional release, and uses their tools, this will help to unveil the truth behind the façade. Humor can unlock the potential for the client to possess a new understanding of their experience and how they feel (Tapley, p.421, 2006). In addition, the above study examines the benefit of *just* catharsis; individuals will have an *even higher* reduction of stress and freedom when the release of these negative emotions facilitates treatment, and the utilization of psychoanalysis begins.

We have come to a crossroads in this paper, where the thought arises: "If

humor is so beneficial for treating and addressing trauma, we must find a way to integrate it into sessions!" This thought is not a fatuous thing to think after everything has been addressed. However, the utilization of humor must be salubrious, and integrating or forcing such an intricate and personal process, such as tragic humor, would defeat the purpose of the unconscious unveiling itself naturally and using it efficiently and ethically. Therefore, it must be clear that the catalyst for this process is not the analyst but strictly the client and their humorous spontaneity. In addition, ensuring the client does not feel exposed or misunderstood when handling their humor would be most beneficial. The analyst must follow the unconscious's pace, catharsis, and the client's capacity to integrate insight; interpretations and analysis must not be made until the client is ripe for them. (Freud, p.35, 1915a). Therefore, it is about utilizing what the client brings to the session and being prepared to handle humor appropriately when it arises.

In addition, it would be inappropriate for the analyst to use humor to respond to the client's humor. In 1957, during the Paris Congress, there was a session about psychoanalytic techniques, and the role of jokes was a central discussion point (Barron, p.25, 2013). This symposium concluded that an analyst using the exact defense mechanism as the client is an "undesirable modification of analytic technique because it circumvents the resistance[15] and is experienced as seductive" (Barron, p.25, 2013). Suppose you think about the intimacy shared when one jokes back and forth with someone, when two people laugh in unison, or when one cracks a smile at someone else; there is a moment of freedom from our moral inhibitions. As Freud (1963) discusses in his book *Jokes and Their Relation to The Unconscious*, jokes are often disguised as an expression of hostile and sexual

[15] Clients' unconscious (or conscious) efforts to avoid confronting threatening or painful material (American Psychological Association, p.1, 2018b)

impulses (p.118). We enjoy humor because we participate in the expression of our unconscious in a guilt-free manner, along with our more acceptable disregard for others' feelings (Mindess, p.3, 1971). An analyst who responds to their client with humor is likely involved in countertransference, i.e., consciously or unconsciously seeking to seduce or agitate the patient, on their benefit, thus creating a situation that distracts from the analytical work (Barron, p.25, 2013). One can infer how humorous remarks are more than acceptable from the patient because, if transference is present, this fosters the most change, creating the introspection path. After all, transference holds unconscious repetitions of the past so that the most change will occur through interpretation and analysis. However, humor from the analyst breaches professionalism, damaging the detached mode of technical neutrality. Even twenty years after the Paris Conference, psychologists still agree that the sharing of humor from the analyst is destructive to the psychotherapeutic relationship, and it creates a:

> "Powerful secret emotional involvement… a form of self-display or wooing. They are asking the patient, see how bright, witty, amusing, charming, and delightful I can be? [in addition] if the therapist steps into the trap of echoing the patient's humor about his ailments [they] will reinforce the patient's neurotic defenses" (Kubie, pp. 38-40, 1971).

This intimate exchange will obstruct the client's process and inappropriately encourage the humorous façade. Therefore, humor must be approached professionally and broken down immediately with psychoanalytic tools, so it is not encouraged. It is not about being humorous but having the skills, knowledge, and character to handle humor effectively with empathy and technical neutrality (Bader, p.23-30, 1993).

Rationale, Research Question, and Purpose

This paper will answer the following two questions: (1) How would Freudian Psychoanalysis benefit Generation Z and their use of humor? (2) Should psychoanalysts recognize this humor as cathartic and an opportunity to facilitate more profound psychological liberation[16]? Addressing this will enlighten the field and suggest that Freudian psychoanalysis would benefit those in Generation Z to ensure humor is utilized as a form of emotional release that holds unconscious connotations. This research is vital because the prevalence of humor concerning trauma and pain employed by Generation Z is an ineffective and harmful way to address trauma. Therefore, it would be advantageous to this generation to have their humor utilized within psychoanalytic therapy to conquer their pain rather than joke about it. Previous literature discusses how there is potential in using humor as a tool, but states that there needs to be more exploration and future development on this topic. Moreover, the future development has not gone immensely far, leaving this topic rarely addressed since the 20th century; more recent literature has a reduced amount of research dedicated to exploring the clinical potential of a patient's humor, specifically as a tool in a psychoanalytical setting. This paper will focus on the cathartic release of humor within Gen Z and how Freudian psychoanalysis would be beneficial. This paper aims to support the claim that the therapeutic promise Freudian psychoanalysis holds is grand concerning creating clarity from the once repressed. It is psychological liberation from one's trauma and pain.

[16] Through the internal process of having the repressed become conscious, an individuals insight grows through a sense of agency and the ability to engage with their world in a less conflicting and self sabotaging way

Analysis

The Deeper Meaning and Origin of Humor

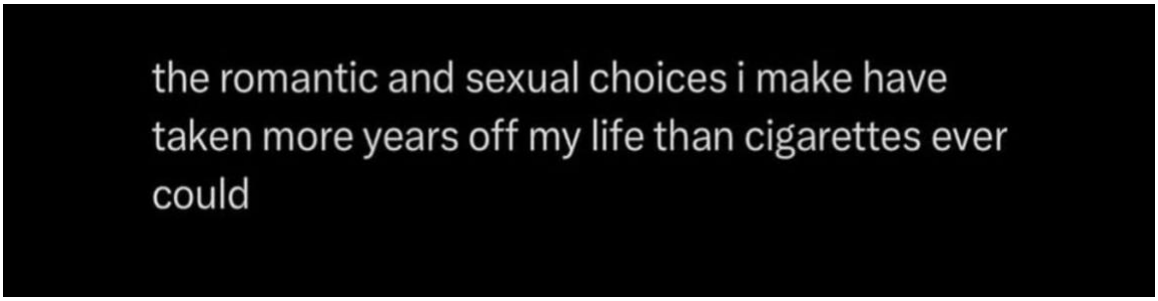
Humor is often dismissed as lighthearted entertainment; however, beneath the depths of consciousness, the motor behind humor is unconscious, and the content encompassed by humor points to repression, holding a connotation that reveals unprocessed trauma and pain. According to Freudian theory (1915a), when something becomes repressed, it goes through two phases: first, it *becomes* unconscious, and second, it is forced to *remain* unconscious (pp.141-158). For example, if an individual experiences an emotionally or physically traumatic event, this memory trace goes through the first stage of being incorporated into the system of the unconscious. This happens through involuntary detachment (dissociation) from one's thoughts, feelings, and memories to protect oneself from the pain accompanying the stimuli reminders (Boyer et al., p.1, 2022). However, being incorporated into the unconscious mind is insufficient to count this memory as repressed. As Freud (1923) writes, "everything repressed is unconscious, but not everything unconscious is repressed" (p.4). An unconscious memory does not count as repressed until it tries to emerge from the unconscious and is rejected from becoming conscious, being forced to remain (Freud & Strachey, p.354, 1966). Freud understands this in terms of an internal "censor": a person's conscious emotional life is protected by an act of censorship that takes place at a "preconscious" level. As an unconscious memory trace emerges from the unconscious, the preconscious censor prevents it (Freud, pp. 39-40, 1923) from becoming conscious to protect the person's experience of reality and tranquility.

This two-phase process happens without a person's awareness, making it unconscious. However, the process can nevertheless be evident to an analyst encountering a patient dealing with trauma due to the rigorous training involved in noticing when one unknowingly and unintentionally reveals aspects of their unconscious life. In a Freudian picture (1920), the unconscious always finds a way to be conscious (p.13), and when this process occurs, it is disguised as humor. In this moment, the individual will get the pleasure of catharsis, yet no full acknowledgment of the trauma, with the whole experience of pain attached. Analysts can use their knowledge base of the unconscious life to facilitate more thorough recovery and service.

If humorous remarks can, in some instances, be expressions of buried psychic trauma, then how can the Freudian account for the fact that we are conscious of such remarks? We are not unaware of the fact that we are joking when we make light of a situation. However, we are unaware of the origin and meaning of the joke. The Freudian can explain this through reference to the censorship of the preconscious. The initial repression has failed to be maintained because the unconscious has discovered a way to bypass the censorship of the preconscious: disguising itself in humor.

Figure 3

Instagram Post of a Tragic Joke, Encompassed by the Unconscious



Humor is a safe outlet. In Figure 3, the expression of humor does not look or feel like something negative; therefore, the part of the mind that seeks to protect the ego does not see humor as a threat. Therefore, some aspects of repressed memory are brought to consciousness and discharged in speech, such as in a joke. However, one can arguably notice how this joke has a deeper meaning, reflecting repressed thoughts, feelings, and desires about this person's poor life decisions.

The Structure and Process of Humor Within the Unconscious

Importantly, however, the whole nature of the unconscious memory (or thought, feeling, or desire) does *not* come to consciousness. The Freudian has an explanation for this as well. Humor is an involuntary ego defense process, and the heavily censored material is being purged, clothed in words that come in forms of symbolization and disguise (Freud, pp.19-30,1963; Lothane, pp.180-188, 2008). Thus, just because one makes a joke does not mean that the trauma they are joking about is within full consciousness; it is only partly on the surface but still protected behind the humorous remark. This cathartic purge can be established as "word presentations, [which] come from perceptions corresponding to memory, becoming [acceptable] for the preconscious and conscious system" (Freud, p.40, 1923). In joking, a person can purge some part of a trauma, engaging in a moment of pity and fear that allows them to "work through" a past event. However, it is not erroneous to claim that this purging happens dissociatively; the person is unaware of the full extent of the trauma they are drawing upon in their humor. Thus, to them, it may seem they are working through it, because they are aware they are addressing the situation (through a joke); however, the "real work through" can only take place when the pain/situation is addressed *wholly*, not *partially* through the dissociative humorous façade coming from the

ego and preconscious. This makes a person feel a false sense of harmony "between reality and illusion as it introduces a viewpoint that can make potentially grave situations appear not only threatening but amusing" (Barron, p. 92, 2013). The person who jokes about unconscious trauma is consciously experiencing some of that trauma, but is also largely detaching from the trauma, the force of which remains in the unconscious.

Clothed in words, the trauma avails itself as a humorous remark. These remarks are like a blanket, which is stitched together so intricately and is woven into something meaningful. Before continuing, it must be addressed that not all jokes represent unconscious turmoil within. According to Freud (1963), it is essential to differentiate between an innocent remark and a tendentious remark, where tendentious humor has an implicit bias attached, embraced with the purpose of a sexual, defensive, aggressive, or hostile connotation (p.137). The innocent joke does not share these same qualities, and where a

> "double meaning [does not] arise from the literal and metaphorical meaning of words… [where it does not] transform one thought into an unusual form, providing a basis for its combination with a second thought" (Freud, pp. 39 and 49, 1963).

The tendentious remark reveals something taboo and out of the client's reality. An analyst can unveil the meaning of the combinations created by engaging in the known psychological formulation[17] and connecting the known information with what has not been discovered. For example,

[17] Understanding someone's difficulties and life from every angle (thoughts, feelings, emotions, etc.) starting from youth up to present day

> "A doctor, as he came away from a lady's bedside, said to her husband with a shake of his head: 'I do not like her looks.' 'I have not liked her looks for a long time,' the husband hastened to agree. The doctor was, of course, referring to the lady's condition. However, he expressed his anxiety about the patient in words which the husband could interpret as a confirmation of his own marital aversion" (Freud, p.41, 1963).

The technique of humor lies in the form of expression and the chosen words and phrases used for this expression. For example, Freud (1963) describes words like plastic as a substance that can be molded and rearranged into different meanings (pp. 36-37); when an individual uses certain connections, like the man from the above joke, their meaning reflects the unconscious processes.

In addition, this cathartic process reveals the incongruence of the person, emphasizing more profound meaning. For example, the norm of discussing a traumatic event usually occurs with congruence, where their emotion matches their affect. When engaging in metaphoric humor, the client "may appear joyful while speaking of a gut-wrenching situation [where technique reveals connections to life]" (Fletcher, p.1, 2024). The aspect of incongruence meshed with tendentious technique and presentation of humor is a vital suggestion to problems in the client's unconscious that have not yet become fully conscious.

The absurd reference to the turmoil is fostered in the "pleasure and play with words, and nonsense serves to remove repression" (Grotjahn, p.14, 1966). This release of pleasure and play serves as a humorous outlet for the individual, where they are concealing what

they have to say, yet have something forbidden that should be fully revealed. This process can be explained, from a psychoanalytic perspective, regarding the mechanisms of the id: unconscious part of our mind that store taboo desires or unacceptable thoughts, impulses, and feelings, the ego, and the superego: a partly unconscious part of our mind that acts as a moral compass and stores acceptable expectations working with the ego. When the repressed turmoil and desires originate unconsciously from the id and bypass the censorship of the preconscious, the superego is seen as a leader who refuses to be associated with the reality arising. Therefore, it serves as an illusion and conveys comfort to the scared ego, which creates false elevation and reality for the individual (Baker, p.951, 1993; Freud, p.159, 1927). The ego then acts as a mediator and submits to the superego's pressure to match illusion with reality, and this is where humor is born: an easy way out of harsh reality, but still succumbing to the demands of the superego in a linguistic form that seems morally safe and yet cathartically logical. This guilt-free mechanism and agency of the ego and superego is a "triumph over reality, giving a feeling of strength [and control] with the victory of the seemingly vulnerable ego. Laughter may occur, but usually a smile suffices" (Baker, p.20, 1993). The ego does not want reality to be disturbed through the confrontation of trauma and does not want to be in distress. It is the overcoming of fear through a humorous light that creates pleasure and coping, where what seems dangerous is turned into a light-hearted phenomenon.

Revisiting Childhood: Humor's Psychoanalytical Origin

In these unconscious moments, it is evident that the "humorous person is treating himself like a child, and at the same time playing the part of the superior adult toward the child" (Barron, p.38, 2013). By using humor to discharge the psychic energy relating to repressed

trauma, a person unconsciously comforts themselves by “pretending” the trauma is nothing and will be okay; This is possible because the superego fosters a kind of pleasure and play just as a parent would console a child in distress. In these cases, “the humorist is a person trying to be his own loving mother” [and the humorous activity] poses [for the person] a glimpse of what the loving mother might have been” (Barron, p.112, 2013). The humor one uses is protection and projection of a lack of love, not only from a mother but also a father: By the ego and superego playing the role of the person’s inner child, there is also the role of an “actively teasing father, [where] the kidder hopes to eliminate the hurt carried in the heart from childhood when they had to take the kidding” (Freud, p. 221, 1963). The lack of parental care from childhood creates this defense and the cathartic release through the dissociative force of humor. This cathartic release is the starting point, a symptom of an underlying, repressed issue. This “symptom is the substitute for what did not occur, the unconscious thought, had the power to create a symptom” (Freud & Strachey, p.199, 1966). In this situation, what did not take place was the proper assimilation of parents into the ego.

Therefore, it can be said that “neurotic symptoms are substitutes for sexual satisfaction” (Freud & Strachey, p. 208, 1966). An analyst’s understanding that humor can be a neurotic symptom in this regard, originating from the lack of love in childhood, will be pivotal for grasping the connotation of the joke and processing it holistically. For example, this originates in the lack of care from the mother or father in the anal stage of psychosexual development. In the anal stage, the child is 1-3 years old, and the primary focus is on the libido, which is dictated by controlling bladder and bowel movements and the role the parent plays in this process (Lanzts & Ray, p.1, 2022). Thus, the child must

learn to control their bodily needs to obtain a strong sense of accomplishment, independence, and confidence, and the outcome depends on how the parent approaches toilet training. The parent can either punish and shame the child or praise and encourage them, and those who receive negative feedback tend to foster adverse outcomes for the child and their life beyond (Lantz & Ray, p.1, 2022).

It is imperative for the child's psychological health that, at this stage of development, they receive a strong foundation of support. Suppose a child does not get positive feedback in this stage. In that case, the unconscious idea of an unsupportive parent is ingrained within the first few pivotal years of life, including encountering one's first stressful situation. From here, the negative integration happens unconsciously due to the mind not retaining memories until about 3.5-4 years old, due to a process called childhood amnesia (Alberini & Travaglia, p.3, 2017). This unconscious memory of poor feedback is never resolved due to the quick change into the other psychosexual phases of life, where sexual and general energy is focused elsewhere (Lantz & Ray, p.2, 2022). This is when the ego and superego develop more profoundly, repressing this never met sexual energy from the id, originating in this anal phase from the lack of reassurance and care. The individual goes through life unconsciously stuck in this phase. Freud believed (1920) that everything unconscious finds a way to be conscious (p.13). Thus, the sublimated psychic energy is turned into an outlet during times of distress, and humor is present to act like that caring, supportive parent that they did not have during their first encounters with stress in the anal stage. If this specific foundation of care is never adequately addressed, this damage lives in the unconscious forever until it is taken care of, made fully conscious, and processed. Thus, it impacts people's coping skills with adversity as they age. When one faces stressful

life circumstances or undergoes a traumatic event, they still have the unconscious memory trace of the lack of their parents' care. Still, they create a neurotic substitute (humor) for being their own loving mother or father in these times when they must experience pain. However, they do not know how to cope effectively since their first experience with adversity was negative. This symptom substitutes for the sexual satisfaction that was never fully achieved (and then repressed) due to the lack of love in the anal stage. Moreover, the caring parent was never fully assimilated into the ego, and one uses humor as a source of reconciliation, which can carry a sexual and aggressive connotation, revealing poor parental relationships as the origin of this coping mechanism.

This thesis focuses on jokes referencing trauma and pain, *not* overall jokes. However, for those whose jokes encompass trauma and pain, it is vital to note that parental problems are the reason *for* the defense mechanism occurring in the first place; it is not that the meaning behind all humor is an unconscious poor relationship; the ego id and superego do not only deal with childhood repression; this defense mechanism is tied to any desires fears and taboos (Freud, pp.9-11, 1923). Thus, the ego, id, and superego produce their workings with any moment (e.g. trauma) in life that does not want to surpass the acceptance of consciousness, having the ego distort it when arising from the preconscious.

Trauma's Improper Cognitive Integration

It is not just about the origin of this cathartic defense but about the improper assimilation of the repressed trauma into the conscious from the preconscious into the ego and superego, creating the meaning behind the humor employed by the comic. Therefore, the joke technique and the humor's contextual situation are important to note so that an analyst can tailor treatment holistically, touching upon the trauma encased in the humor.

One's sense of humor "cushions from the burdens of everyday activities and helps reconcile us to the pains and failures that are a part of everyone's life, helping maintain equilibrium [from the actions of the ego and superego]" (Mindess, p. 4, 1971). Therefore, it is not inconceivable that maladaptive childhood parental relations catalyze one's humor. Thus, one addresses their trauma in a socially acceptable way to avoid seriousness and revert to a lighthearted mindset that we knew as children and never correctly received from the parent(s). The ego helps discharge this psychic traumatic energy through the engagement of humor, alleviating the tension of reality and slipping back into consciousness when obtaining memory traces of trauma. However, the tolerance of the ego is low, and to adhere to the superego, it chooses a lighthearted mechanism that fulfills unresolved sexual, aggressive, and hostile tension. Still, it dissociates itself from the painful experience through the partial catharsis of non-appropriately addressed events (Leung, pp.1-4, 2017). Therefore, the potential for insight in humorous moments is grand because it is key to the unconscious processes of people's unprocessed experiences and emotions. It creates an "opportunity to have a glimpse of that alternate reality, but also encourages [utilization] and action to move forward and work toward an ideal reality [that is in correspondence to the ego and super ego]" (Cloete, p. 85, 2019).

Using Freudian Psychoanalysis to Uncover the Comic Façade

Psychoanalytic theory helps us to see that humor is fueled by the unconscious and is, in this way, symptomatic of underlying psychic phenomena. The psychoanalyst or psychodynamic therapist can utilize the cathartic release that occurs in a humorous speech to explore the inner workings of a patient's mind and their traumatic past and present. Jokes or witty remarks that are cathartically released have meaning, momentarily revealing the

unconscious, and one role that the analyst is supposed to play is the role of interpreter, finding the hidden meaning in those jokes or remarks. The analyst should interpret jokes made by their patients to facilitate deeper psychological insight and, ultimately, liberation from psychic trauma. To do so, this section will describe multiple key psychoanalytic techniques that an analyst should use to draw out the hidden meaning of a client's humorous remarks. The following techniques are not randomly selected; they are foundational Freudian methods to bypass ego defenses and uncover the repressed. Since humor is a dissociative defense catalyzed by the ego, using these methods will ensure that the lighthearted joking is utilized enrichingly, emphasizing the psychoanalytic promise of uncovering the more profound truths of one's life.

Free Association

When encountering a humorous remark, the therapist aims to penetrate the hidden unconscious through conversation. As Freud writes, when describing the goals of the psychoanalytic process:

> "Nothing will occur but the interchange of words between the patient and the [analyst]. The [analyst] tries to direct the patient's thought process, reminds them of things, forces his attention into certain channels, gives him explanations, and observes the reactions of the understanding or denial" (Freud & Strachey, p.10, 1966).

The primary tool to achieve this process in the context of humor is to have the client engage in free association after they make a humorous remark. This does not mean that free association should be used exclusively in the context of a patient making a humorous remark; free association is an important, more general psychoanalytic method, and the

analyst must make connections between what the client jokes about and what they say when freely associating in other contexts. Free association is also known as the stream of consciousness (Sosnoski, p.1, 2021), and the analyst creates a collaborative effort for the client to express whatever is on their mind, revealing unconscious or repressed connections and making feelings or thoughts more transparent. For example, say there is a client who is a musician, constantly having relationship troubles, who says, "It is like we are a duet, and we both constantly off-key, but I am the one who gets thrown off stage," and lets out a smirk. A path begins to emerge toward the analyst letting the client laugh or smile, correct themselves, or see where they guide the conversation; however, if there is a slight pause, there should be a moment of confrontation where the analyst suggests breaking down the joke with engaging in free associations concerning specific phrases used. To begin, free association involves preparing the client to engage in free-flowing thoughts and encouraging an

> "increase [in] attention to own perceptions through the elimination of the criticism by which [they] habitually sift emerging thoughts … noticing and reporting whatever comes into his head [and not] suppressing an idea because it seems irrelevant. (Lothane, p. 416, 2018)

The collaborative effort begins with the analyst starting by saying a single word, such as "off key," and having the client say what comes to mind and continuing with every significant aspect of the joke: "thrown," "stage," "duet," etc. Utilizing the humor in such a way allows the joke to be broken down and unveil the double and more profound meaning, interpreting it in a non-threatening manner guided by the client, leading to confrontation, processing, liberation, and empowerment of repressed thoughts and emotions. Processing

the cathartic defense through free association can lead to self-acceptance and change in the client's life by "strengthening the ego by bringing light to how the past affects the present, undoing aspects of painful repressed experiences" (Sosnoski, p. 1, 2021).

Dream Interpretation

In addition to free association, an analyst should incorporate dream interpretation to thicken the understanding of the humor presented and make connections between what is joked about, what is dreamed about, and what is revealed in free association. The analyst should let the client share the most recent dream(s) and separate the manifest and latent content: the actual plot and the unconscious meaning (Freud, p. xiii, 1900). Starting with the manifest content and analyzing it can reveal the latent content and what is happening underneath the client's mind because "people dream about the things that concern them in waking life" (Freud, p. xii, 1900). Dreams and jokes have a deeper meaning, and the

> "physical process in a joke, the part that is hidden from us is precisely the one that [is] compared to the dream work, namely what happens during the formation of a joke…[and the suggested] conclusion is that joke work and dream work must be at least in essential respect be identical" (Freud & Strachey, p.205, 1966).

Therefore, it is imperative to uncover the parallels between what clients dream about and what they joke about. This will foster a more profound session and psychological understanding.

Within an analytic context, dreams are understood to be ways for a person to psychologically fulfill desires or wishes stemming from the id, some of which are repressed desires or wishes that originated in childhood. This wish fulfillment takes place in the dream. However, the dream makes it possible for the ego to take charge and "[satisfy] their

function without offending the ethical and aesthetic tendencies [of the person's reality]" (Freud, p.97, 1963). This process occurs with help from the preconscious, the doorway from the unconscious to the conscious. Thus, there are unconscious infantile, aggressive, and sexual thoughts from what Freud (1900) calls the day residue and the individual life that emerge (p.199). The unconscious smuggles the wish past the censorship of the preconscious, where the wish is formed in the unconscious, reaches the gateway of the preconscious, but goes through a process of revision due to the ego and superego (center of morality), creating a symbolically disguised representation in the consciousness (Freud, p.90, 1963; Grotjahn, p.15, 1966). This dream work is like wit work, where the associations are connected to the repressed, having an opportunity for an involuntary breakthrough and release. Moreover, according to Freud (1920), the unconscious always finds a way to become conscious (p.13), even with the censorship of the ego and preconscious, forming symbolic dreams and metaphorical humor to create satisfaction (Grotjahn, p.15, 1966). The dream and the joke are dissociated substitutes for something unconscious, holding a meaningful connotation of the psychic life in a physical form corresponding to one's waking life and experience. Therefore, when encountering a dream, an analyst must use a decoding method of interpretation like the one used for free association: viewing the dream and the joke as a secret message from the unconscious, where every aspect and every sign is translated and broken down to release the repression.

Resistance Interpretation

In moments of confrontation when working with the above methods, the analyst communicates an interpretation or idea that is arising from the repressed "we have discovered in him, [and] our telling him makes at first no change in his mental condition"

(Freud, p. 125, 1915b). This lack of change is because repression cannot be fully lifted until the client overcomes the resistance to and suppression (conscious action to forget) of the emerging unconscious trace. This suppression comes from an individual being unable to get past the mental watchman that guards the doorway of the preconscious (Freud & Strachey, p.201, 1966). Hence, when a patient faces a once-repressed thought, the unconscious threshold is broken, breaking through the preconscious censor. Nevertheless, no longer repressed does not mean the patient can sit with that thought. The ego will defend against the disturbance of that thought by suppressing it and meeting the analyst with resistance to the work of analysis (Freud & Strachey, p.201,1966), which can come in many forms, including anger, denial, rebuttals, blame-shifting, etc. An analyst must be able to identify this process through which thought begins to emerge in consciousness and then is suppressed or avoided through a tactic of resistance.

Along with basic forms of resistance, such as the ones mentioned above, this can come in a humorous form, such as a witty remark or joke acting as a comforting defense. It is important to remember that humor is also a form of release, not just a defense, so paying attention to humor that fosters a separate resistance when breaking down jokes is just as imperative. Regardless of the form of resistance, if the suppression cannot be removed, the repressed thought cannot become fully conscious, and the treatment will not become fully effective until "the inner resistance of the patient [is] abolished" (Freud & Strachey, p.305, 1966). In this sense, Freud & Strachey (1966) argues that overcoming resistance is the fundamental task of the analytical cure (p.78). Think of a curious child who is playing outside and encounters a big bug and puts it in his fist to keep, but when his mother comes over and asks him to open his hand to see what he has, he refuses. Hence,

there is a purpose for concealment, whether unconscious or conscious, knowing that reality will be shaken if honesty occurs, so resistance is present. Once the resistance is identified, the analyst can confront the patient with it since it is difficult for a patient to become aware, on their own, of their resistance to treatment. Freud uses a metaphor to make this final point: it is much easier to understand where the balloon is in the sky if someone points directly at it (Freud & Strachey, p.295,1966).

Transference Analysis and Interpretation

There is one final method central to psychoanalysis generally and important to the analysis of jokes, and that is transference analysis. Freud himself places a great deal of emphasis on this method: "Transference [analysis] in every case becomes the most effectual tool which aids the opening to the locked compartments of the psychic life" (Freud & Strachey, p. 300, 1966). When interpreting humor, interpreting dreams, encouraging free association, or dealing with resistance, its beneficial for the analyst to be aware of transference: historical conflicts and experiences that show themselves through unconscious repetition of impulses, feelings, thoughts, and behaviors that infiltrate the therapeutic space along with being directed at the therapist (Yilmaz et al., pp.1-5 2024). Interpretive work on transference should bring clarity and light to clients' anxieties, wishes, and representations projected onto the analyst in the form of comments, jokes, dreams, free association, or anger within the resistance. This gives rise to having transference overcome and shows the client that their expressed feelings and thoughts do not originate in the present and are not intended for the analyst. The role of insight in psychoanalysis is grand, and using specific methods to uncover the truth behind the humor presented will help lead

the client to greater self-awareness and emotional healing and deepen the therapeutic relationship through vulnerability and efficacy of treatment.

The Therapeutic Promise of Freudian Psychoanalysis

Psychoanalysis, with its deep attunement to unconscious processes, is a particularly well-suited therapeutic approach to address the use of humor employed by Generation Z. A psychoanalyst brings theoretical rigor and human sensitivity to approaching mental health. Psychoanalysis focuses on the unconscious and early childhood, allowing individuals to understand their lives and inner and outer conflicts on a deeper and more conceptualized level. Through careful attention to symbols and details within the interpretation and analysis of dreams, resistance, transference, and free association, the client's healing and turmoil will be honored to promote psychological liberation and understanding. Thus, psychoanalysis enables sufficient exploration of humor's cathartic and unconscious dimensions. Psychoanalytical work for addressing humor will be beneficial to break the humorous façade and foster clarity, deep introspection, and the development of healthier coping mechanisms, ultimately leading to a more fulfilling life.

Critical Reflections and Limitations

While this research provides a valuable analysis and exploration of humor and its use, it is limited by its theoretical approach rather than empirical testing. Moreover, future research should build upon this analysis through empirical observation, testing, and comparison. All progressions in the field start with a theory. Still, to increase validity (accuracy) and reliability (consistency), this work's theoretical proposition should be expanded through correlational and experimental procedures examining the efficacy of humor, its potential, and the therapeutic promise of psychoanalysis. This thesis focuses solely on humor and its potential in Freudian psychoanalysis, which takes away from other scholars' approaches to psychoanalysis. Further development of this work would benefit from exploring how psychoanalysts such as Harry Sullivan or Jacques Lacan view humor interpersonally, which will expand on social media's driving factor of connectivity and the approach to treating it as more interconnected. In addition, this work focuses on psychoanalysis and not broader psychotherapy. However, this is not to say that the psychoanalytic approach to treating humor does not have potential in other forms of therapy. Therefore, future research should broaden the exploration of humor and be open to psychoanalytic mechanisms and Freudian theory in practice to inform and benefit the therapeutic process of individuals enrolled in other theoretical treatment disciplines. Lastly, this thesis narrows in on Generation Z and their use of humor. This is not to say that other generations do not use humor similarly. Thus, to broaden this work, future analyses should bring in other generations and contrast parallels between age groups to get a more holistic view of humor and its unconscious connotations.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the role of humor in the lives of Generation Z and how Freudian psychoanalysis would be beneficial. Ultimately, a humorous man is a man in disguise, and humor serves as a disguised yet revealing outlet for repressed thoughts and emotions, offering psychoanalysis a unique avenue for uncovering hidden truths. As Martin Grotjahn says (1966) in *Beyond Laughter: Humor and the Subconscious*, "We all need some delusion to carry on this cruel reality" (p. 62). Instead of fostering delusion, this analysis demonstrates that utilizing humor through Freudian psychoanalysis can deepen clients' introspection into this defense mechanism's origins and illusory connotations, leading to more profound psychological liberation from trauma and pain. Through the internal process of having the repressed become conscious, an individual's insight grows through a sense of agency and the ability to engage with their world in a less conflicting and self-sabotaging way. Therefore, Freudian psychoanalysis addressing humor fosters a more profound exploration, leading to clarity rather than keeping the truth concealed.

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