

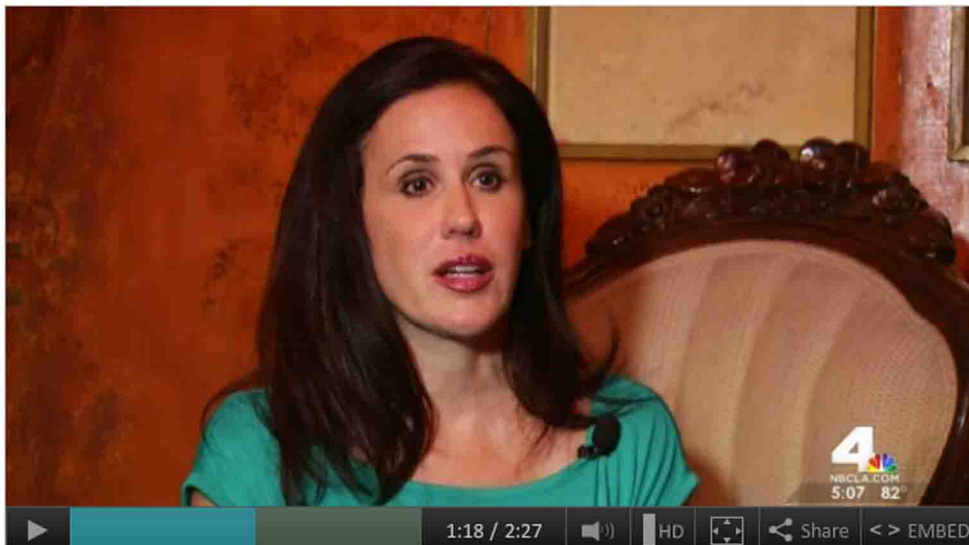


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"It's a Mask": Humor Hides Darker Issues in Comedy World, Psychologist Says

A clinical psychologist says depression and mental illness "don't discriminate," and using humor can be a way to mask darker issues

By John Cádiz Klemack



The suicide death of Robin Williams has some comedians talking about the darker, deeper side of show business and the pressure of always being entertaining to people. John Cádiz Klemack reports for NBC4 News at 5 p.m. from Hollywood Tuesday, Aug. 12, 2014.

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Lined up outside the Laugh Factory in Hollywood, it happens every Tuesday: aspiring comedians signing up to take part in Open Mic night.

But the death of Robin Williams has some talking about something deeper than just their act.

- **Robin Williams' Daughter: "I'll Try to Keep Looking Up"**

"I think comedy is a tough business, and I think sometimes people that get into the business are a little tortured," aspiring comedian Katy Weingarten said.

Weingarten was taken aback when she found out the Laugh Factory has its own clinical psychologist on staff to help comedians who seek it.



Robin Williams: Life and Times

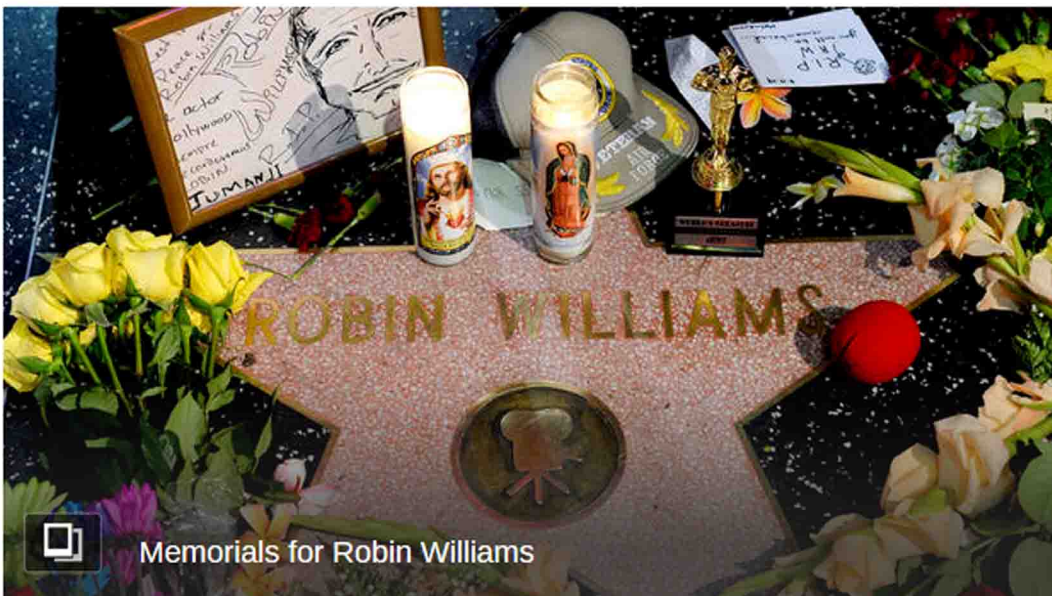
"You get off stage and there's this high that's very similar to other highs," Weingarten said. "And you come off and it's like there's an immediate down."

Ildiko Tabori, licensed clinical psychologist, said that feeling is a common one.

- **Robin Williams Hanged Himself With Belt: Sheriff**

"There's a high propensity of depression and bipolar for comedians," Tabori said.

Tabori meets with comedians four to five times a week on the "Groucho Marx couch" as they call it.



Memorials for Robin Williams

Laugh Factory owner Jamie Masada said he sought her out after the suicide death of comedian Richard Jeni in 2007.

"I didn't even know," Masada said. "I was so dumb and naive, I didn't realize he was just saying goodbye to me."

- **Chinese Theatre to Dim Lights for Robin Williams**

After a performance at the Laugh Factory, Jeni shot himself in his West Hollywood apartment.

"Depression, mental illness, these things don't discriminate," Tabori said. "You could be at the beginnings of your career, you could be hugely adored and successful with lots of money and still feel the things we feel as human beings. This is human nature. We all have baggage."



Comedians echoed Tabori's observations.

"I can definitely see it, aspiring comedian Donna Stoilova said. "There's a lot of pressure to being in the limelight and to always be entertaining people."

- **Robin Williams Leaves Behind Four New Movies**

Aspiring for those laughs is another battle.

"You see the results right away so if you don't hear a laugh, it can have a huge effect on you," aspiring comedian Satya Vanii said.

"Sometimes I wonder, 'Were they really laughing? Was it in my head?'" Weingarten said.

On stage, Tabori likens getting laughs to wearing a mask of defense.

"It's a mask that comedians wear on stage," Tabori said. "Laughter and humor is a defense mechanism and it's one of the strongest mechanisms we have."