Laughter is a subject that has been studying intensively. However, it is still a new area of study. William F. Fry, one of the founders of gelotology, started to experiment on himself in the early 1960’s, by drawing blood samples at regular intervals while watching a funny movie and found the laughter enhanced the activity of certain immune system cells. (Liebertz, Charmaine). Many other studies have been done on how laughter affects the body on psychological and physiological levels. Dr. Robert Provine, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Maryland University, has been studying laughter for many years. In his book called *Laughter*, Dr. Provine explains that laughter is part of our DNA. Also, he explains the social, psychological, and neurological aspects of laughter, its history and studies with chimpanzees. He says, “Laughter is instinctive behavior programmed by our genes, not by the vocal community in which we grow up” (p. 1).

Since laughter is part of our genes, it is easy and simple to just laugh. Therefore, many studies have been done by researchers around the world to show the healthy benefits of laughter and humor, and how it can improve someone’s life. Studies have shown that laughter enhances mood, decreases pain, improves the immune system, improves respiration and muscle relaxation, decreases stress and blood pressure, and has many other health benefits. Studies have been done not only on the health benefits of laughter, but also--more specifically--the benefits of laughter
yoga sessions as an intervention for better health. Laughter yoga is a new area of research. It started in 1995 in India by a doctor called Madan Kataria. Since then laughter yoga has been implemented in many medical settings to help patients to cope with anxiety, depression and other mental illness.

Several studies on depression and laughter yoga have been done. They analyze the effects of laughter yoga and how it can improve mood in patients waiting for organ transplant, undergoing cancer treatment, recovering from surgery, dealing with diabetes, suffering from mental illness, and depression. We will discuss a few of these studies below.

One study in Korea analyzed depressed middle-aged women and the effects that laughter yoga had on them. The results showed that the serotonin levels increased after five times a week laughter yoga sessions during the period of two weeks. They concluded that serotonin activation through laughter therapy can help middle-aged women by lessening depression. (Cha and Hong). Even though the study is written in Korean, the abstract describes the purpose, methods, results and conclusion in English. It also shows the contents of laughter therapy program.

Another study, also done in Korea, was conducted to research the effects of laughter yoga among depressed people in the elderly community. Their main concern was about the untreated depression that is related to the increase of illness and disability, suicide and mortality and elderly quality of life (Hae and Chang). The study group had laughter yoga therapy session once a week for a month. Even though the sample size dropped from 200 volunteers to 129 at the end of the study, they conclude, “Our study demonstrated that depression, insomnia and sleep quality improved in the laughter therapy group, while they worsened or showed no significant change in
the control group” (Hae and Chang). A similar study in Iran with elderly depressed women showed significant improvement in their life satisfaction with ten sessions of laughter yoga. They say, “Our study showed promising results about the effect of Laughter Yoga on the improvement of depressed mood as well life satisfaction in elderly depressive women (Shahidi et al).

A review article studies the use of humor in mental illness. They discuss the intervention of laughter therapy on individuals with serious mental illness--such as for bipolar disorder, panic disorder, major depression, obsessive compulsive disorder and others. They mention that a laughter therapy group may help them with the lack of social skills and social alienation (Gelkopf).

In another study with patients waiting for organ transplant, the results suggest that laughter yoga may increase feeling to liveliness, activation, cheerfulness, and friendliness in the patients waiting for organ transplants (Dolgoff-Kaspar et al.). Also they mention about a pilot study using humor therapy that helped reduce depression symptoms, improved mood, daily living activities and quality of life. Other participants overcame depression, discontinued their medication and had an overall improvement in their personal life (Gelkopf).

It is true that most laughter yoga studies have only been conducted over short periods of time, usually over a month. Also, they used small sample sizes. Many researchers believe that it would be better to have a larger sample size with a prolonged time of study to confirm the healthy benefits of laughter yoga for people with depression and other disorders. It would be interesting to study how the brain chemistry and the production of neurotransmitters may be affected by laughter. One study expressed some concern about getting financial support for an
intervention or a scientific study (Gelkop). So, it is important to remember that the study of laughter yoga is still quite young and the current research we have is quite new.

In conclusion, laughter yoga has been a subject of study all over the world and the studies will likely continue growing rapidly. Personally, I have been noticing how laughter yoga has been helping me cope with stress, depression and anxiety. It has been helping me to have a positive and brighter approach to face life’s challenges. In addition to all the research that has been done, I see the benefits of laughter yoga in my own personal life.
Work Cited

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