Laughing Together Or Joking Apart?
The Role of Humor Styles in Children’s Friendships

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Children and Humor

Little comedians

Toddlers as young as 19 months are able to distinguish jokes from mistakes - a skill that lays the groundwork for their later ability to recognise lies and false beliefs. That's according to Elena Hoicka and Merideth Gattis, who tested a large group of children aged between 19 and 36 months.

Joking and pretending 'key to toddler learning'

Younger siblings 'more amusing'
Children's Friendships

Examining how friendships help children cope in stressful situations

Lia Steakley on January 26th, 2012 |  No Comments

Scientists find link between number of friends and physical activity in children

7 May 2012

Children with more friends are more physically active than those with less, scientists have discovered.

Girls' friendships at primary school can be destructive

This page was made on Monday 19th March 2012

Should teachers stop children having 'best friends'?
Children’s Friendships

**Friendship**: a mutual relationship between two people (Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1996).

**Measuring Friendships**: Has its basis in sociometry (Moreno, 1930) and involves asking children to nominate their friends. The number of “reciprocal friends” that a child has can then be determined.

**Peer Acceptance**: a measure of a child’s liking by their peers.

Generally speaking, having friendships leads to better psychological adjustment (Rubin, Bukowski, & Laursen, 2009).
Children’s Friendship Groups

Children have a need to feel that they **belong** to groups (Baumeister & Leary, 2005).

Belonging has an influential bearing on children’s **self-worth** (Verkuyten, 2009).

Work within the frame of **Social Identity Theory** (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) has started to explain the processes underpinning children’s behaviour in groups, including the role of group membership in **behavioral similarities** (e.g., Nesdale et al., 2010; Jones et al, 2012).
Children’s Friendships and Humor

There is a plethora of evidence suggesting that the more similar people are, the more likely they are to be friends.

Demographic similarity
For example: age, sex, and race, socioeconomics (e.g., Aboud, 1988)

Personal similarity
For example: attitudes and values, self-esteem levels, activities (e.g., Gottman, 1983)

Does the similarity hypothesis extend to humor styles?
Research Questions

Is the humor of 11-13 year-olds’ related to that of their friendship groups?

Are there differences in the humor styles of those who have many versus few friends?
Research Methodology

Part of the ESRC humor and Bullying Research Project.

Sample of 1 300 UK children, aged 11-13 years.

Children completed the Child Humor Styles Questionnaire (Fox, Dean, & Lyford, in press).

Children were asked to nominate a best friend, and their friends, in the class, and to give them a rating from 1 “dislike very much”, to 5 “like very much”.
Reciprocal friendships are those where the peer nomination is mutual.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of reciprocal friendships (class level)</td>
<td>14.79</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>15.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Peer Liking (1-5)</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Groups and Cores

• A **group** is defined as a set of children each of whom reciprocally nominates at least two others in the group as friends (or best friends).

• A **core** is defined as a set of children (N ≥2) each of whom reciprocally nominates at least two others in the core as a friend or best friend, and reciprocally gives at least one of those a friendship rating of 5 ("like very much").
Seeking Memberships

• A child is said to want to belong to a core or group when s/he unreciprocally nominates at least one child in a core or group, but s/he does not belong to it.

• A child is said to be wanted by a core or group when at least one child in a group or core unreciprocally nominates that child, but s/he does not belong to it.
# Group Compositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Boys</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Girls</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Gender</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N of Groups</th>
<th>Mean Group Size</th>
<th>Mean N Wanting to Be in Group</th>
<th>Mean N Wanted By Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All Boys</td>
<td>All Girls</td>
<td>Mixed Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Groups</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>132</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Group Size</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>9.05</td>
<td>6.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean N Wanting to Be in Group</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>4.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean N Wanted By Group</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>5.10</td>
</tr>
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</table>
# Core Compositions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N of Cores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Boys</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Girls</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Gender</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Participants’ Core / Group Memberships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N of Core Memberships</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of Group Memberships</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Group Belonging Only to One Group</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Core Belonging Only to One Core</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cluster Analysis

Cluster analysis, using mean substitution for missing data, and the Bayesian Information Criterion to optimize the number of clusters selected, revealed a two-cluster solution.

Cores and groups were made up of children whose humor profiles were either:

- Self-enhancing and affiliative OR
- Self-defeating and aggressive

This cluster structure was confirmed by a factor analysis in which two components were extracted.

Averaging over the humor profiles for each group and core revealed the dominant humor profile for that group or core.
Humor in Cores

Is there a relation between a core wanting you to belong to it, and sharing its humor style?

![Graph showing the mean percentage of Core's Humor Profile]

- **Self-Enhancing/Affiliative Style**
- **Self-Defeating/Agressive Humor Style**
Being in a Core

Children who were in a core were more likely to have a self-enhancing / affiliative humor style. Those who were not in a core were more likely to have an aggressive / self-defeating humor style.
Humor Style & Membership

Children had more memberships when they had a self-enhancing / affiliative humor style.
Children were more wanted by other groups when they had a self-enhancing / affiliative humor style.
Summary

Children’s use of humor is related to their memberships in friendship groups.

- Participants who had a self-defeating and aggressive humor style were wanted by cores with a self-enhancing/affiliative profile, while those who had a self-enhancing and affiliative humor style were wanted by cores with a self-defeating/aggressive profile.
- Children had more group / core memberships when they had an affiliative/self-enhancing humor style.
- Children who were “isolates” were more likely to have a maladaptive (self-defeating/aggressive) humor style.

Why is this – does humor style cause friends who are similar to group together – or do children who group together develop a similar humor style?
Thank you 😊

To all the children who took part, and the parents and teachers who allowed them to do so.

To you for listening

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