



LMAO? Longitudinal relationships between humour and involvement in bullying.



Dr Simon C. Hunter

*School of Psychological Sciences and Health,
University of Strathclyde*

email: simon.hunter@strath.ac.uk



This research was funded by the *Economic and Social Research Council*, award reference RES-062-23-2647.



Project team and info

P.I.: Dr Claire Fox, Keele University

Research Fellow: Dr Siân Jones, Oxford Brookes University

Project team: Sirandou Saidy Khan, Hayley Gilman, Katie Walker, Katie Wright-Bevans, Lucy James, Rebecca Hale, Rebecca Serella, Toni Karic, Mary-Louise Corr, Claire Wilson, and Victoria Caines.

Thanks and acknowledgements:

Teachers, parents and children in the participating schools.
The ESRC.

More info:

Project blog: <http://esrcbullyingandhumourproject.wordpress.com/>

Twitter: @Humour_Bullying

Overview

- Background
- Methods
- Victimization, loneliness and humour
- Dyadic analyses
- Summary



Background

Involves recognition of an incongruity and, later, the ability to resolve that incongruity (Bernstein, 1986).

For incongruity to operate successfully, it needs to occur within a safe framework (Bariaud, 1988). 'Safe' cues become less obvious as we get older.



Development



Humour develops and becomes more complex across childhood and into adolescence e.g. At 10-14 years old, young people understand riddles with complex cognitive incongruities where humour is due to illogical resolution and hence violated expectations (Bruno et al., 1987).

What did the newscaster say after he announced that the world had come to an end?

"Stay tuned - Bob's here with the weather next!"

Functions of humour



Early conceptualisation of humour viewed it predominantly as a 'force for good' (Cousins, 1979; Lefcourt, 2001).

Fulfils myriad social roles:

- Enhancing relationships; increasing or maintaining group cohesion; relieving tension; saving face; expressing aggression in a socially acceptable way; probing intentions and values indirectly; backing down from a previous position; ingratiating yourself; attracting/maintaining attention; expressing views that are otherwise difficult to communicate (Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010).

Functions of humour



Martin (2007)

- *Social*: Strengthening relationships, but also excluding, humiliating, or manipulating others.
- *Personal*: To cope with dis/stress, esp. in reappraisal and in 'replacing' negative feelings.

Positive Humour Styles



Multi-dimensional (Fox et al., in press; Martin, 2007), with two 'positive' forms of humour:

Self-enhancing: A generally humorous outlook on life, even in the face of stress or adversity (sample item: 'I find that laughing and joking are good ways to cope with problems').

- Among adults, correlates with anxiety, depression, self-esteem, social intimacy, and positive wellbeing.

Affiliative: Enhances relationships and can reduce interpersonal tensions; these people tell jokes, engage in witty banter etc (sample item: 'I often make people laugh by telling jokes or funny stories').

- Among adults, correlates with anxiety, depression, self-esteem, and social intimacy.

Negative Humour Styles



And two 'negative' forms of humour:

Aggressive: Enhancing the self at the expense of others, use of sarcasm, ridicule, derision, and "put downs" (sample item: 'If someone makes a mistake I often tease them about it').

- Among adults, correlates with hostility, aggression, not with measures of psychological adjustment though.



Self-defeating: Excessively disparaging, aims to enhance relationships but at the expense of personal integrity or one's own emotional needs (sample item: 'I often put myself down when making jokes or trying to be funny').

- Among adults, correlates with depression, anxiety, self-esteem, hostility, aggression, social intimacy, and positive wellbeing.

Humour and Victimization



How might humour be associated with peer-victimisation?

Peer-Victimisation



- Repeated attacks on an individual.
- Conceptualised as a continuum rather than a category (Hunter et al., 2007).



Includes verbal, physical, and relational aggression.

Peer-Victimisation



Clearly a stressful experience for many young people, associated with depressive symptomatology (Hunter et al., 2007, 2010), anxiety (Visconti et al., 2010), self-harm (Viljoen et al., 2005) and suicidal ideation (Dempsey et al., 2011; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2009), PTSD (Idsoe et al., 2012; Tehrani et al., 2004), loneliness (Catterson & Hunter, 2010; Woodhouse et al., 2012), psychosomatic problems (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009), ...etc

Also a very social experience – peer roles can be broader than just victim or aggressor (Salmivalli et al., 1996).

Loneliness is particularly interesting in the context of victimisation and humour.

Loneliness



Thinking that you have few friends, are socially incompetent and are unable to satisfy basic friendship needs (Cassidy & Asher, 1992).



Associated with victimisation in children and adolescents (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Storch & Warner, 2004).

Persists even when victimisation has stopped (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Wardrop, 2001).

Peer-Victimisation & Humour



Children who are bullied often have less opportunity to interact with their peers and so are at a disadvantage *with respect to the development of humour competence* (Klein & Kuiper, 2008):

- Cross-sectional data support this: Peer-victimisation is negatively correlated with both affiliative *and* self-enhancing humour (Fox & Lyford, 2009).
- May be particularly true of relational victimisation.

Peer-Victimisation & Humour



Victimisation = greater use of self-defeating humour?

- May be particularly true for verbal victimisation as peers directly supply the victim with negative self-relevant cognitions such as “*You’re a loser*”, “*You’re stupid*” etc which are internalised (see also Rose & Abramson, 1992, re. depressive cognitions).
- Adolescents with an internal locus of control (“*It was my fault*”) less likely to use adaptive forms of humour (Roesch et al., 2009).
 - Self-blame mediates effect of parental conflict on internalising (Grych et al., 2000)
 - Some forms of self-blame (though not all) mediate effect of victimisation on loneliness (Catterson & Hunter, 2010; Graham & Juvonen, 1998).

Today’s focus



Primarily, to evaluate the relationship between humour, peer-victimisation, and loneliness

- Does peer-victimisation influence the development of humour? Specifically, does it lead to a reduction in levels of adaptive humour use and an increase in levels of maladaptive humour use?
- Does self-defeating humour mediate the effect of peer-victimisation on loneliness?
- Are friendship dyads important for the development of humour in early adolescence?

Methods



- N=1241 (612 male), 11-13 years old, from six Secondary schools in England.
- Data collected at two points in time: At the start and again at the end of the 2011-2012 school session.
- Data collection spread over two sessions at each time point due to number of tasks.

Measures



Self-Report:

- 24-item Child Humour Styles Questionnaire (Fox et al., in press).
- 36-item Victimization and Aggression (Owens et al., 2005).
- 4-item Loneliness (Asher et al., 1984; Rotenberg et al., 2005). "I am lonely", "I feel alone", "I feel left out of things", "I have no one to talk to".

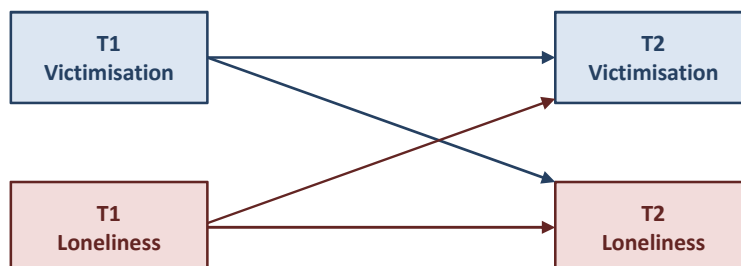


Also had peer-nomination data, and self-report data on depression and self-esteem.

Cross-lagged analyses



First, checking direction of effects between victimisation and loneliness



Cross-lagged analyses



Model fit statistics are fine:

CMIN/DF = 3.72; CFI = .903; RMSEA = .047 (95%CI = .045, .049).

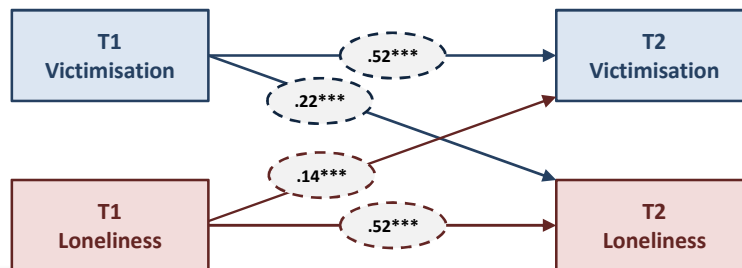
Cross-sectional correlations (T1):

Victimisation & Loneliness = .49***

Cross-lagged analyses



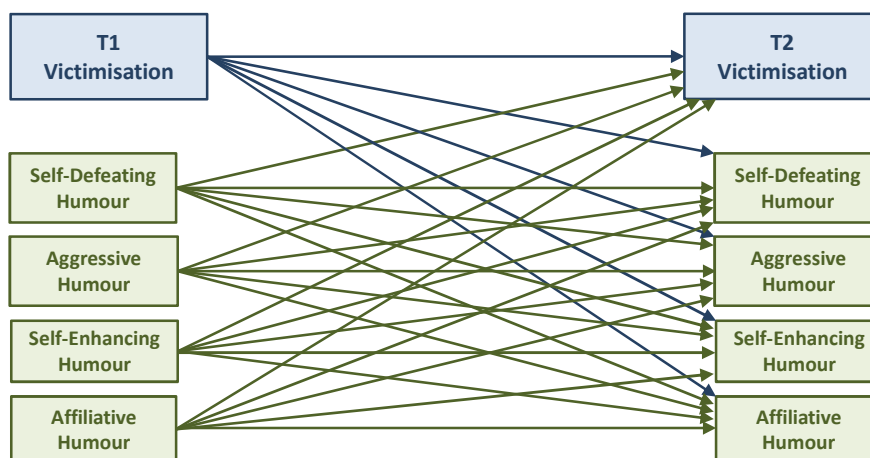
Direction of effects between victimisation and loneliness:



Cross-lagged analyses



Mediation. First step, check to see relationships between humour and victimisation



Cross-lagged analyses



Model fit statistics are fine:

CMIN/DF = 2.22; CFI = .890; RMSEA = .032 (95%CI = .031, .032).

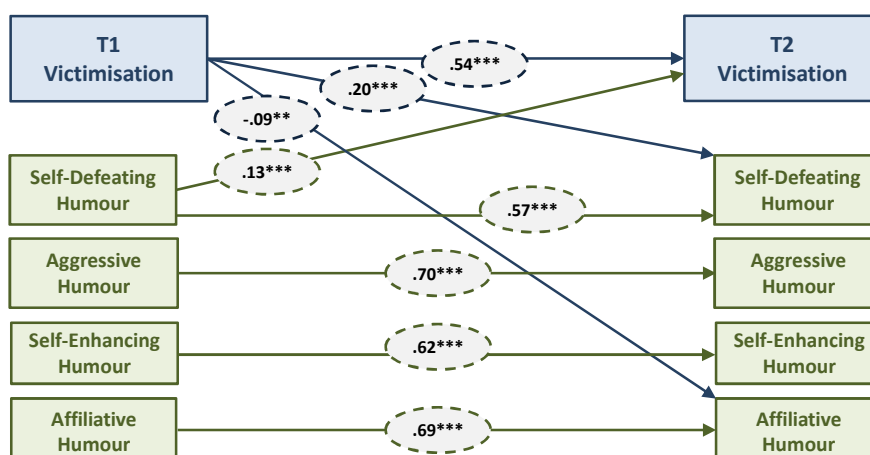
Cross-sectional correlations (T1):

	Affiliative	Self-Enhance	Aggressive	Self-Defeat
Victimisation	-.17***	-.03	.12**	.42***
Affiliative		.45***	.20***	-.17***
Self-Enhance			.12***	.16***
Aggressive				.30***

Cross-lagged analyses



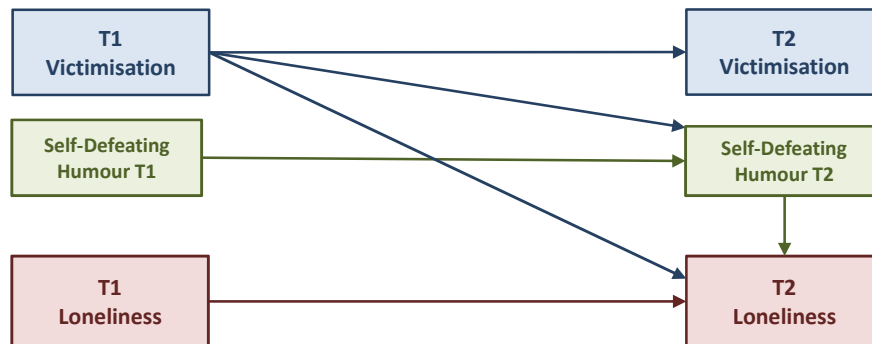
Self-defeating humour plays central role:



Cross-lagged analyses



Finally, assess possible mediation



Cross-lagged analyses



Use bootstrapping, which halves sample size here.

Significant indirect effect, and approximately half the effect of victimisation upon loneliness goes via self-defeating humour.

Cross-lagged analyses



Also interested in humour as a resilience factor (Cheung & Yue, 2012), i.e. as a coping strategy.

- Self-defeating humour associated with avoidance coping, self-enhancing humour with approach coping (Erickson & Feldstein, 2007).
- Positive humour more generally is associated with problem solving and positive affect (Roesch et al., 2009; Vera et al., 2012).
- Humour as a coping strategy moderates effect of stress on life satisfaction amongst adolescents (Vera et al., 2012).

Does humour use moderate effects of victimisation on loneliness?

Cross-lagged analyses



Answer: No.

	Level of Humour		
	High	Average	Low
Affiliative	.21*	.23***	.16**
Self-Enhancing	.20*	.20***	.28**
Self-Defeating	.19*	.22***	.21**
Aggressive	.16*	.23***	.13**

Cross-lagged analyses



Summary

- Humour is quite a stable construct, even in early adolescence.
- Different forms of humour appear to be quite distinct and, at least over the course of one school year, do not influence each other's development.
- Self-defeating humour seems to feed, and to feed off, peer-victimisation. In this way, it mediates some of the effect of victimisation upon loneliness.
- Humour does not moderate the effect of peer-victimisation upon loneliness.

Dyadic analyses - APIM



Normal assumption is that data are independent.

But, children in friendships are likely to produce data which are **related** in some way.

Shared experiences may shape friends' similarity or their similarity may be what the attraction was to begin with.

The Actor-Partner Independence Model (APIM: Kenny, 1996) makes a virtue of this data structure.

Dyadic analyses



Specific questions:

- Are humour styles shared by best friends? Birds of a feather...?
- Do children converge, over time, with their best friend's humour style? We might expect this given the theoretical emphasis on maintaining group cohesion, strengthening relationships etc (Martin, 2007; Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010).
- Following on from previous cross-lagged analyses, does your best friend's level of victimisation influence the degree to which you use self-defeating humour? Possible, given documented bystander effects (Rivers et al., 2009).

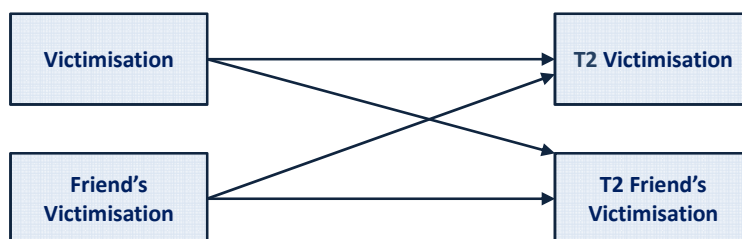
Dyadic analyses



Indistinguishable dyads: Best friends.

- $N_{\text{dyad}} = 457$ (best friends at T1)

Basic model:



- Extended to include humour styles too.

Dyadic analyses



Are humour styles shared by best friends?

Table: Cross-sectional ACTOR (& PARTNER) correlations at T1

	Victimis.	Affiliative	Self-Enhan	Aggressive	Self-Def
Victimisation	<i>N/A (.13)</i>	-.06 (.00)	-.03 (-.02)	.06 (-.03)	.30 (.04)
Affiliative		<i>N/A (.08)</i>	.40 (.09)	.09 (-.02)	-.16 (.02)
Self-Enhance			<i>N/A (.24)</i>	.03 (-.05)	.04 (.01)
Aggressive				<i>N/A (.27)</i>	.15 (.04)
Self-Defeat					<i>N/A (.19)</i>

Dyadic analyses



Longitudinally:

- *Do children converge, over time, with their best friend's humour style?* – No, not across the 9 months of this study.
- Friend's level of victimisation does not influence own later victimisation (.02^{ns}).
- Victimization influences best friend's later self-defeating humour (.07*; very small effect- but NB stability of humour .6/.7) as well as own (.17*).
- Self-defeating humour influences best friend's later victimisation (.08*) as well as own (.18*).
 - Why no cross-sectional partner effects? (due to being in S1?)

Dyadic analyses



Summary

- Young people do seem to share humour styles (though, perhaps ironically, not affiliative), but don't converge over time – evidence for “choice” argument rather than convergence.
- Friendship with a victimised peer is not a risk factor for own later victimisation.
- Best friend's victimisation related (just) to changes in own self-defeating humour.

General conclusions



Victimisation and loneliness each influence the other.

The effect of victimisation on loneliness is partially mediated by self-defeating humour.

Humour styles do not moderate the effects of victimisation on loneliness (arguing against conceptualisation of humour as a coping strategy, at in context of loneliness).

By early adolescence, humour is a stable, multi-dimensional construct.

Young people seem to choose friends with a similar sense of humour rather than becoming more similar to their friends. Some (weak) evidence that a best friend's victimisation influences humour.

Future research



Humour research

- Lots of interesting questions arise re. developmental issues.
 - How to characterise change in humour styles (oil tanker?).
 - Only about 25% of variance in humour explained by genes (Veselka et al., 2010). What are other social influences?
 - Wider group context (social network effects).
- Re. health and wellbeing: Important topic or epiphenomenon?
- Effects of being laughed at? Victimisation already associated with gelotophobia (fear of being laughed at) in children and adolescents (Führ, 2010; Proyer et al., 2012).

Bullying research

- Assessing humour styles specific to different forms of victimisation.
- Use of humour by bullies/aggressive young people

