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# Humour styles as moderators and mediators of the relationship between peer-victimisation and internalising

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# Humour

What functions does humour serve?



*Social:* Strengthening relationships, but also excluding, humiliating, or manipulating others (Martin, 2007).

*Personal:* To cope with dis/stress, esp. in reappraisal and in 'replacing' negative feelings (Martin, 2007).

Both of these functions are directly relevant to bullying and peer-victimisation contexts.



# Humour

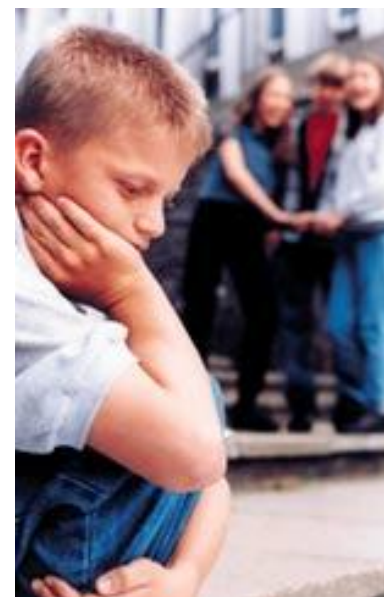
Humour is multi-dimensional (Martin, 2007):

- *Self-enhancing*: Not detrimental toward others (e.g. 'I find that laughing and joking are good ways to cope with problems').
- *Aggressive*: Enhancing the self at the expense of others (e.g. 'If someone makes a mistake I often tease them about it').
- *Affiliative*: Enhances relationships and can reduce interpersonal tensions (e.g. 'I often make people laugh by telling jokes or funny stories').
- *Self-defeating*: Enhances relationships, but at the expense of personal integrity or one's own emotional needs (e.g. 'I often put myself down when making jokes or trying to be funny').



# Peer-victimisation

- Repeated attacks on an individual.
- Conceptualised as a continuum rather than as a category (viz. bullying).
- Associated with many, many different indices of maladjustment.



Also multi-dimensional in nature:

- *Verbal*: Being teased or called names.
- *Physical*: Hitting, kicking etc. Also includes property damage.
- *Social*: Exclusion, rumour spreading.



# Humour as a mediator

Klein and Kuiper (2008)

Children who are bullied have much less opportunity to interact with their peers and so are at a disadvantage with respect to the development of humour competence.

- Cross-sectional data supports : Peer-victimisation is negatively correlated with both affiliative *and* self-enhancing humour (Fox & Lyford, 2009).
- May be particularly true for victims of social aggression.

Victims gravitate toward more use of self-defeating humour?

- May be particularly true for victims of verbal aggression 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).



# Humour as a moderator

- Among adults, humour moderates the effect of negative life stressors upon internalising difficulties (Martin & Lefcourt, 1983), positive affect (Martin et al., 1993), and biological markers of stress (Martin & Dobbin, 1988). This is true for depression even when controlling for earlier depression (Nezu, 1988).



- Among children, humour use moderates effect of daily cancer 'hassles' upon both psychological adjustment and infection (Dowling et al., 2003).
- However, there is very little research assessing humour as a moderator of the effects of stress in children and young people.



# Our study

- N=1241 (612 male), 11-13 years old, from six Secondary schools.
- Data collection spread over two sessions.

## Self-Report:

- 24-item Child Humour Styles Questionnaire (Fox et al., in press).
- 10-item Children's Depression Inventory – Short Form (Kovacs, 1985)

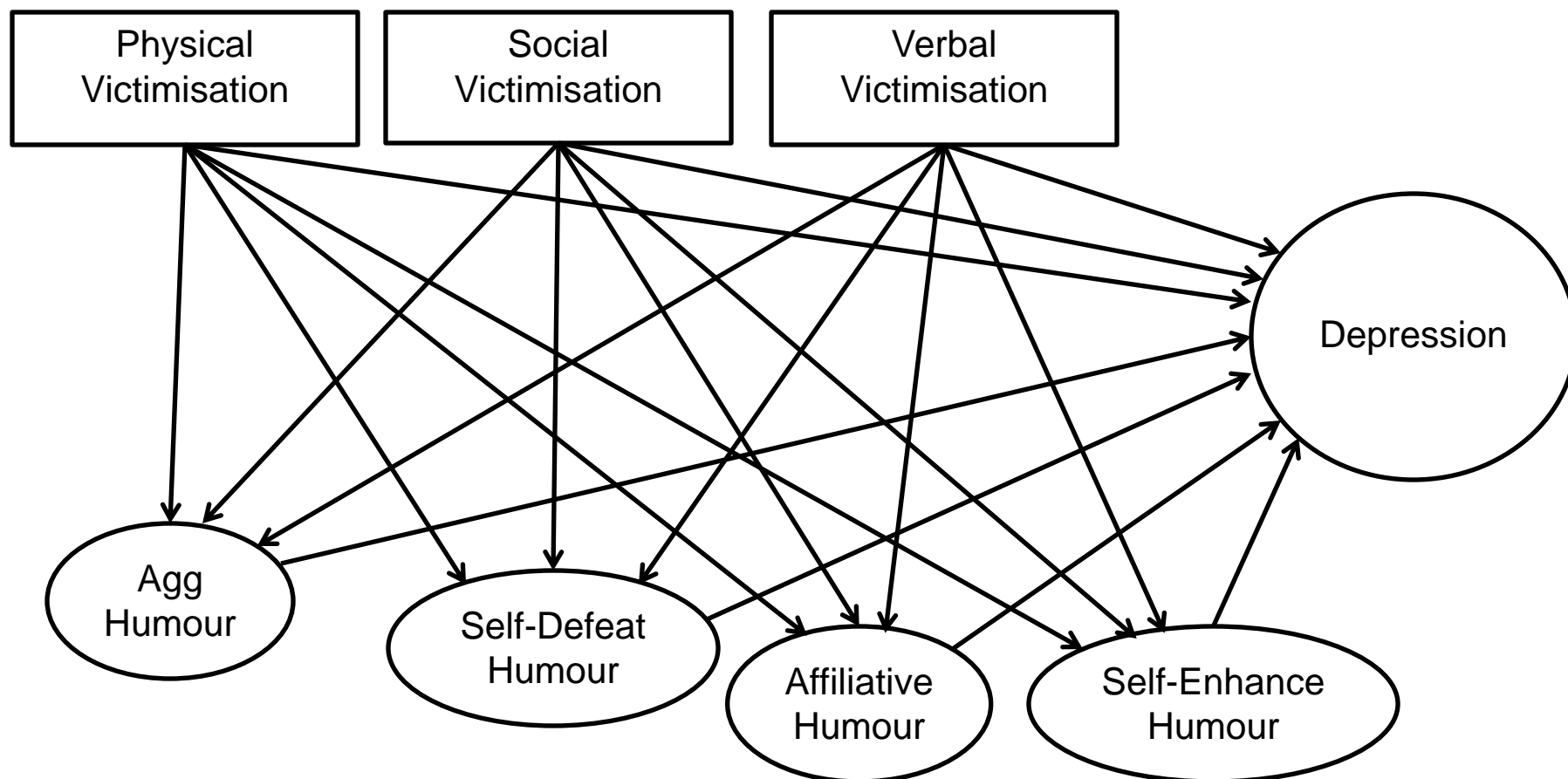
## Peer-nomination:

- Peer-victimisation, unlimited nominations:
  - Verbal: “*Gets called nasty names by other children.*”
  - Physical: “*Gets kicked, hit and pushed around by other children.*”
  - Indirect – “*Gets left out of the group by other children*” and “*Has nasty rumours spread about them by other children.*”



# Mediation Model

Assessing mediation of the effect of peer-nominated victimisation upon depressive symptomatology via maladaptive humour use:



*NB. All three victimisation variables were allowed to covary, as well were the four humour variables. Gender effects on depressive symptomatology and victimisation were also controlled for.*



# Mediation Model – Standardised Effects

Peer-Victimisation	DV	Total	Direct	Indirect
Physical →	Depression	-.03	-.01	-.02
Verbal →		<b>.18***</b>	.09	.09
Social →		<b>.15**</b>	.08	.06
Physical →	Affiliative Humour	.02	-	-
Verbal →		<b>-.13*</b>	-	-
Social →		<b>-.11*</b>	-	-
Physical →	Self-Enhancing Humour	-.06	-	-
Verbal →		.00	-	-
Social →		-.06	-	-
Physical →	Aggressive Humour	<b>.10*</b>	-	-
Verbal →		.02	-	-
Social →		-.07	-	-
Physical →	Self-Defeating Humour	-.04	-	-
Verbal →		<b>.16**</b>	-	-
Social →		.07	-	-



# Mediation Model – Standardised Effects

Humour	DV	Total
Affiliative →	Depression	-.12**
Self-Enhancing →		-.22***
Aggressive →		-.08
Self-Defeating →		.50***

So, two possible mediational pathways:

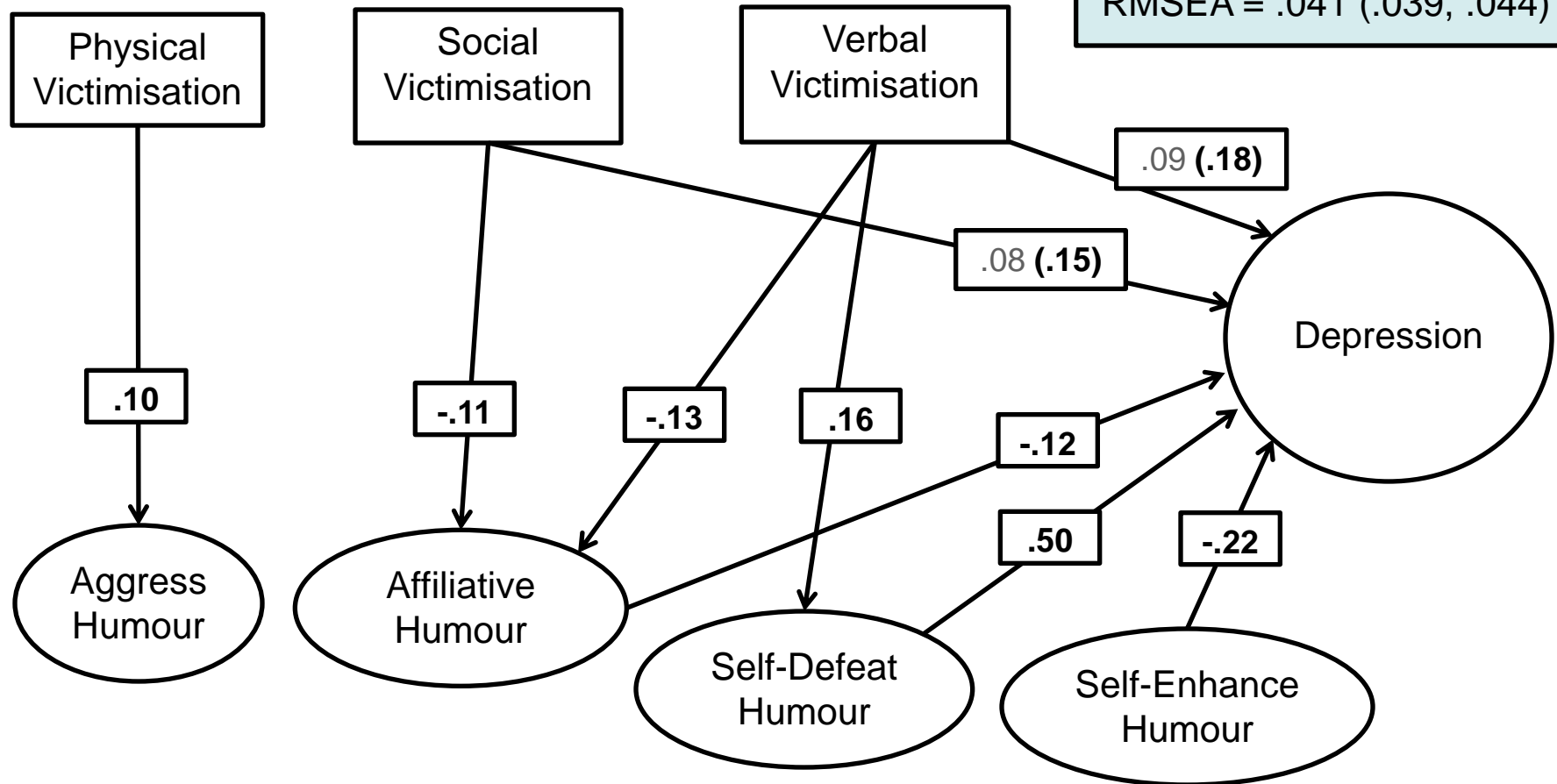
- Verbal victimisation influencing depression via its effects on self-defeating and/or affiliative humour.
- Social victimisation influencing depression via its effects on affiliative humour



# Mediation Model – Peer Nominations

No mediation present.

$\chi^2 (464) = 1449, p < .001$   
CFI = .915  
RMSEA = .041 (.039, .044)



*NB. All three victimisation variables were allowed to covary, as well were the four humour variables. Gender effects on depressive symptomatology and victimisation were also controlled for.*



# Moderation

- Evaluated whether the paths leading from each type of victimisation to depression were moderated by level of humour.
- Using preceding analysis, we created factor scores for each style of humour. We then created low, average, and high groups for each of these humour styles based on 1SD above or below the mean.
- Multi-group analyses were then undertaken to assess moderation by each type of humour style.
  - No moderation present.



# Discussion

- Recall that effect of ‘major’ cancer stressors upon psychosocial adjustment *not* moderated by humour (Dowling et al., 2003). Perhaps victimisation should be conceptualised as a major stressor, not a daily hassle?
- Support for theory that verbal victimisation is a particular risk factor for self-defeating humour (Klein & Kuiper, 2008; Rose & Abramson, 1992).
- Also, some support for theory that victimisation may negatively impact development of humour
- Small effects, especially re. relationships between peer-victimisation and depressive symptomatology
  - Due to peer nomination? Because gender is controlled for?
- Causality? Maladjustment may mediate link between victimisation and humour use (see Masten, 1986)



# Further information

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

Twitter: @Humour\_Bullying

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