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Coping processes, resilience, and school bullying

Simon C. Hunter

BPS Division of Education and Child Psychology Conference,
Glasgow Radisson Hotel, 3-5 January 2007

Collaborators on the projects reported here were:
Mr James Boyle, Dr David Warden, Prof. Kevin Durkin (all University of Strathclyde)
Prof. Christine Howe (University of Cambridge)
Dr Derek Heim (University of Central Lancashire)
Mr Dermot Bergin (University of Edinburgh)

So…what exactly is resilience?

"*Resilience is demonstrated when children attain positive outcomes or display positive adaptation despite encountering significant risk, adversity or stress*"
(Naglieri & LeBuffe, 2006:108)

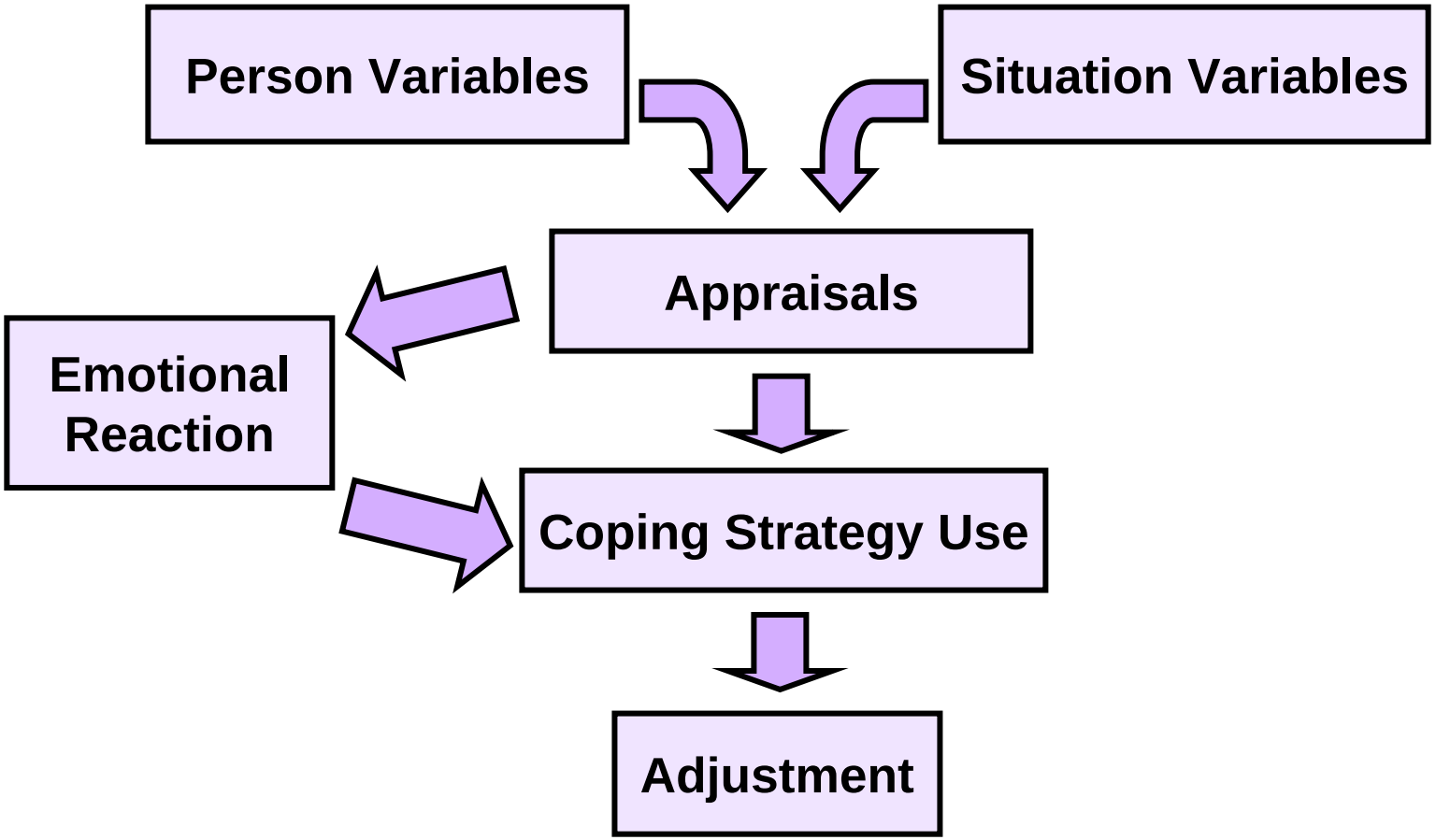
Today's presentation will outline results from three studies, two conducted with the same cohort. These focus on resilience in the context of school bullying.

Are there aspects of the coping processes typical of bullied children which can inform resilience in other children?

Transactional coping

How can we examine resilience within the context of bullying?

- Transactional coping theory (e.g. Lazarus, 1999) offers a way of examining children's reactions so that protective factors can be teased out.



Participants

Study 1 & 2 (See Hunter et al., 2006 & in prep):

- 830 children and young people attending six Secondary and 10 Primary schools in Aberdeenshire and North Lanarkshire, Scotland.
- 317 in P6 (mean age at beginning of study = 8.95, S.D. = 0.27, 49% boys), 306 in S2 (mean age at beginning of study = 11.93, S.D. = 0.27, 49% boys), and 205 in S3 (mean age at beginning of study = 13.01, S.D. = 0.24, 48% boys).

Study 3 (ESRC award RES-000-22-1428):

- 925 children attending schools in Glasgow City, Scotland and Preston, England.
- Children were in P5, P6 and P7, aged 8 to 12 years old (mean = 9.81, SD = 0.91).
- Majority (60%) of children from minority national or religious groups

Methods

Study 1 & 2 (See Hunter et al., 2006; in prep):

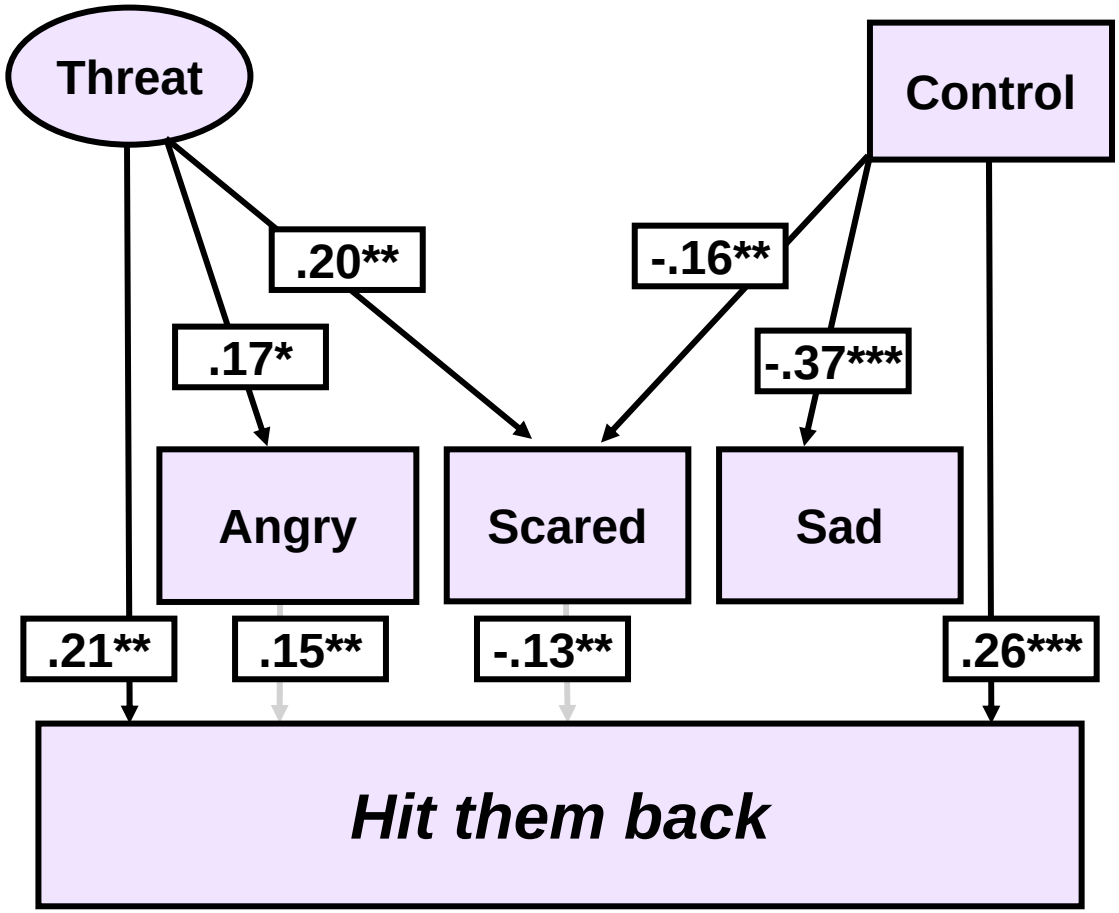
- Questionnaire based.
- Assessments included appraisals of threat and control, emotional reactions when bullied, coping strategies used when bullied, and depressive symptomatology (Birleson, 1981)
- Longitudinal – took part on five evenly spread intervals over 24 months.

Study 3 (ESRC award RES-000-22-1428):

- Questionnaire based.
- Assessments included appraisals of threat and control, coping strategies used when bullied (Causey & Dubow, 1992), and depressive symptomatology (Kovacs, 1985)

Study 1 Results: Emotions and Coping

What are the relationships between appraisals, emotional experience and coping strategies?



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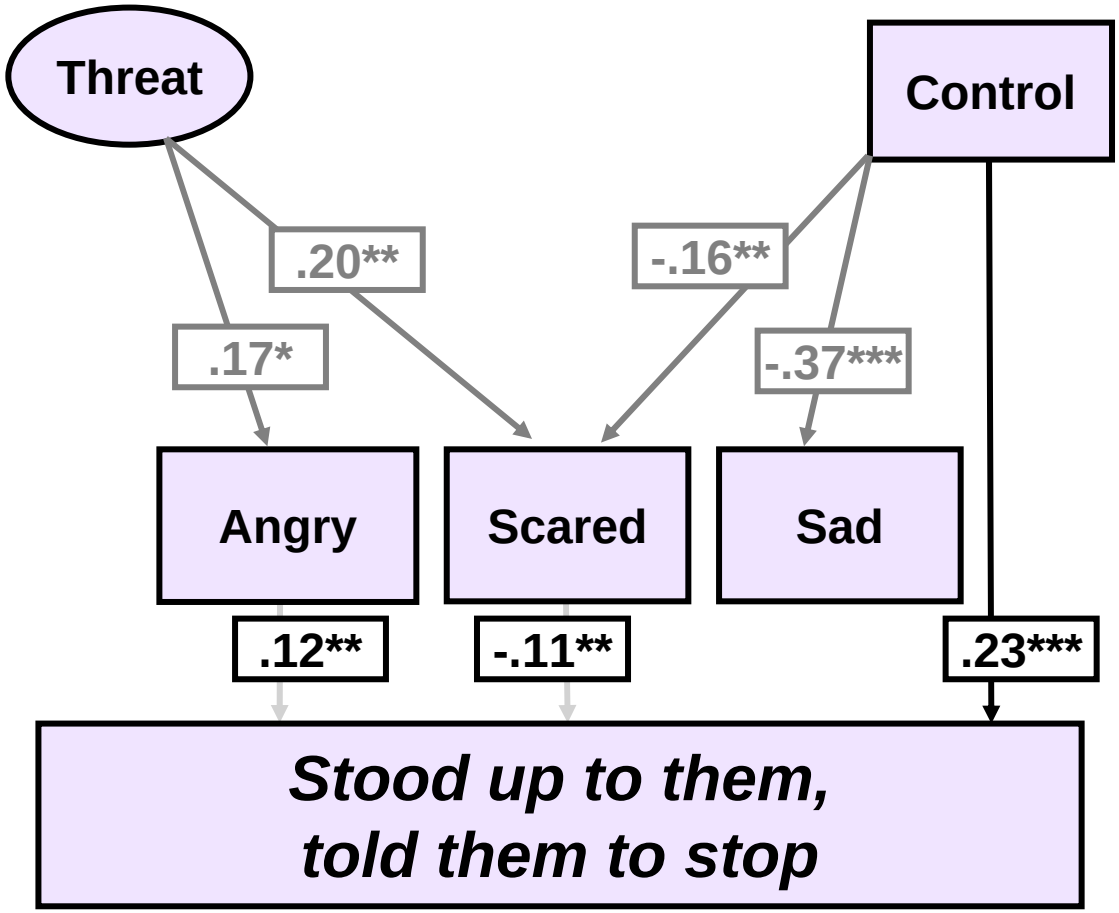


Study 2: Age and Gender

Research on children coping with parental conflict has focussed on their cognitive appraisals and depressive symptomatology. This has indicated that:

- Links between appraisals and outcomes become more appraisal-specific when children are about 10 years old. *To what might this be true for children dealing with bullying?*
- Appraisals influence boys' levels adjustment more than they do girls'. *Again, we wondered whether this was also true in the context of bullying?*

Study 2 Results

Children aged 10 and under:

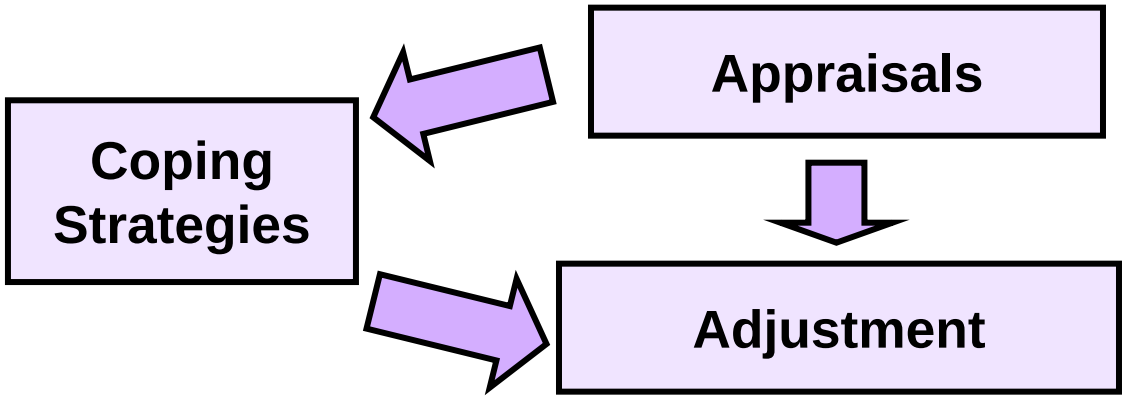
- No gender differences in relationships between appraisal and adjustment
- Threat (.41***) and control (-.23**) both predict depressive symptomatology, accounting for 20-25% of variance

Children aged 11 and over:

- Boys: Threat (.42***) predicts depressive symptomatology, accounting for 20% of the variance
- Girls: Control (-.23**) predicts depressive symptomatology (4% of variance), but so too does current victimisation and victimisation six months earlier (13% of variance)

Study 3: Appraisal, coping and adjustment

How do appraisals and coping strategies both contribute toward depressive symptomatology?



Do appraisals influence adjustment *because* they influence coping strategies (a mediational model), or do they have independent direct effects?

- Implications for effective and efficient intervention re. focus of efforts

Study 3 Results

Direct effects:

- Threat (.63***) and control (-.10*) both associated with depressive symptomatology
- Only Internalising (.34*) and Externalising (.24*) coping strategies associated with depressive symptomatology
- Social Support, Distancing, and Problem Solving not associated with adjustment

Mediational model:

- Internalising and Externalising partially mediate the effects of threat

Implications:

- A focus on only teaching coping strategies means that the negative effects of cognitive appriasals will still persist

Summary and Conclusions

- Cognitive appraisals, particularly threat, are important in determining how children and young people cope when they are bullied by their peers
- Cognitive appraisals, particularly threat, are important influences relating to children and young people's psychological adjustment
- The effects of cognitive appraisals on psychological adjustment are partially mediated by coping strategy use and are moderated by age and gender
- In terms of resilience building within the context of schools and bullying, intervention should focus upon both coping skills and cognitive appraisals

Thanks for your time!

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