Hunter, Simon C. (2010) Peer-victimisation and internalising symptoms: process and protection. In: Bullying Seminar at Universidad de Cordoba, 7 April 2010, Cordoba, Spain.

http://strathprints.strath.ac.uk/25728/

Peer-victimisation and internalising symptoms: Process and protection.

Simon C. Hunter

Universidad de Cordoba, 7th April, 2010

A Summary of Two Papers Currently *In Press*

1. Catterson, J., & Hunter, S.C. (in press). Cognitive mediators of the effect of peer-victimization on loneliness. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*.

- Jennifer Catterson was an undergraduate student, and this work was completed as part of her final year research project.

2. Hunter, S.C., Durkin, K., Heim, D., Howe, C., & Bergin, D. (in press). Psychosocial mediators and moderators of the effect of peer-victimization upon depressive symptomatology. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*.

- This project was supported by the *Economic and Social Research Council*, award RES-000-22-1428.

Appraisals are cognitive interpretations of a situation

- **Control**: Do I think I can change the situation?
- **Threat**: Will the situation have negative outcomes for me, e.g. leading to physical harm, low self-esteem, escalating victimisation etc.
- **Blame**: Who caused the event? Was it my fault, or was it someone else's fault?

Can these cognitive variables account for the effects of victimisation upon internalising problems (i.e., upon loneliness and symptoms of depression)?

Catterson, J., & Hunter, S.C. (in press).

Loneliness: feeling that one has few friends, is socially incompetent and is unable to satisfy basic friendship needs (see Cassidy & Asher, 1992).

•"Few friends" = high threat?

•"Feelings socially incompetent" = low control, and high self-blame?

N= 110 children aged 8-12 years.

Self-report questionnaire: peer-victimisation (Owens et al., 2005), loneliness (Asher et al., 1984), threat (Hunter et al., 2004). Measures of self-blame and control were designed for the study.

	2	3	4	5
1. Peer victimization	.43	.56	.19	− .33
2. Loneliness		.37	.23	− .56
3. Threat			.05	− .22
4. Blame[a]				− .23
5. Control				NA

Note. Correlations above .18 significant at $p < .05$; above .24 significant at $p < .001$.
[a] Higher scores on blame represent more self- than other-blame.

Hierarchical Linear Multiple Regression analyses:
•There were two gender differences (boys blamed themselves more and felt more in control) so gender was statistically controlled for at first step in all analyses
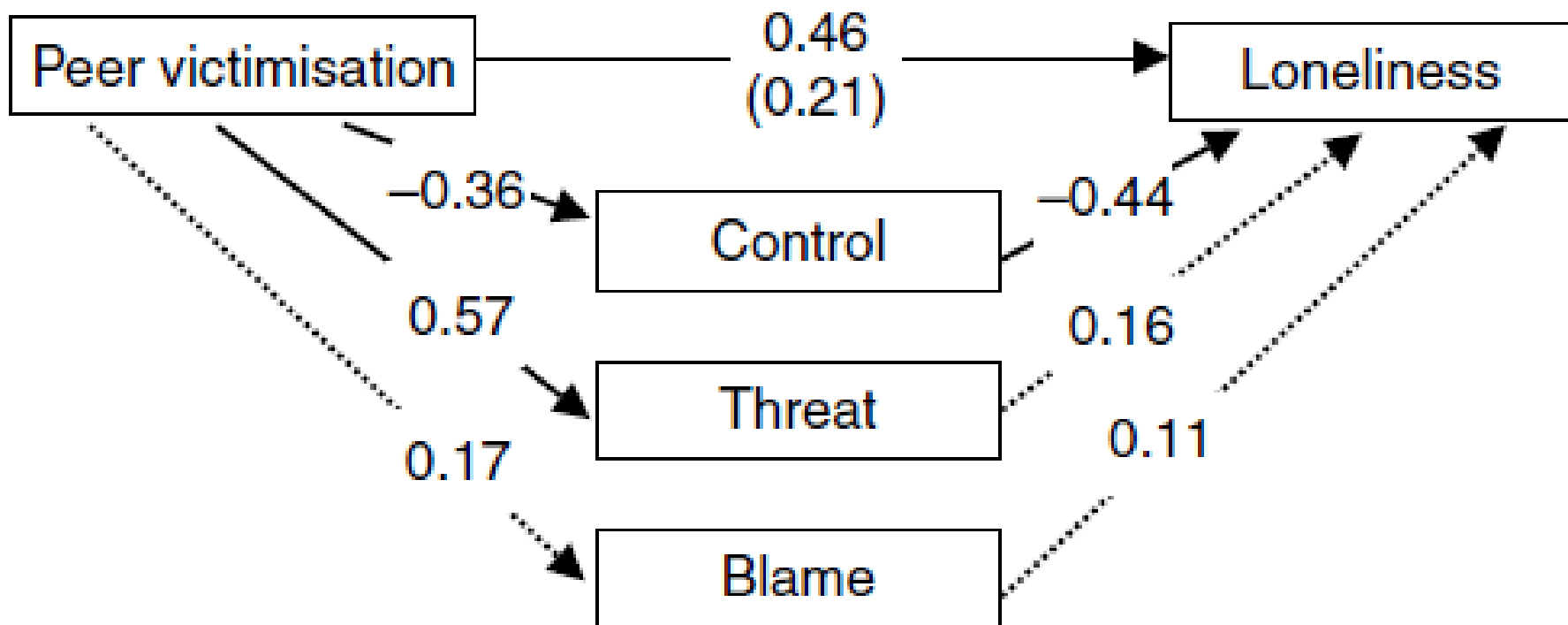
Conclusions:

• Appraisals of self-blame, control, and threat are all associated with (i) victimisation and (ii) loneliness. These associations are in the expected directions.

• However, after controlling for gender, and considering the appraisals simultaneously, results indicated that only perceived control was an important process linking peer-victimisation to loneliness.

Hunter, S.C. et al. (in press).

•When aggression is *non-discriminatory*, the effects are likely to be associated with self-focused cognitions (control, threat to self) and these may determine levels of depression.

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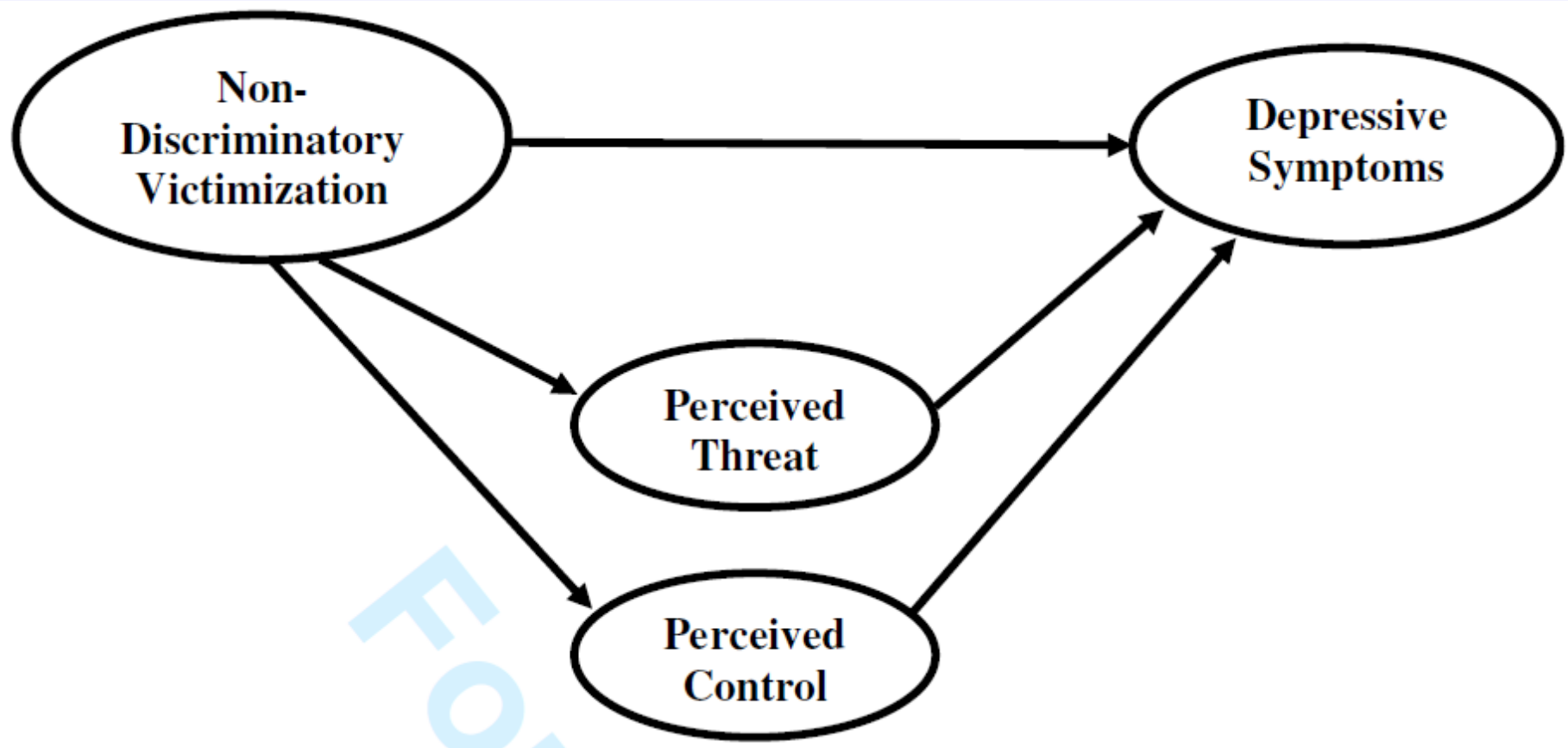
- However, when aggression is perceived to be *discriminatory*, it should invoke group-relevant identification processes (see Turner 1987; Nesdale et al., 2005).
- A strong sense of identity has already been shown to buffer children against the effects of discrimination (e.g., Rivas-Drake et al., 2008).
- Therefore, when children are attacked because of their skin colour or religious beliefs, their ethnic/religious identity may *buffer* against the negative effects.
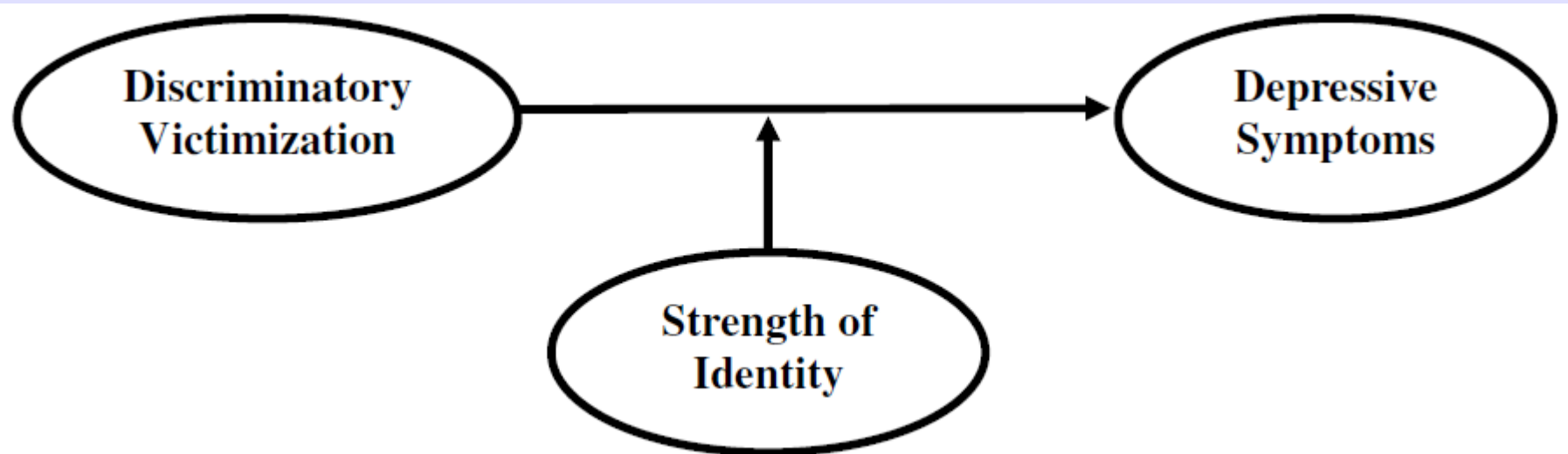
Methods

•N=925 children aged 8-12 years. Schools were selected so that there would be a high percentage of students from minority ethnic and/or religious backgrounds (26% to 99%). 'Minority' was defined as any religious or national group other than "*Scottish", "English", "British", "Northern Irish"* and "*Christian".*

•Self-report questionnaires: strength of ethnic/religious identity (based on Barrett, 2007), peer-victimisation (Hunter et al., 2004), threat (Hunter et al., 2004), perceived control (Hunter et al., 2004), symptoms of depression (Children's Depression Inventory, CDI: Kovacs, 1985).

Results

- Victims of non-discriminatory peer-victimisation (n=532, 57.5%) were significantly more depressed than non-victims (n=309, 33.4%).

- Victims of discriminatory peer-victimisation (n=80, 8.6%) were significantly more depressed than victims of non-discriminatory peer-victimisation.
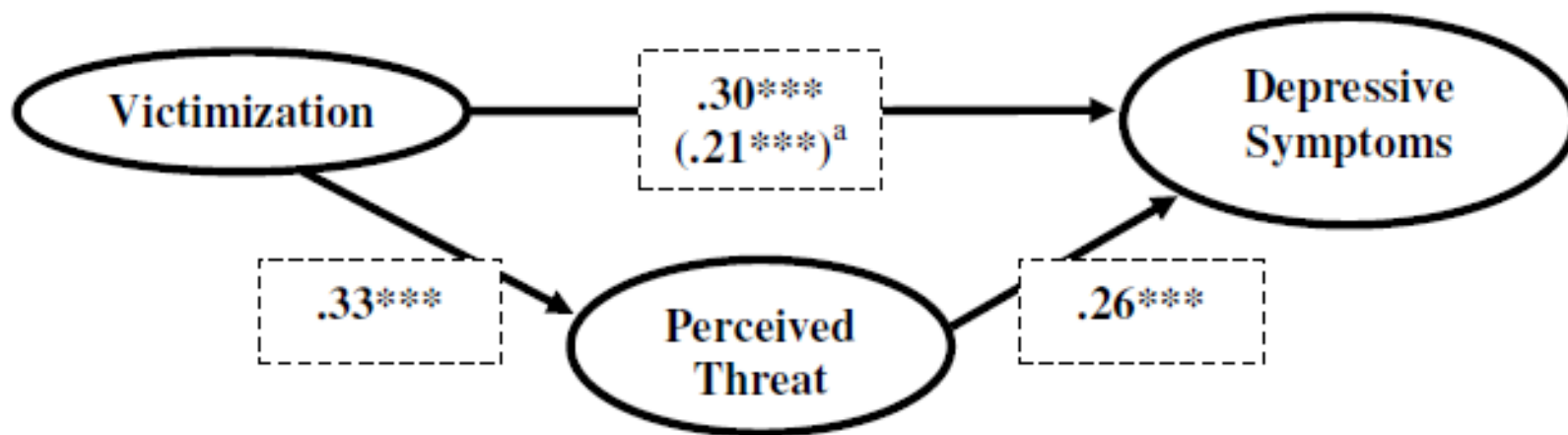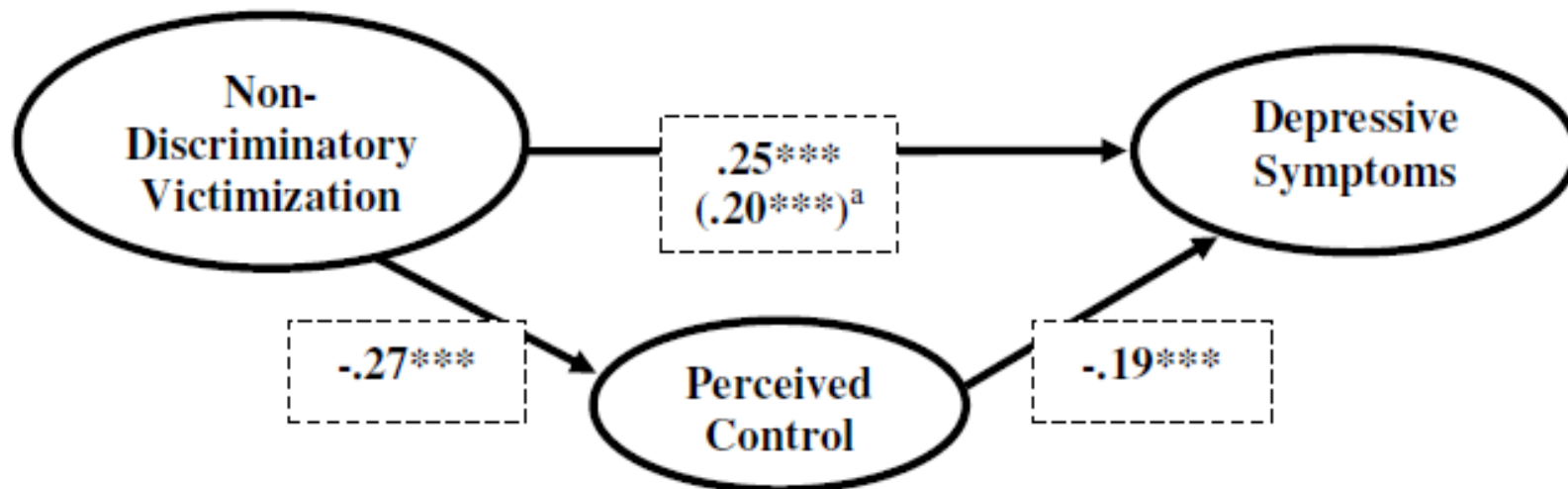
	2	3	4	Mean (SD)
Non-Discriminatory Peer-Victimization (N = 379 to 392)				
1. CDI-S[1,2]	.31***	-.25***	.25***	1.43 (0.95)
2. Perceived Threat	-	-.30***	.37***	1.64 (0.67)
3. Perceived Control		-	-.27***	2.33 (1.06)
4. Peer-Victimization[2]				0.33 (0.28)
Discriminatory Peer-Victimization (N = 77 to 80)				
1. CDI-S[1,2]	.39***	-.26*	.39***	1.86 (1.02)
2. Perceived Threat	-	-.13	.28*	2.03 (0.91)
3. Perceived Control		-	.08	2.01 (1.14)
4. Peer-Victimization[2]				0.52 (0.30)

Ethnic/religious identity offers protections against *both* discriminatory and non-discriminatory victimisation.
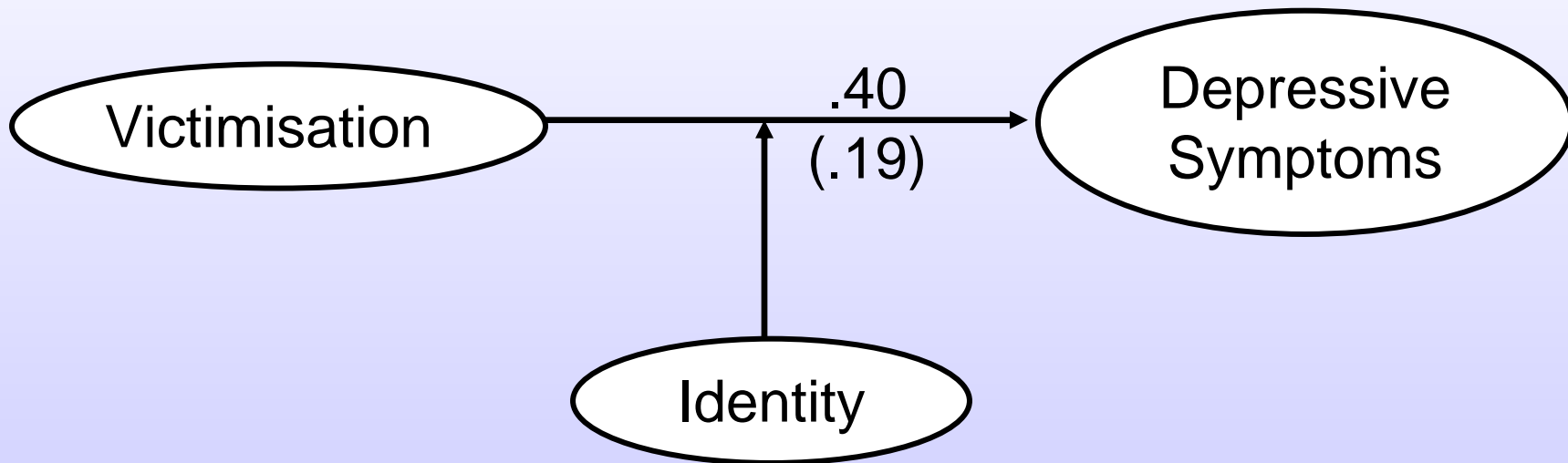
Conclusions:

•Appraisals of control mediate the effects of non-discriminatory peer-victimisation; appraisals of threat mediate the effects of *both* types of peer-victimisation. So, attending to children's perceptions of control and threat may be relevant in relation to resilience.

•A strong sense of ethnic/religious identity protects children against *internalising* problems. NB. this may *not* be the case for *externalising*!

Final Conclusions:

• How children interpret and understand events which involve them can have serious implications for their attendant psychological wellbeing.

• It is important to simultaneously consider multiple indices of appraisal in order to get an 'honest' picture of their effects.

• The social context is important, and may influence the extent to which person-relevant cognitions are salient.