

Gelotophobia and bullying: The assessment of the fear of being laughed at and its application among bullying victims

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Abstract

Within the framework of social interaction this paper relates experiences of being bullied to the fear of being laughed at (gelotophobia) in two empirical studies. Study 1 ($N = 252$) describes the adaptation of a German-language instrument for the assessment of gelotophobia into English (the *GELOPH<15>*). The translation yielded good psychometric properties (high reliability; $\alpha = .90$). The one-factor solution of the original version could be replicated. Gelotophobia existed independently of age and gender but was more prevalent among those who were single. 13% exceeded a cut-off score, indicating a slight expression of gelotophobic symptoms. Study 2 ($N = 102$) used the English *GELOPH<15>* together with an instrument for assessing emotional reactions in mean-spirited ridicule and good-natured teasing situations (the *Ridicule Teasing Scenario questionnaire*; Platt, 2008). Results indicated that being a victim of bullying yielded higher shame responses to teasing scenarios, and lower happiness and higher fear in response to both types of laughter situations. Stepwise multiple regression showed that self-reported experiences of having been a victim of bullying were best predicted by low happiness during teasing and high fear in response to ridicule, but gelotophobia accounted for most of these effects. Results are discussed within the context of future studies on gelotophobia-bullying social relationships.

Key words: bullying; gelotophobia; humour; test adaptation

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Since the first empirical studies on bullying were conducted, in the 1970's, by Olweus, the bullying phenomenon has attracted attention among researchers and practitioners around the globe. Different models for explaining what is behind bullying were set up (e.g., Salin, 2003). Research dealt with specific groups of persons (e.g., Atria, Strohmeier, & Spiel, 2007; Ireland, 2000; Strohmeier, Spiel, & Gradinger, 2008) or with measurement issues (e.g., Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith, & Pereira, 2002). However, comparatively less attention has been given to the role of the victim in the bullying-relationship. In a study by Hawker and Boulton (2000) victimization was most strongly associated with depression and less so with (generalized and social) anxiety. It is not proposed that victims are the cause of bullying (though this should also be considered in multi-causal models of bullying; cf., Zapf, 1999) but the possibility is raised that there might be specific characteristics of certain persons that could lead them to misinterpret harmless social interactions. Thus, we present a study that does not deal with causes or prevalence rates of bullying; instead, we are interested to see how an individual difference phenomenon (i.e., the fear of being laughed at) relates to experiences of having been bullied. Thus, the main point is not whether someone has really been bullied or not but to find out how differences in the way people deal with laughter might be a clue towards a better understanding of the interaction between putative agents and targets of bullying. So far the perception of humour has not been a topic for bullying research. However, this seems to be a crucial point for both, humour research (from a personality psychology perspective) but also for bullying research, as a systematic misperception of humorous productions during social communication might in some cases lead to the impression of having been bullied.

In recent time, much effort has been spent on empirical research on the fear of being laughed at (gelotophobia; Ruch, 2009; Ruch & Proyer, 2008ab). This phenomenon seems to be well suited for research into the role of the perception of laughter by others in bullying-related situations. Gelotophobes do not experience laughter and smiling from their interaction partners as something positive but as something others do in order to put them down. They are very observant when they are with other people and get suspicious easily when hearing laughter from others. Having the conviction they are ridiculous, gelotophobes assume they are being laughed at for good reasons. Recently, *gelotophobia* has been studied with regard to emotions, virtuousness, intelligence, humour, and the recollected frequency of having been laughed at. Furthermore, the universal existence of the fear of being laughed at was substantiated in a cross-cultural study involving 73 nations (see Ruch, 2009).

Gelotophobia and bullying

No direct research on gelotophobia and bullying exists so far. However, gelotophobia has already been studied in relation to bullying-type of situations. For example, one study focused on the gelotophobes' reaction towards two different kinds of laughter-related situations – harmless and playful teasing among colleagues and friends vs. mean-spirited ridicule, i.e. bullying laughter. Gelotophobes are unable to differentiate between these situations and experience negative emotions, not only to mean-spirited ridicule but also to good-natured teasing (Platt, 2008). This supports the theoretical accounts on gelotophobia (Ruch & Proyer, 2008a) namely that gelotophobes have the suspicion of having been laughed at – even in

harmless, non-threatening (good-natured) situations. Thus, it seems as if gelotophobes misinterpret these laughter-related situations.

Coyne, Seigne and Randall (2000) found a significant difference between victims and non-victims personality on the ICES personality inventory (Bartram, 1994, 1998) in a workplace setting. The victims of bullying had an inclination to be submissive and preferred to not get involved in conflicts. As well as being traditional and conscientious, they were found to be anxious and sensitive and not able to cope effectively. Indeed, in the PEN-model of personality gelotophobes were seen to be introverted neurotics with higher P (Psychoticism) scores (Ruch & Proyer, 2009). Likewise, in a study of the five factor-model of personality gelotophobes were primarily low in emotional stability and introverted. However they also displayed lower scores in openness and friendliness (Ruch, Proyer, & Popa, 2008).

Olweus (1993) defined the personality characteristics of child victims of bullying as being: *anxious, insecure* and *unhappy*, albeit a descriptor of child victims, Platt and Ruch (2009) show that gelotophobes are not predisposed to experience happiness. Various studies suggest that being bullied has negative outcomes on a variety of variables in adults as well (e.g., subjective well-being, health-related variables etc; cf. Niedl, 1996; Zapf, Knorz, & Kulla, 1996). Gelotophobes experience much lower levels of happiness when compared to individuals without fear of being laughed at. These compelling similarities within the personality of gelotophobes and bully victims would allow for the hypothesis that the two are associated in some way, even if, as suggested, it is not solely the causal effect.

In an experimental study by Ruch, Altfreder and Proyer (2009) gelotophobes experienced acoustically presented, positively motivated laughter as more unpleasant than non-gelotophobes, and the gelotophobes were also more prone to indicate that the laughing person was in a state of negative affect. Those without fear of laughter experienced an increase in positive mood and a decrease in negative mood after hearing the laughter task, whereas the gelotophobes remained unaffected (i.e., laughter was not contagious to them). In a second study, gelotophobes gave more answers, in a semi-projective test, that expressed mockery and fear of being laughed at than the other subjects; i.e., they more often interpreted laughter in ambiguous situations to be of a derogatory nature. Thus, gelotophobes might be the ones raising false alarms of being laughed at more often than the non-gelotophobes. This might be due to having been bullied in the past (Titze, 2009). However, as no convincing data exist proving a causal effect – and as first empirical studies conducted to test the hypothesis fail to support it (Ruch, Proyer, & Ventis, 2009) – no statement on the origins of the fear of being laughed at is made. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned hypothesis is orthogonal to causality.

As gelotophobia is a relatively new concept, it is hard to predict what kind of results are to be expected from England. According to bullying literature, 11.4% of females and 9.9% of males experience workplace bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2000). A clearer indicator of the scale of the problem is offered by the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) a service funded primarily by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform an independent council in the United Kingdom who claim that reports of workplace bullying in the U.K. rose to over 45,000 in the period of 2004/5 (ACAS, 2006). Thus, bullying seems to be a quite frequent phenomenon and studying it in relation to the fear of being laughed at might uncover some new facets to the studies conducted so far.

In the first direct examination of the relation between gelotophobia and bullying two studies are needed. Firstly, a study that describes the psychometric properties of the German-

language instrument, for the assessment of gelotophobia (Ruch & Proyer, 2008b) in the English-speaking world, is required. After showing that the instrument is reliable and fulfils the common statistical criteria in its English translation, it needs to be administered to a sample of victims of bullying and a sample of non-bullied controls as validation of the instrument. The major question to be answered, therefore, refers to the predictive power of gelotophobia regarding bullying-experiences.

Aims of the present studies

The aim of study 1 was to examine the psychometric properties of the gelotophobia-scale in its English translation. Therefore, reliability and factor analyses were computed. Furthermore, the correlations of each item and the total score for gelotophobia with age, sex, and the marital status were computed. Finally, the application of the cut-off scores by Ruch and Proyer (2008b) allows for estimating how many gelotophobes were in the sample.

Study 2 examined the emotions experienced by bullying victims and non-bullied controls in the teasing and ridiculing scenarios, created by Platt (2008). If prior experience of having been laughed at leads to the generalization that all laughter is malicious laughter, then one can expect that bullying victims experience similar (mainly negative) emotions in both teasing and ridicule scenarios. Firstly, a multiple regression analysis will tell to what extent the emotional responses to harmless and more bullying type of social interactions predict (or account for) whether or not one considers him-/herself to be a victim of bullying. Secondly, the role of gelotophobia as a putative predictor of self-reports of having been bullied is examined. It is expected that gelotophobia contributes to whether or not individuals report having been bullied, as laughter-related events (ridiculing) might be a part of the bullying process. Hence, gelotophobia is expected to account for much of the different emotions of bullied and non-bullied individuals.

Study 1

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of $N = 252$ participants. 94 were males and 158 were females. The mean of the age was 27.1 ($SD = 13.5$) and ranged from 18 to 88 years. 74 were not in a relationship (single; including widowed, divorced, or separated) and the others were either married or in a relationship (three did not provide information on their marital status).

Measure

The GELOPH<15> (Ruch & Proyer, 2008b) is a 15-item questionnaire for the assessment of gelotophobia. All items are positively keyed and the 4-point answer format ranges from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 4 = "strongly agree". The GELOPH is the standard instru-

ment for the assessment of gelotophobia and is widely used in research (e.g., Platt, 2008; Ruch, 2009). The English version can be found in Appendix I.

Procedure

The GELOPH was translated from German into English and an independent bilingual person translated this version to German. The first author of the instrument compared the two German versions (original and back-translation) and modifications were applied. This procedure not only ensured that the original version was correctly translated but also that cultural specifications were taken into account.

To ensure heterogeneity of the sample a variety of ways to recruit participants were employed. The first was collected by participation of students in their first year of a psychology degree in two different universities in the north of England, U.K. Paper copies were distributed before lectures and collected once the lecture had finished. A tear off slip with contact details to the gelotophobia website was provided for anyone wanting general feedback. Participants were also obtained by attending meetings in community rooms. Participants completed a pen and paper questionnaire booklet in private. Alternatively, a website address, with an online version of the questionnaires, was promoted in anti-workplace bullying support network groups. Participants were told they could go directly to the website or were given an address to write for a paper copy. Anonymous feedback was offered to honour participation in the study.

Results

The reliability analysis indicated that the English version yielded a high internal consistency ($\alpha = .90$). We also computed mean scores and standard deviations for each item separately and a total score. The items and the mean score in gelotophobia were correlated with age, sex, and marital status of the participants (see Table 1).

Table 1 shows that the corrected item-total correlations ranged between .36 and .69 (*median* = .60). The item-intercorrelations ranged between .15 and .57 (*median* = .41). Gelotophobia existed independently from the age and gender of the participants. However, persons that were not in a relationship yielded higher scores. For the examination of the factorial structure of the scale a principal components analysis for the 15 items was computed. The analysis revealed one potent first factor. The eigenvalues were 6.56, 1.09, .85, and .79, respectively. The first factor explained 43.70% of the variance. The loadings of the items on the first factor ranged between .42 (item 7) and .75 (items 12 and 15). The median of the loadings on the first factor was .66. Overall, a one-dimensional solution fitted the data best.

The results so far show that there are single items that are relevant in England but information on how many persons in the sample exceeded the cut-off scores for gelotophobia were needed. In the present sample there were 13% of the participants that exceeded the score indicating that gelotophobic symptoms apply (i.e., a mean score ≥ 2.50). 10% were characterized with slight and 2% with pronounced expressions, and 1% yielded extreme expressions of gelotophobia.

Table 1:

Descriptive Statistics, Corrected Item Total Correlations, and Correlations with Age, Gender, and Marital Status for the English form of the 15-item GELOPH

Item nr.	M	SD	CITC	Age	Sex	Ms
1	2.08	0.87	.60	-.10	.17*	-.13*
2	1.83	0.92	.64	.04	.12	-.01
3	1.87	0.95	.67	-.03	.10	-.11
4	1.71	0.90	.63	.00	.08	-.03
5	1.62	0.86	.64	.06	.06	-.07
6	1.94	0.90	.60	.03	.03	-.03
7	2.00	0.92	.36	.08	-.08	-.12
8	1.58	0.85	.57	.10	-.04	-.06
9	1.82	0.86	.59	-.02	.09	-.09
10	2.20	1.05	.56	-.13*	.11	-.21*
11	1.73	0.87	.58	-.08	.06	-.10
12	1.82	0.92	.68	.06	.11	.01
13	1.87	1.01	.53	-.01	.03	-.03
14	1.40	0.72	.57	.05	.05	-.06
15	1.55	0.79	.69	.04	-.05	-.01
Total	1.80	0.59	.60	.01	.09	-.13*

Note. $N = 249-252$. M = mean, SD = standard deviation; $CITC$ = corrected item-total correlation (total = median $CITC$); Age = correlation with age, Sex = correlation with sex (1 = males, 2 females), Ms = correlation with marital status (1 = single; 2 = in a relationship).

* $p < .05$.

Discussion

The present study shows that gelotophobia is of relevance in England. In a random sample 13% of the persons exceeded the cut-off scores for at least slight expressions of the fear of being laughed at. This is about equal to the scores reported for Germany in Ruch and Proyer (2008b; i.e., 12%). Age and gender were not related to the expression of the fear of being laughed at. This is in line with the findings for the German-speaking world (Ruch & Proyer, 2008b). However, participants that were not in a relationship tended to score higher in gelotophobia. This raises the question: Do gelotophobes stay single more frequently or does being in a relationship reduce the fear of being laughed at? It should be noted that the correlation was statistically significant but that it only accounted for 2% of shared variance. While it seems to be of a lower practical relevance, this relation should be further observed in future studies, especially within the realms of interpersonal relationships.

The English version of the GELOPH yielded good psychometric properties in terms of a high internal consistency ($\alpha = .90$). As in the original version, a one-dimensional factor solution did fit the data best. In the mean time there are encouraging results from the application of the English version of the scale from other research groups (Rawlings & Tham, 2008). Overall, it is concluded that the English version is a useful and reliable instrument for the assessment of the fear of being laughed at.

Study two deals with a practical application of the questionnaire. The relations of the fear of being laughed at, among persons who report having been bullied, as opposed to persons that did not report such experiences, were compared.

Study 2

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of $N = 102$ participants. 38 were males and 64 were females. The mean of the age was 39.7 ($SD = 14.5$) and ranged from 18 to 76 years. $N = 58$ reported having been victims of bullying, 35 did not report such experiences, and nine did not answer that question. Those who reported being bullied were members of a bully victim forum or support network prior to the study.

Measure

As in Study 1, the English version of the GELOPH<15> (Ruch & Proyer, 2008b) was used and yielded a high reliability ($\alpha = .89$).

The *Ridicule Teasing Scenario questionnaire* (RTSq; Platt 2008) contains nine scenarios, four teasing, four ridicule and one ambiguous (as a filler), that enable the assessment of emotions that the respondents experience when involved in predetermined ridicule and teasing social scenarios. It utilizes a 9point answer form (from 0 = lowest to 8 = highest experience of emotions) and ratings are given for the emotions happiness, sadness, anger, disgust, surprise, shame, and fear.

Procedure

The sample of adult volunteers was recruited in one of two ways. The first method of soliciting participation was by inviting people on the main shopping areas of cities in the north of England to complete a pen and paper questionnaire booklet. Alternatively, those who declined due to time constraints were given a website address where an online version of the questionnaires was available. In the second method participants were sought via an advertisement placed in an anti-workplace bullying support network group. Participants were told they could go directly to the website or given an address to write for a paper copy. Anonymous feedback was given to honour participation in the study.

Results

Mean scores and standard deviations for each of the emotions experienced for the teasing and the bullying scenarios were examined. A 2 x 2 ANOVA was computed with victim

status (bullied vs. not bullied) as classification variable and types of scenario (ridicule vs. teasing) as repeated measures for each of the seven emotions separately. Table 2 contains the means and standard deviations and the F-values for the main effects and the interaction. It was checked whether the assumptions were met (e.g., Box's Test of equality of covariance matrices) and if deviations occurred the Greenhouse-Geisser corrections were applied.

Table 2 shows that the two scenarios had an effect on each of the emotions. Teasing evoked more happiness than ridicule, but for all negative emotions (and for surprise) the means were higher for ridicule than for teasing. For anger, sadness, and surprise there were no further effects. However, for happiness, there was a main effect of victim status: those who reported having been bullied in the past had lower happiness scores than those who had not been bullied. Moreover, there was a significant interaction. While teasing led to more happiness than ridicule, this was less strong for those who have been bullied compared to those that have not been bullied. There was a main effect for victim status for fear (but no interaction). Those being bullied reported more fear to *both* scenarios than those who reported not having been bullied. Finally, two interactions just missed the five percent level of significance (disgust: $p = .052$ and shame: $p = .087$). Non-bullied individuals reported more disgust in response to the ridicule scenarios than the bullied persons while there was no such difference for teasing. The interaction involving shame was of theoretical interest. While for the ridicule scenario the bullied and non-bullied participants did not differ from each other ($p = .482$), the victims of bullying reported a higher amount of shame in response to teasing

Table 2:

Means and Standard Deviations of the Groups of Victims of Bullying and Non-Victims in the RTSq Emotion Ratings

Scenarios		Ridicule scenarios		Teasing scenarios		Victim status	Scenario	Interaction
		bullied	not bullied	bullied	not bullied	$F(1,91)$	$F(1,91)$	$F(1,91)$
Happiness	M	0.86	1.59	2.44	4.61	24.151*	109.715*	10.645*
	SD	0.96	1.49	2.14	2.09			
Sadness	M	4.83	4.85	2.33	2.16	0.052	147.067*	0.198
	SD	1.97	1.46	1.98	1.38			
Anger	M	5.06	5.22	2.62	2.28	0.082	193.581*	1.629
	SD	1.84	1.50	1.88	1.49			
Disgust	M	4.04	4.70	2.33	2.14	0.417	99.016*	3.889
	SD	2.14	2.02	1.89	1.72			
Surprise	M	3.28	3.96	2.72	2.95	1.615	13.921*	1.157
	SD	1.96	1.87	2.00	1.92			
Shame	M	4.36	4.00	3.21	2.10	2.693	48.947*	2.994
	SD	2.41	2.30	2.55	1.76			
Fear	M	4.72	3.72	2.66	1.57	6.077*	117.839*	0.053
	SD	2.35	1.99	2.34	1.65			

Note. $N = 93$ ($n = 35$ not bullied; $n = 58$ bullied).

* $p < .05$.

than the non-bullied individuals did ($p = .025$). While for the non-bullied persons teasing yielded more happiness than shame ($p = .0001$), among the bullied persons teasing yielded numerically more shame ($M = 3.21$) than happiness ($M = 2.44$).

In order to estimate how well the victim status could be predicted by the emotional responses to the two scenarios first zero-order correlations and second a multiple regression analysis were computed. All seven emotions were included in the correlational analysis although correlations were expected to emerge primarily for the three emotions relevant for gelotophobia, namely shame, fear, and happiness. Indeed, for the bullying scenarios the coefficients were significant for happiness ($r = .29$) and fear ($r = .21$), and for the teasing scenarios the coefficients were significant for happiness ($r = .45$), shame ($r = .23$), and fear ($r = .24$, all $p < .05$). For the three emotions a stepwise regression analysis was computed with the six emotion ratings as predictors (intensity of happiness, shame and fear for each for the two types of scenarios) and bully status (i.e., reports of having been a victim of bullying or not being bullied) as a criterion were conducted. This analysis yielded a multiple correlation of .49 ($F[1,90] = 14.21$, $p = .0001$). Happiness in response to teasing entered the equation first (with a negative weight) and fear in response to the ridicule scenario entered in a second step. Thus, not experiencing joy in a playful laughter situation ($\beta = .44$; $p = .0001$) and experiencing high levels of fear in ridicule scenarios ($\beta = -.22$; $p = .032$) predicted reports of having been bullied.

Gelotophobia correlated with .47 with the criterion variable of reports of having been a victim of bullying or not. In order to see how much of the above-mentioned effects could be accounted for by gelotophobia, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis with gelotophobia (method: enter) and six emotion rating (method: stepwise) and bully status as a criterion was computed. Entering gelotophobia into the equation rendered the zero-order correlations of three variables to non-significance (i.e., fear in response to teasing, fear in response to ridicule, and shame in response to teasing) and largely reduced the predictive power of two variables (happiness in response to teasing and ridicule). In a second step happiness in response to teasing was added (rendering happiness in response to ridicule to non-significance) and yielded a multiple correlation coefficient of .54 ($F[2,90] = 18.48$, $p = .0001$). Thus, all in all, the report of being bullied was predicted best by high scores in gelotophobia ($\beta = -.34$; $p = .0001$) and by low happiness in response to playful teasing situations ($\beta = .30$; $p = .004$).

Discussion

The present study indicates clearly that there is a relation between the experienced emotions in teasing and ridicule-type scenarios and the self-reported status of being a victim of bullying. Those who reported having been bullied indicated that they would not experience joy in teasing situations, and they would also experience more shame and fear than those that are not bullied. The reversal of joy/happiness and shame is particularly striking. Ridicule situations were discriminating too. Those reporting having been bullied had higher scores in fear and lower ones in happiness compared to people that were not victims of bullying. Thus, being a victim of bullying goes along with generally lower scores in happiness and higher ones in fear in the response to the two scenarios.

However, the two types of scenarios also provided discrimination. The correlation between group membership (bullied, not bullied) and emotions was much higher for the teasing scenario and there, only shame was relevant. On the one hand, bullied individuals will experience fear in response to ridicule in higher intensity and the level of joy is much lower. On the other hand, having been ridiculed might generalize, and the belief that "all laughter is bad laughter" emerges. Hence, the bullied individuals might not be able to notice the pleasurable aspects of the harmless teasing scenarios; rather, they will experience shame and more intense fear. The regression analysis showed that reports of having been bullied were best predicted by a combination of low happiness in response to playful teasing and high fear in response to ridicule. Thus, a significant portion of the persons who report having been bullied, would actually respond overly fearful to ridicule, but they also don't appreciate the more playful teasing situations. We did not ask whether their experience of bullying was actually related to having been laughed at, indeed, the physical forms of bullying are undeniable, however, it remains that some forms of bullying, especially among adults, are more subjective and one can see that the people would not appreciate playful laughter neither and respond to it with shame, anger and fear, rather than with happiness. For the non-bullied the emotional profile to ridicule and teasing were more separate than for the ones having been bullied.

Most important, gelotophobia did account for most but not all of these effects. In other words, most of the differences in the emotions that bullied and non-bullied individuals show in response to ridicule and teasing can be predicted by the habitual fear of being laughed at. They mostly disappear once the degree of the fear of being laughed at is statistically being controlled for. Gelotophobia alone explained already 22% of the variance, and only low happiness in teasing situations had incremental value explaining a further 7% of the variance of the criterion. Thus, gelotophobia fully accounts for the higher shame in response to teasing, and the higher fear in response to teasing and ridicule. It mostly but not fully, accounts for the reduced happiness in response to teasing and ridicule. This suggests that gelotophobia and bullying-related differences in emotions to teasing and ridicule strongly overlap. Nevertheless, it should also be noted that the level of joy in teasing situations is a predictor of reports of bullying that is not fully accounted for by gelotophobia and this needs further attention in research.

Taken together, this means that bullied and non-bullied persons differ in the way they react emotionally to playful teasing and ridicule, and most of this difference can be accounted for by gelotophobia. Thus, there seems to be a stable relationship between indicating experiences with bullying and gelotophobia. It is a topic for future studies whether the inability of recognizing the happy and non-fearful aspects of friendly teasing among friends or colleagues or related misinterpretations at the workplace might be relevant in certain cases of reports of bullying that appear to be false alarms, i.e., can not be further substantiated by facts. The present data do not allow inferences about causality. It is equally possible that bullied persons do not see joy in teasing anymore, or that not being able to appreciate teasing situations facilitates judgments of being bullied.

From a bullying context this is indeed a contentious and debate provoking issue. Most bully literature claims that workplace bullying relates only to the effect on the recipient and not the intention of the bully (Cox, 2004). Specifically this means that if someone says what you are doing makes him or her feel bullied, then you are a bully. Within the UK, human resource departments in organisations have anti-bullying and harassment policies, and offer training that teaches the assailant to be less aggressive, following disciplinary action of accu-

sations of bullying. Yet, what if all they were doing was laughing at something they found funny within a playful social group interaction? Maybe, in the case of gelotophobes within the workplace, the emphasis should be on offering counselling to them, to help them develop an understanding of the context of humour.

As a limitation of the study it should be reminded that the cut-off points were derived from studies with German subjects and should not be automatically applied to a different country. Following the steps undertaken by Ruch and Proyer (2008b) for deriving the scores with equivalent data from English samples (or more generally spoken: in a different country) might lead to different cut-off scores. However, it has to be kept in mind that the cut-off point for slight fear is oriented on the midpoint of the four-point scale (i.e., 2.5), which will apply to any language version.

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Appendix I

GELOPH<15>

Instructions

The following statements refer to your feelings, actions, and perceptions **in general**. Please try as much as possible to describe your **habitual** behaviour patterns and attitudes by marking an X through one of the four alternatives. Please use the following scale:

- (1) strongly disagree
- (2) moderately disagree
- (3) moderately agree
- (4) strongly agree

For example

I am a cheerful person.....(1) (2) (3) (4)

If you strongly agree with this statement, that is, if you are **in general** a cheerful person, **mark an X through (4)**. If you strongly disagree, that is, if you are **habitually not** cheerful **at all**, **mark an X through (1)**. If you have difficulty answering a question, pick the response that **most** applies.

Please answer *every* question, do not omit any.

1	When others laugh in my presence I get suspicious.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
2	I avoid showing myself in public because I fear that people could become aware of my insecurity and could make fun of me.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
3	When strangers laugh in my presence I often relate it to me personally.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
4	It is difficult for me to hold eye contact because I fear being assessed in a disparaging way.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
5	When others make joking remarks about me I feel being paralyzed.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
6	I control myself strongly in order not to attract negative attention so I do not make a ridiculous impression.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
7	I believe that I make involuntarily a funny impression on others.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
8	Although I frequently feel lonely, I have the tendency not to share social activities in order to protect myself from derision.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
9	When I have made an embarrassing impression somewhere, I avoid the place thereafter.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
10	If I did not fear making a fool of myself I would speak much more in public.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
11	If someone has teased me in the past I cannot deal freely with him forever.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
12	It takes me very long to recover from having been laughed at.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
13	While dancing I feel uneasy because I am convinced that those watching me assess me as being ridiculous.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
14	Especially when I feel relatively unconcerned, the risk is high for me to attract negative attention and appear peculiar to others.	(1) (2) (3) (4)
15	When I have made a fool of myself in front of others I grow completely stiff and lose my ability to behave adequately.	(1) (2) (3) (4)

Please check to see that you have answered **every** statement.