Exploring the perception, interpretation, and role of humour in cyberbullying from the perspective of adolescents and emerging adults

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Copyright Statement

ABSTRACT

Cyberbullying is a pervasive form of online aggression that can lead to considerably negative and harmful consequences. Previous research with adolescents and emerging adults has identified a range of motivations for cyberbullying perpetration. A frequently reported motive to cyberbully others is for humorous entertainment. The overall aim of the research program was to explore the role of humour within cyberbullying from the perspective of young people and emerging adults and to explore the factors which mediate the severity perception of humoristic cyberbullying.

A sequential exploratory mixed methods approach with three studies was employed. Study 1 utilised seven focus groups with 28 adolescents (aged 11-15) to gain insight into the attitudes, understandings, and perspectives of young people concerning the role of humour within cyberbullying. Using Reflexive Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021), Study 1 identified a number of core factors related to severity perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying, which were incorporated into 96 hypothetical vignettes for experimental studies 2 and 3. Study 2 explored 356 adolescents aged 11-16 (Mean age = 13.24, SD = 1.28) severity perception of online aggressive humour. For the purpose of rigour and exploration of age differences in severity perceptions, Study 3 was designed to replicate the design of Study 2. Study 3 was conducted with an older sample population of 417 participants aged between 16-21 (Mean age = 17.14, SD = 1.11). Additionally, Study 3 incorporated three covariates, cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration experiences and aggressive humour style, which were added to the design with the aim to account for potential confounding effects.

Findings from multilevel modelling indicated that severity perceptions of the humoristic cyberbullying vignettes were influenced by range of factors in Study 2 and 3. Key findings were found to be attributed to gender differences, the influence of repetition and audience and social context across both studies. A final key finding from covariate analysis reported from Study 3 indicated a relationship between aggressive humour style and lower severity perceptions. Aspects of these findings challenge and support the cyberbullying definition, and therefore substantially contribute to the growing body of literature that is building a theoretical framework around cyberbullying. Implication and the prospects of future research leading from the findings of this thesis

are expansive and are imperative to the future understanding of the role of humour within cyberbullying behaviours.

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Some of the content in Chapter 4 has been reported in a publication:

Steer, O. L., Betts, L. R., Baguley, T., & Binder, J. F. (2020). "I feel like everyone does it": adolescents' perceptions and awareness of the association between humour, banter, and cyberbullying. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *108*, 106297.

Chapter 1 – Thesis overview
1.1 Chapter overview

Chapter 1 introduces a reference framework for the three studies conducted for this thesis. An initial review of cyberbullying literature is presented which provides a contextual baseline of the topic area. The concept of cyberbullying is outlined, which entails a cyberbullying definition and an explanation of the criteria that the definition is built on. Prevalence rates of young peoples' experiences of cyberbullying are also presented and discussed in relation to reported issues with measuring cyberbullying involvement. The affordances of information communication technologies are reviewed with regards to cyberbullying activity and reported negative consequences of cyberbullying victimisation are briefly outlined. Finally, the literature review presents some of the reported motivations for cyberbullying perpetration. The chapter then moves onto the overall thesis aim and research questions generated for this thesis. A methodological overview of the research conducted for the thesis will be presented, providing details concerning methods employed for each of the three studies. Following on from this section, the chapter then outlines how the research carried out for the purpose of this thesis provides an original contribution to the cyberbullying literature. The last section of the chapter provides a descriptive narrative of the remaining chapters of the thesis.

1.2 Cyberbullying background

There are various definitions of cyberbullying. Although over a decade old, a commonly cited definition (Ansary, 2020) of cyberbullying is "An aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself" (Smith et al., 2008, p.376). This definition corresponds with the original definition of tradition bullying (Olweus, 1993), which include the criteria of intentionality, repetition and a power imbalance, except for the addition which refers to the means of enacting the behaviour electronically. Intentionality relates to an indication that the perpetrator of an aggressive behaviour has the intention to cause harm to the victim. The imbalance of power element is represented if a victim is unable to defend themselves and repetition

is accounted for when a victim is targeted repeatedly, over time (Olweus, 2013). The clear overlap of both traditional cyberbullying definitions indicates a degree of consensus that both constructs, and therefore their corresponding criteria, are comparable and alike.

Over the past two decades, cyberbullying has received a considerable amount of research attention as young people have gradually gained greater access to the internet. From recent data collected from a United Kingdom sample, Ofcom (2022) reports an increase of mobile phone ownership and social media usage from the age of 3 to 17 years old. Between the ages of 3 – 4, 17% of this age group owned a mobile phone device and 21% use social media. Similarity low percentages can be viewed for the 5-7 age group, with a noticeable increase at the 8-11 age group, with 60% of children owning a mobile phone and 64% using social media. Another significant increase is seen with the age group 12-15, with 97% owning a mobile and 91% using social media. By the time an adolescent reaches 16-17, 100% were reported to own a mobile phone and 97% used social media. As this data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic, this may not be a realistic reflection of young peoples' ease of access to the digital world in the twenty first century. However, the findings represent the potential aftermath of the pandemic and the current state of children and adolescents' preference to access the affordances of the online environment.

Cyberbullying has been reported to be experienced by children as young as 7 years old (Monks et al., 2009) and can span a lifetime (Ševčíková & Smahel, 2009). Cyberbullying involvement prevalence rates for adolescents are highly variable due to a host of variations between research articles such as the demographic characteristics of the sample, if a definition of cyberbullying was provided, which definition was provided, if the survey instrument involved types of cyberbullying or medium used to perpetrate cyberbullying, frequency cut-off points and the recall period used in the survey (i.e., last six months, last year, lifetime) (Kowalski et al., 2019; Smith, 2019). Hinduja and Patchin (n.d) reviewed 234 cyberbullying research articles from peer reviewed academic journals which had been published between 2003 and 2015. From 122 articles, a range of victimisation rates were reported from 0.4% to 92%, with an average of 21%. From 88 articles, a range of perpetration rates were found between 1.0% and 60.4%, with an average of 13%. These findings are comparable with other reviews of prevalence such

as Brochado and colleagues' (2017) scoping review of literature published between 2004 and 2014. This review reported for the recall period of the last 6 months, estimates ranged between 1.6% to 56.9% and 1.9% to 79.3% for victimisation and perpetration respectively. Although literatures clearly agrees that cyberbullying is experienced by young people, due to multiple variations in how cyberbullying is measured as a construct, it is unclear to what extent they are experiencing it.

Rigby and Smith (2011) reported from the multinational investigation that a decline in traditional bullying for young people could be viewed between the year 1990 and 2009, but cyberbullying had increased as the internet availability improved, and mobile phones became more accessible. Smart phones accessibility and internet connection has become pervasive in society to the extent that Hinduja and Patchin (2015) suggest that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can be viewed simply as adolescents' lives, not just a part of it. Smart phones and the internet are a critical tool to developing and managing social relationships (Cassidy et al., 2013). The internet provides affordances for cyberbullying activity as it allows the behaviour to occur at any time and any place, extending traditional bullying that may occur during school hours to the home environment (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015; Tokunaga, 2010). Cyberbullying has also been considered to be opportunistic as it involves no physical interaction or planning and low risk of being caught (Tokunaga, 2010). Victims of cyberbullying can also be exposed on a continual basis of the initial attack as one post or one photo can be viewed or shared by large audiences which may results in mass humiliation for the victim (Law et al., 2012; Sticca & Perren, 2013). Indeed, young people have referred to cyberbullying as "non-stop bullying" due to the affordances of the internet (Mishna et al., 2009). Finally, ICT facilitates anonymous cyberbullying by depersonalised perpetrators who can create fake profiles and attack others without providing their true identity (Barlett et al., 2018). These affordances of ICT have led some academics to suggest that cyberbullying conceptually differs to traditional bullying (Campbell & Bauman, 2018; Kofoed & Staksrud, 2019). Research demonstrates that males and females of varying ages behave more aggressively online than they would in the physical world (Erdur-Baker, 2010; Subrahmanyam et al., 2001, Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). However, with the evolving patterns of technology

use, further research is required to explore if young people are behaving differently online due to the affordability of the digital world.

Akin to bullying research, the importance of cyberbullying research aligns with the potential to experience damaging negative outcomes that are linked with experiencing cyberbullying. An array of negative consequences has been associated with victims of cyberbullying; for example, higher levels of emotional distress and mental illness, such as depression and anxiety have been reported by victims alongside suicidal ideation, somatic issues, and a decrease in physical health (Goebert et al., 2011; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Låftman et al., 2013; Perren et al., 2010). Literature also indicates that cyberbullying has a greater negative impact on young people compared to traditional bullying (Vaillancourt et al., 2017). Adolescents who experience cyberbullying more frequently also experience greater negative outcomes, which is called a dose-response effect (Ybarra et al., 2014). In order to consider possible intervention and preventative avenues, research has been undertaken to investigate the possible motivations behind why cyberbullying is perpetrated. If literature can shed light on why young people cyberbully, then research may be able to reduce the negative outcomes experienced by victims.

From a range of literature, young people have reported that cyberbullying perpetration is carried out for a number of reasons. Using semi-structured interviews, Varjas et al. (2010) explored motivations for cyber perpetration with American students aged 15 -19 and distinguished between internal and external motivations. Internal motivations linked to the emotional state of the perpetrator were reported as instigation, protection, jealousy, rejection, revenge, boredom, seeking approval, to make themselves feel better and for anonymity (Varjas et al., 2010). External motivations relate to the lack of experiencing repercussion or confrontation and there being something unique about the victim and was described as something that provoked the perpetrator that was specific about the victim or the situation (Varjas et al., 2010). Similarly, an Australian study which held focus groups with teachers, parents and adolescents aged 13 -15 reported motives for cyber perpetration as avoiding punishment/retaliation, anonymity, power and status, fun and boredom and the ease (Compton et al., 2014). Support for anonymity being an affordance of the internet being associated to the motivation to perpetrate cyberbullying has been reported in previous

literature (Englander, 2008; Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Williams & Guerra, 2007). Support has also been reported for the aspect of fun, highlighted by Compton et al. (2014). Cyberbullying perpetration for entertainment purposes and "for fun" (Li, 2007; Slonje & Smith, 2008) is a motive that has consistently been evidenced but has received little research attention. For instance, 30% of Englander's (2008) survey sample of young American people aged 14- 15 reported their perpetration was carried out for the purpose of "a joke". Another survey sample with 38% of young American participants aged 13-18 reported that cyberbullies' motivation for their actions were "for fun" (Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Further, Huang and Chou's (2010) research found that 64.3% of bystanders have witnessed cyberbullying in the form of a joke. Cyberbullying has also been described as a way to have fun for young people (Englander & Muldowney, 2007; Mishna et al., 2010) suggesting a form of entertainment value of the behaviour. This motivation is a complex social incident to untangle as it is difficult to identify if these perpetrators are targeting victims with negative intent or if the lack of concern for the impact of their actions on the victim indirectly indicates a degree of intentionality (Englander, 2008). Furthermore, identifying if online aggressive behaviours are prosocial or antisocial cyberbullying or harmless aggressive behaviour has been suggested to be an appraisal made by the victim of that behaviour (Dredge et al., 2014; Naylor et al., 2006; Vandebosch & Van Cleeput, 2008), which may be mediated by the perceived severity of the aggressive humour (Chen et al., 2015). The overall aim of the research program carried out for this thesis is to explore the role of humour within cyberbullying for young people and to explore the factors which mediate the severity perception of humoristic cyberbullying.

1.3 Overall Thesis aim and research questions

The overall aim of the thesis is to:

Explore how adolescents and emerging adults use and experience humour in the context of cyberbullying.

To achieve this, the following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1. How do young people interpret and experience humour within the context of cyberbullying? (Study 1)

RQ2. What factors influence how young people perceive the use of online aggressive humour that targets others? (Study 1 & 2)

RQ3. What factors influence how young people differentiate between humorous intent and cyberbullying? (Study 1 & 2)

RQ4. What factors influence how older adolescents and emerging adults perceive the use of online aggressive humour that targets others? (Study 1 & 3)

RQ5. What factors influence how older adolescents and emerging adults differentiate between humorous intent and cyberbullying? (Study 1 & 3)

1.4 Thesis research objectives

Seven research objectives were generated for this thesis with the scope to answer each research question and therefore fulfil the overall aim of the thesis.

Study 1

Study 1 takes a qualitative perspective due to the lack of evidence concerning how young people experience aggressive humour online in the context of cyberbullying.

> Research objective 1: To qualitatively investigate young people's perception of how humour and cyberbullying are related and experienced.

Study 2

Study 2 aims to explore young peoples' severity perception of online aggressive humour, which a focus on the influence of identified, core factors upon adolescents' differentiation between humorous intent and cyberbullying.

> Research objective 2: Investigate the relationship between the variables of interest, which emerge from Study 1, and perceived **offensiveness** to gain a greater understanding of how humour impacts offensive perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying.
>
> Research objective 3: Investigate the relationship between the variables of interest, which emerge from Study 1, and perceived cyberbullying to gain a greater understanding of how humour impacts the **identification of cyberbullying**.
>
> Research objective 4: Examine the **gender difference** within research objectives 2 and 3.

Study 3

The purpose of Study 3 is to replicate findings of Study 2, with the same objectives, with an older sample and with covariates (aggressive humour style, cyberbullying victimisation and cyberbullying perpetration). Therefore, Study 3 incorporates research objectives 2 – 4 and the following additional objectives:

Research objective 5: Investigate the effect of having an **aggressive humour** style on older adolescents' and emerging adults' perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying.

Research objective 6: Investigate the effect of experiencing **cyberbullying victimisation** on older adolescents' and emerging adults' perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying.

Research objective 7: Investigate the effect of experiencing **cyberbullying perpetration** on older adolescents' and emerging adults' perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying.

1.5 Methodological overview

A combination of qualitative and quantitative research was employed to address the specific investigative aims of this research project. Using a sequential exploratory mixed methods approach has enabled the overall exploration to be unrestricted to one form of analysis, and to utilise the benefits and opportunities provided by both approaches. To the primary investigator's knowledge, an in-depth exploration of young peoples' understanding and perception of humoristic cyberbullying such as banter and teasing, had not been considered prior to Study 1 of this thesis. Using focus groups data that had been collected from adolescents enabled Study 1 (see chapter 4) to gain insight into the attitudes, understandings, and perspectives of young people, which quantitative data would not be able to achieve. Sequentially, data from Study 1 was used to inform and direct the next two quantitative studies of the program of research (Doyle et al., 2009). Cyberbullying that is based in humoristic intent is a complex topic due to the multiple factors involved in its interpretation by a victim. In order to explore these factors, an initial exploration of young peoples' understanding was required to build a knowledge base which could be applied contiguously to previous literature to design the

experimental approach of Study 2 and 3 (see chapter 5 and 6). Furthermore, replication of cyberbullying research has been suggested to be a forgotten form of validating research findings (Olweus & Limber, 2018). To address this issue, Study 3 was designed to replicate the design of Study 2 with an older sample population, with the aim to explore the potential differences and similarities between both studies and both age groups and therefore ensure that findings were not due to chance (Plucker & Makel, 2021).

To address RQ1, 7 focus groups were conducted for Study 1 with adolescents aged between 11 and 16 to explore how young people perceive the role of humour in the context of cyberbullying. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021) was applied to the transcribed dataset. Focus groups were selected as the most appropriate methodology for the aims of the research due to the flexible nature of the group discussion. This allowed participants' discourse to build between participants based on group dynamics and provided greater opportunity to voice opinions and considerations in a relaxed environment (Carey, 2015; Peterson-Sweeney, 2005), which can aid the development of greater insight and depth (Nyumba et al., 2018). Following on from this, data content from Study 1 was utilised to build and develop hypothetical vignettes of humoristic cyberbullying for Study 2 with a participant age group of 11-16. An Experimental Vignette Method (EVM) was implemented to answer RQ2 and RQ3. Factors such as gender, audience, repetition, type of cyberbullying and levels of humour were implemented and manipulated within the vignettes in order to produce a tool to explore how offensive the vignettes were perceived and to what extent they were perceived as cyberbullying.

Experimentally, the hypothetical vignettes in the form of short stories, attempt to measure how participants evaluate a contextual situation of online aggressive humour that they are the hypothetical victim of (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). The short stories include a number of factors which have varying levels which change the context of the story. Participants were asked two questions per vignette to gain quantitative insight regarding how offensive the vignette was perceived and to what extent the vignette was perceived to be cyberbullying. The vignettes were created using the focus groups' data from Study 1 with the aim to make the vignettes as realistic as possible (Wason et al., 2002), which has been considered a potential issue with the vignette

methodology (Hughes & Huby, 2002). Study 3 replicates the same design as Study 2 and aims to address RQ2 and RQ3 with an older sample population of 16 to 21. Additionally, Study 3 incorporates three covariates which were added to the design with the aim to account for potential confounding effects. Based on evidence provided by previous literature, the three variables selected for Study 3 were aggressive humour style, and previous experience of cybervictimisation and cyberperpetration. Including these covariates, Study 3 was able to explore if previous experience of cyberbullying or aggressive humour style impacts the severity perception of hypothetical vignettes.

1.6 Original contribution to knowledge

The assembly of research conducted for the purpose of this thesis contributes to the literature and understanding of cyberbullying and the role of humour within cyberbullying activity for young people. Particularly, findings from this thesis contribute to following fields of literature:

1. Humour and the entertainment value of humour has been reported to be a motive to perpetrate cyberbullying which indicates that humour plays a role in cyberbullying (Englander, 2008; Huang and Chou, 2010; Raskauskas & Stolz, 2007). The evidence for this motive contrasts the view that humour is a construct that distinguishes between harmless jokes and hurtful behaviour (Nocentini et al., 2010; Olweus, 2013). Focus group findings reported in Study 1 outline how young people perceive and interpret online aggressive humour, bridging the gap between which grey area of humorous cyberbullying and the difficulties of appraising online hostile humour that targets adolescents (see chapter 4, RQ1).

2. Severity perceptions of cyberbullying have been researched to some extent within the literature, indicating a number of factors which impact how severe cyberbullying is appraised by young people such as gender (Bauman & Newman, 2013), publicity (Sticca & Perren, 2013) and type of behaviour (Smith et al., 2008). Online aggressive humour behaviours such as cyberbanter or cyberteasing can either be hurtful or harmless and have received little attention by researchers previously. Online aggressive humour has been suggested to be difficult for young people to interpret as either prosocial or antisocial (Baas et

al., 2013). Study 2 and 3 contribute to this field of literature by examining factors which have been reported to influence severity perception of cyberbullying and that were reported in Study 1. The findings of these studies convey factors which contribute to the cyberbullying body of literature concerning adolescents (Study 2, aged 11-16), and older adolescents and emerging adults (Study 3, aged 16-21). Having a greater understanding of severity perceptions of cyberbullying and contextually humoristic cyberbullying is an area of research which needs to continually be updated as the internet evolves and young people experience ICT differently over time.

3. This thesis provides a primary contribution to cyberbullying literature by drawing on a theoretical framework of humour and applying it to the context of humoristic cyberbullying. This thesis explores the factors which impact the appraisal of online hostile humour with the aim to build an understanding of how online hostile humour resides within the limits of the cyberbullying definition criteria. There is still much debate concerning the viability of the cyberbullying definition as an extension of traditional cyberbullying (Ansary, 2020). The research program conducted for this thesis contributes to exploring the under-research area of humoristic cyberbullying, which tentatively may verge outside the cyberbullying definition due to ambiguity and misinterpretation (Baas et al., 2013). The implications of contributing to a greater understanding of cyberbullying may lead to a conceptualisation of cyberbullying that presents a more accurate representation of the behaviour that is experienced by young people.

1.7 Thesis structure

This last section of Chapter 1 provides a brief overview of the chapters presented in this thesis. Chapter 2 reviews the current body of literate and considers how cyberbullying is conceptualised by initially discussing the broader concept of aggressive behaviour, leading onto a general summary of traditional bullying. The definitional framework of cyberbullying is considered alongside traditional bullying and is evaluated by exploring the differences between the online and offline environments. Reported prevalence

rates of young peoples' cyberbullying activity are reviewed and assessed, which is followed by an overview of research concerning the consequences of experiencing cyberbullying.

Chapter 3 approaches cyberbullying literature with more focus on what cyberbullying behaviours look like in the digital world. A description of each behaviour is provided with an overview of which behaviours have been reported as being most and least common. Following on is an extensive discussion of what predicting factors have been reported by literature that may make a young individual more likely or vulnerable to experience cyberbullying activity. A literature review of the cyberbully/victim role is reported, giving additional background insight into roles of those involved in cyberbullying. A considerable summary of literature concerning the online audience outlines the relationship between this online affordance and the construct of cyberbullying. A focussed review is then provided on bystanders and bystander behaviour, who are the general online audience and also the potential audience of cyberbullying behaviours.

Chapter 4 reports results from qualitative Study 1 of the assembly of research conducted for the thesis, which addresses RQ1. The literature review introduces the topic area of humour and its definition. An outline of the stages of humour development portrays the social benefits of developing humour skills throughout early and later childhood. A concentrated consideration of aggressive humour behaviours such as teasing, and banter are conceptualised and discussed in relation to cyberbullying and the online environment. A coherent rationale for Study 1 is then followed by the remaining research which seeks to explore the question, how do young people interpret and experience humour within the context of cyberbullying?

Chapter 5 presents the second study of this thesis, which is a quantitative study. The chapter starts with a literature review of the importance of social context within online hostile humour exchanges. An extensive and evaluative theoretical perspective is considered within the context of online aggressive humour. Literature is then reviewed concerning factors which impact severity perceptions of online aggressive humour and interpreting cyberbullying. The remainder of Chapter 5 presents the results of the experimental vignette method which was employed to address RQ2 and RQ3. Factors which influenced perceived offensiveness and perceived cyberbullying in relation to the

hypothetical vignettes are discussed in relation to theoretical insight and previous literature.

Chapter 6 presents quantitative Study 3, the final study of the programme of research conducted for this thesis. Study 3 addresses RQ2 and RQ3 but extends the investigation to answer these research questions by replicating Study 2, using a participant sample from an older population and introducing three covariates which were selected based on previous literature. Results of the analysis are discussed, again considering the factors found to enhance perceived offensiveness and perceived cyberbullying. Findings of the covariate analysis are discussed in light of previous literature and their impact on the severity perception of the hypothetical vignettes.

Chapter 7 is the final chapter of thesis and is a general discussion of the thesis as a whole.

Chapter 2 – Literature review

2.1 Chapter introduction

This early stage of this chapter introduces the overarching construct of aggressive behaviour. The chapter follows onto summarising traditional, face-to-face, bullying which is a subtype of aggressive behaviour. The concept and definitional criterion of traditional bullying are detailed within the context of research conducted with adolescents. Following on, an extensive review of cyberbullying literature is provided, depicting a detailed narrative of cyberbullying literature which builds towards presenting the current status of cyberbullying in terms of conceptualisation and operationalisation. Compelling research evidence is explored in favour for cyberbullying to be conceptually regarded as an extension of traditional bullying. Comparatively, evidence for the construct of cyberbullying to be observed as a separate, singular phenomenon, is provided in parallel with overlapping links to other concepts such as cyber aggression, cyber harassment and cyber trolling. A synopsis of cyberbullying prevalence rates ranging from earlier research to more current findings is explored with specific attention focused on the disparity of prevalence reported across the literature. This section then concludes by outlining the internalised and externalised negative outcomes associated with those adolescents who experience cyberbullying victimisation, highlighting the necessity for research to continue exploring what is reported to be a highly destructive behaviour within society.

2.2 Aggressive behaviour

The construct of 'aggressive behaviour' has been described as an observable behaviour that is intended to cause harm by means of physical, verbal, or psychological acts (Liu et al., 2013). Although the definition of aggressive behaviour encompasses a wide variety of behavioural phenomena, the definition draws focus onto the key element of intentionality to cause harm (Berkowitz, 1993; Crick & Gropeter, 1995). Aggressive behaviours have been categorised into proactive, or instrumental, and reactive, or defensive, subgroups (Crick & Dodge, 1996; Dodge & Coie, 1987). Proactive aggression is a deliberate, unprovoked behaviour which is motivated by potential rewards or goals,

such as power (Olweus, 1993), which result from the aggressive acts. In contrast, reactive behaviour is an impulsive, provoked aggressive response that is triggered by a real or perceived offense. Proactive and reactive aggression have been reported to be positively associated with traditional bullying (Hubbard et al., 2001; Salmivalli et al., 1996) and cyberbullying perpetration (Calvete et al., 2010).

2.3 Bullying

Bullying is a specific subtype of the overarching term aggressive behaviour and is recognized as a major public health issue (Olweus & Limber, 2010). An extensive proportion of bullying research has been pioneered by a Norwegian psychologist Dan Olweus. Olweus defines traditional, or face-to-face bullying, as "a student is being bullied or victimised when he/she is exposed, repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students. It is a negative action when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another" (1993, p.9). Fundamentally, Olweus stresses that the bullying definition includes three criteria: a) intentionality of the perpetrator to cause harm, b) an asymmetric power imbalance between perpetrator and victim and c) repetition of the act made by the same perpetrator, which must be present for an act of aggression to be identified as bullying. Olweus also emphasises that bullying is a term to be applied contextually when aggressive behaviour, which meets the previously stated criterion, is observed between peers, or those who belong to the same social unit such as a school or class (Olweus & Limber, 2018). In brief, bullying behaviours are a specific group of aggressive acts which are performed repetitively and intentionally and that occur between known peers of unequal power status.

A substantive body of research indicates bullying can have lasting harmful consequences on young people (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000; Lund et al., 2009) and therefore has remained a topic of considerable interest since the late 1970s. A meta-analysis of 80 research articles concerning bullying prevalence rates involving adolescents aged 12-18 years old report 36% of young people experience bullying as victims and 35% perpetrate bullying against others (Modecki et al., 2014). Bullying behaviours are broadly divided into two subcategories of direct and indirect bullying

(Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010; Hampel et al., 2009). Direct, or also referred to as overt bullying, is face-to-face and involves physical behaviours such as kicking, pushing or punching, and verbal abuse such as name calling, teasing and vocal threats (Olweus, 1993; Wang et al., 2010). Indirect, or covert, behaviours include spreading rumours, gossiping, social isolation and group exclusion (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Indirect bullying is also known as psychological, relational bullying and can overlap with direct bullying as it can involve abuse or sexual gestures that are verbal that are conducted within a victim's social group (Corvo & deLara, 2010). Research concerning the prevalence of types of bullying behaviour has consistently reported verbal bullying to be the most common form of bullying for adolescents (Green et al., 2010; Olweus, 2012; Rivers & Smith, 1994; Yang & Salmivalli, 2013). For example, Vaillancourt et al. (2010) reported 51% of their substantial Canadian sample of 8- to 19-year-olds were involved in verbal bullying as a victim, 37% experienced relational bullying and 31% had been physically bullied. Although traditional bullying is reported by young people to be experienced frequently, a more modern form of bullying, cyberbullying, has been made possible with the proliferation of advanced technology (Livingstone et al., 2014).

2.4 Cyberbullying

The internet has been accessible to the mainstream public for over two decades, with many generations of young people growing up not knowing or experiencing life without technology or smart devices. For those who have internet access, communication within society has effectively been facilitated by the internet by enabling users to share information, such as text, images, videos or voice, between computer networks in different locations (Ofcom, 2018; Valkenburg & Peter, 2007; Wellman & Haythornthwaite, 2002). With 9 out of 10 people in the United Kingdom having access to the internet in the home (Ofcom, 2018), the internet is now a firmly ingrained, daily feature within society providing many clear positive implications for individuals, businesses, industries and organisations (Finkelhor, 2014; Livingstone et al., 2017). The main benefits of the internet for young people relate to recreational use for the purpose of communication and socialising, entertainment, and educational use by accessing

large volumes of shared knowledge and information (Chayko, 2014; Gianesini & Brighi, 2015; Livingstone et al., 2017).

For some adolescents, it is difficult to imagine life without the internet (Berson et al., 2002). Young people under the age of 18 are estimated to account for 1 in every 3 internet users across the globe (Keeley & Little, 2017). In the United Kingdom, Ofcom (2019) reports 37% of 8- to 11-year-old children own a smart phone and 21% have a social media profile. For the 12 to 15 age group, 83% own a smartphone and 71% have a social media profile. A national report concerning eleven European countries found 80% young people aged between 9 – 16 have a smart phone and use it at least once a day (Smahel et al., 2020). Despite how embedded the internet is in society, some caution is required. Although, the internet can be a positive experience, it can also enable negative experiences, most notably cyberbullying (Livingstone et al., 2014), which has been linked to serious, psychological effects (Kowalski et al., 2019; Nixon, 2014). Since the beginning of the 21st century when cyberbullying first became a topic of interest (Zych et al., 2015) several definitions of cyberbullying have been cited within psychology literature and the debate still continues.

2.5 Definition of cyberbullying

The word cyberbullying was first coined and defined by Canadian politician Bill Belsey in 2003 (Bauman & Bellmore, 2015). Belsey had previously developed an award-winning bullying website (www.bullying.org) in 1999 with the aim of sharing information on bullying and support for victims of bullying. Belsey later went on to develop (www.cyberbullying.ca) with a similar purpose but for victims of cyberbullying. Belsey outlines cyberbullying as "…the use of information and communication technologies to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group that is intended to harm others" (n.d, para. 1). This definition includes the technology aspect of cyberbullying behaviour and characterises the traditional bullying elements of intent and repetition but is vague in terms of other cited elements, i.e., power imbalance, that other researchers include (Olweus, 2013; Smith et al., 2008). However, although power imbalance is not addressed in Belsey's definition, his website places great emphasis on power being a key factor within cyberbullying behaviour, suggesting that Belsey does

include the definitional criterion of power imbalance despite it not being clearly referred to in his frequently cited definition. It is unknown when the addition of power imbalance was included on the website, which may have significant implications for research that has applied Belsey's conceptual definition and did not include the aspect of power. Bill Belsey's definition is commonly cited within research articles as being the first available definition to the public and academia (Aricak et al., 2008; Dooley et al., 2009; Li, 2007). Research has used a great deal of diverse names for behaviour that resembles cyberbullying which include electronic bullying (Asher, Stark, & Fireman, 2017; Raskauskas, & Stoltz, 2007), online harassment (Finkelhor et al., 2000), online bullying (Canty et al., 2016; Mishna et al., 2009), cyber aggression (Pornarni & Wood, 2010) and internet bullying (Law et al., 2011). Having various labels for what could be conceived as cyberbullying behaviour has led to some conceptual confusion within the cyberbullying literature, with some definitions being too broad and some too specific (Lucas-Molina et al., 2016; Mehari et al., 2014).

A similar concept to cyberbully is online victimisation which was first studied in 2000 by Finkelhor, Mitchell and Wolak, who interviewed 1501 American youth aged between 10 to 17 years old. Online victimisation for this study involved a number of online behaviours such as sexual solicitations, aggressive sexual solicitation, unwanted exposure to sexual material and harassment. Of this group of behaviours, online harassment, defined as 'Threats or other offensive behaviour (not sexual solicitation), sent online to youth or posted online about the youth for others to see' (Finkelhor et al., 2000 p. 11), closely resembles what is more commonly known as cyberbullying. Shortly after cyberbullying was recognised as an emerging online behaviour, many researchers became interested in the phenomenon and a number of instruments were developed in order to measure cyberbullying behaviour. Berne et al. (2013) carried a systematic review of 44 multinational cyberbullying questionnaires which were published between 2004 and 2010. This high figure of potential questionnaires demonstrates the scope of how the definition of cyberbullying was operationalised within various instruments during that time. Of the 44 instruments, 42 included definitions which were technology specific, 40 included the criterion of intentionality, 25 referred to repetition and only 13 incorporated the criterion imbalance of power. Findings of this systematic review suggests various definitions have previously been applied in cyberbullying research

which may distort an overall evaluation of the scale of adolescent cyberbullying behaviours potentially present within society.

One of the most commonly cited cyberbullying definitions is provided by Smith et al. (2008) who were one of the first groups of academics to provide an online context specific definition of cyberbullying which was described as "An aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself" (p.376). Smith et al. (2008) notes that this definition corresponds with Olweus' (1993) definition of traditional bullying, which suggests a clear standpoint that cyberbullying is viewed synonymously as bullying. Since Smith et al. (2008) published their definition of cyberbullying, a core body of researchers (Calvete et al., 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2014; Olweus & Limber, 2018; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Slonje et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2008; Smith et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2013; Ybarra et al., 2012) have conceptually pursued cyberbullying in a similar light, building from evidence provided by Smith et al. (2008) suggesting cyberbullying to be an extension or a subgroup of traditional bullying. This view applies the traditional bullying definitional criterion of imbalance of power, intentionality and repetition to the concept of cyberbullying.

Support for the unity of cyberbullying and traditional bullying can be obtained from a meta-analysis of cyberbullying literature conducted by Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, and Lattanner (2014) who found strong evidence to suggest the construct of cyberbullying should include four components, "(a) intentional aggressive behaviour that is, (b) carried out repeatedly, (c) occurs between a perpetrator and victim who are unequal in power, and (d) occurs through electronic technologies" (p. 37). Evidence for the view point that cyberbullying is an extension of traditional bullying is deduced from research which reports bullying and cyberbullying to be highly correlated (Görzig & Machackova, 2015; Gradinger et al., 2009; Hase et al., 2015; Iranzo et al., 2020; Kowalski et al., 2014; Modecki et al., 2014) suggesting that victims and perpetrators of traditional bullying are also highly likely to be cyberbullying victims or perpetrators. Furthermore, both bullying and cyberbullying have common predictors (Kim et al., 2017) and outcomes (Thomas et al., 2015). Findings from qualitative research has also suggested cyberbullying to be a subtype of traditional bullying. Ševčíková, Šmahel, and Otavová (2012) interviewed young people from Czech Republic, aged 15 to 17 years, who were

victims of cyberbullying. Online attacks were found to be most harmful when the victim knew the aggressor offline, and when the attacks were linked to the offline environment leading researchers to conclude that cyberbullying is a direct extension of traditional bullying. Literature clearly outlines a strong argument for cyberbullying to be viewed as an extension of traditional bullying, which therefore, implicates cyberbullying activity to be viewed under the term of bullying by the public, practitioners, policy makers and academia.

There are a number of researchers who dispute bullying and cyberbullying to be a part of the same phenomenon and argue the need for a bespoke cyberbullying definition. Research has identified definitional issues originating from the unique online environment, which could potentially divide the constructs of bullying and cyberbullying (Kofoed & Staksrud, 2018). The virtual, online environment has been commonly reported to be different to the real, offline world in five exclusive ways. Firstly, the online domain enables individuals to choose to be anonymous or have multiple identities which can facilitate online perpetration (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Mishna et al., 2009). Perceived online anonymity has been related to the concept of deindividuation (Brink, 2014; Zimbardo, 1969) whereby a user's self-awareness and individuality is reduced which in turn, reduces the personal responsibility for online actions, including aggressive behaviours (McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Postmes et al., 2002). Perceived online anonymity has also been linked to the concept of online disinhibition where anonymity facilitates cyberbullying by enabling users to separate their offline identity with their online actions (Lowry et al., 2016; Suler, 2004). Secondly, cyberspace has consistently been reported to have a lack of authority and supervision compared to the physical environment, enabling a consequence free space for perpetrators (Shariff, 2004; Shariff & Strong-Wilson, 2005). The third difference is the internet's ability to essentially repeat one act of aggression that can become 'viral' whereby limitless audiences can view a victim being targeted by a perpetrator, which can be shared and distributed by bystanders (Dooley et al., 2009; Slonje et al., 2013). The fourth difference concerns the 24/7 aspect of cyberbullying which is unique because the internet is not restricted by time and is accessible to users at any point during the day or night (Dooley et al., 2009; Li, 2008). Finally, another pertinent difference is the remote nature of online communication, text or media based, which can generate emotional reactivity (Kowalski et al., 2012). Without

the aid of verbal or nonverbal cues to guide express emotion (i.e., facial gestures, verbal utterances, tone of voice) some online interactions may cause offence more easily and interfere with the perception of cyberbullying (Aoyama et al., 2011; Kowalski et al., 2012). These five overall differences create some disparity around how the three-bullying criteria of imbalance of power, intentionality and repetition fit into the construct of cyberbullying.

A number of researchers have focused on how the three criteria of the traditional bullying definition, imbalance of power, repetition, and intentionality, translate into the offline environment. Research has yet to fully address an issue that was proposed by Swain (1998) who observes how difficult intentionality and power asymmetry can be identified within the region between prosocial and antisocial behaviour. Research findings also suggest young people do not fully agree with the three criteria of traditional bullying. Menesini et al. (2012) conducted a wide scale study in six European countries (Italy, Spain, Germany, Sweden, Estonia and France) and used hypothetical cyberbullying scenarios which systematically manipulated the three criteria of the traditional bullying definition. The scenarios additionally included publicity and autonomy in order to capture participant views on these possible, previously suggest criteria (Dooley et al., 2009, Erdur-Baker, 2010; Slonje & Smith; 2008). Participants, aged 11-17, were asked if they perceived each scenario as cyberbullying. Power imbalance and intent were found to have the strongest relationship with defining cyberbullying, while autonomy was recognised more than repetition as being a defining element of cyberbullying. Further qualitative research concerning young people's perspective on cyberbullying has also highlighted disparity for some definitional criterion, such as intentionality (Baas et al., 2013; Topcu, Yildirim, & Erdur-Baker, 2013) and imbalance of power (Nocentini et al., 2010) suggesting inconsistent evidence for this proposed cyberbullying definition.

Repetition as a definitional criterion for cyberbullying is highly debateable within cyberbullying literature. Repetition in the context of a traditional bullying is an explicit concept because it can be quantified i.e., more than one incident of bullying is classed as repetition (Langos, 2012). However, a repetitive act of cyberbullying is ambiguous and difficult to quantify, as a one act of aggression online may be viewed by many others and could cause reoccurring harm to a victim (Baas et al., 2013; Hutson, 2016;

Vandebosch & van Cleemput, 2009). Research has also shown that a single hurtful act of cyberbullying can have similar consequences to a repetitive aggressive act (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008; Ybarra et al., 2007). Moreover, an act of aggression perpetrated in the virtual domain is potentially more permanent and can easily be shared to an infinite number of users (Heirman & Walrave, 2008), which could distort a victim's perception of the amount of bystander views (Dooley et al., 2009) and therefore facilitate longevity of the impact created by the act (Mishna et al., 2010).

The concept of imbalance of power has also been considered to be ambiguous within the digital world (Grigg, 2010; Slonje et al., 2013). Olweus (1993) characterises an imbalance of power as an evident weakness that contrasts between the victim and perpetrator, physically, psychologically or in terms of popularity status. However, these characteristics are not clearly relevant for cyberbullying perpetration which presents an issue for how the asymmetric power criterion can translate contextually within the online environment. For instance, power could be attributed to perceived anonymity of the perpetrator (Durán & Martinez-Pecino, 2015; Slonje et al., 2013), which may affect a victim's ability to defend themselves (Menesini et al., 2012). Without knowing the perpetrator's identity, Olweus' (2013) definition of cyberbullying becomes inadequate as there is no way in knowing if a power imbalance exists between the victim and perpetrator. Furthermore, perpetrator anonymity disables the notion that cyberbullying only occurs between peers of the same social unit (i.e., a school or club). Power has been suggested to be measured by the degree of technological skills a perpetrator may have (Smith et al., 2008; Vandebosch & van Cleemput, 2009; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004) or the ability to humiliate in public with extensive audiences available online (Langos, 2012; Thomas et al., 2015). Research concerning these possibilities is still under development leaving power in an unclear position of understanding within the cyberbullying literature.

Intentionality as a definitional criterion of cyberbullying has been identified as being more ambiguous to interpret online due to the lack of social indicators, i.e., facial expressions and tone of voice, and social context cues (Baruch, 2005). Ambiguity has been reported to lead to a deficiency within online communication which has been attributed to potential misinterpretation of a perpetrator's intent to cause harm (Baas et al., 2013; Langos, 2012; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004a). Results from semi structured

interviews with 15- to 24-year-old Australian participants (Dredge et al., 2014), 53 focus groups with Belgium youth aged 10 to 18 years (Vandebosch & Van Cleeput, 2008) and questionnaire results obtained with 11- to 14-year-old British participants (Naylor et al., 2006) have suggested young people recognise the victim's experience of the impact or 'feeling hurt' to classify the event as cyberbullying. Furthermore, some interview findings have also reported this classification to be included in the traditional bullying definition (Jeffrey & Stuart, 2020). Overall, it is clear that evidence exists which contends the credibility of the three components of intentionality, power imbalance and repetition within the cyberbullying definition. Due to the reported discrepancies for each criterion within the cyberbullying definition, this thesis will take into account how conceptually the definition criteria are represented and implemented within each study.

2.6 Alternative online aggressive behaviours

It is important to differentiate the construct of cyberbullying from other aggressive online behaviours for clarity of concept purposes, operationalisation of the construct of cyberbullying and for accurate measurement. Other similar online aggressive behaviours that have been reported include cyber aggression, cyber harassment and cyber trolling. Cyber aggression has been defined as an intentionally harmful behaviour which utilises electronic means to target an individual or group who perceive the behaviour to be offensive and unwanted (Grigg, 2010; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Wright, 2015; Ybarra et al., 2007). The clear difference between cyberbullying and cyber aggression is that the latter definition is a much broader concept. The definition of cyber aggression has no reference to imbalance of power, behaviour repetition or if the victim knows the perpetrator and more emphasis is placed on the perception of the victim. Cyber aggression and cyberbullying overlap considerably as they both comprise of a wide scope of behaviours that can be carried out online, except some behaviours are exclusive to the term of cyber aggression i.e., cyber harassment behaviours (Grigg, 2010; Pyzalski, 2012), and the psychological consequences of both online behaviours are similar (Corcoran et al., 2015; Grigg, 2010). Some researchers argue that instruments used to measure cyber aggression and cyberbullying could potentially be measuring the same construct and by limiting cyberbullying to Olweus' (1993) traditional bullying

definition criteria, research could be restricting more accurate findings of the phenomenon (Cocoran & Mc Guckin, 2014; Grigg, 2010; Pyzalski, 2012). In opposition, Olweus and Limber (2018) argue that behaviours that fall under the cyber aggression or cyber harassment definition, specifically behaviours observed between unknown peers, are conceptually different behaviours to cyberbullying.

Cyber harassment is an online behaviour which is similar to cyberbullying in that they both involve an aggressive act that is perpetrated upon a victim (Burgess-Proctor, Patchin & Hinduja, 2009). Cyber harassment has been conceptualised as an online behaviour that can be a one off or repeated act that is intended to cause upset, disturb, or threaten others (Piotrowski, 2012; Workman, 2010). However, similar to cyberbullying, cyber harassment has various definitions which include or exclude certain criteria. For instance, Hazelwood and Koon-Magnin (2013) and Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) include the criterion of intent for their definition of cyber harassment, while Burgess-Proctor et al. (2009) extend the definition to include unintentional comments which are perceived to be offensive by the victim. Furthermore, Mitchell and colleagues (2016) state that an online aggressive behaviour only needs to be threatening or offensive for it to be deemed as cyber harassment. Evidently, cyber harassment, like cyberbullying, is still in the development phases of conceptualisation with various propositions for how both online behaviours relate to one another. Wick and colleagues (2017) suggest that cyber harassment extends the cyberbullying construct to include unknown individuals as well as known peers, as emphasised by Olweus and Limber (2018). The concept of cyber harassment covers a wide range of multiple behaviours from single insults and general hate speech, threats, cyber stalking, identity theft, cyberbullying, spamming and sexual harassment (Beran & Li, 2005; Burgess-Proctor et al., 2009; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006; Lwin et al., 2012). Many of these behaviours could be categorised as antisocial behaviour. Cyber trolling is an umbrella term for general online antisocial behaviour which can occur on online public discussions, social media or news applications (Cheng et al., 2017). The definition of Cyber trolling is ambiguous as it is a highly under researched area (Komaç & Çağıltay, 2019) and in a fairly early stage of development. The definition of cyber trolling encompasses overlapping possible definitional aspects of cyber aggression, cyber harassment and cyberbullying behaviours and includes behaviours such as spamming, hate speech, flaming, griefing (online

gaming specific), swearing, or personal attacks (Akbulut et al., 2010; Buckels et al., 2014; Hardaker, 2010; Willard, 2007).

Reaching an agreeable operational definition of cyberbullying is imperative for the future of cyberbullying research. Implementing an instrument which uses an accurate cyberbullying definition enables researchers to operationalise and measure cyberbullying activity with construct validity. Reliable instruments are highly important as they lead to accurate research findings which can inform policies and intervention programs that are put in place to safeguard the young people who are at risk of experiencing the negative consequences of cyberbullying. Conceptualisation of the cyberbullying definition is not linear as there are various arguments relating to how cyberbullying falls besides traditional bullying. This disparity has unfortunately led to various cyberbullying definitions being used by different researchers and organisations. Furthermore, some research has suggested that young people report differing perceptions of cyberbullying behaviours. Research provided by this thesis fundamentally aims to contribute to future development of an established cyberbullying definition.

2.7 Prevalence of Cyberbullying

The first research studies concerning cyberbullying prevalence rates were published in 2004 (Tokunaga, 2010). Examining cyberbullying prevalence rates for young people is difficult due to the variability of reported prevalence estimates which varies considerably between studies. An example of variability can be viewed in a systematic scoping analysis by Brochado and colleagues (2017) who reviewed 159 international papers published between 2004 and 2014. For the recall periods of the last year, victimisation of cyberbullying was reported to be between 1.0% and 61.1% and perpetration varied between 3.0% and 39%. For the recall period of the last 6 months, estimates ranged between 1.6% to 56.9% and 1.9% to 79.3% for victimisation and perpetration respectively. From this review it is clear that prevalence estimates can range between quite low or very high percentage estimates. An earlier review by Tokunaga (2010) reported similar results for cyberbullying victimisation from a meta-synthesis of literature (n=25). Findings indicated 20-40% of young people will experience

some form of cyberbullying during their adolescent years. It is possible that the range is reported to be less in Tokunaga's (2010) review as there were fewer studies to take into account. What can be attributed to both review findings is the clear evidence that there are some young people who are potentially experiencing high levels of cyberbullying victimisation.

The variability of prevalence rates can be problematic as they depict an inaccurate report of the extent of cyberbullying behaviours within society. Mixed prevalence findings have primarily been attributed to methodology differences. For instance, Juvoven and Gross (2008) reported 72% of American 12- to 17-year-olds had been cyberbullied at some point in their life. This highly inflated estimate could be attributed to the recall period of an entire life but also to the study using a broadly phrased definition of bullying, "anything that someone does that upsets or offends someone else" (p.499). These findings contrast recent reports from a large-scale study that collected prevalence data from 9- to 16-year-olds from a collection of 16 European countries. Smahel et al. (2020) utilised a cyberbullying definition which included the three criteria of intent, power imbalance and repetition. Relatively low estimates were reported for a recall period of the past year with 5% of the participants identifying as victims and 3% as perpetrators of cyberbullying (Smahel et al., 2020). Both studies highlight how prevalence findings can vary depending on what recall periods are implemented and which cyberbullying definition is utilised.

Irregular prevalence estimates of cyberbullying behaviours have also been associated to how cyberbullying is measured. In a systematic review of 44 cyberbullying assessment instruments, researchers identified a number of poignant inconsistencies across the instruments such as conceptual and definitional disparity, and unreported internal reliability and validity tests (Berne et al., 2013). A systematic review of longitudinal cyberbullying studies additionally indicates that a great deal of research uses vague single item questions to identify victimisation and perpetration behaviour within their sample (Camerini et al., 2020). Instruments of this kind can lead to inaccurate results as they lack clarity, for the participants and readers of the research, around the different types of cyberbullying behaviours that are being experienced. Findings from both systematic reviews (Berne et al., 2013; Camerini et al., 2020) have implications for the research conducted for the current thesis. Therefore, research

designs for quantitative studies will consider internal consistency reliability tests (i.e., Cronbach's Alpha) and validity tests (convergent tests) from previous research whilst selecting an instrument to measure cyberbullying involvement. Additionally, the methodology of quantitative research will avoid single item questions.

Research design of studies conducted for the current thesis will need to consider other potential issues linked to cyberbullying prevalence estimates which have been raised. For instance, irregular prevalence estimates have been attributed to research becoming outdated (Englander, 2019) which could be due to advancements in technology, SNS and new online platforms, such as gaming (McInroy & Mishna, 2017), which indirectly facilitate cyberbullying. Prevalence rates have also been reported to be different depending cultural contexts of different countries or regions (Barlett et al., 2014; Ortega et al., 2012) which is not generally taken into account across the literature. Overall, the variability of prevalence rates for cyberbullying involvement demonstrates that conceptually cyberbullying is still in a developmental phase. The research conducted within this thesis aims to contribute to cyberbullying literature by following guidance provided by key systematic reviews (Berne et al., 2013; Camerini et al., 2020; Chun et al., 2020), which have reported operational and methodological issues within previous research. Furthermore, research within this thesis intends to qualitatively and experimentally explore how cyberbullying conceptually relates to other behaviours that are current and sparsely explored within the literature and therefore are not taken into account operationally.

2.8 Consequences of Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying has gained a considerable degree of interest from researchers, media, educators and parents due to reported psychosocial consequences of experiencing cyberbullying. Cyber-victimisation has consistently been associated with internalised and externalised behavioural problems. Examples of reported internalised behaviours are perceived stress (Garaigordobil, 2011, Shpiegel et al., 2015), low self-esteem (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015: Cénat et al., 2014), anxiety (Gonzalez-Cabrera, Calvete, Leon-Mejia, Perez-Sancho, & Peinado, 2017, Wright 2016), loneliness (Pereda & Sicillia, 2017; Şahin, 2012) and depressive symptomatology (Rose & Tynes, 2015; Salmivalli et al.,

2013). Victims of cyberbullying have also been reported to have a higher likelihood of experiencing suicide ideation (Mitchell et al., 2018; Nixon, 2014), which involves repeatedly desiring, planning and thinking about committing suicide (Beck et al., 1979). Suicide ideation has been reported to have a stronger relationship with cyberbullying than traditional bullying (Iranzo et al., 2020; Van Geel et al., 2014). A number of negative externalised outcomes have also been associated with cyberbullying victimisation; these behaviours are viewed as behaviours that are directed to the external environment. For instance, cross-sectional studies with young people have reported increased delinquency behaviour and substance abuse for victims of cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2007), decreased academic achievements (Tsitsika et al., 2015) and decreased school attendance (Price & Dalgleish, 2010).

Previous research provides compelling evidence that there is a high risk of cyberbullying victims experiencing adverse harmful consequences; however, no conclusive research can state that cyberbullying directly leads to or causes negative factors such as depression or suicide. It is also unclear whether internalised behaviours are consequences of precursors of cyberbullying experiences (Kaltiala-Heino et al., 2000). What can be proposed by research is that negative factors can play a mediating role with other variables related to cyberbullying victimisation. For example, with a sample of adolescent victims of cyberbullying, Sampasa-Kanyinga et al. (2014) found depressive symptomology mediated the relationship between victimisation and suicidal thoughts, planning and attempts. Similar results were found by Reed et al. (2015); however, their model included substance abuse as a factor which mediated the relationship between depression, victimisation and suicidal thinking. From these studies it would be appropriate to suggest that among some adolescents, cyberbullying victimisation and suicide ideation properties may co-occur with one or more other psychosocial behaviours (Skapinakis et al., 2011). This can lead to the potential conclusion that some victims may already be experiencing some underlying problematic behaviours which then are exacerbated by experiencing cyberbullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Furthermore, it identifies the need to gain more understanding of how specific factors can mediate or contribute to the extent a victim experiences potential negative outcomes of cyberbullying.

One of the main difficulties of exploring the associated consequences of cyberbullying is the overlap between traditional bullying and cyberbullying. Consistent findings suggest the majority of individuals who experience cyberbullying are also victims of traditional bullying (Chen et al., 2017; Li, 2007), with as high as 93% being reported in some studies (Hase et al., 2015). Findings from longitudinal research indicates victims of traditional bullying are also more likely to become victims of cyberbullying (Del Rey, Elipe, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2012), therefore measuring negative outcomes of both constructs separately and controlling for the amount of time each construct has been experienced is methodologically problematic. This issue could lead to unclear interpretations of research findings regarding which behaviour can be attributed to which negative outcome and also adds to issues around conceptualising cyberbullying as a separate construct (Olweus, 2012; Olweus & Limber, 2018). However, research does exist that controls for traditional bullying victimisation and has reported results suggesting cyberbullying alone does predict negative consequences. Cole et al. (2016) illustrate in their longitudinal study with American youth aged 8-13 years old that cybervictimisation incrementally predicted depressive symptoms after controlling for other forms of traditional bullying. Cross-sectional studies have also found young victims of cyberbullying to be independently associated with depressive symptoms (Bonnano & Hymel, 2013; Perren et al., 2010), lower academic achievement (Wigderson & Lynch, 2013) and suicidal ideation (Bonnano & Hymel, 2013). Researchers discuss the unique features of cyberbullying such as audience, autonomy and 24/7 nature of the internet as potential explanations for their findings (Bonanno & Hymel, 2013; Cole et al., 2016; Landoll et al., 2015; Perren et al., 2010). Findings from these studies provide a degree of evidence indicating that although the implications of cyberbullying and traditional bullying are comparable, outcomes of experiencing cyberbullying alone are distinct which demonstrates the propensity for cyberbullying to be a standalone construct.

A further issue to consider relating to reported outcomes of adolescent victims of cyberbullying is the disparity between reported consequences. For instance, some victims of cyberbullying state they experienced no harmful impact after the incident. In a large-scale international study, Smahel et al. (2020) asked victims of cyberbullying how they felt after their experience; 20% of the victims reported no harm and 20% reported they experienced intense harm. In a different study with young Spanish people aged 12-

17 years, Ortega, Elipe and Monks (2012) reported 42.3% of victims who had been cyberbullied via the internet were 'indifferent' to their experience. These findings illustrate that not all cyberbullying victimisation leads to negative outcomes which suggests that the impact of cyberbullying for some young people could perhaps be mediated by background factors. Exploring the factors which may influence how adolescents perceive cyberbullying may aid an understanding of how negative outcomes of cyberbullying can be supported and reduced and who may be at greater risk of experiencing significant negative impact. Further scope of adolescents' perception of cyberbullying will be discussed to a greater extent in future chapters as perceived severity of cyberbullying is integral to this thesis and its research questions.

2.9 Chapter conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide an in-depth overview of the construct cyberbullying. Firstly, the chapter developed an outline of aggressive behaviour, leading onto a detailed account of traditional bullying, a subtype of aggressive behaviour. The chapter follows on to review relevant literature which suggests traditional bullying and cyberbullying to essentially be the same phenomenon with regards to definitional criteria of intentionality, power imbalance and repetition (Olweus, 2013). The key strength of this view is maintained by research findings indicating traditional bullying and cyberbullying to be highly correlated (Kowalski et al., 2014), meaning that those adolescents involved with traditional bullying are highly likely to also be involved with cyberbullying activity.

Secondly, based on research evidence the chapter proposes a counter argument to cyberbullying being an extension of traditional bullying. This section of the chapter discusses reported ambiguities from the literature concerning the definitional criterion of traditional bullying individually in relation to cyberbullying. Evidence from previous findings have indicated that cyberbullying may require a tailored definition to account for the discrepancies founded in the unique online environment (Kofoed & Staksrud, 2018). This thesis explores the proposed ambiguities reported in previous literature with the aim to contribute to the ongoing debate concerning the conceptualisation of

cyberbullying and provide greater insight into how traditional bullying and cyberbullying may or may not relate to one another as a construct.

Thirdly, the chapter progresses onto broadly considering the overlap between cyberbullying and other online aggressive behaviours i.e., cyber aggression, cyber harassment, and cyber trolling. Each behaviour is broken down into their respective definition and examined in light of consistencies and inconsistencies relating to cyberbullying. The purpose of this differentiation was to present clarification of alternative constructs which are reported to be conceptually similar to cyber aggression (Corcoran et al., 2015; Grigg, 2010), which have been argued to be more closely associated with defining cyberbullying than traditional bulling. Consequently, the importance of reaching an agreeable definition of cyberbullying is reflected upon with regards to operationalisation. As this thesis involves research which measures young peoples' cyberbullying activity, implications of previously reported incongruities associated with measuring cyberbullying activities need to be considered and managed where applicable.

Fourthly, the chapter follows on to discuss cyberbullying prevalence rates, common approaches to measuring cyberbullying, and the potential issues related to operationalising cyberbullying. High variability of cyberbullying prevalence rates is reported across the literature, which is evidenced in a recent systematic scoping analysis reported by Brochado et al. (2017). Methodological differences that involve using different definitions and recall periods are potentially the source of variability. Applying different instruments to measure cyberbullying involvement is also highlighted as a possible rationale for inconsistent prevalence rates, in relation to reliability and validity (Berne et al., 2013). The chapter considers the implications of methodological issues in relation to the thesis, suggesting that instrument selection should be robust and involve rigorous examination of internal consistency reliability tests and validity test from previous research.

Finally, the chapter presents an in-depth overview of literature findings that concern the negative consequences of experiencing cyberbullying. An array of internalised and externalised behavioural problems has been associated with being a victim of cyberbullying. Although research cannot directly find a cause-and-effect relationship between cyberbullying and negative outcomes, what is strongly indicated

by the literature is that being cyberbullied for some adolescents may increase the chance of experiencing psychosocial problems due to the mediating role of other underlying factors, for instance depression (Sampasa-Kanyinga et al., 2014). Furthermore, research has explored the outcome of cyberbullying by controlling for traditional bullying and found cyberbullying victimisation to predict potentially distinct negative consequences (Cole et al., 2016). These findings suggest that cyberbullying is perceived differently to traditional bullying and may therefore be a standalone construct and not an extension of traditional bullying. Research concerning the severity perception of cyberbullying reports contrasting evidence indicating some victims are indifferent to their experience (Ortega et al., 2012). Consequently, these findings denote that adolescent severity perception of cyberbullying requires further exploration, which is a key aim of this thesis.

Chapter 3 – Literature review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter initially aims to provide a clear overview of the different types of cyberbullying behaviours which can be experienced or perpetrated by young people. An extensive literature review will then follow, delineating individual, media related, and environmental factors that are related to high-risk adolescents who are more likely to be involved with cyberbullying activity. A brief overview of the unique cyberbully/victim group will then be provided, examining those young people who are simultaneously involved in victimisation and perpetration. Potential reasoning for a greater representation for bully/victims within cyberbullying literature as opposed to traditional bullying will be explored. A prominent affordance of ICT is the large audiences that online activity can reach. The subject area of online audiences and cyberbystanders, who are essentially the online audience will then be summarised. As audiences may lead to greater severity perception of cyberbullying (Sticca & Perren, 2013), this section provides a focused review of the current literature pertaining to the context of audience and cyberbystanders.

3.2 Cyberbullying behaviours

There are multiple types of cyberbullying behaviour that can be experienced online by young people. Nocentini et al. (2010) propose a typology of cyberbullying behaviours: written-verbal, visual, exclusion, and impersonation. The written-verbal category relates to any behaviour that includes reading or audio, such as phone calls and text on various communication platforms. Visual cyberbullying involves a perpetrator posting or sharing pictures/photos/videos online that would negatively affect the victim. Exclusion is purposefully excluding an individual from an online group and impersonation is using another user's details or account to damage their identity or reputation. This model was experimentally validated with Italian youth aged between 13 and 20 years old by Palladino and colleagues (2015) in their instrument to measure cyberbullying activity.

Willard's (2007) taxonomy of cyberbully behaviours is commonly cited in the literature, providing a more specific classification of behaviours. The taxonomy consists of eight different behaviours:

1. Flaming (i.e., arguments),

2. Harassment (i.e., repetitive offensive messages),

3. Denigration (i.e., posting untrue and/or harmful information to damage reputation),

4. Impersonation (i.e., pretending to another user to damage them),

5. Outing and trickery (i.e., gaining trust to then share information without consent),

6. Exclusion (i.e., excluding another user from an online group),

7. Cyberstalking (i.e., repetitively sending threatening and offensive content making a victim fearful for their safety), and

8. Cyberthreats (i.e., communication of intent to harm to a victim).

Other cyberbullying behaviours have also been suggested by other researchers such as hacking or spreading infected emails (Aricak et al., 2008) and happy slapping (Chan et al., 2012). Happy slapping involves filming a physical assault and sharing that footage to the public (Chan et al., 2012). Cyberbullying behaviours can be perpetrated through an array of modes such as email, text messages, phone calls, websites, chat rooms, instant messaging, digital gaming or picture/video (Fryling et al., 2015; Langos, 2015; Smith et al., 2008).

A number of studies have reported the most common types of cyberbullying, with varying outcomes. Staude-Müller et al. (2012) found harassment to be the most common form of cyberbullying, with 81.5% of their German adolescent sample reporting they had at least once been verbally harassed online. Other empirical studies have reported denigration and harassment to be the most frequently reported category of experienced cyberbullying behaviour (Pieschl & Porsch, 2012; Riebel et al., 2009; Wachs & Wolf, 2011). Brewer and Kerslake (2015) reported 'insults' and 'making fun of comments' in online forums and social network sites to be the highest perpetrated cyberbully behaviours from a victim's perspective in their study with English participants

aged 16 to 18. 'Making fun of comments' and 'sharing private internet conversation without the other's knowledge' were the most frequently reported behaviours from a perpetrator's perspective (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015). Similarly, Betts et al. (2017) reported 'insulting communications' and 'nasty communications' to be the most frequently reported type of cyberbullying behaviour in their study with English participants aged 16 to 19. Research also reports male and female adolescents experience different types of cyberbullying. In a study with Irish adolescents aged 12 to 16, females were more likely to be cybervictimised via instant messaging, and social networking sites over mobile phone whereas males were likely to experience cyberbullying over email, YouTube and multiplayer gaming devices (Foody et al., 2019). Findings from these studies demonstrate evidence which suggests that young people may be experiencing specific forms of cyberbullying, such as harassment, more frequently than others which may be dependent on individual factors such as gender. However, this area of research is limited and therefore requires further investigation. Findings from this thesis will contribute to this area of the cyberbullying literature by exploring possible gender differences between experienced cyberbullying behaviours.

3.3 Predictors of cyberbullying

A great deal of cyberbullying literature has examined a wide range of risk factors related to an increased likelihood of an individual becoming a victim or perpetrator of cyberbullying. Predicting factors of cyberbullying activity is an important area of research as it can lead to identifying individuals or groups of young people who are potentially more at risk to experience cyberbullying involvement. Predicting factors generally come under three headings, individual factors (e.g., age, gender, and personality), media-related factors (e.g., Internet use and problematic use), and environmental factors (e.g., school climate, relationships with both peers and parents) (Chen et al., 2017). Although media related, it is important to highlight an overwhelmingly reported key risk factor for cyberbullying involvement, which is engagement in traditional bullying (Chen et al., 2016; Guo, 2016), as previously mentioned in Chapter 2. Cross sectionally, Álvarez-García and colleagues (2015) found traditional bullying to be highly associated with an increased probability of experiencing

occasional and severe cyberbullying for their participant group of 11- to 19-year-old Spanish youth. Further evidence can be drawn from a systematic review of 76 longitudinal studies (Camerini et al., 2020) where researchers conclude that victims of traditional bullying are at risk of experiencing cyberbullying victimisation at a later point in time, describing this overlap as a "spill over" effect (p. 9).

Individual predicting factors have been explored to a great extent by researchers, with gender and age representing a large proportion within the cyberbullying literature. The main aim of research concentrating on person factors is to potentially isolate findings which can indicate if cyberbullying is a gender or age range specific behaviour. Literature illustrates inconsistent findings between gender (Kowalski et al., 2014), age (Camerini et al., 2020), and cyberbullying activity, victimisation and perpetration, and therefore the existence of a bias in inconclusive. Cyberbullying, in contrast to traditional bullying, is non-physical and is more firmly positioned within an indirect category of aggression (Beran & Li, 2008; Ronis & Slaunwhite, 2019) due to the remote nature of sharing information and communicating on the internet. Traditional bullying research portrays strong evidence for direct forms of traditional bullying (i.e., physical and verbal) to be highly associated with males (Griezel et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2002) and indirect traditional bullying associated with females (Crick et al., 2002; Dilmac, 2009). Indirect bullying has been suggested to more attributable to females due to their communication tendencies to be more emotional and covert (Card et al., 2008; Simmons, 2002). Taking this into account, it could be inferred that females have a greater bias towards cyberbullying perpetration. However, research findings have reported different results indicating a gender bias for males for perpetration (Li, 2006; Sun et al., 2016) and for females (Mark & Ratliffe, 2011) or no conclusive gender bias (Griezel et al., 2012; Navarro et al., 2012; Werner & Bumpus, 2010). With regards to victimisation, a number of studies have reported females as more likely to be cyberbullied than males (Gorzig & Olafsson, 2013; Zhang et al., 2016). Additionally, contrasting research has reported no variance between males and females regarding a bias towards victimisation (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Lapidot–Lefler & Dolev-Cohen, 2015; Tokunaga, 2010). In summary, cyberbullying research is yet to reach a conclusive stance on a gender bias for cyberbullying victimisation or perpetration. This thesis will explore gender

bias/differences in Study 2 and 3 for cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration to extend this area of literature.

Age related research within the cyberbullying literature provides a wide overview in terms of specific age groups being predicting factors of cyberbullying perpetration and victimisation. The majority of research concerns adolescents within the age range of 11 to approximately 19 years old. Within this age range, younger adolescents are less likely to be involved with cyberbullying victimisation (Taraptar & Kellett, 2013; Williams and Guerra 2007) and perpetration (Barlett & Coyne, 2014; Del Rey et al., 2016) in relation to older age groups of adolescents. Longitudinally, Sumter et al. (2012) investigated development trajectories of victimisation with Dutch participants aged between 12 and 17 years old and found victimisation peaked at the age of 14. A sparse amount of research has considered cyberbullying prevalence rates below the age of 11. What has been reported suggests young adolescents are involved in cyberbullying activity. For example, younger age groups of 7- to 11-year-olds living in the United Kingdom have been found to experience cyberbullying victimisation (20.5%) and engage in perpetration (5%) (Monks et al., 2012). Limited research concerns younger adolescents and therefore, a comparison of early adolescents to mid and older adolescents is inconclusive. Although, it is clear that adolescents experience cyberbullying (Sumter et al., 2012) the prevalence of cyberbullying is also reported by young people and emerging adults (Watts et al., 2017). Additionally, alternative research has reported inconclusive findings concerning the relationship between age and cyberbullying (Camerini et al., 2020). Research from this thesis will cover a participant age range of 11-16 years old in Study 1 and 2 and 16-21 in Study 3 in order to cover a broad age range which will contribute to literature regarding age and cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying literature depicts a number of salient personality predictive and protective factors associated with cyberbullying involvement. Self-esteem is one of the most predominant personality risk factors considered in the literature (Kowalski et al., 2019). Higher involvement in cyberbullying victimisation (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015) and perpetration (Baldry et al., 2015) has been reported to be linked with those individuals with lower self-esteem. Whereas high self-esteem has been indicated to be a protective factor for cyberbullying victimisation (Álvarez-Garcia et al., 2015) and perpetration (Chen et al., 2015). There are many other reported personality factors associated with

an increased likelihood of experiencing cyberbullying victimisation such as low self-control (Vazsonyi et al., 2012), social intelligence (Baldry et al., 2015), social anxiety (Kowalski et al., 2014), anti-social personality (Guo, 2016) and moral disengagement (Chen et al., 2015). Low empathy has consistently been found to be related with cyberbullying perpetration (Baldry et al., 2015; Peterson & Densley, 2017). For instance, Del Rey et al. (2015) conducted a cross-sectional study using self-report methods with students from Spain and Greece aged between 11-18 years old. Findings from the study showed that lower scores of cognitive and affective empathy predicted self-reported cyberbullying perpetration (Del Rey et al., 2015). Additionally, empathy deficit is a personality characteristic that has been considered to be linked with other personality factors associated with predicted engagement in cyberbullying perpetration such as the maladaptive dark triad traits i.e., psychopathy, machiavellianism and narcissism (Goodboy & Martin, 2015; Guo, 2016; van Geel et al., 2017).

Research exploring media related factors that may predict cyberbullying involvement suggests adolescents' technology usage may play a key role. An increased frequency usage of internet-based communication has been coherently attributed to an elevated probability of experiencing cyberbullying as a victim (Çelik et al., 2012; Erdur-Baker, 2010; Tsitsika et al., 2015), or engaging in perpetration (Chen et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2017; You & Lim, 2016). Spending more time online allows more online visibility and access to online communication platforms, increasing the probability of cyberbullying involvement. Park et al. (2014) conducted face-to-face surveys with 12- to 15-year-old South Korean youth and found those who spent more time online and frequently used SNSs were more likely to engage in or experience cyberbullying. More specifically, Park et al. (2014) reported the types of online behaviours also influenced cyberbullying involvement. Victims of cyberbullying were more likely to frequently use the internet for information (browsing, information seeking, emails) and social purpose (instant messaging, SNS) and perpetrators were more likely to engage in information and entertainment (films and music) uses. Adolescents who use SNSs compared to those who do not use SNSs have also reported to be more likely to experience cyberbullying victimisation (Staksrud et al., 2013). For some adolescents, time spent online could also mean a higher likelihood of carrying out risky online behaviours such as contact with strangers and sharing private information, such as passwords, phone numbers and

media content (Mesch, 2009). Risky online behaviour has consistently been attributed to a greater chance of experiencing cyberbullying and committing an act of cyberbullying against others (Chen et al., 2017; Mishna et al., 2012; Walrave & Heirman, 2011).

Environmental factors such as school climate, and relationships with both peers and parents has been considered within the literature to be valid predictors for perpetrating or experiencing cyberbullying behaviours (Kowalski et al., 2019). Environmental predictors are viewed as contextual factors as they are variables which relate to a circumstantial environment which a young person experiences. Within the school context, school climate refers to a school's quality of culture and can mean a wide range of elements such as school safety, student-teacher relations, liking of school, fairness of rules, and student-student relations (Bear et al., 2011). Research indicates that students who study at a school with a more negative climate are more likely to engage in cyberbullying perpetration (Casas et al., 2013; Guo, 2016; Kowalski et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2019; Williams & Guerra, 2007). The majority of research focuses on predictors for cyberbullying perpetration; however, existing research also suggests young people are less likely to experience cybervictimisation if there is a more positive school climate (Cook et al., 2010; Kowalski et al., 2014; Lee & Song, 2012). School climate and cyberbullying has also been reported to a reciprocal relationship which means that lower levels of cyberbullying victimisation within a school decreases the likelihood of a perceived negative school climate (Holfield & Leadbeater, 2017).

Research demonstrates that environmental factors can be moderated by other factors. For instance, Wang et al. (2019) collected self-report data concerning cyberbullying, school climate, friends' moral identity and moral disengagement at two time points with 11- to 16-year-old Chinese participants. Results demonstrated that over the short-term time period of six months, a more negative school climate significantly predicted cyberbullying engagement, which was mediated by moral disengagement. Wang et al. (2019) proposed that essentially, the external social environment of a school can influence adolescents to engage or disengage from their own moral, self-regulatory mechanisms (Bandura et al., 1996). Therefore, the relationship between school climate and moral disengagement mediates the potential for students to engage in cyberbullying perpetration as the more adolescents disengage from their own moral mechanisms, allowing them to perceive cyberbullying as more acceptable, the more

likely they are to cyberbully others (Allison & Bussey, 2017; Orue & Calvete, 2019). Wang et al.'s (2019) research further explored risk factors of cyberbullying friendships and considered the moral identity of friendships. Findings from this study suggests that moral identity of friends can moderate the relationship between cyberbullying engagement and moral disengagement, whereby adolescents with friends that have high moral identity are less likely to detach from their morals and cyberbully others.

Peer related predictors and friendships during adolescents can have an important and influential role in terms of cyberbullying involvement. During adolescence a large amount of time is spent with peers, which can influence the development of attitudes and behavioural norms (Simons et al., 2005; Warr, 1993). Prosocial peer relationships as an environmental predictor of cyberbullying involvement is a subject of interest that has gained attention by researchers. Adolescents with fewer prosocial peers (Cappadocia et al., 2013) or peers who have pro-cyberbullying norms (Festl et al., 2016) are reported to be at a higher risk factor for cyberbullying perpetration. Supporting these empirical findings, in a large scale (N=4441) cross-sectional study with American youth aged 11-18, Hinduja and Patchin (2013) found 62% of their participants who reported "all" or "most" of their friends had cyberbullied others, had also cyberbullied themselves. Further characteristics concerning the nature of friendships have also been reported to be associated with the risk of cyberbullying involvement. For example, a lower likelihood of being cyberbullied has been attributed to elevated scores for perceived supportive friends (Fridh et al., 2015; Baldry et al., 2015) and experiencing less peer rejection (Bayraktar et al., 2015).

Environmental risk factors related to cyberbullying include the contextual social network of family, which can be categorised into family support and parental control. The social environment at home is of high interest to researchers as most cyberbullying activity has been identified to occur mostly at home in the family setting (Dehue et al., 2008), after an event has occurred in the school setting (Cassidy et al., 2009). Family support has been demonstrated to be an important risk factor related to cyberbullying involvement (Wang et al., 2009). For example, a longitudinal study with Cypriot adolescents aged 11-14 years found that lower involvement in cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration was associated with adolescents who had greater family support (Fanti et al., 2012). Furthermore, family support and friendship support were

found to be particularly linked, as cybervictimisation was reported less for those with combined higher family support and low friendship support compared to those with combined low friendship support and low family support (Fanti et al., 2012). Other family emotional support factors have also been associated with predicted cyberbullying engagement such as poor parent attachment (i.e., trust, communication, alienation) (Bayraktar et al., 2014), low parental monitoring (Kowalski et al., 2014) and poor family management (i.e., clear family rules) (Hemphill & Heerde, 2014).

Research concerning parental control as a risk factor for cyberbullying involvement is minimal and inconclusive with how it is related to cyberbullying. Parental control incorporates restricting internet access and monitoring the use of technology and online access to children (Baldry et al., 2019). Some evidence suggests that parental control does impact on the potential for cyberbullying involvement (Chang et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2016). For instance, Mesch (2009) conducted cross-sectional research which involved telephone surveys with American youth aged 12-17 and found evaluative parental mediation, i.e., discussing rules for specific website access, reduced the potential risk of cyberbullying victimisation but there was no significant finding for restricting websites and recording internet activities. In support, a review of existing literature specifically concerning parents' influence of adolescent cyberbullying demonstrated strong evidence that the association between parenting practises that restrict access to the internet is weak (Elsaesser et al., 2017). A rationale for this outcome is that youth are more skilled with technology and its constant changes and so can solve restriction problems put in place by parents (Elsaesser et al., 2017; Mesch, 2009), which is supported by findings of focus groups held with adults concerning parent perceptions of adolescent cyberbullying (Monks et al., 2016). Furthermore, parenting styles that are more collaborative, as opposed to controlling, with young people have been found to be associated with lower involvement in cyberbullying activity (Legate et al., 2019).

3.4 Bully-victim role in cyberbullying

Cyberbullying literature depicts a number of different roles that can be adopted during a cyberbullying event including the non-involved, pure bully, pure victim, and

bully/victim (Baldry et al., 2017; Wachs, 2012). This section of the chapter will address the bully/victim population of adolescents who are individuals that are involved in the combined roles as cyberbully and victim (Selkie et al., 2015). Of the four cyberbullying roles, bully/victims have been reported to be the most at-risk group of adolescents as they are more likely to experience the most severe negative outcomes of cyberbullying in relation to psychological wellbeing, academic performance, physical health and suicidal ideation (Baldry et al., 2018; Bonanno & Hymel, 2013; Foody et al., 2019; Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Researchers have suggested that this group of adolescents are the most at-risk population because they experience the emotional outcomes of a victim and the behavioural problems of bullies (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Menesini et al., 2009).

Bully/victims can be viewed from alternative perspectives within the cyberbullying literature. Research reports a significant overlap between traditional bully/victim and cyberbully/victim populations indicating a continuity between victimised perpetrators, online and offline (Baldry et al., 2017). Bully/victims have also been viewed as retaliators who are individuals involved in a cycle of aggression who experience a traditional bullying or cyberbullying incident and then retaliate, or take revenge against their perpetrator online (König et al., 2010; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004). For instance, research has found cyberbully/victims are much more likely to think that it is acceptable to retaliate after being cyberbullied than are non-victims (O'Brennan et al., 2009). Cyberbullying involvement as a perpetrator has been found to be highly correlated with cyberbullying victimisation, suggesting strong evidence for a reciprocal relationship between both behaviours (Kowalski et al., 2014).

The bully/victim group for traditional bullying activity (Wolke & Samara, 2004) has typically been found to portray low prevalence rates (Solberg et al., 2007). However, for cyberbullying behaviours, strong evidence suggests that the bully/victim population may have a greater presence than traditional bullying (Kowalski & Limber 2007; Mishna et al., 2012; Wolak et al., 2007; Werner & Bumpus, 2010). For instance, with a sample of 11- to 18-year-old Spanish students Del Rey et al. (2012) found considerably greater longitudinal correlations for cyberbully/victim behaviours, 0.64 and 0.51, at two time points in comparison to traditional bully/victim behaviours, 0.34 and 0.27 respectively. Concerning the prevalence of the bully/victim group, key research utilising large samples

demonstrates the difference of prevalence between traditional bullying and cyberbullying bully/victim populations. Nansel et al. (2001) found 6.3% of their sample of 15,686 American adolescents aged 11-16 years were bully/victims for traditional bullying. Furthermore, a lower prevalence rate of 1.9% for traditional bully/victims was reported by Solberg et al. (2007) for their large sample of 14833 Norwegian adolescents aged between 11 and 15 years old. Research concerning the cyberbully/victim population has reported a greater prevalence. Research using adolescent participants depicts prevalence rates for cyberbully/victims as 15.3% (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2015), 25% (Mishna et al., 2012), 18.5% (Buelga et al., 2017) and 14.3% (Romera et al., 2016). The cyberbully/victim population has also been suggested to have significant longevity. For instance, longitudinal research conducted with Spanish adolescents aged 13 to 18, found that after an interval of 1 year, 72% of the sample who were victims at both time points, also perpetrated cyberbullying against others (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2015). These findings suggest cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration have a more fluid relationship in comparison to traditional bullying behaviours.

Cyberbullying literature does highlight some inconsistencies concerning prevalence of bully/victims suggesting this area of research is still in development. A number of studies have reported low prevalence rates for cyberbully/victim populations such as 4.8 % (Bayraktar et al., 2015) and 2.9% (Foody et al., 2019). Furthermore, Coelho and Romão (2018) found a greater prevalence of bully/victims for traditional bullying (5.7%) versus prevalence for cyberbully/victims (1.9%) with a sample of 11- to 16-year-old Portuguese adolescents. There are a number of possible reasons for inconsistent findings within the literature, one being the arbitrary cut off points which are implemented within research to establish groups of participant behaviours based on statistical distributions. To manage this, some studies have managed self-report datasets with a person-centred approach which allows the analysis to identify heterogeneous clusters which are based on individual participant scores (Muthén & Muthén, 2000). For example, Schultze-Krumbholz et al. (2015) used Latent Class Analysis to identify cyberbullying and traditional bullying involvement of participants aged 11 to 23 years old from Poland, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom, Germany, and Greece. Using Latent class analysis, three classifications were found to best fit the dataset, the non-involved, bully/victim, and perpetrator with mild victimisation. These results identified

no exclusive victim class, similar to Festl et al. (2017). Longitudinally, Festl et al. (2017) used Latent Transition Analysis for their sample of 12- to 15-year-old German participants and found 5 latent classes best fit the data; the non-involved, insulting bully/victim, gossiping bully/victim, heavy bully/victim, and heavily victimised with mild perpetration. Finally, Betts and colleagues (2017) used cluster analysis to determine involvement in cyberbullying roles with British participants aged 16-19. Statistical analysis yielded 4 types of cyberbullying, not involved, rarely victim and bully, typically victim, and retaliator. Findings from Betts et al. (2017) highlighted the absence of the pure bully group. Although findings from the three studies do not fully align with one another, they indicate that young people who are involved in cyberbullying are likely to adopt a role that incorporates both cyberbullying and victim behaviours.

A number of possible explanations have been suggested for the high levels of reported co-occurring perpetrator and victimised cyberbullying behaviours, which generally derive from the unique attributes of the digital domain. Firstly, researchers highlight having increased access to smart phones and the internet elevates the probability of cyberbullying activity (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2016). Research conducted in America has seen a change in technology use between three to four years with adolescents stating they go online "almost constantly" rising from 24% (Lenhart, 2015) to 45% (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). As the internet becomes more widely available, younger people have the opportunity to use technology to aggress against one another (Englander, 2018). Secondly, physical power attributes that are present in traditional bullying are made redundant by technology, enabling those adolescents who may not be as physically dominant to retaliate online in a safer environment (Lapidot-Lefler & Dolev-Cohen, 2015). Thirdly, having the capability to hide identity and become anonymous has been attributed to the dual role of bully/victim being more common online than for traditional bullying environment (Buelga et al., 2017; Cuadrado-Gordillo & Fernández-Antelo, 2014; Gámez-Guadix et al., 2015; Pettalia et al., 2013). Finally, some researchers (Buelga et al., 2017; Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2015) attribute the increased cyberbully/victim convergence to the prominent concept of online disinhibition effect (ODE) (Suler, 2004). The ODE is a phenomenon whereby individuals behave in a different manner online to their offline identity. Capabilities provided by technology, such as anonymity, invisibility, and status neutralisation facilitate the ODE

and therefore may allow adolescents to retaliate against their online or offline aggressor more easily. ODE will be discussed in a later chapter as it coincides with research conducted for this thesis.

3.5 Online audience

Online audience is an important topic for research within the cyberbullying literature because it is conceptually different online compared to how audiences occur during face-to-face bullying. Publicly, cyberbullying has the potential to have a much greater number of bystanders than traditional bullying. Although face-to-face bullying can have an audience where individuals witness the aggressive behaviour, this audience is limited geographically when compared to the scope of an audience available online. For instance, an act of public cyberbullying on a Social Networking Site (SNS) could potentially be viewed and shared infinitely by users in various locations (Slonje & Smith, 2008). Having an expansive audience also enables an act of victimisation to be potentially viewed by individuals in different social groups or peers (Mishna et al., 2009) who usually would not have witnessed the offense, which could lead a victim to feeling more exposed to negative peer judgement (Horner et al., 2015). Publicity has been reported to be a highly prominent predicting factor for perceived severity and victim distress for both traditional bullying (Bukowski & Sippola, 2001; Salmivalli, 2001; Sticca & Perren, 2013) and cyberbullying (Chen & Cheng, 2017; Horner et al., 2015; Slonje & Smith, 2008, Smith & Slonje, 2010; Sticca & Perren, 2013). Longitudinal research (conducted with Swiss participants with a mean age of 14) applied hypothetical scenarios which were manipulated to examine the perceived severity of traditional and cyberbullying behaviour which incorporated autonomy and publicity. Marginal findings suggested that public cyberbullying was more severe than public face-to-face bullying (Sticca & Perren, 2013). The increased severity of an act of public cyberbullying has been attributed to elevated feelings of embarrassment (Dredge et al., 2014; Slonje, 2011), potential peer judgement (Horner et al., 2015), helplessness (Sticca & Perren, 2013), and the potential for prolonged exposure to the victimisation (Dooley et al., 2009). Cyberbullying that occurs publicly can take various forms such as e-mails, messages sent in large group chats, or acts that take place on SNS (i.e., sharing media or posting

messages) (Slonje & Smith, 2008). The role of publicity in cyberbullying is unique and can be easily facilitated and exploited in the online environment to humiliate others (Campbell & Bauman, 2018).

A great deal of research has considered why young people cyberbully others, but limited research considers why young people specifically may publicly cyberbully others who are mainly peers (Dredge et al., 2014) and choose an audience to witness that cyberbullying. Public cyberbullying has been considered by some researchers as a social influencing tool that can be used to enhance and maintain social status by those young people who are already popular (Festl, 2016). More popular adolescents have been associated with greater cyberbullying perpetration than lower status individuals (Pieschl et al., 2017). Essentially, public cyberbullying can be used to impress friends, which may explain why public cyberbullying, as opposed to private cyberbullying has also been reasoned to be an expression of power, as the act involves demeaning another in a large social context (Fernández-Antelo et al., 2020). However, these popular individuals display a lack of positive views of cyberbullying (Festl, 2016), which may mean that they view their public cyberbullying as harmless humour. Within this social context, public cyberbullying is at high risk of causing harm and therefore is problematic in terms of the perceptions of the victim. Public cyberbullying comes with potential outcomes that hinder the decision to carry out the action, such as potential repercussions from others, or being caught by parents (Barlinska et al., 2013). Furthermore, social norms which actively enforce that harming others is morally unacceptable may also hinder public cyberbullying (Wicklund, 1975). This has been considered as a possible reason as to why cyberbullying on social networking sites such as WhatsApp, is more likely to be private than in the group setting (Aizenkot, 2020).

The unique nature of publicity in relation to the cyberbullying definition has been considered for adolescents' perspective within the literature. Nocentini et al. (2010) conducted 9 focus group with participants aged 11-18 years old, from Italy, Spain and Germany. Participants described public cyberbullying as 'Mass bullying' or 'Multiple bullying', which implies one act of public cyberbullying may constitute as multiple, repetitive acts, which creates conceptual disparity around the definitional criterion of repetition. A one-off event of public cyberbullying that reaches a large audience therefore blurs the concept of repetition and is more clearly viewed within the definition

of cyber harassment (Machacova et al., 2013) or cyber aggression (Grigg, 2010). Furthermore, audience has been suggested to have a mediating role that can aid in the recognition of a cyberbullying act as it can provide more context and clarity around the severity of the perpetrator's intentions (Nocentini et al., 2010). These findings support Sticca and Perren's (2013) results which indicate public cyberbullying to have an increased likelihood of a higher score for perceived severity than private cyberbullying, therefore highlighting the serious role audience can have within cyberbullying activity.

The unique attributes of having an audience play an intrinsic role within cyberbullying, although the element itself has not been found to be a perceived definitional criterion (Nocentini et al., 2010). The relevance and effect of audience within cyberbullying activity has contradictory findings which suggest further research is needed concerning this topic. For instance, two studies have found audience to have no effect on the perceived severity of cyberbullying (Menesini et al. 2012; Palladino et al., 2017). Palladino et al.'s (2017) rationale for the contradictory evidence is that their study took into account the concurrent impact of the other definitional criterion which previous studies had failed to do. This suggests that alongside the three definitional criterion of intent, power imbalance and repetition, audience has little effect on the perceived severity or definition of cyberbullying, despite previous research findings. A counter argument to this is that different types of traditional and cyberbullying behaviours, public and private, may have differing degrees of perceived severity, as suggested by Smith et al. (2008) and Slonje and Smith (2008), which indicates that audience may have a place within the criterion of the cyberbullying definition.

3.6 Bystanders

Bullying and cyberbullying behaviour is viewed in the literature as more than the dyad roles of the victim and perpetrator but as a group phenomenon that also involves those who witness the behaviour (Allison & Bussey, 2016). Bystander activity is a predominantly researched area within cyberbullying and traditional bullying as their function within an incident of victimisation can have highly significant implications. Observational research indicates most adolescent traditional bullying incidents occur with a group of peers who witness the behaviour (Hawkins et al., 2001). Researchers

attribute these findings to the perpetrator's motivation for visibility to display power and status (Houghton et al., 2012; Veenstra et al., 2007). An incident of traditional bullying can be observed by witnesses who are present at that time and can play a key role as a bystander in terms of intensify or reducing the impact experienced by the victim (Salmivalli, 1999). Salmivalli et al. (1996) outline four types of bullying bystanders as assistants (i.e., supports perpetrator), reinforcers (i.e., incites perpetrator by laughing or shouting), outsiders (i.e., takes no action) and defenders (i.e., directly attempts to stop the perpetrator). Through peer nominations, Salmivalli et al. (1996) found that only 17% of bystanders defend the victim and 24% take the outsider role and take no action which contradicts evidence that most young people express antibullying attitudes towards bullying behaviour (Boulton et al., 2002; Rigby & Johnson, 2006).

Bystanders in the online environment are those who witness the cyberbullying act publicly, such as an insult posted on SNS, at the time of the incident or afterwards. Bystanders are a part of the wider audience, and their role falls into the category of indirect cyberbullying as opposed to direct cyberbully which occurs privately between victim and perpetrator (Langos, 2012). Although bystander roles of cyberbullying and traditional bullying incidents have been suggested to be similar (Quirk & Campbell, 2015), being a bystander of cyberbullying is conceptually different due to the unique abilities the internet provides such as anonymity and wide scale audiences (Wong-Lo & Bullock, 2014) and online disinhibition (Suler, 2004). The potential audience of the episode of cyberbullying can be vast as acts can be shared or liked by bystanders, conceivably repeating the behaviour (Kowalski et al., 2014; Slonje et al., 2013). Lenhart et al. (2011) reported 67% of their sample aged between 12-17 years old had observed cyberbullying on SNS, with 91% of this group reporting they ignored the behaviour. Similar to traditional bullying bystander roles (Salmivalli et al., 1996), online bystander behaviour has been divided into active practises, which can be either negative or positive, and passive practises (Desmet et al., 2014). Negatively active responses include reinforcement, participation, or encouraging the behaviour by sharing it online. Positive, active responses involve the bystander defending or supporting the target or reporting the perpetration. Ignoring the perpetration is a passive response by a bystander and has been attributed to a number of possible reasons such as further embarrassing the target becoming a victim (Thornberg, 2007), becoming a victim themselves (DeSmet et al.,

2014), lack of responsibility (Olenik-Shemesh et al., 2015), and fear of an undesirable result (Thornberg & Jungert, 2013). Research indicates passive bystanders to consistently represent the predominant group compared to active bystanders (Dillon & Bushman, 2015; Freis & Gurung, 2013; Song & Oh, 2018; Van Cleemput et al., 2014). Although passive bystanders are not directly contributing negatively to the observed cyberbullying, their lack of response could be viewed as implied approval of the behaviour for cyberbullying (Bastiaensens et al., 2014) and traditional bullying (Salmivalli, 2014).

The bystander effect (Latané & Darley, 1970) is at the core of theoretical literature concerning bystanders' behaviour who witness cyberbullying and traditional bullying. Deriving from research concerning emergency situations such as a fire or threat to obtaining an injury, this theory posits that an individual is less likely to support a victim when other people are present and are more likely to support a victim when there are fewer witnesses. Latané and Darley (1970) introduced the Bystander Intervention Model (BIM) which is a five-step model outlining a bystander's decision making process leading to intervention during an incident. During the five steps a bystander is deciding whether or not to help a victim based on experiential, situational, and psychological factors. With each step being necessary for the next to occur, the following steps of the BIM are 1) identifying the event; 2) recognising the need for assistance for the situation; 3) feeling the responsibility to help; 4) believing they can help; and 5) acting to help for the victim. Research reports cyber bystanders are more likely to intervene when there are fewer witnesses of an incident (Macháčková et al., 2015; Obermaier et al., 2016; Song & Oh, 2018) and therefore indicates the bystander effect does support cyberbullying situations as well as emergency situations.

A number of factors are reported by Latané and Darley (1970) that affect the BIM and the likelihood of a bystander supporting the victim; one predominant factor is ambiguity of the situation being witnessed. These factors have also been considered within cyberbullying research. For bystanders, situational ambiguity seems to be a predominant issue whilst deciding to intervene. Due to the remote nature of the online environment and not being able to see a victim's response, cyberbullying has been reported as a difficult situation to interpret (Smith, 2012), especially from the perspective of a bystander (Holfied, 2014). Research suggests that bystander decisions

of intervening could be related to previous bystander experiences, as prior victims of cyberbullying have been found more likely to offer support (DeSmet et al, 2016). This is because experience of cyberbullying has been suggested to aid the identification of an ambiguous bullying situation (Barlińska et al., 2013; Van Cleemput et al., 2014). Bystanders have been suggested to evaluate an incident more favourably in line with deciding to intervene if the situation is clearly perceived to have high severity and therefore less is ambiguous (Bastiaensens et al., 2014; Patterson, Allan, & Cross, 2015). Ambiguity can also be counteracted by the victim asking for help, which in turn increases the likelihood of bystanders deciding to support the victim (Macháčková et al., 2013). Despite being an undeveloped area of research, existing literature concerning ambiguous perceptions of cyberbullying is clearly imperative to understanding how bystanders can be encouraged to support and defend victims of cyberbullying. Research within this thesis aims to explore adolescents' severity perception of cyberbullying which may provide further understanding of how bystanders perceive ambiguous cyberbullying situations.

3.7 Chapter summary

The current chapter discussed multiple key subject areas within the cyberbullying literature which are highly relevant to this thesis and its objectives. Firstly, this chapter demonstrates the wide array of behaviours that have been identified as cyberbullying behaviours. An important aim of this thesis is to measure cyberbullying activity of victimisation and perpetration in relation to other associated salient factors and it is therefore imperative that this thesis implements an instrument that reliably measures cyberbullying behaviours. On that basis, Palladino and colleagues' (2015) instrument will be utilised for Study 3 as their questionnaire has been demonstrated as having empirical validation, reliability, and theoretically depicts the requirement of measuring four dimensions of cyberbullying behaviours; written/verbal, visual, impersonation, and exclusion. Utilising this scale will enable the thesis to assess frequency of different forms of cyberbullying behaviours independently but also in relation to other variables this thesis aims to examine.

Secondly, predicting factors of cyberbullying involvement were discussed at length with regards to individual, media related, and environmental aspects. Predicting factors of cyberbullying engagement is important as they demonstrate the need to explore what elements may put some young people more at risk of experiencing cyberbullying than others. Previous literature provided in this chapter emphasises the continual need to explore other predicting factors which could ultimately be viewed within prevention and intervention programmes. Based on this rationale, a main objective of this thesis is to explore the predictive power of a number of salient variables and their association with degrees of involvement of cyberbullying victimization and perpetration. The focus of this examination will include individual variables which are inconclusive within the literature such as gender and age. This thesis will also place attention on humour style as a possible predicting factor of cyberbullying involvement, which has limited representation within the literature.

Finally, salient subject areas of online audience and bystanders were outlined in this chapter as these areas highly relate to the general theme of this thesis. Research depicts strong evidence indicating that online audience can influence the severity perception of cyberbullying (Nocentini et al., 2010; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Sticca & Perren, 2013) and so highlights itself as a key factor to take into account with regards to design and analysis elements within the current thesis. Furthermore, although bystander perceptions are not closely relevant to the objectives of this thesis, research regarding bystanders' perceptions of cyberbullying severity and how they can be affected is significantly comparable. Specifically, some researchers have reported that cyberbystanders are less likely to intervene during episodes of cyberbullying that were more ambiguous (Holfied, 2014; Schultz et al., 2014) and are more likely to intervene if perceived severity is greater (Allison & Bussey, 2016; Bastiaensens et al., 2014). Findings from this thesis contribute to this area of literature by highlighting factors that may mediate perceived ambiguity, such as perceived severity of cyberbullying episodes.

Chapter 4 – Study 1

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 presents the first study that was conducted for this thesis[1]. Study 1 explores young peoples' understanding, perceptions, and opinions of online aggressive humour behaviours in the context of cyberbullying. An initial literature review provides an in-depth overview of relevant topics pertaining to the general construct of humour and the developmental stages of humour during childhood. An overview of research concerning aggressive humour behaviours such as teasing and banter will then be addressed alongside the phenomenon of cyberbullying, cyberteasing, and cyberbanter. The literature review of these topics will then be applied to develop a coherent rationale for Study 1 in relation to the first research question of this thesis, which concerns how young people interpret and experience humour within the context of cyberbullying. The chapter will then provide detail regarding the participants who took part in the focus group study, the procedure and materials applied within the study, and the data analysis that was selected – reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021). The results section will then present the four associated themes and sub-themes obtained from the data analysis, which will be followed by an extensive discussion of these findings alongside previous literature.

4.2 Humour definition

The aim of Study 1 is to explore young peoples' perceptions and understanding of online aggressive humour behaviours in order to gain insight into the role of humour within the context of cyberbullying. Humour is a complex and diverse concept. From a developmental perspective, the laughter response to humour is one of the first social interactions demonstrated by an infant (McGhee, 1979). Although humour is perceived and applied differently cross culturally (Martin & Ford, 2018), humour has been suggested to be a universal experience across all cultures (Apte, 1985; Lefcourt, 2001). Positive Psychology research depicts a strong relationship between mental and physical

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[1] A large part of this chapter has been published as a journal article in Computers in Human Behavior see 'PUBLICATIONS FROM THE THESIS' on page 10.

benefits and humour. For instance, engaging in humour has been suggested to reduce stress (Lefcourt & Thomas, 1998; Rosenberg, 1991; Wooten, 1996), anxiety (Cann et al., 1999; Moran, 1996; Szabo, 2003), and depressive symptoms (Freiheit et al., 1998; Konradt et al., 2012; Porterfield, 1987). Although there is no universal definition of humour (Gulas & Weinberger, 2006), Martin and Ford (2018), propose humour as:

"… a multifaceted term that represents anything that people say or do that others perceive as funny and tends to make them laugh, as well as the mental processes that go into both creating and perceiving such an amusing stimulus, and also the emotional response of mirth involved in the enjoyment of it" (p. 3).

Humour involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioural psychological elements (Martin & Ford, 2018). It is indicated by one of three responses; 1) a behavioural reaction of laughter, 2) cognitively appraising something as humorous, and 3) experiencing a positive emotion of amusement (Warren & McGraw, 2015).

4.3 Humour development

Evidence suggests that children begin to develop humour appreciation within their first year (Addyman & Addyman, 2013; McGhee, 1979) and by the age of two can understand intentions of humour such as copying wrong or incongruent actions during play (Hoicka & Akhtar, 2011; Hoicka & Gattis, 2008). Child development research considers humour to be an important adjustment construct for children as they grow and gain appreciation for humour, with cognitive development being consistently viewed as a mediator between humour and adjustment (Dowling, 2013; Masten, 1986; McGhee & Chapman, 1980). Extant literature demonstrates a wealth of evidence that indicates how children use humour to bond with peers (Sanford & Eder, 1984), manage relationships with adults (Bergen, 2007), and as a coping strategy (Erickson & Feldstein, 2007; Ransohoff, 1975; Semrud-Clikeman & Glass, 2010). For example, from focus groups with American children aged 7-12 years old, participants reported using humour to cope with stress that may come from friendships, academic performance, and homelife (Dowling, 2013). Participants also reported that humour lifted mood, triggered motivation, and aided information building and relationship development. Comparable findings indicate that children who struggle to use humour competently are less popular, less accepted, and

more disliked by their peers (Bergen, 2007), and are more likely to experience peer rejection (Craig & Pepler, 2000; Williams & Asher, 1988).

Between the years of 7-12, as children grow and gain more experience of humour, they become more cognitively skilled with humour, such as telling jokes and riddles (Bergen, 2020). At approximately around the age of 9 or 10, there is a humour shift from prosocial to antisocial behaviour (Franzini, 2002), with more adult hostile or sexual themed humour being produced around 11 or 12 (Bergen, 2020). Research at this stage in development begins to illustrate a number of gender differences, which are spurred by the idea that females and males have alternative preferences for how to facilitate bonding through humour (Bergen, 2020). For instance, males are more likely to be the joker in interactions and express humour, whereas females are more likely to be the recipient of humour (Canzler, 1980). Males value humour more than females in terms how they positively perceive others as being popular (Closson, 2009; Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006). Additionally, young males have also been more inclined to use humour as a coping strategy (Rose & Rudolph, 2006), with humour that is more aggressive and sexualised in nature in terms of that strategy, whereas females tend to use humour to lift their mood (Fuhr, 2002). At this age, humour for males is mainly related to the opposite sex and their peers, highlighting mistakes that their peers are making and making fun of others (Bergen 2003, 2020; Socha, 1994). Making jokes at the expense of the self and others, including peers and family, is considered to be aggressive humour and is more typical for males than for females (Dowling, 2013; McGhee & Lloyd, 1981). It has been suggested that this may be because males use more aggressive humour to socially form bonds (Rose et al., 2016), especially if their friends are relationally aggressive (Bowker & Etkin, 2014). From this brief overview of literature, it is clear that humour is a highly significant construct within adolescent social development, which differs between genders and can involve prosocial and antisocial behaviours.

4.4 Humour and teasing

Research that has explored the possible motives behind why young people bully one another has found that bullying has been stated to be 'fun' or 'jokes' by some young people (Guerra et al., 2011; Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008; Harrison, Hulme, & Fox, 2022;

Postigo et al., 2019; Thornberg, 2010). Throughout the literature, being 'made fun of' is synonymous with teasing (Flores Aguilar et al., 2020; McClanahan et al., 2015; Peyton et al., 2017). In turn, teasing can be viewed as harmless aggressive humour or as aggressive verbal bullying (Bergen; 2021; Khosropour & Walsh, 2001; Kowalski, 2000). Teasing is viewed as aggressive humour because it attacks the identity of another person by using directed jokes (Kowalski, 2003). The fine line between prosocial teasing and anti-social verbal bullying behaviour has been acknowledged within the bullying literature (Kruger et al., 2006; Mills & Carwile, 2009; Thornberg & Delby, 2019).

Teasing can be defined as ''the juxtaposition of two potentially contradictory acts: (a) a challenge to one or more of the target's goals and (b) play'' (Mills & Babrow, 2003, p. 278). Teasing has also been defined as "identity confrontation couched in humor" (Kowalski et al., 2001, p178). Both teasing definitions (Mills & Babrow, 2003; Kowalski et al, 2001) correspond with the construct of banter. Banter has been described as a playful interaction between individuals that serves to improve the relationship, which can involve innocuous aggression (Dynel, 2008). The contrast between challenge and play that can be seen in both teasing and banter can create an ambiguous social interaction (Bergen, 2001; Kowalski, 2003; Kruger et al., 2006). To manage this ambiguity, non-verbal social cues such as tone, or vocal and facial gestures (Dehue et al., 2008; Keltner et al., 2001; Kruger et al., 2006; Shapiro et al., 1991) are used in humorous social interactions that involve teasing and banter to help distinguish malign or benign intentions of the teaser.

An instance of teasing can be verbal or nonverbal and is generally negative in literal content (Keltner et al., 2001). A tease can involve highlighting perceived flaws in other people, regarding their attire or physical stature or behaviours or a negative observation (Keltner et al., 1998; Kowalski, 2000; Shapiro et al., 1991). Teasing is a pervasive experience during adolescence (Jones et al., 2005; Sanford & Eder, 1984) and can be used by young people to positively build and maintain friendships, understand peer norms and demonstrate affection (Jones & Crawford, 2006; Keltner et al., 2001; Weger & Truch, 1996). However, hurtful teasing has been conceptualised as the most common type of bullying (Jansen et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2009). Olweus (2013) refers to teasing within the framework of bullying when it is mean and hurtful. Hurtful teasing is considered to be deliberately aggressive, with the intention to cause distress to the

victim (Infante, 1987; Madlock & Westerman, 2011; Warm, 1997). Humorous teasing behaviours can also be used to socially reject peers (Bergen, 2021), especially those who are not as cognitively skilled to respond to teasing with matching humorous quips (Asher & McDonald, 2009; Sandstrom, 2004). Despite teasing as being reported as highly pervasive, previous research has tended to focus on bullying as a whole construct, which has led to a relative lack of research concerning the outcomes of teasing (Van dale et al., 2014). Research findings have identified some outcomes of experiencing teasing which are linked to several negative internalized consequences including the development of eating disorders (Shroff & Thompson, 2004), reduction in self-esteem (Mercante, 2002; Roth et al., 2002), and anxiety or depression (McCabe et al., 2003; Rickert et al., 1996).

Teasing is ambiguous because of its dual meaning (Bergen, 2020; Keltner et al., 1998; Kowalski, 2003), which derives from the contrast between humour and aggression and the potential disparity between the literal meaning of the tease and teaser's true opinion of the target (Dennehy et al., 2020; Shapiro et al., 1991). Due to this ambiguity, interpreting benign or malign intent of teasing behaviours has been reported to be difficult by young people (Eder et al., 1995; Mooney et al., 1991; Thornberg & Delby, 2019). The young Swedish participants, 13-15 years old, in Thornberg and Delby's (2019) focus group research reported that ambiguity that stems from humour has the ability to normalise some teasing behaviours, which could be viewed as both benign and malign. This was reported not only to be demonstrated by students, but also by teachers who laughed alongside students, as they also perceived directed jokes and teasing as humorous due to the ambiguity. Additionally, ambiguity created by humour within teasing behaviours has had an impact on research as teasing tends to be conflated with the concept of bullying, despite there being reported differences between prosocial and antisocial teasing (Keltner et al., 2001). Additionally, different studies conceptualise teasing as something else, such as 'being made fun of' (McClanahan et al, 2015), banter (Betts & Spenser, 2017; Espelage & Swearer, 2008), or more broadly, disparaging humour (Ferguson & Ford, 2008). This could lead to confusion with regards to how the construct of teasing is interpreted within research findings and therefore reflect inconsistencies across the body of literature. Rigby (1997) acknowledges the difference between bullying that fits the traditional bullying definition and non-malign bullying that involves teasing, and argues that this latter form of bullying is significant and should be

addressed. The evidence for this claim can be seen in the research findings that report negative outcomes of teasing that occur between peers and friends (Douglass et al., 2016; Hayden-Wade et al., 2005; McCabe et al., 2010). Study 1 of this thesis will contribute to the research field of teasing by exploring how young people perceive the role of humour within cyberbullying with the aim of capturing their perceptions of aggressive humour behaviours that occur within and between friendship groups.

There are many aspects of an individual that can be targeted verbally with aggressive jokes; literature indicates that teasing can be racist (Douglass et al., 2016), sexist (Peyton et al., 2017), about weight or appearance (Flores Aguilar et al., 2020; Hayden-Wade et al., 2005), or homophobic (Odenbring & Johansson, 2021; Miller et al., 2020). These types of jokes can come under the term of teasing and can be both prosocial and antisocial. For example, Odenbring and Johansson (2021) conducted focus groups, individual interviews, and interviews with pairs of 15-year-old males in Sweden to explore the line between fun and harassment. They found that verbal insults, name calling, and homophobic teasing are made to make one another laugh and are a means of maintaining a group of friends together and expressing allegiance with the in-group. Odenbring and Johansson (2021) explain that these behaviours are normalised and so are expected on a daily basis. A similar outcome was reported with American adolescent males and females (with a mean age 17.3) in focus groups and semi-structured interviews (Douglas et al., 2016). Douglass and colleagues reported that young people use and experience ethnic/racial teasing among close peers and friends regularly. These normative teasing interactions were consistently explained to have no discriminatory or hurtful intent but were used within social interactions for the purpose of fun. These studies suggest that what may be viewed as anti-social teasing can be benign, prosocial teasing between friends, and therefore humorous, as they are dictated by group norms (Keltner et al., 1998), even when the teasing involves highly controversial insults that in other social contexts are viewed as hate crimes. However, it is unclear if this paradoxical framework of teasing being both anti-social and prosocial applies to the online environment, which is an area this thesis aims to explore.

4.5 Humour and Cyberbullying

Humour has been reported as being one motivational factor for cyberbullying perpetration. Limited yet salient research indicates cyberbullying perpetration to be an enjoyable activity for some (Topcu et al., 2013; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008) or a behaviour that is for the purpose of humour or joke (Englander, 2008; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). Evidence for the existence of humour and jokes used in cyberbullying is provided by Huang and Chou's (2010) research with Taiwanese high school students. Results from self-report measures found that 64.3% of bystanders had witnessed cyberbullying in the form of a joke. Further, victims (32.3%) and perpetrators (18.2%) also reported to have experienced cyberbullying that took the form of being made fun of. Young people have justified cyberbullying behaviours such as name calling and criticising comments as harmless jokes (Baas et al., 2013; Ging & Norman, 2016). Although there is some evidence regarding how humour is perceived in cyberbullying, very little research has considered how humour is characterised or how it is operationalised within the framework of the cyberbullying definition.

Distinguishing between a harmless joke and a cyberbullying behaviour is reported to be difficult for young people (Baas et al., 2013; Ging & Norman, 2016). Baas and colleagues (2013) considered perspectives of 11- and 12-year-olds regarding humour and cyberbullying behaviour. Their findings suggest that adolescents struggle to differentiate between humour and cyberbullying due to characteristics of the online environment. Baas et al. surmised that online humour that is directed at others could lead to an underestimation of the degree of severity from the perpetrators' viewpoint. In such cases, acts of innocent, humoristic online behaviours will be interpreted to be more hostile than they would be in face-to-face situations – ultimately creating a sense of ambiguity, which distorts the victim's perception of the perpetrator's intentions. Supporting these findings, Smith and colleagues (2008) inferred from their focus group data that some cyberbullying could be viewed as fun due to the victim not being physically present, leading to a lack of empathy for the target from the perspective of the perpetrator. From these findings it is proposed that online humour is more likely to be ambiguous and therefore interpreted as cyberbullying. Consequently, humour may play a larger role in cyberbullying perpetration than in traditional bullying perpetration.

This proposition has received minimal focus in the cyberbullying field of literature. Therefore, Study 1 aims to contribute to this field by providing young people with the opportunity to voice their perceptions, attitudes and understanding of the role of aggressive humour within cyberbullying activity.

Researchers have recognised humour to have the ability to obscure perpetrator intentions, making it difficult for victims to subjectively perceive jokes as harmless or hostile bullying behaviour (Carerra et al., 2011). Considering the views of young people, Topcu and colleagues (2013) conducted semi-structured interviews with 15-year-old students who had experienced cyberbullying. Participants consistently stated joking to be the primary reason for why others engage in cyberbullying, clarifying that humorous cyberbullying had no intent to cause harm. Topcu and colleagues' (2013) findings, however, contradict Olweus' (2013) cyberbullying definition which emphasises that an act of cyberbullying includes clear intent to cause harm. This finding is problematic because if there is no intent to cause harm, any impact of the cyberbullying on a victim is an indirect consequence of a perpetrator's behaviour. The incongruence between Topcu et al.'s (2013) findings and Olweus' (2013) definition indicate two points of interest. First, young people can conceptually ignore intentionality within an act of cyberbullying when it involves humour. Second, practitioners who are being guided by policy which states the definition of cyberbullying that includes intention to cause harm, may overlook 'humorous' cyberbullying. If this was to occur, it could result in a group of adolescents who experience the negative outcomes of cyberbullying who are not correctly identified as victims.

Topcu et al.'s (2013) findings challenge the definitional aspect of intentionality, which alters the concept of the cyberbullying and therefore how it is operationalised within research. For instance, the ambiguity of jokes within the cyberbullying literature has led some researchers to use joking as a control variable for intent (Menesini et al., 2012; Palladino et al., 2017) as Olweus (2013) states that a one-off attack of bullying/cyberbullying could be viewed as a joke. This conceptualisation stems from the relationship that Olweus rationalises between repetition and intentionality, whereby repetitive attacks of aggression by a perpetrator provide clear evidence for the intent to cause harm. Both Menesini et al. (2012) and Palladino et al. (2017) research use experiments presenting hypothetical vignettes to explore young people's perceptions of

the cyberbullying definition and use joking as a control variable for the intentionality criterion. However, if joking is viewed by young people as a motivation that has no malign intent (Topcu et al., 2013), this method of data collection may yield inaccurate and variable findings. Further investigation into how humour and jokes interplay with adolescents' perception of cyberbullying is needed for future research to accurately define and measure cyberbullying.

4.6 Rationale for Study 1

Sparse consideration has been given to teasing and banter and how it conceptually relates to cyberbullying behaviour. Furthermore, cyberteasing and cyberbanter as phenomena have received little research coverage in comparison to teasing and banter in the non-virtual sense. This raises the need for a qualitative approach to gain insight into adolescents' understanding of how humour, cyberteasing/cyberbanter, and cyberbullying are related. Like face-to-face teasing, cyberteasing can have no intent to cause harm and is between those of equal power (e.g., friends; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008). A notable distinction between online and offline communication is the lack of physical and social cues (Baruch, 2005), which are required to accurately distinguish between prosocial or antisocial teasing (Keltner et al., 2001; Keltner, 2009). This main difference suggests that teasing and banter may be perceived differently online as opposed to offline. Focus group research with young people from the United Kingdom (Betts & Spenser, 2017) and America (Burnham & Wright, 2012) has identified online banter as a form of humour having the potential to escalate into cyberbullying owing to the ambiguity of humour. Supporting research involving adult participants found that cyberteasing instigated more offline conflicts, and hurtful cyberteasing was reported as more prevalent than face-to-face hurtful teasing (Madlock & Westerman, 2011). Together, this evidence suggests cyberteasing or cyberbanter has a close relationship with cyberbullying and may occur more online than offline, which would increase the likelihood of becoming a victim of cyberbullying.

Despite research highlighting jokes and humour as potential motives of cyberbullying behaviours (Englander, 2008; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007), there is a dearth of knowledge concerning the role of humour in adolescents' experiences of

cyberbullying. Qualitative methods were adopted in Study 1 as a starting point to gain insight as no prior research has directly considered an association between humour, banter, and individuals' experiences of cyberbullying. The focus group approach was chosen over other methods (e.g., interviews) as focus groups mirror a more natural form of communication for young people (Eder & Fingerson, 2002) and therefore promote a more in-depth discussion (Carey & Smith, 1994). The term 'banter' was used instead of 'teasing' to ensure the focus group questions were as realistic and accurate to the current use of wording for adolescents, as demonstrated by Betts and Spenser (2017).

4.7 Study 1 Research question and objective

In view of the consistent evidence indicating that humour and cyberbanter/cyberteasing have a prominent role within cyberbullying behaviour for adolescents, this study addresses the first research question of this thesis:

> **RQ1**: How do young people interpret and experience humour within the context of cyberbullying?

To effectively approach the research questions, Study 1 aligns with thesis research objective 1, which is:

> Research objective 1: To qualitatively investigate young people's perception of how humour and cyberbullying are related and experienced.

4.8 Method

4.8.1 Participants

Focus group participants were recruited from two secondary schools situated in the Midlands area of the United Kingdom. In total, 30 schools were contacted during the recruitment phase. Both secondary schools involved in the study have a post sixteen option, educating young people 11-18 years old. One of the schools was larger than the other in terms of enrolled students, one having approximately 1,000 students and the other having approximately 650. Four focus groups were held at the larger school and three at the smaller school. Both schools involved in the study have academy status and were pre-selected with the aim of obtaining a group of participants that are relatively homogenous to encourage engagement within the group discussion (Krueger, 1994).

Homogeneity of age was also controlled, as focus groups were held with students of the same year group. Although schools were asked for a blend of student gender, some focus groups were exclusively female participants and others were predominately female. Focus groups varied between three and six participants, which aligns with adequate group sizes for gaining depth and breadth of participant contributions (Krueger, 2014, Ritchie et al., 2013).

Participants for each focus group were initially selected using convenience sampling. This involved teaching staff approaching students and asking them if they would like to take part in focus group research concerning cyberbullying and humour. This method of participant selection was utilised on the basis that the young people who were taking part in the focus groups a) understood the topic being discussed and b) chose to be involved. In total, 28 participants took part in the study, aged between 11 and 15 years old. Table 4-1 provides details of the focus group participants regarding the size of each group and the year group of each participant.

Table 4-1. Focus group and participant information

Focus group	*N*	*n* female	*n* male	Year group
1	3	2	1	10
2	5	5	0	8
3	4	3	1	7
4	3	2	1	7
5	3	3	0	8
6	4	1	3	9
7	6	4	2	10

Note. Year group 7: 11-12 years old, 8: 12-13 years old, 9: 13-14 years old, 10: 14-15 years old.

4.8.2 Procedure and materials

The focus group method was selected for this study as it provides the opportunity for participants to consider the subject of discussion and voice ideas, perceptions, preferences, and opinions in their own language (Carey, 2015; Creswell, 2003; Parris et al., 2011). An alternative method which could have been applied to the research question would have been semi-structured or group interviews (Parker & Tritter, 2006), however, the benefits related to focus groups led to this methodology being selected for this study. For instance, interviews involve the interviewer having greater control

over discussion dynamics and having one to one discussion with participants. This can lead to exclusive dialogue which is dictated by a conceptual framework (Nyumba et al., 2018). In contrast, focus groups are less restrictive, with primary investigators taking a more facilitative role that guides a discussion between focus group members (Bloor, 2001). Focus groups are a beneficial tool for topic areas that are relatively under-researched as the open and flexible platform they create allows discussions to build on group dynamics which lead to greater depth and insight (Nyumba et al., 2018).

Focus groups were held in a classroom by the researcher and generally lasted 45 to 55 minutes. Focus groups were tailored to the needs of the participants based on the participant age and the potentially distressing topic of discussion. For instance, focus groups involved students of the same year group and so were similar of age as advised by Hoppe et al. (1995). A question schedule (Appendix A) was produced based on the format recommended by Gibson (2007). Initial ice breaker questions were used which involved questions around favourite Social Networking Sites and communication platforms (e.g., *"Please can we start off with talking about the social network sites, which ones do you use at the moment?"*). These questions were designed to be straight-forward in order to set a comfortable tone for the discussion and build a rapport between facilitator and students (Gibson, 2007). Following ice breaker questions, the discussion led onto questions concerning participant perceptions of cyberbullying and the differences between face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying, the topic of banter, and how humour and banter can relate to cyberbullying, which was the final discussion section of the question schedule. Participants were also given the opportunity to add anything further to the discussion at the end of the focus groups. All focus groups were recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim.

British Psychological Society and institutional code of ethics were observed (Approval Reference No. 2018/48). Initial permission was gained from the Head teacher using a consent form (Appendix B), which led onto obtaining parental consent for each student selected for the study, attained via an opt-in process (Appendix C). Prior to the focus group taking place, verbal consent was also acquired from each student. Participants were initially provided with time to read an information sheet (Appendix D) before being asked for their verbal consent. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw during or after the focus groups had taken place and were informed that

the focus group content was confidential and were encouraged not to discuss the content outside of the group discussion. Participants were not asked for their personal details and were anonymised using pseudonyms. All participants were provided with a debrief sheet (Appendix E) once the focus group had ended, which provided a summary of the aims of the focus group and support information if they felt this was necessary.

4.8.3 Data Analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis (TA; Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021), was applied to the focus group transcripts to analyse participants' responses. The analysis was conducted by one coder, an acceptable practise approved by Braun and Clark (2021). This researcher stringently followed the six phases of TA outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The phases were as follows: a) familiarisation with the data, b) generating initial codes, c) searching for themes, d) reviewing themes, e) defining and naming themes, and f) producing the report. The data analysis was data led and based on the entire data set.

Reflexive TA is a method of analysing data that is firmly placed within a qualitative paradigm. As there has been little research carried out in the subject area of banter/humour within the phenomenon of cyberbullying, Reflexive TA was applied with an inductive approach allowing the analysis to recognise and reflect meaning from the data without relating to previous ideas or theories. Themes identified by this approach were generally determined from the dataset based on their strength of alliance to participants' perceptions and dialogue (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021). Data analysis included prevalent patterned responses from all participant responses to build meaning to themes and sub-themes related to the research questions. Themes were identified and coded from a semantic level allowing the analysis to prompt explicit, detailed, and meaningful content from significant interpretations made from participant dialogue from across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021). Participants are identified via pseudonyms within the results.

4.9 Results

Four themes were developed from the focus group data set: Banter as a social interaction, Online misinterpretation, "Bad" banter and cyberbullying, and Severity

perception. Table 4-2 provides an overview of each theme and corresponding sub-themes.

Table 4-2. Identified themes and associated sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme
1. Banter as a social interaction	Friendly banter
	Offensive banter
2. Online misinterpretation	Online banter
	Social indicators and Context
	Using emojis
3. "Bad" banter and cyberbullying	Euphemistic labelling of banter
	Popularity and social status
4. Severity perception	Repetition
	Audience

4.9.1 Banter as a social interaction

Banter consistently represented something similar to the adolescents who took part in the focus groups. Participants understood banter to be a harmless exchange of social interactions between friends which involves teasing or mocking one another either on a one-to-one basis or more commonly on a friendship group basis. Frequent references to banter were terms such as "taking the mick", "messing around", "inside jokes", and "having a laugh". The banter interaction between friends is a contradictive social situation that involves an offensive/negative comment or action which has no intent to cause emotional injury or to insult. When asked what banter means to them during one focus group, Veronica comments:

> **Veronica**: *I'd say it's sort of like, picking fun at your friends and stuff like, you're all in on it and you're all like having a laugh.* (Year 7)

Between friends, the outcome of such a comment or action is humour and laughter, which itself can reinforce the friendship. An example provided in one focus group was a student directing jovial comments to their friend who fell off their chair during class that day. Although the humour is resultant at the expense of the individual concerned, no offense is taken or perceived. A clear description of banter was made by Ben and Jayce:

Ben: *But banter's just kind of, if you know someone well and you know that they won't get offended or whatever by something they say. Say have a little tease and a joke about it, you know. So let's say someone's fallen over something and you kinda laughing at them but you're like their mate so they're just kinda like,*

Jayce: *Laughing with them.*

Ben: *Yeah, laughing with them instead of laughing at them*

(Both year 9)

4.9.1.1 Friendly banter

Participants' responses expressed that the foundations of banter lie in the strength of the friendships. For an individual to perceive no offensive within the exchange of banter between friends, they must trust that their friend has no intent to harm them. There must also be a degree of understanding and acceptance between each friend in terms of their knowledge about one another:

Brea: *like with friends you know exactly, well, you might know exactly what they are going through, you might know about their home life, you might know about family life and friendship, and stuff like that, whereas if it's someone you don't know, you don't know what's going off at home, you don't know if they've got mental health problems you know, it can obviously effect mental health.* (Year 10)

Banter between individuals who do not know one another was described by students as something that would not usually occur. According to participants, the reason why banter between unknown individuals is unlikely is due to the increased chance that a line of acceptability would be crossed, and offence would be perceived. Without the existence of a friendship or a relationship the recipient of banter could easily feel offended as Charlotte explains:

Charlotte: *you have to be like, quite good friends with them to banter around with someone otherwise somebody you don't know will take it the wrong way and then you'll get in trouble for joking around.* (Year 7)

It would seem there is an unspoken agreement that in most social situations, the targeted offensive comments can only be humorous after a friendship has been established. Holly describes the distinction between friendly banter and banter from non-friends:

> **Holly**: *And friends know when like, not to cross the line, not to say something, know, like, personally, like, really upset them and not just be banter but people you don't know, when we're around know just, might say things that might cross the line, with like banter.* (Year 10)

4.9.1.2 Offensive banter

The participants commonly referred to a metaphorical line of acceptability which appears to be fundamental to how banter functions in a social interaction. Participants consistently spoke of a line or referred to someone "crossing the line" or "going too far" within the context of friends and non-friends. When this line of acceptability is crossed, offense is taken by the recipient of banter because the achieved level of offensiveness has reached a degree that is too high for it to be deemed as a contradiction:

> **Eli**: *There is that fine line between like, having a joke and then like, actually offending someone… Even if they didn't mean it, it could be classed as like, offensive.*
> (Year 10)

Discussions concerning crossing a line and causing offense lead onto highlighting a number of subjects that adolescents listed to be generally offensive. Subjects to avoid that were mentioned were: referring to another person's family member, comments about appearance and self-harming, comments about someone or something that has died (e.g., family member, friend, or pet), and hate crimes such as racist and homophobic comments. For example, Alan explains a situation which involves banter that has gone too far:

> **Alan**: *You could like, I s'pose, keep going on about someone's appearance and they could, I don't know, like get to them in a way and then cause, cause them*

to like self-harm or something or try and lose weight and, or gain weight whatever. (Year 10)

Spreading a rumour or sharing private media, was also something that was more likely to cause offense and cross the line of acceptability, which would suggest that trust plays an important role between friends and social interaction involving banter. Brea describes how banter can become offensive within a friendship due to media shared without permission:

> **Brea**: *screen shotting something off of someone's social media and then pasting it on your own, with like a harsh caption or something, I think that's (.) quite embarrassing for the person…Like some people might think "oh, it's a joke" I'll do it, we do it, that to each other and that's where it's like banter, whereas if it's just constantly, or even just once it can be extremely embarrassing.* (Year 10)

4.9.2 Online misinterpretation

From the data, it appears that online banter does occur but can have its pitfalls. Due to the limitations of online communication, banter becomes a social interaction that has an increased risk of leading to a negative outcome between friends. The internet provides obstacles which can lead to misinterpretation of harmless, yet potentially offensive actions or comments. The judgement that is initially made by an individual on their friend's line of acceptability is more susceptible to misinterpretation online than it is face-to-face.

4.9.2.1 Online banter

Characteristics of online banter are suggested by the participants' responses, similar to those of face-to-face banter. Participant responses portrayed online banter to occur between friends, one-to-one but more commonly as a group of friends in a group chat. Participants acknowledged that it would be more difficult to have online banter. One strategy to manage this was given by Rebecca when asked if you can have online banter:

> **Rebecca**: *I'd say a bit but if you say in person and then you just say it online as well it'd be banter but if you just come up like online maybe it might not be banter to the other person.* (Year 8)

This structure of interaction enables safety within the group chat as during the face-to-face interaction the banter was inoffensive which then can allow the online banter to be perceived more clearly.

4.9.2.2 Social indicators and Context

The online misinterpretation theme is generally applied to the subtheme of social indicators within the data. It appears that online communications can be perceived by a recipient in a manner that is more confusing in comparison to communication made face-to-face. Ellie clarifies how online communication can be confusing:

> **Ellie**:…*on text messages and on like social media and things you can't put your expression in there like, how you were supposed to be saying because if you was like joking around you might say a comment and it supposed to be like a joke or a bit of banter but then it can go too far cause the other person thinks "oh, have they said it in a mean way or in a funny way"* (Year 7)

It became clear that adolescents are highly aware of the lack of social indicators throughout online communication, and this was something consistently referred to across all focus groups. Social indicators that are available offline do not exist online, which can place a recipient of banter in a disadvantaged position when evaluating a humorous remark. Therefore, it is evident that adolescents do have a degree of understanding regarding the role of social indicators within online communication as illustrated in the following quote.

> **Josh**: *you can't input your own, you can only type but can't say it in the voice you want to say it in sort of, anything to make it funny or to really like, make it mean, that's (.) the whole point, that's one of the bad things about social media is (.) people can take it wrong ways…* (Year 7)

Participants' responses also acknowledged the lack of context in the online environment. A text message for instance does not have the surrounding framework and information that is usually present in a face-to-face interaction. Beth explains:

> **Beth**: *You can't see the context of the message, like you can't see the way they're saying it, like, and it depends what they're joking about, like some people can be insecure about somethings, more than others can."* (Year 9)

Without context there are limited resources for the recipient to use to evaluate online banter and so this leaves interpretation of communications more open. Jayce clearly describes an experience he had to further demonstrate this subtheme:

> **Jayce**:*… in some groups chats that I've been in is someone's said something about someone as a clear joke and that person hasn't understood the context and then they've had a go (.) said somart back to try un' disprove it, rather than laughing along with it.* (Year 9)

Across the data, focus group responses indicate that misinterpretation of banter is not uncommon between individuals. For instance, in relation to bad banter online, James (year 10) expresses *"I feel like everyone does it…but they don't realise they're doing it sometimes"*. Participant responses portray that misinterpretation of online banter may lead to young people to perceive themselves as a victim of cyberbullying. Stephanie demonstrates how a joke can be taken differently online:

> **Interviewer**: *Which one* (bullying or cyberbullying) *do you think happens more?*
>
> **Stephanie**: *Cyberbullying*
>
> **Interviewer**: *Why do you think that is?*
>
> **Stephanie**: *Because anyone can do it and they can do it without not meaning it because, if its face-to-face you have to build up courage to say bad stuff about them but if its online you can do the simplest thing and it's still be hurtful to them but you don't know you've done.*
>
> **Interviewer**: *Why do you think they won't know?*
>
> **Stephanie**: *Because sometimes people can have jokes with other people about someone and they can be taking the mick out of them but to them that's their humour but to the person's who's it happening to its really upsetting.* (Year 8)

4.9.2.3 Using emojis

Across the sample there was strong evidence that adolescents are using emojis as a strategy to express themselves clearly and to ensure a message is interpreted how the

sender intends it to. By using emojis, adolescents are attempting to overcome the lack of social indicators and context and reduce the likelihood of their banter interactions being misinterpreted, as described by Rose:

> **Rose**: *Like, you can tell it's a joke, like say, it says something funny but then like, you reply to them saying "you're such an idiot" but you can put emojis on them, say you put a laughing face, you could just mean it as a joke but if you didn't do anything erm, it could mean that you were, mean it in a bad way. (*Year 7)

Although the majority of participant responses included general discussion around the useful application of emojis, it was acknowledged in some focus groups that they are not fully reliable. Ben demonstrates how emojis can fail to express emotion clearly:

> **Ben**: *… there's not really a piece of punctuation for laughing and anger and (.) whatnot, so. You know, that (emojis) can help people express what they are feeling but it still doesn't go nowhere near expressing what you're feeling in real life.* (Year 9)

4.9.3 "Bad" banter and cyberbullying

Banter that was classified as 'bad' was identified by the participants as being directly related to the overarching term of bullying or cyberbullying. As Beth (year 8) comments *'Bad banter is cyberbullying, that's what I think'*. Bad banter, according to the participants, generally refers to banter that is perceived as offensive and primarily involves crossing the line of acceptability. Between friends, crossing the line tends to be unintentional and can lead to arguments or flaming and the breakdown of friendships, especially if repetition of the comment occurs, as Jessica demonstrates:

> **Jessica**: *I think like if someone says something to someone and then they like, say like "arr stop it now it's not funny anymore" and they carry on then I think that's when it goes too far because they've asked you to stop and you don't stop.* (Year 8)

Bad banter between non-friends is generally accepted as being bullying/cyberbullying behaviour on the basis of the social norm that banter between non-friends is deemed as offensive generally. Natasha describes the banter between non-friends:

Natasha: *You sort of need to be close to them so that they know it's a joke and you're not really like that, you're not the person who's goes round beating people up or something, it's just a joke cause you're friends.* (Year 9)

Offensive banter between friends was suggested by participants to be a more hidden form of bullying and cyberbullying which involves a social dilemma. If the line of acceptability is crossed during a banter interaction and the recipient feels offended, they may decide to hide their offense and a fake a positive, humorous response in order to avoid any conflict or lose the friendship. Jordan (year 9) expresses his opinion on the social dilemma clearly:

Jordan: *yeah, well there's a few people that I know that have been put in a group chat and there's someone's that took offense to it that's been sent, and I don't think people will say anything cause they want to stay with that group of people, it' about staying with your friends.* (Year 9)

An imbalance of power within a friendship group could therefore lead to some individuals having the need to fake their true response. Jessica and Rebecca (year 8) provide an example of faking a response whilst taking about banter interactions between friends:

Jessica: *I'd say banter is like, just like, joking around with your mates like, just a joke.*

Interviewer: *Yeah?*

Rebecca: *That you both find funny though, not just like one person finds funny and everyone's like fake laughing, cause they think it's funny but really they just don't wanna show it's not funny.* (Year 8)

4.9.3.1 Euphemistic labelling of banter

Responses from the focus groups indicated that the alternative situation to the social dilemma is to initiate conflict that may arise from offensive banter between friends. Sophie (year 10) explains *'If you got offended by it the other person will be like "oh, it's just banter" and you just have to try and take it as a joke'* In this situation, offense has been taken after a friend has unintentionally or intentionally crossed a line and made

an offensive comment. In order to bypass an argument or take any responsibility for the offense that was caused, the word "banter" can be euphemistically used by the instigator to cover the offense and play down the extent of the impact it may have caused. This was acknowledged within the focus group responses as presenting a confusing social situation which could lead to mistrust:

> **James***: "That's just banter"*
>
> **A few participants***: yeah. "It's just banter"*
>
> **Kenzie***: They portray it as a joke.*
>
> **Brea***: Yeah, but then it's like, ok, if it's banter then why am I not involved, you know, why yer having, why are yer, why are you joking about me, not with me.*
>
> (Year 10)

Moreover, euphemistically labelling cyberbullying as banter was also discussed as a frequent occurrence between non-friends as a strategy to avoid retribution, as well as diluting responsibility of their own behaviour. When asked why some people say something is a joke that is really cyberbullying, one participant replies '*I think it's to like, they want to say something to other people, but they don't want to get in trouble for it so they create an excuse to get themselves out of trouble*' (Charlotte, year 7).

4.9.3.2 Popularity and social status

Offensive banter that was deemed to be cyberbullying between non-friends was commonly associated with status and popularity. Having perceived higher peer status was portrayed to enable an acceptable gateway to the choice of using offensive banter towards others. Individuals with higher amounts of friends online (e.g., followers) and offline were viewed as having greater popularity, protection, and superiority. For example:

> **Kenzie***: Like at school, there might be someone that's not as like, social or popular, so like, if you're with your friends like, just hanging out you might feel like, prank call or something that might like actually hurt them or start doing something online* (Year 10).

The rules of banter in this context have taken a shift, enabling offensive banter to be socially acceptable for an individual or group with a higher degree of status. A joint

discussion between Ben and Jordan demonstrates how euphemistic labelling would be utilised in this scenario:

> **Ben**: *…cause sharing that video will make you have more followers or make you more popular or whatever and then, because people don't even want to be bullying you they're just doing it for their own personal gain, in terms of "oh, erm I've got this video of somebody, follow me to look at the video".*
> **Interviewer**: *… in a banter way or just in a mean way?*
> **Jordan**: *A joke.*
> **Ben**: *They try to pass it off in a joke.*
> (Both year 9).

Social acceptance for offensive banter, which was also deemed as cyberbullying, was fundamentally related to being perceived as more comparable to others in their peer group. In some situations, those individuals who are different are perceived as being in a lower status group and therefore more vulnerable to offensive jokes made at their expense. The power imbalance is prominently in effect in this situation, as bad banter is used to divide higher status from lower status individuals:

> **Stephanie**: *… someone else might not have the best things as you or they might look a bit different to you because that's not like, you're like normal, cause that's not basic they're just gonna make fun of that because they've chose to be different and to you that's not good because you just want everyone else to be the same.* (Year 8).

4.9.4 Severity perception

Analysis of the focus group data provided insight concerning aspects of humoristic online interactions which influenced how severe the interaction could potentially be perceived. The main elements that participants volunteered to discuss on numerous occasions were repetitive interactions by the same perpetrator and the role of having an audience who witnessed the interaction. Participant contributions described and explained to great depth how these elements could alter how an interaction involving

banter or teasing is perceived by the victim, between individuals of the same friendship group and individuals of separate friendship groups.

4.9.4.1 Repetition

Repetitive banter directed at a person was consistently discussed as being highly likely to be perceived as cyberbullying as opposed to harmless banter. The differentiation between harmless and harmful banter was concretely linked to intention, such as repeating a targeted joke, when the victim has clearly expressed for the perpetrator to desist, clearly identifies intent to harm. At a basic level of consideration for what repetition represents within an interaction of online banter, Natasha explains from her perspective:

> **Natasha**: *There's a difference between cyberbullying and a joke because a joke you don't actually mean it but a cyberbully, cyberbullying is actually trying to get to that person. Un a joke could possibly turn into it if they're carrying it on too much and the person its being directed at just doesn't like and has asked them to stop but they haven't.* (Year 9).

Repeating a targeted attack of banter or teasing without the victim vocalising for the tease to stop was explained to dilute the underlying humour to some degree. Perpetual continuation of a using the same joke was viewed as making the humour element of the tease weaker. In turn, as the tease becomes less humorous the degree of offensiveness increases. Participants generally regarded the construct of repetition as being fairly arbitrary. The number of times a tease needed to be received by a victim for it to become offensive rather than harmless teasing was dependent on the victims' perspective. For example, Ellie explains how making a joke about their friend repeatedly may suggest that the joke may represent a truthful or real observation and not something fictitious.

> **Interviewer**:*… So what would be like the main reason a joke would obviously be cyberbullying?*
>
> **Ellie**: *When somebody like, repeats it, and like, even if they are friends and they kept repeating the same joke, people start to think "that was funny the first time, maybe the second but once it's got past that, it isn't funny anymore", and if people carry on and, that's what is classed as bullying or if somebody does*

something repeatedly on purpose to hurt the other person, so even if they are friends, if they carry on putting like the same comment it can go too far because they think "well, they've already made that one so it's gone further than the joke now" sort of thing (Year 7).

By using the words *'it's gone further'*, implies the first perception of banter and teasing is harmless and therefore humorous. Any negativity or offensive aspect to the tease is acknowledged to be untrue, but as the tease is repeated, these aspects are questioned and considered more by the victim as being true and related to the underlying intention of the tease. In that sense, the joke has gone too far. There was also discussed within the context of a friendship group, where the same joke directed at one person is used by multiple members of the same group.

Stephanie*: Well it's like, (..) it depends how far they've taken the joke. Because if it's a joke where it's like, everyone's included, even the person it's about and they're all makin' fun of that person but the person it's about kind of like, jokes on with it it's not that bad but it depends if they take it further and start using it against them every day and then that could just like, even though they might joke along they might not like it.* (Year 8).

In this situation, the construct of repetition of the joke is related to a combination of how many times a joke or tease is directed at the victim by members of a friendship group and by how regularly the group members use the same joke. The irony of the victims laughing at the joke, which then encourages the joke to continue puts the victims in a difficult situation. This again highlights how lower status members of a friendship group may feel they are unable to voice their genuine feelings of hurt within a teasing or banter group situation, which was mentioned in the previous theme "Bad" banter and cyberbullying. Within a non-friendship group context, the role of repetition is much clearer in terms of its role in identifying cyberbullying. However, the role of repetition within a friendship group is more complex as although repetitive banter could be collectively perceived by the group as humorous, the victim may perceive repetitive group banter as less humorous and more offensive.

Banter as a construct was considered by participants to be more of a group social interaction online and offline than a one-to-one interaction. Analysis of the data outlines how the context of the group essentially underpins the basis of the banter. This suggests that banter is used not just make the recipient laugh, but questionably, it is more importantly used to make other group members laugh. Therefore, banter generally is more likely to occur with an audience than between two people.

> **Michelle***: I think more groups have it, then, like.*
>
> **Barbara***: yeah*
>
> **Emma***: two people*
>
> **Michelle***: like yeah, then just (.) two people havin banter, like, can't really happen, it's gotta happen with a good crowd of people.*
>
> **Emma***: yeah, so you say "that group's got good banter"*
>
> (Year 8)

Private banter is perceived to be potentially more offensive, as James (year 10) also indicates '*if you have like, private messages, like try and like make fun of people and stuff you're just bullying 'em'.* However, despite banter generally requiring an audience, having an audience means the face-to-face setting and the online setting are clearly evidenced as different constructs. Having an online audience was highlighted as a problematic situation where banter could potentially cause offense. An audience may involve unknown people which consequently blurs the rules of banter occurring between friends. Depending on the banter interaction, having an audience could cause the individual receiving the banter to feel embarrassed and ridiculed. One participant, Jayce, explains his feelings when a friend shares a video he had originally shared in a group chat of him dancing in a jovial way on social media for a joke:

> **Jayce***: I was irritated he ant, the idea was it's in-group chat, it stays in-group chat (.) but then people that I don't like seen that and they've tried to get under my skin through it cause they don't understand the context, they thought I was being serious cause it don't affect me cause I knew it was satire, I knew it was a joke, cause they don't and they think "oh, we can", I can't speak for them but, I*

was thinking to myself, I'm thinking "oh well if, his mates alright to make a joke about it and put somart on his story about it, surely we are". (Year 9)

Sharing another friend's media to an outside audience was considered as higher risk for being highly offensive but perhaps considered by the individual who shared the content to be banter. As Jayce explains, by his friend posting the content to an audience that were not intended by him to see, such as friends of friends, exposes Jayce to outsiders perceiving it to be acceptable for them to make jokes about the content. The context of the social interaction has collapsed, which can lead to boundaries of banter becoming unstable and the victim perceiving greater offensive. Another example of contextual collapse for online audiences is explained by Ellie:

> **Ellie***: I think you'd be careful what you put up because if somebody sees what you've put, so if you're having banter with your friend that's just posted the picture erm if somebody else comes and reads the things that you've put down, they might think actually you're being mean to the person who's posted the picture as in, cause they don't understand what you've put and how, and they might not understand how close you are as a friend with them.*
>
> (Year 7)

Participants demonstrated a degree of awareness of how due to differences between social media platforms, banter may be carried out differently. For instance, because social media platforms such as Instagram are more public orientated, with the main use of Instagram being to post media, Instagram is a less of a safe place to use banter. Whereas Snapchat enables users to have more control of who views content and know if anyone has screen shotted their media content or has recorded a conversation. These affordances mean that Snapchat is more private for one-to-one or group chats and so perhaps a safer place for banter with a more controlled audience. Brea explains the differences clearly:

> **Brea***: And you can choose who, like, I, on Instagram you can make your accounts private but on Snapchat you can choose who you add and you can choose who you block, and things like that. And you can block people from seeing your story whereas on Instagram if they follow you, they follow you, you know, they're gonna see everything you post. Then it goes on your Instagram story and things like that.* (Year 10).

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This awareness goes some way to explain why carrying out banter on different platforms may indicate intent. For example, carrying out banter on Instagram where it is known that a large audience may view something may indicate intentionality compared to banter via more enclosed and controlled group chats on platforms such as Snapchat. However, responses were variable, and some participants did explain that banter can be conducted on social media platforms that are more public. The role of audience clearly plays a role within hostile humour behaviour such as banter, as without an audience, there essentially would be no joke. Due to the varying ways that audience can be represented online, it is unclear to what extent public banter is perceived as offensive.

4.10 Discussion

Reflexive Thematic Analysis yielded four salient themes from across the dataset: banter as a social interaction, online misinterpretation, "bad" banter and cyberbullying and severity perception.

4.10.1 Banter as a social interaction

Banter was generally described as a form of humorous social interaction which entails an aggressive, yet innocuous, playful behaviour directed at another individual. This perception falls in line with Mills and Babrow's (2003) and Kowalksi's (2001) definitions of teasing being a challenging yet playful behaviour. Similarly, Dynel's (2008) definition of banter, as an interactional game that serves to unite friendships, also supports the participants' view that banter was perceived to generally occur between friends. Although not all banter or teasing involves a degree of aggression (Dynel, 2006; Mills & Carwile, 2009), the predominant description of banter by participants involved an element of play alongside aggression and antagonism. This suggests that adolescents' teasing and banter interactions are more likely to include aggressive behaviours alongside play.

Banter and teasing can be viewed theoretically in parallel with McGraw and Warren's (2010) Benign Moral Violation theory. McGraw and Warren (2010) posit that for something to be humorous it must be simultaneously perceived as a moral violation and a benign situation. This aligns with participants' description of banter being

offensive; a violation of social norms, but also a benign situation aided by the key context of friendship. According to participants, banter can be offensive and cross a line of acceptability due to several possible reasons (e.g., individual sensitivities, empathy and perception, and harsh subjects, or if the interaction was between non-friends). It was evident that this type of conflicting humour can be a complex social interaction that some young people may struggle to fully grasp and therefore may lead to causing unintentional offense.

In accordance with research that looked at face-to-face teasing (Douglass et al., 2016; Odenbring & Johansson, 2021) participants described friendship as an important criterion for differentiating between a joke and cyberbullying. Supporting this, Vandebosch and Van Cleeput (2008), in their exploration of adolescent perceptions of cyberbullying, conceptualise friendships as relationships with an equal power balance. Specifically, the context of friendship enables banter to be perceived as harmless despite having aggressive connotations. Analysis of the current data indicated that banter between friends of equal power could be interpreted as cyberbullying if a joke had crossed the line of acceptability and was perceived to have negative intentions, therefore overlooking the importance of friendship. Leary and colleagues (1998) consider crossing the line to be the point in the teasing interaction where the target believes the teaser has unvalued their relationship. This is supported by Betts and Spenser's (2017) focus group research held with young people outlining online banter as harmless fun between friends but also having the capability to escalate into cyberbullying. Therefore, the definitional criterion of intention, stated within the definition of cyberbullying (Olweus, 2013), may play a greater role than the power criterion within a friendship banter interaction that may be perceived as cyberbullying. Implications of an escalation from banter to cyberbullying could have negative consequences for the victim (Kowalski, 2000), as the initial behaviour could be unintentionally disregarded by practitioners in the position to manage and support those involved. Moreover, bystanders who witness the interaction are likely to have difficulty differentiating between banter and cyberbullying if the interaction occurs between friends. This could have an impact on how bystanders respond to an event in terms of passively ignoring it, supporting the target, or negatively encouraging the behaviour (DeSmet et al., 2014).

4.10.2 Online misinterpretation

Misinterpretation of online banter is a theme that demonstrates how young people perceive the difficulties of online communication and perceiving humour/banter online. Participants were able to accurately articulate experiences and beliefs about misunderstandings that occur online due to the unique environment which lacks the ability to display facial expressions, tone of voice, and provide relevant situational information. Literature refers to social indicators as redressive verbal and nonverbal messages (Brown et al., 1987; Goffman, 1967) and context as social context cues (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986; 1991). Verbal and nonverbal redressive messages (i.e., tone of voice, facial expression, or body language), and social context cues are utilised in a social interaction such as teasing (Dehue et al., 2008) to mediate and clarify the intended interpretation of the initial communication (Baruch, 2005). The online environment limits the ability to express social indicators (Kiesler et al., 1984). Participants in the current study demonstrated an awareness of how online banter can be misinterpreted as cyberbullying with the absence of social indicators to help correctly interpret intentions. These findings suggest misinterpretation of online banter is more likely to occur than misinterpretation of face-to-face banter and therefore a greater potential exists for perceived cyberbullying to occur. This issue could additionally be viewed in parallel with the ambiguity that arises with the contradictory nature of aggression and play displayed in teasing and banter behaviours (Kowalski, 2000), and the need for social indicators to indicate clear intentions in face-to-face interaction.

Supporting young people's awareness of their online communication behaviours is paramount to ensuring adolescents are communicating online with a sense of self-restraint. Low self-control and impulsive behaviours are highly prevalent during adolescent development (Casey & Caudle, 2013), and have been related to cyber perpetration (Holt et al., 2011; You & Lim, 2016). Findings from the current study indicate that adolescents could benefit from interventions which facilitate awareness of the absence of nonverbal redressive messages and social context cues. Van Royen et al. (2017) experimentally considered how self-censorship could be encouraged by reflective messages, and a time delay presented prior to posting a hurtful online comment could reduce intentions to cyber harass. The time delay and reflective

messages significantly reduced participants' intention to harass online, reducing perpetration behaviours. These findings suggest tailored reflective messages or time delays could be a possible strategy to support adolescents to consider their online banter in relation to how it may be perceived without the benefit of having nonverbal redressive messages and social context cues.

Participants frequently discussed misinterpretation of online banter in parallel with using emojis as a potential strategy to overcome this issue. Emojis were described by participants as pictorial indicators placed within an online communication to reinforce the sender's intentions by displaying the direction of valence, positive or negative. Comparably, literature considers emojis as a similar concept (Medlock & McCulloch, 2016) with some research referring to emoticons which are typed facial expressions i.e., ;-). Emojis' and emoticons' overarching function has been reported to be a substitute for nonverbal redressive messages and context cues that are non-existent on the internet (Medlock & McCulloch, 2016; Skovholt et al., 2014). Use of emoticons has been suggested to facilitate the interpretation of online text (Dresner & Herring, 2010) and more specifically humour (Farnia & Karimi, 2019). Research supports the current findings concerning the potentially unreliable aspects of using emojis within humorous online interaction such as banter. For instance, Miller and colleagues (2017) found text using emojis can make emoji interpretation more ambiguous to perceive. This would suggest that although emojis can have a useful interpretative purpose for young people they cannot be relied upon to provide full interpretation and can, in some instances, be confusing and hinder interpretation of the sender's intentions. Therefore, adolescents' strategy of attempting to avoid misinterpretation of online banter by using emojis is a low-level attempt to clarify intent that can have unintended negative consequences. The potential for unintended negative consequences when using emojis to signify banter should be viewed alongside the outlook that online banter can be ambiguous and difficult to perceive without the use of emojis. Practitioners supporting adolescents who experience the negative outcomes of misinterpreting online banter would need to consider if emojis were involved in the interaction and how to guide young people on the potentially negative and positive effects of using emojis in this context.

4.10.3 "Bad" banter and cyberbullying

Focus group participants consistently described online banter as having the capability to be cyberbullying. An online social interaction of this kind could occur between friends or non-friends. Online banter that was perceived by participants to be cyberbullying involving a perpetrator directing an offensive humorous comment or action towards a victim that was intentionally or unintentionally offensive. Again, this contradicts some definitional aspects of the cyberbullying definition (Olweus, 2013), namely imbalance of power, harmful intentions, and repetition. Participants considered repetitive acts and harmful intentions to be clear indicators that online banter was cyberbullying. However, humour was described to have the ability to hinder the victims' evaluation of the perpetrator's intention, as reported by Baas et al. (2013) and Smahel et al. (2014). This indicates that if a perpetrator's intentions are unclear from an online interaction, due to using banter for instance, the subjective perception of the victim should be considered for a behaviour to be classed as cyberbullying (Dredge et al., 2014; Fernández-Antelo et al., 2020; Thornberg & Delby; 2019). Furthermore, participants described online "bad" banter as a form of cyberbullying that can occur between friends. Literature contradicts this finding and suggests that "bad" banter is likely to be cyberteasing (Vandebosch & van Cleemput, 2008) that is not categorised as hurtful, signified by the equal power relationship, and no intent to harm. The current findings highlight a grey area of interpretation between adolescents' perception of cyberbullying and the literature that guides policy, practitioners, and parents who manage young people involved in cyberbullying. Labelling humoristic aggressive behaviours as harmless cyberteasing could deemphasise the seriousness of a perpetration, promoting reduced levels of support for a victim and reduced perpetrator management. Additionally, if "bad" banter is considered to be harmless cyberteasing, future research is likely to disregard participants who are labelled as targets of cyberteasing and not targets of cyberbullying. This could lead to variability across research findings as concluded by Schäfer et al. (2002) regarding teasing and traditional bullying.

Bad banter was described by participants as an ambiguous, aggressive social interaction that could be manipulated and portrayed by the perpetrator as less aversive and more humorous, euphemistically labelling the interaction as banter (Bandura,

2002). Avoiding trouble with authority figures and bypassing responsibility for causing offense was generally described as the explanation for downplaying banter. Support for this subtheme derives from moral disengagement (MD) mechanisms (Bandura, 1986; 2002). MD involves self-regulation processes that facilitate undesirable behaviours by enabling individuals to disconnect their internal moral standards from their actions to reduce tension caused by this situational incongruity. Euphemistic labelling is one of eight possible cognitive mechanisms, which include moral justification, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusions of responsibility, distorting consequences, attribution of blame, and dehumanisation (Bandura, 1986). MD has been reported to be associated with cyberbullying perpetration (Bussey et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2016). Further support stems from Baas et al.'s (2013) research that reports humorous online acts directed at others to be ambiguous within the cyberbullying context to the extent where perpetrators can deemphasise their actions, mediated by euphemistic labelling. Therefore, it can be surmised that some young people may be using euphemistic labelling to downplay banter that is perceived by the victim as cyberbullying behaviour. In terms of the victim, the negative consequences of the perceived cyberbullying could be psychologically harmful and so the incident would need to be acknowledged as an act of cyberbullying, and not a joke, to be supported. The implications of these findings acknowledge support is needed for young people who are prone to MD behaviours that involves supporting mindfulness around the potential consequences and ambiguity of humorous, online behaviours.

Participants openly explained their perception of how online banter can be viewed as cyberbullying between non-friends. Banter of this kind was described to be a more socially acceptable interaction if the perpetrator had high status or popularity. For this scenario, a clear imbalance of power was described between the perpetrator and victim which was based on how many friends/followers the perpetrator had and how "normal" the victim was perceived to be by the perpetrator. By default, this interaction would be viewed as having harmful intentions by the victim because the interaction is between individuals who are not friends – as described in theme 1 (Banter as a social interaction). Shapiro et al. (1991) reported that social dominance is one of the main outcomes of teasing and the most frequently identified children who do tease are bullies (51%) and popular children (23%). Traditional bullies have been found to target rejected

individuals with the aim to gain and cultivate social status (Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Sijtsema et al., 2009) and have higher peer assessed perceived popularity but less likeability (DeBruyn et al., 2010; Sijtsema et al., 2009). Further relevant support can be drawn from longitudinal research that reported peer perceived popularity increased over a period of eight months for perpetrators of cyberbullying (Wegge et al., 2016). These findings alongside the current study suggest that humoristic cyberbullying is a) more admissible for those who are more popular, and b) an effective behaviour to enhance perceived popularity. Prevention and intervention programs should consider concentrating on changing normative beliefs which consider victimising others online using humour to be more acceptable based on status and popularity.

4.10.4 Severity perception

Repetition of targeted hostile humour interactions such as banter and teasing was a theme that surfaced from data analysis as a factor that mediates harmless banter to offensive banter. Participants discussed the impact of repetition as a conflated construct in terms of the online and an offline setting, which suggests that repetition in the sense of what it reflects (i.e., an act occurring more than once) can be attributed to both face-to-face banter and cyber banter. Repetitive banter was rationalised as being more offensive as it created uncertainty around the intentions of the interaction, as banter initially is a humorous interaction that involves a degree of hostility within a friendship group. By repeating the same attack, the recipient of the banter evaluates the interaction to have intent to cause harm. Although this regulatory aspect of repetition was viewed as an unspoken agreement, for clarity, the victim would need to express to the perpetrator that they would like the banter to stop. If the online banter then continued, this became a more concrete indictor of banter moving from benign to intentional cyberbullying. However, participants additionally explained that not all individuals feel they have the social standing to inform their friend who is instigating the banter,that they wish the attack to stop. In this problematic situation, it would be the perpetrator or another member of the friendship group to decide when the banter has gone past being humorous. It is unclear what factors may contribute to the perpetrator making this decision.

Olweus (2013) states that the fundamental purpose of the criterion of repetition within the definition of traditional bullying and cyberbullying is to aid the identification of intentionality. Langos (2012) supports this position within an extensive review article concerning the challenges of defining cyberbullying, which is evidenced by research that explores young peoples' perceptions of cyberbullying definition (Nocentini et al., 2010). Using focus groups, Nocentini et al. (2010) considered the perspectives of 70 adolescents aged 11-16 from Italy, Germany, and Spain. They found that repetition differentiates between joke and intentional perpetration, and that repetitive cyberbullying is perceived as more severe than one-off attacks. Baas et al. (2013) reported supporting findings this in their extensive focus group study with Dutch adolescents aged 11-12 who also identified repetition as having a relationship with intentionality regarding the interpretation of online hostile humour. These findings support the sub-theme of repetition found in this study, as banter and teasing – which are aggressive humorous acts – were considered to be perceived as more hostile and severe when they were repeated. In line with Olweus' (2013) rationale for the inclusion of repetition in the cyberbullying definition, participants explained that repetition linked to malign intentions behind of the banter.

Banter was considered by participants to be a social construct that occurs within a group of friends rather than a dyadic exchange. Banter and teasing are viewed by the literature to be an exchange of playful and humorous interactions which have an element of hostility, and have the purpose of bonding and maintaining friendships (Dynel, 2008; Keltner et al., 2001) and promoting group identity (Alexander et al., 2012). Banter serves the purpose of amusement within a group of friends by making each other laugh, which highlights how for young people, banter requires a group to witness the social interaction. In the face-to-face context, a group of friends may constitute an audience of individuals who collectively witness the banter interaction. How this translates to the online environment is difficult as different platforms allow audiences to contain friends, acquaintances, family, work colleagues, and/or strangers. The topic of audience was discussed with a degree of depth in relation to how severity of banter or teasing can be increased when the act involves banter content being viewed by an unintended audience with multiple bystanders. Buglass et al. (2021) reported comparable findings from focus groups held with university students aged 18-26.

Participants outlined how banter is contextually different between groups, who themselves are audiences who have different tolerances of banter associated with them. To have appropriate banter within each group, banter would need to match the tolerance levels of the group. Failing to pair banter tolerance with a specific group can lead to causing offense to the recipient, as the banter may be overly harsh which could lead to perceptions of power asymmetries and bullying (Buglass et al., 2021). Having awareness of how a shift from the intended to the unintended audience is detrimental to ensuring prosocial banter is not perceived as antisocial banter by the victim.

Affordances of the internet allow different social groups to be accessed and overlap with greater ease as participants in the focus group discussed in relation to specific social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram. Having this awareness enables banter to be contained to the audience that it was intended for, which allows the banter to be perceived as humorous and harmless. Focus group participants rationalised that the sharing in-group jokes with an audience who have little contextual understanding of in-group banter, may lead to misinterpretation of malign, antisocial banter. Researchers have referred to the impact of a wider audience viewing in-group communication as the collapse and collision of social context (boyd, 2010; boyd & Marwick, 2011; Vitak, 2012). This field of research is sparce concerning young people's perceptions of online aggressive humour. However, young people have been found to be highly skilled at managing context collapse on social media despite it being an expected and common occurrence (Dennen et al., 2017). This supports the depth of understanding that the young participants provided around privacy and publicity affordance of differing social media platforms. Public interactions of online aggressive behaviours have been closely linked with greater severity perception. Focus group discussions with college students reported a connection between audience and intentionality of cyberbullying, as acts with large audiences are perceived to impact the victim with greater harm, especially if bystanders then become involved (Baldasare et al., 2012). The impact of context collapse and collision is an area of research which needs greater attention in relation to perceptions of severity and exploring where the line of prosocial banter ends and antisocial, hurtful banter begins.

4.11 Conclusion

Study 1 addresses RQ1 of this thesis, how do young people interpret and experience humour within the context of cyberbullying? Primarily, this study demonstrates aggressive humour behaviours such as teasing or banter can easily be viewed as cyberbullying behaviour from a young person's perspective. Owing to the online environment having a lack of nonverbal redressive cues and social context cues, online banter can be misinterpreted and perceived as targeted cyberbullying and therefore may occur more frequently. Findings also establish that humour can be a form of online aggression used to cyberbully others, motivated by the possible aim of achieving or maintaining popularity and status. Aspects of these findings challenge two definitional criteria of cyberbullying; power imbalance and harmful intentions of the perpetrator. For example, the data suggest victims' perceptions of a perpetrator's intentions carry some weight in determining if an act of online aggression is cyberbullying behaviour. Finally, the findings provide some clarity regarding mediating factors of severity perception of banter (i.e., repetition and presence of an audience). This insight provides significant insight into how young people perceive the aggressive humour in the online environment and how these factors may enhance the perceived severity of banter. Overall, Study 1 offers a unique perspective of how adolescents view humour and banter within the context of cyberbullying.

Chapter 5 – Study 2

5.1 Introduction

Chapter 5 presents Study 2 of the research carried out for this thesis. Study 2 aims to experimentally explore the perceived severity of humoristic online aggressive behaviours in terms of how offensive they are perceived and to what extent they are perceived as cyberbullying behaviours. The chapter initially considers a theoretical perspective of online hostile humour behaviours within the framework of Benign Violation Theory (BVT) (McGraw & Warren, 2010). BVT emerged as a relevant theoretical perspective in Study 1 as it relates to why aggressive humour can be perceived as humorous. The chapter considers the application of BVT to the process of appraising hostile humour behaviours such as banter and teasing, and demonstrates how the context of the online environment may create certain obstacles during the appraisal process. BVT theory is elaborated to include the role of social context (Gorman & Jordan, 2015; Hernández-Gutiérrez et al., 2018), redressive verbal and nonverbal messages (Brown et al., 1987; Keltner et al., 2001), and the Online disinhibition Effect (Suler, 2004). The introduction follows on to review literature concerning a range of contextual factors which may impact the severity perception of cyberbullying such as individual differences, cyberbullying behaviours, types of cyberbullying, repetitive cyberbullying, anonymity, and public cyberbullying. A comprehensive rationale for Study 2 of this thesis is then considered, incorporating the findings from Study 1, the review of the literature, and theoretical perspectives.

A large degree of content from the qualitative themes reported in Study 1 informed the quantitative methods utilised in Study 2, which are experimental vignettes. Consequently, an extensive summary of the methodology utilised for Study 2 is provided within the methods section, outlining a rationale for selecting vignettes, how the vignettes were developed, and how the vignettes were applied to the design of the study. Results of the multilevel modelling implemented on the vignette data are provided, describing significant main effects and interactions in relation to the outcome variables, perceived offensiveness, and perceived cyberbullying. An in-depth discussion of the findings in relation to previous literature leads to a conclusion of the chapter.

5.1.1 Interpreting online aggressive humour

The aim of Study 2 to is to investigate the factors which influence adolescents' severity perceptions of online humoristic aggressive interactions and secondly, explore how adolescents differentiate between benign and malign online aggressive humour. Interpreting and appraising online aggressive humour can be problematic for adolescents (Baas et al., 2013). Adolescents have been reported to state that bullying, including cyberbullying, is when something stops being funny (Guerra et al., 2011). However, based on the findings from Study 1 of this thesis, it is unclear if that statement refers to the perspective of a victim, perpetrator, or bystander. The findings suggest that due to a range of factors, perceiving when a joke becomes cyberbullying is a difficult task for all individuals involved in an online interaction that involves hostile humour. Evaluating the difference between a joke and bullying may be made more difficult when the behaviour is committed online, where actions are more ambiguous and more difficult to interpret (Pettalia et al., 2013). In a face-to-face context, aggressive humour that is directed towards individuals such as teasing or banter, can be prosocial or antisocial (Bergen; 2021; Mills & Carwile, 2009). Perceiving the severity of these kinds of behaviour, and therefore evaluating if the behaviour is prosocial or antisocial, has been reported to be arbitrary as it can depend on a range of factors. For some adolescents, the appraisal of aggressive humour that targets others is an automatic process. Research suggests that aggressive humour in the form of jokes and teasing is normalised to the extent that jokes at the expense of others are viewed by some young people as harmless, despite how they may impact the targeted individual (Odenbring & Johansson, 2021; Thornberg & Delby, 2019). This can also be seen in Postigo and colleagues (2019) study that collected spontaneous discourse data with Spanish adolescents aged 15-21, with one quote being "if it's meant as a joke, it doesn't hurt" (p. 254). Postigo et al. (2019) surmised that young people are possibly in denial by refusing to view teasing as possibly harmful. This research demonstrates how the ambiguity of humour can impact the intention behind behaviours such as banter and teasing that can both be hurtful and harmful.

The majority of literature agrees with Postigo et al.'s (2019) conclusion and suggests a wide range of factors that may impact severity perception of aggressive

humour. The predominant factor which distinguishes between prosocial and antisocial humour is social context: teasing between in-group members is perceived as prosocial and therefore benign (Gorman & Jordan, 2015; Odenbring & Johansson, 2021). This is exemplified by a US study (Douglass et al., 2016) with young people (mean age of 15) that found discriminatory racial and ethnic teasing to be common between members of the same friend group and used to express close bonds. Prosocial teasing and aggressive humour align with Olweus' (2013) guidance that distinguishes between hurtful and harmless teasing. Olweus (2013) outlines that teasing is bullying when it is hurtful and between those of unequal power (e.g., non-friends). However, some research findings contest this assumption. For instance, an additional finding from the Douglass et al. (2016) study demonstrated the hidden harmful impact of racial/ethnic teasing on some young people. This suggests that although there may be a group agreement that teasing is benign, an individual may perceive some teasing as malign without making it apparent to others in their group. Theoretical perspectives such as Benign Violation Theory (BVT) (Warren & McGraw, 2015; 2016) provides a possible explanation for why some humoristic aggressive behaviours like teasing and banter can be perceived as humorous or offensive. Additionally, the versatility of BVT allows the theory to incorporate how the online environment may impact severity perception of aggressive humour.

5.1.2 Benign Violation Theory

Warren and McGraw (2015; 2016; McGraw & Warren, 2010) propose a contemporary and refined theoretical explanation for why some stimuli are perceived as funny and some are not with BVT. They suggest that something is humorous when it is appraised simultaneously as a violation of norms and something that is benign. Perceiving incongruity has consistently been argued within the literature to be fundamental to the construct of humour and why a contextual instance is perceived to be humorous (Carrel, 2008; Forabosco, 1992; Gervais & Wilson, 2005; Morreall, 2009; Mulkay, 1988). However, the construct of incongruity alone has been criticized as being too simplistic and broadly defined (Forabosco; 1992; Martin & Ford, 2018; Ritchie, 2004) and therefore not always applicable to all humorous instances. Furthermore, incongruity can also be applied to many non-humorous events and so lacks clarity and detail regarding

how a humorous response can be predicted (Warren & McGraw, 2015; Warren et al., 2021). Warren et al. (2021) argue that BVT narrows down the construct of incongruity by considering the juxtaposition of a violation that is also benign. Warren and McGraw (2016a) describe a violation as "Something that threatens your sense of how things should be" (p. 3). A violation refers to any negative stimuli that is perceived to be threatening an individual's physical well-being, identity, or normative belief structures (Veatch, 1998; Warren & McGraw, 2016). A well-being violation refers to physical violations such as someone falling over or being tickled. Identity violation broadly refers to how people view themselves in society and how others view people in society (e.g., jokes regarding group identity). Violations that concern normative belief structures include cultural norms (e.g., wearing black to a wedding), communicative and linguistic (e.g., sarcasm or puns), and logical norms (e.g., food shopping in a scuba suit). Essentially, from the BVT perspective, a humorous event involves a stimulus that is a violation of some kind, and which is juxtaposed with the understanding that the episode is playful, harmless, and nonliteral, allowing the event to be perceived without judgement and so be appraised as humorous (Warren & McGraw, 2016).

5.1.3 Psychological distance

If BVT is viewed within the context of bullying and cyberbullying, then the violation comes from the initial teasing/banter comment that is made verbally or online using text or media. This violation would come under the violation of identity, as teasing is considered an attack of identity (Kowalski, 2003). From the victim's perspective, the violation would need to be simultaneously appraised as benign, and non-threatening for the interaction to be humorous and therefore not offensive. One of the main strengths of BVT is that it includes the role of the social context of a humorous event (Martin & Ford, 2018). Warren and colleagues (2021) include a number of factors which may have an impact on appraising the interaction as benign. BVT is primarily built on Trope and Liberman's (2010) Construal-Level Theory of psychological distance (Liberman & Trope, 2008), which underpins how a violation can be excessively benign or volatile, leading it to being perceived as not funny (McGraw et al., 2012). BVT stipulates that psychological distance reduces the perceived severity of an aversive situation, therefore making it

more benign (McGraw et al., 2014). There are four forms of psychological distance: 1) spatial (e.g., a kilometre is a greater than a metre), 2) social (e.g., a stranger is more distant than a family member), 3) temporal (e.g., an hour is shorter than a day), and 4) hypothetical (e.g., a fictitious event is more distant than a non-fictitious event). McGraw et al. (2014) emphasise that psychological distance plays a role in how negative stimuli violations, can be is perceived as benign and therefore humorous. More severe violations, such as tragedies, require greater psychological distance to aid the perception of the violation being benign. In contrast, milder violations require less psychological distance in order to be perceived as funny, as the perceived violation is already small. McGraw et al. (2014) refer to the point where psychological distance is not too far or too close as being the "sweet spot" (p.567) for a humorous response to be triggered.

One of the most notable types of distance that has been considered in relation to aggressive humour interpretation is social distance. Psychological social distance can be considered in line with offensive humour in terms of why jokes are perceived as more or less offensive. Social distance in this context is referred to as the felt distance between the joker and the individual(s), group practice, norms, or roles that the joke concerns (Kant & Norman, 2019; Liberman et al., 2007). There are two main ways that social distance can be discussed within the context of cyberteasing and cyberbanter: social commitment and social closeness to content.

5.1.3.1 Social commitment

Social commitment explains how individuals who share the same social group or share the same norms will find disparaging jokes funny regarding an out-group because there is greater social distance between the in-group and the out-group (Gorman & Jordan, 2015; Hernández-Gutiérrez et al., 2018). For example, Burmeister & Carels (2014) found videos that made jokes about obesity were funnier to those who held negative views on obese people in comparison to people who had positive views. In this instance, the in-group has found jokes made about an out-group funnier compared to those who do not share their group norms. Warren and McGraw (2015) suggest that norms are contextually bias towards cultural and social norms and so what may be a violation for

some may not be for others. Appraising a violation as harmless and benign enables the episode to be humorous depending on the context of the event and the individuals involved.

Adolescents' general teasing and banter that occurs between individuals within a group has consistently been viewed as pro-social because the group norms dictate the acceptability of aggressive humour (Keltner et al., 1998; Kowalski, 2001; 2003). This may explain why pro-social teasing for teenagers is an important method of building and maintaining friendship (Mills & Carwile, 2009), as they help to build an understanding of appreciation for group norms. Whereas teasing between members of different groups is seen as anti-social and more in line with verbal bullying behaviours (Olweus, 2013). These findings support social distance within the framework of BVT and severity perception, as they indicate that disparaging humour, which is an identity violation, is perceived as benign, or less severe, because the interaction is between friends who are members of the same social group. McGraw and Warren (2010) endorse this distinction with their theoretical views on disparaging humour of others of low commitment. In this context, commitment refers to how much an individual is invested or cares for another individual or the sanctity of a particular norm. Therefore, if individuals or groups are attributed with low commitment, they are more likely to be considered by the appraisee as benign and therefore more humorous (McGraw & Warren, 2010). Scarce research has considered if the dynamic of group commitment alters in the online environment within the context of aggressive humour. Findings from Study 1 diverge on the concept of social commitment, in that participants clearly demonstrated that face-to-face banter occurs between friends, however, there were some discrepancies with how banter translates online due to ambiguity created by that online environment. Consequently, Study 2 will explore how group relationships may impact the perceived severity of aggressive humour in the online environment.

5.1.3.2 Social closeness to content

Social distance, as a form of psychological distance, has been considered on a deeper level to the intentionality of a direct joke, as the social distance in this context refers to how close the targeted individual subjectively perceives the teaser to the content of the

disparaging joke (Kant & Norman, 2019). For instance, if the recipient of the teasing comment perceives the distance between teaser and the content of the tease to be far away, then they have perceived no intentionality and therefore the joke is funny. The main factor to consider which may create ambiguity around how to appraise are redressive verbal and nonverbal messages (Brown et al., 1987; Goffman, 1967; Keltner et al., 2001) such as tone of voice, facial gestures, and social context (Sproull & Kiesler, 1986; 1991), which are used within the evaluation of aggressive humour to distinguish between malign or benign teasing (Dehue et al., 2008; Keltner et al., 2001; Kelter, 2009; Shapiro et al., 1991). However, these cues are not typically available online. It would make logical sense, according to BVT, that the lack of redressive verbal and nonverbal indicators leads to greater perceptual ambiguity for how socially close a perpetrator is to the content of the tease. It may be possible that for some young people, offence may be taken from online banter or teasing, due to the lack of clarity regarding the intentions of the perpetrator. Although a potentially compelling argument, this theoretical perspective presents some questions that are difficult to answer. It is unclear how significant the lack of redressive indicators is in the context of severity perception for online aggressive humour. Literature demonstrates that there are other potential moderating factors to consider alongside this issue such as social context (Kelter et al., 2001), gender differences (Bauman & Newman, 2013), types of aggression (Pieschl et al., 2015), repetition of an act (Palladino et al., 2017), or if there is an audience (Sticca & Perren, 2013). Therefore, Study 2 aims to explore the construct of online aggressive humour acts alongside such variables to explore this unique attribute of virtual communication.

5.1.3.3 Spatial distance

Psychological distance with regards to the spatial element could be related to the context of interaction of banter and teasing online, as individuals can communicate remotely, with no physical consequence to their actions. In this instance, BVT would view aggressive humour as being more likely to be considered as benign, and less severe, due to the physical distance between the sender and receiver. This proposal corresponds with the Online Disinhibition Effect (ODE) (Suler, 2004), which may explain

the possibility of technology mediating aggressive online behaviour. Online disinhibition has been theorized by Suler (2004) to have benign and toxic dimensions. Benign disinhibition refers to online behaviour that is comfortably open, kind, and generous, which usually would be difficult to produce in the physical world (e.g., a heartfelt conversation in a chat room). Toxic disinhibition involves rude, aggressive, insulting, or ridiculing behaviour online that would usually not be produced by an individual in the physical world.

An element of the ODE which has closer ties with aggressive humour and cyberbullying is that of invisibility (Udris, 2014). This element of ODE considers how an online perpetrator cannot see their victim, or any harm they may be inflicting, which allows some people to behave differently online than they would offline. Invisibility is therefore one of the factors that is considered within ODE that may be related to cyberbullying. Without having the possibility of having repercussions, individuals may feel they can be harsher online (Kiesler et al., 1984), which has been reported in some literature (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Mishna et al., 2009; Pelfrey Jr., & Weber, 2014) and in Study 1 of this thesis. Furthermore, the relationship between ODE and cyberbullying was considered by Udris (2014), who found that adolescents who cyberbully others are more disinhibited online, with those scoring higher for disinhibition being 1.2 times more likely to be perpetrators. This was the finding for adolescents who spent an average amount of time online. This relationship indicates that having greater spatial distance may create a subjective feeling of invisibility from a victim of banter or teasing may play a role in severity perception from a perpetrator's perspective. This could possibly be linked to Smith and colleagues' (2008) focus group findings that demonstrate how some cyberbullying may be perceived as fun to a perpetrator, as they are unable to physically see a victim and so may be more blinded from considering the victims' perspective and therefore any offense they may have caused.

In the context of aggressive humour and cyberbullying, it could be possible that social distance and spatial distance dimensions within the psychological distance framework are influencing one another. Consider the scenario where two friends are having banter online, where a disparaging joke or tease is produced by one friend about the other. According to BVT, the violation of the disparaging comment would need to be appraised as benign for the targeted individual to find the joke funny and not

offensive. However, due to the online setting creating greater geographical distance, the instigator has been harsher than they usually would in a face-to-face setting. Here, ODE has the potential to influence the appraisal of the comment as being more threatening than benign because the harsher disparaging comment may influence the victim to view the intention of their friend as being closer to the content. If the teaser is viewed as being socially closer to the content of their joke, then the victim may be unsure how to appraise the violation as benign if there is possible intent to harm. The greater spatial distance has indirectly made banter/teasing more severe which ultimately influences the victims' perception. Adding to this ambiguity is the lack of verbal and nonverbal indicators which would usually be used to interpret the behaviour. Without redressive verbal and nonverbal cues, there is limited information to draw from to make a conclusive interpretation of the aggressive humour. In the cyberbullying or cyberteasing context, this may be an explanation as to how unintentional online jokes, banter, and teases between friends are perhaps being perceived as offensive.

5.1.4 Severity Perception of Cyberbullying

The difference between perceiving an online behaviour as benign or malign can depend on a great deal of factors. Cyberbullying research concerning adolescents' severity perception of cyberbullying experiences has been proposed to be the exploration of how young people appraise an episode of online aggression based on its negative physical or mental effects on themselves or other individuals (Chen et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2015). Research concerning traditional bullying (Mishna, 2004) and cyberbullying (Dredge et al., 2014; Menesini et al., 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010) has found adolescents' severity perception influences the classification of an act being identified as bullying or cyberbullying. Furthermore, severity perception also has been linked to the likelihood of traditional bully victims (Craig et al., 2007), teachers (Ellis & Shute, 2007), and bystanders of traditional bullying (Salmivalli, 2010) and cyberbullying (Bastiaensens et al., 2014; Koehler & Weber, 2018) intervening in an attempt to stop the victimisation. An understanding of the literature concerning severity perception is important to consider as research conducted for this thesis relates to how factors, such as humour, may influence how severe an act of online aggression is perceived by a young person.

For some individuals, the same episode of cyberbullying may not be perceived to the same degree as severity when compared to another's perception (O'Moore, 2012). For example, research findings indicate that not all victims of cyberbullying experience negative outcomes (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Otega et al., 2012) suggesting perceived severity generally varies depending on factors related to the victim and the episode. Moreover, from focus groups with children aged 9 to 16 from 9 different European countries, Smahel and Wright (2014) found varied perceptions of online harassment and sexual content. Namely, receiving sexual content or nasty comments may be appraised as humorous or offensive (Smahel & Wright, 2014). Similar findings in a cross-sectional study were also reported by 14- and 15-year-old Turkish students, with participants either reporting feelings of anger as their primary response to cyberbullying or alternatively perceiving an act to be a harmless joke (Topçu et al., 2008). However, some research suggests that although cyberbullying may not be reported as harmful, those victims may still experience negative outcomes (Campbell et al., 2012). Severity perception research related to cyberbullying is limited with some researchers suggesting that greater emphasis is placed on the frequency and prevalence of cyberbullying within the literature and not how the behaviour can impact young people (Chen, Liu & Cheng, 2011). However, there is a limited number of studies which demonstrate that an episode of online aggression can be appraised differently depending on a number of contextual factors which can be grouped into three categories: a) individual differences, b) the type of cyberbullying behaviour, and c) how the behaviour was administered online.

Gender is a factor that has been evidenced within research as having high impact of how young people perceive cyberbullying severity. The consistent conclusion suggests females have a greater perceived severity of cyberbullying behaviours than males (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Berne, Frisén, & Kling, 2014; Campbell et al., 2012; Chen & Cheng, 2017; Menesini, Nocentini, & Calussi, 2011; Pettalia et al., 2013). In a cross-sectional study with Canadian adolescents aged 12 to 15 using scenarios, Pettalia et al. (2013) reported females were significantly more likely to perceive cyberbullying as more hurtful than males. Also, in a focus group study with 15 year-old Swedish students, females were found to be more affected by appearance-based cyberbullying than males (Berne et al., 2014). Menesini et al. (2011) reported from their sample of 11- to 18-year-old Italian participants that cybervictimised males perceived cyberbullying that involved

intimate photos, pictures, or videos to be less severe than females. Both studies (Berne et al. 2014 & Menesini et al., 2011) rationalised their findings by suggesting that males and females may be conforming to westernised gender stereotypes in terms of feminine and masculine attributes. Gender difference considerations will be accommodated in Study 2 of this thesis to explore this subject area further within the literature and to develop a clearer understanding around gender and severity perceptions of cyberbullying.

Research has reported separate cyberbullying behaviours as having more or less weight regarding their perceived severity (Nocentini et al., 2010). For example, Smith et al. (2008) found that out of seven different types of media (i.e., phone calls, text messages, email, picture/video, instant messaging, websites and chatrooms), picture/video based cyberbullying had the highest perceived severity rating, including traditional bullying for young British participants aged 11-16 years old. Higher perceived severity for visual behaviours, as opposed to online written or verbal behaviours, is supported by other research in the cyberbullying literature (Nocentini et al., 2010; Pieschl et al., 2013; Slonje & Smith, 2008). More specifically, Menesini et al. (2011) found that photos or video that were violent, unpleasant, and intimate in nature were regarded as the most severe form of cyberbullying. Staude-Müller et al. (2009) found similar findings suggesting that a greater degree of distress for cyberbully victims is created by perpetrators connecting the boundary between reality (captured in photos and videos) and the virtual space.

Types of cyberbullying from Willard's (2007) taxonomy of cyberbullying behaviours have been distinguished as being perceived as more stressful and therefore more severe. Although findings are mixed, a general assumption could be made from research findings regarding what forms of cyberbullying are viewed as more harmful than others. As previously stated at the beginning of this chapter, Willard's (2007) categories of cyberbullying behaviours are flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing and trickery, exclusion, cyberstalking, and cyberthreats, although some studies do not include cyberthreats. For example, with a German participant group of children and adults, with an age range of 11 to 25, Staude-Müller et al. (2012) identified denigration, impersonation, and outing and trickery to be perceived as the most severe forms of cyberbullying. Support for Staude-Müller et al.'s (2012) research

also indicates outing as having higher severity implications (Pieschl, Kuhlmann & Porsch, 2015) with an Ecuadorian adolescent sample, and impersonation was found with Taiwanese adolescents to have the highest perceived severity (Chen & Cheng, 2017). However, Chen and Cheng (2017) proposed that the type of behaviour depended on how the cyberbullying was delivered, with public cyberbullying generally depicting more perceived severity by their participants. This is supported by other research that indicates public cyberbullying overall is a more severe form of cyberbullying (Sticca & Perren, 2013). These limited research findings indicate that although there are conflicting findings, types of cyberbullying have a significant impact of severity perception of cyberbullying behaviours, especially if they are publicly perpetrated. Consequently, Study 2 will involve considerations which accommodate types of cyberbullying behaviour in order to provide further insight into how different forms of cyberbullying may be perceived differently within a humoristic context.

The manner in which a cyberbullying behaviour is carried out by a perpetrator can play an important role in how a victim appraises an episode of cyberbullying. Public forms of cyberbullying have been found to be perceived with a higher degree of severity than private forms of cyberbullying (Nocentini et al., 2010; Slonje & Smith, 2008). Sticca and Perren (2013) examined adolescents' perceived severity of public and anonymous cyberbullying and traditional bullying with Swiss students aged 13-14 years old. Small effects were reported between traditional and cyberbullying, with cyberbullying perceived as worse than traditional bullying. However, overall findings indicated that the role of publicity and anonymity played a greater role in mediating the severity perception of cyberbullying and traditional bullying with public and anonymous cyberbullying producing the highest severity ratings. Sticca and Perren (2013) rationalised these findings, suggesting that a greater audience denotes an awareness of more people witnessing the damaging public attack on their social status and image, leading to feelings of powerlessness and perhaps greater negative consequences for the victim (Smith & Slonje, 2010). Furthermore, public attacks of cyberbullying have been proposed to be highly damaging because they cannot be controlled in terms of how a victim can manage them (e.g., delete the comment or manage who views them) (Ševčíková et al., 2012). Study 2 and 3 therefore aim to provide further clarification regarding the impact of public cyberbullying in contrast to private cyberbullying.

Evidence suggests that being cyberbullied by someone you know has greater severity implications than by being cyberbullied by someone anonymous (Nocentini et al., 2010). Contrasting research, however, suggests that anonymous cyberbullying can be more distressful for a victim by inciting greater levels of fear, powerlessness, and insecurity (Mishna et al., 2009; Dooley et al., 2009; Sticca & Perren, 2013). Researchers have suggested that anonymous cyberbullying is viewed as highly fearful and incites helplessness due to the wide scale possibilities provided by the internet for the perpetrator, being perceived by a victim, to potentially be anyone (Slonje, Smith & Frisen, 2013; Sticca & Perren, 2013). Other researchers have taken a different stance, proposing that greater distress may be experienced by victims who know their perpetrators and therefore may have greater intentions to harm alongside greater knowledge of the victim (Staudmüller et al., 2012). Ševčíková, et al. (2012) found from online interviews with Czech adolescents aged 15-17, that the context of the aggressor is important in a victims' appraisal of an incident. Anonymous attacks were found to have the highest severity when they were related more to the real world, such as public humiliation. Furthermore, victims perceived public attacks from known attackers that connect the real-world setting, such as school, to the online environment to be perceived as highly distressful and damaging. This suggests that cyberbullying attacks that publicly cross over from school into the after-school environment can intensify perceived severity because of longevity and continuity (Ševčíková et al., 2012). These findings suggest that it is the cohesion of public humiliation and continuity between offline and online media which can influence how severe an episode of cyberbullying is appraised by a young person.

Repetition has been stated within the literature to be a defining criterion of traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Olweus & Limber, 2018; Langos, 2012; Slonje & Smith, 2008). Repetition as a criterion differentiates cyberbullying from one-off attacks of online aggression which would be categorised as cyber aggression (Olweus & Limber, 2018). With regards to severity perception of cyberbullying, repetitive acts of cyberbullying have been suggested to be perceived with higher severity than one-off acts (Pieschl et al., 2015) as they can mediate the perception of another definitional criterion – intentionality (Palladino et al., 2017). For instance, from group discussions with Dutch students aged 11-12 years old, Baas et al. (2013) discovered that repeated

online attacks of aggression, as opposed to single attacks, enabled the identification of cyberbullying. Participants explained that repetitive attacks mediated the perception of the perpetrator's intent to harm a victim by reducing ambiguity and inducing severity. In contrast, participants indicated that there are instances where one-time public attacks may have repetitive effects, which increase severity perception of the act for it to be perceived as cyberbullying (Baas et al., 2013). These findings are support by focus groups study held with adolescents, aged 11-19, from Italy, Spain, and Germany (Nocentini et al., 2010). Participants in this study denoted repetition with the capability to perceive greater severity of an online aggressive attack to the extent that it would be identified as cyberbullying. However, participants also expressed that public cyberbullying that was not repetitive could also be viewed as cyberbullying, owing to the potential damage from having a large audience. These findings suggest for some acts repetition can enhance severity perception but not for all cyberbullying offenses such as public attacks, as argued by other researchers (Hutson, 2016).

Fernández-Antelo and Cuadrado-Gordillo, (2018) explored both the perception of victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying in relation to the three cyberbullying definitional criterion, intentionality, power imbalance, and repetition, alongside publicity and anonymity. Their aim was to explore the criteria that their Spanish participants, aged 12-16 years old, most used to identify cyberbullying. Neither cyberbullying offenders or victims perceived repetition to be a core, determinant factor of cyberbullying. However, repetition was reported as having the role of reinforcer for other criteria such as power imbalance for perpetrators, and intentionality for victims. These findings suggest repetition may aid adolescents with severity perception of cyberbullying depending on the role of the adolescent as a victim or perpetrator. These findings highlight the need to further explore the extent of how much repetition influences severity perception of cyberbullying in differing contexts. For example, researchers have referred to one-off events of online aggression as jokes or humour (Langos, 2012; Menesini et al., 2012; Palladino et al., 2017). Contradictory findings have indicated a one-off episode of online aggression may be perceived as more severe, and thus cyberbullying, if the episode was executed publicly (Bass et al., 2013; Nocentini et al., 2010). Further exploration of the perceived impact of repetitive cyberbullying on adolescents' perceived severity will be implemented for Studies 2 and 3, with the

intention to expand on current understanding of this highly relevant subject area. Repetition was recognised as a factor which distinguished jokes from bullying in Study 1 of this thesis. As audience and repetition seem to be closely related and may mediate one another, repetition and audience will be explored further alongside humoristic cyberbullying.

5.1.5 Rationale for Study 2

Utilising the construct of psychological distance, BVT (Warren & McGraw, 2015) provides a useful rationale for how some humoristic cyberbullying may be perceived as benign, therefore funny, or malign, and so offensive. The potential interplay of social commitment, social closeness to content, and spatial distance can be viewed within the context of severity perception of online aggressive humour. However, there is a gap within the framework of BVT concerning individual differences and social context aspects which need to be empirically tested. BVT research heavily considers whether situations are funny or not, with less emphasis being placed the social aspect of humour and the role social context plays in humour appraisal (Kant & Norman, 2019). The framework of BVT is vague when it comes to considering this degree of social complexity within groups and other factors which mediate severity perception of phenomena such as cyberbullying. Literature consistently reports prosocial, benign teasing/banter to occur between members of the same friendship group and antisocial malign teasing/banter to occur between members of out-groups (Gorman & Jordan, 2015; Keltner et al., 1998: Odenbring & Johansson, 2021; Thornberg & Denby, 2019). Study 2 of this thesis aims to contribute to the BVT framework by exploring severity perceptions of online aggressive humour by experimentally manipulating relevant contextual variables, including group membership, that were highlighted from the Study 1 focus group data.

Literature demonstrates that severity perceptions of cyberbullying, which include hurtful cyberteasing and cyberbanter, can depend on factors relating to individual differences such as gender (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Berne et al., 2014; Campbell et al., 2012; Chen & Cheng, 2017; Menesini et al., 2011; Pettalia et al., 2013), the type of cyberbullying behaviour (Chen & Cheng, 2017; Staude-Müller et al., 2012;

Pieschl et al., 2015), and how the behaviour was administered online (Nocentini et al., 2010; Pieschl et al., 2013; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008). Despite how pervasive aggressive humour behaviours such as teasing and banter have been reported to be experienced by young people face-to-face (Jansen et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2009), research has considered severity perception of cyberteasing or cyberbanter with minimal attention. Furthermore, research has failed to consider the relationship between social context and factors that have been related to greater severity perception of cyberbullying such as repetition (Baas et al., 2013; Palladino et al., 2017; Pieschl et al., 2015), audience (Nocentini et al., 2010; Sticca & Perren, 2013), and the social relationship between victim and perpetrator. Findings from Study 1 identify these factors as being highly relevant during the appraisal process of identifying the difference between hurtful or harmless cyberteasing/cyberbanter. Study 2 of this thesis aims to contribute to this area of research by experimentally exploring the relationship between these factors and severity perception using hypothetical vignettes.

Study 2 will include additional rigour to the conceptual framework that underpins the aim of the study by utilising two outcome variables which will measure two separate constructs, perceived offensiveness and the degree to which a vignette is considered to be cyberbullying. The hypothetical vignettes are based on realistic humoristic scenarios extracted from Study 1 focus group data and range from benign banter to banter that is cyberbullying. Previous research and findings from Study 1 suggest online banter and teasing behaviours to be ambiguous and difficult to evaluate for young people (Baas et al., 2013; Ging & Norman, 2016), which potentially may mean that perceiving offensiveness is highly variable in relation to perceiving online aggressive humour as cyberbullying behaviour. By distinguishing between the two outcomes, Study 2 can identify to what extent aggressive humour is considered to be offensive and if it can be viewed as cyberbullying depending on the other factors involved that are included in the model (i.e., gender, audience, repetition, and type of cyberbullying). For instance, controlling for perceived offensiveness allows Study 2 to explore how much a hypothetical vignette of online aggressive humour is considered to be offensive, regardless of variables that depict elements of the cyberbullying definition, such as repetition and intentionality (i.e., relationship between the victim and perpetrator) in the vignette (Olweus, 2013). Consequently, Study 2 will uniquely contribute to the

cyberbullying field of literature by experimentally exploring the perceived severity of humoristic online aggressive behaviours in terms of how offensive they are perceived and to what extent they are perceived as cyberbullying behaviours.

5.1.6 Study 2 Research questions and objectives

Study 2 addresses research questions 2 and 3 of this thesis:

RQ2: What factors influence how young people perceive the use of online aggressive humour that targets others?

RQ3: What factors influence how young people differentiate between humorous intent and cyberbullying?

To effectively approach the research questions, Study 2 aligns with thesis research objectives 2, 3, and 4, which are:

Research objective 2: Investigate the relationship between the variables of interest which emerge from Study 1, and perceived **offensiveness** to gain a greater understanding of how humour impacts offensive perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying.

Research objective 3: Investigate the relationship between the variables of interest which emerge from Study 1, and perceived cyberbullying to gain a greater understanding of how humour impacts the **identification of cyberbullying**.

Research objective 4: Examine the **gender** difference within research objectives 2 and 3.

5.1.7 Study 2 approach

Study 2 will take an exploratory approach to address RQ 2 and 3 of this thesis. The design and methodology of Study 2 has been extensively developed to incorporate factors that have been identified as being involved within the process of severity perception of humoristic cyberbullying for young people. Identification of these factors are based on findings from Study 1 of this thesis and an extensive literature review. As Study 2 is

exploratory, no specific main effects or interaction are predicted. Study 3 will seek to replicate the findings of Study 2 with the aim of confirming findings reported in Study 2.

5.2 Methods

5.2.1 Design

Study 2 is a cross-sectional 4 x 3 x 2 x 2 (Humour scenario [banter, offensive joke, joke cyberbullying, cyberbullying], Cyberbullying behaviour [denigration, outing, harassment], Audience [audience, no audience], and Repetition [repetition, no repetition] fractured, factorial design. The design implemented for this study was mixed effects, which incorporates repeated and independent measures. A repeated measures design was used to investigate the multiple factors within the vignettes as participants were exposed to all the treatment conditions. The multivariate model also incorporated the variable for gender to explore the possible gender differences in relation to other independent variables and the outcome variables. For this gender effect, an independent measures design was implemented to consider the differences between these two groups within the variable.

Data were collected before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. As the pandemic caused significant change to young people's social and educational lives, it was important to control for the potential impact this would have on the findings. As such, covariate analysis was considered in the analysis by including an additional variable that grouped data collected pre-covid with data collected during covid within the model. This covariate was not included in the main experimental manipulation but was considered post analysis to explore any possible adjustments in the model that were associated by the presence of the two groups of data that were collected during these distinct periods.

5.2.2 Participants

Four hundred and six participants were recruited from four secondary schools and from online data collection methods. For the secondary school data, four secondary schools from urban areas of the Midlands in the United Kingdom were recruited between June and December 2019. This dataset was expanded at a later date to include data collected online during the Covid-19 pandemic. All data were first cleaned, with those participants

(N=44) who consistently failed to respond to the questionnaire as a whole being removed. Within the demographic questions, participants were asked for their gender as this variable was required for the analysis. Six participants indicated that their gender was 'other' and nine indicated that they 'preferred not to say'. Responses for these participants were not included in the analysis due to the design of the study attempting to measure a gender bias between the female and male groups. Given the small size of the sample identifying as 'other', it was not appropriate to consider this as an additional gender category within the analysis. Those participants who refrained from providing their gender could not be categorised as either female or male and were not included in the analysis. The final sample for Study 2 compromised of 356 participants (88% response rate).

School data

After data cleaning, a total of 293 participant responses from secondary schools, aged between 11-16 years old, were used in the analysis of the vignettes. The sample consisted of 138 (47.10%) females (M_{age} = 13.06, SD_{age} = 1.07) and 155 (52.90%) males (M_{age} = 13.33, SD_{age} = 1.22). All four secondary schools involved in the study were academy status, meaning that they were managed by an academy trust and received funding directly from the government. With regards to latest Ofsted inspections, three of the four secondary schools had received a good rating and one had received an outstanding rating (Ofsted, 2019).

Online data collection

A total of 63 participant responses, aged between 11-16 years old, were obtained from online data collections methods after data cleaning. The sample consisted of 47 (73.02%) females (M_{age} = 13.53, SD_{age} = 1.83) and 16 (26.98%) males (M_{age} = 13.00, SD_{age} = 1.55). These responses were collected by means of advertising the study through various social media platforms and therefore were from any young person who lived in the United Kingdom at the time.

5.2.3 Materials

5.2.3.1 Rationale for vignette methodology

Experimental vignette method (EVM) was utilised for Study 2 and 3 of this thesis. EVM involves "presenting participants with carefully constructed and realistic scenarios to assess dependent variables including intentions, attitudes, and behaviors" (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014, p. 352). There are a number of reasons as to why vignette methodology was chosen for this study. Primarily, EVM allow the experiment to test how participants evaluate a situation if they were hypothetically involved in the situation. In this study, participants are asked for their perspective of being a hypothetical victim of humoristic cyberbullying of varying degrees. By using hypothetical vignettes, EVM is a viable ethical option to experimentally explore the sensitive nature of this study's topic area. Therefore, vignettes were chosen for this study to overcome the clear ethical issue of re-creating humoristic cyberbullying in a laboratory or real-life setting (Collett & Childs, 2011). Furthermore, EVM allows control over independent variables whilst attempting to explore causation. Potential confounding variables can also be excluded and variables that may correlate can be included, in order to investigate the nature of their relationship (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014). For this reason, it is highly important that the variables that are manipulated in the vignettes are selected attentively. However, there also needs to be the right balance of relevant variables and vignette realism (fidelity). Experimental vignettes have been argued to be a research method which allows an experiment to be enriched with realism, which provides greater internal and external validity (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Atzmüller & Steiner, 2010). The issue with building vignettes primarily stems from the criticism that vignettes are not realistic (Hughes & Huby, 2002). Essentially, by omitting some variables and including some, the vignettes become more or less realistic. For this study, the specification of vignette variables was based on a combination of focus group findings of Study 1 of this thesis, as supported by Wason et al. (2002) and variables evidenced in the literature as being impactful for severity perception of humoristic cyberbullying. Consequently, this study utilised focus group findings from Study 1 as well as literature and theory during vignette development to maximise the fidelity of vignettes given ethical and other constraints.

5.2.3.2 Vignette development

Experimental vignette methodology was utilised for this study to explore severity perception of humoristic cyberbullying behaviour. In order to consider if perceived offensiveness aligns with perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying, the design of the study incorporated two outcome variables: perceived severity and degree of cyberbullying perception. The vignettes that were developed for the study were carefully constructed to depict realistic scenarios to explore the outcome variables. The starting step of the vignette development was to select examples of realistic humorous cyberbullying instances that emerged from the focus groups with young people in Study 1. From exploring the transcripts, a number of examples were selected that were rich enough in content to provide base storylines. From that group of examples, six vignettes were selected based on three different cyberbullying behaviours: denigration, outing, and harassment. The vignettes needed to capture types of cyberbullying as a variable, as these were the behaviours which were most prevalent in the focus group discussions. Two vignettes were developed for each type of cyberbullying behaviour, producing six master vignettes overall. Each vignette was assigned A, B, C, D, E, or F as a means for identification (see Appendix F for all six master vignette tables).

The next stage of the vignette development process was to create a variable that captured humoristic aggressive behaviour, this variable is called humour scenario. For each of the six master vignettes, four levels of humour were created and manipulated within the vignette, 1) banter, 2) offensive joke, 3) cyberbullying behaviour that is labelled as a joke, and 4) pure cyberbullying behaviour. In each story there is a victim and a perpetrator. To demonstrate the degree of low-level banter or teasing, the first level, banter, incorporated only behaviours that involved interactions between friends, the remaining levels all involved behaviours that occurred between non-friends. This level was designed in this way for two reasons. First, the vignettes needed to be as realistic as possible and represent the construct of banter. As participants in Study 1 specifically outlined that banter occurs between friends, the first level of this humour scenario variable was required to reflect this social interaction. Second, the literature consistently reports that benign teasing and banter that has prosocial intentions is between individuals who are friends or members of the same group (Gorman & Jordan,

2015; Keltner et al., 1998: Odenbring & Johansson, 2021; Thornberg & Denby, 2019). In order to test this, there needed to be a baseline level that controlled for banter that occurs between friends and the rest of the levels within the variables.

The next level of the humour scenario variable is offensive joke. The difference between the first level, banter, and offensive joke is that the storyline includes an unknown individual to the victim who becomes perpetrator. The unknown individual in this level is introduced to the victim indirectly by a friend of the victim. This circumstance captures a complex social occurrence that was stated by participants of Study 1 to happen quite frequently, where banter spills out of one friendship group to other groups by individuals who drift between them. This occurrence can create ambiguity around severity perception as it conveys a situation where intentionality is unclear as it was instigated by a friend but perpetrated by a stranger. This instance was reported by participants as occurring as part of a misunderstanding, which from their perspective was why it was deemed an offensive joke.

The next level of the humour scenario variable was antisocial cyberteasing by a perpetrator that does not know the victim or their friends but is referred to in the scenario as intentionally perpetrated for a joke. This level clearly outlines that the perpetrator has prosocial intentions (i.e., "for a joke") and so allows the model to consider if cyberteasing can be viewed as benign by the victim if the intentions are benign from the perpetrator's perspective. By including this level, the model will be able to consider if the victims' perspective outweighs the known innocuous intentions of the perpetrator in terms of severity perception. The final level, cyberbullying, provides no clarity around the humorous intentions of the perpetrators, which leaves the level depicting a cyberbullying episode between a victim and a perpetrator.

Audience and repetition were also themes that emerged from the focus groups and were highlighted as factors which may affect severity perception and recognition of aggressive humoristic behaviour that mat be cyberbullying. Repetition (Fernández-Antelo & Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2018; Langos, 2012; Pieschl et al., 2015) and audience (Nocentini et al., 2010; Ševčíková et al., 2012; Sticca & Perren, 2013) are also variables that have been reported in the literature to have a potential impact on severity perception. Therefore, audience and repetition were factors that were incorporated in the vignettes. Audience and repetition each were two-level factors (i.e., including or

excluding audience or repetition). Audience was manipulated within the storyline itself by the inclusion of bystanders or witnesses. The 'no audience' condition involved only the protagonists within the scenario. Repetition was represented in the vignettes by including information that highlighted if the perpetrator had targeted the victim multiple times previously or if it was the first time.

The final vignettes each compromised of 16 scenarios per vignette, with the vignette universe being 96. Additionally, the study needed to tailor the vignettes to participants as much as possible. To control for any gender bias the vignettes were designed to be gender specific. This meant that the vignette universe was duplicated into two versions, one for males and one for females, which only used male or female names within the vignettes. This approach limits any gender differences of severity perception of humoristic cyberbullying, which is a common approach with other research in the field that has used vignettes (Sticca & Perren, 2013; Talwar et al., 2014). An example of a scenario would be:

"Jacob and his friend are messaging about another student at school, Charlie, who isn't in the group chat. Jacob is making negative comments about Charlie. For a joke, Jacob then adds Charlie to the group chat and continues to make negative comments about him. This is the first time Jacob has done anything like this to Charlie".

In this scenario, the represented levels for each independent Cyberbullying variable are harassment, not repeated, no audience, and male.

5.2.3.3 Vignette set development

The next phase of vignette development involved scaling down the vignette universe into sets of 12 scenarios. It is this scaling down of the vignette universe into sets which makes the design of the study fractional as it would be inappropriate and unrealistic to speculate that participants could manage answering four questions for 96 scenarios, especially considering how taxing this task would be in terms of time and concentration for young people. In addition, this decision was influenced by the need to discourage missing data. Therefore, the 96 scenarios were randomised into 4 balanced blocks of 12 scenarios using a balanced Latin square design (Bradley, 1958). This

approach involved indexing each master vignette (A, B, C, D, E, F) in a 4 x 4 matrix table. The four columns of the matrix table were labelled A, B, C, and D. First, the Latin square formula involved selecting individual scenarios from the vignette matrix by their column indicator. The premise of the Latin square is based on the simple rule of dropping the first letter for each combination and starting with the new combination (ABCD, BCDA, CDAB, etc.). This was the formula applied to the production of the first set of scenarios. For the second set, the formula began at the second combination of the letter (BCDA, CDAB, DABC, etc.). This method was applied to the third and fourth set in the same way. Two scenarios per vignette were selected to produce a set of 12 scenarios. This produced 4 sets of 12 scenarios, which were contextually gender specific. Each set of 12 included a balance of 3 scenarios per humour condition, 4 scenarios per type of cyberbullying which incorporated having an audience or not and having repetition or not.

5.2.3.4 Dependent measures

Participants were randomly allocated 1 of 4 possible sets of 12, gender specific, humoristic cyberbullying scenarios which were extricated from the original set of six vignettes developed for the study. For each scenario, participants were asked four questions in total. Two items were for the purpose of a manipulation check and two items aimed to measure perceived aspects of the scenario. Manipulation check items were incorporated into the scenarios presented to participants in order to encourage participants to read and differentiate between each scenario, as suggested by Betts et al. (2022). These items required a closed response to a factual based question regarding the scenario. There were four possible manipulation check questions a participant could receive:

1. Which character in the short story may have felt offended?
2. Which character in the short story may have offended someone else?
3. Did many people see what happened in the short story?
4. Is this the first time this situation has happened between the two characters?

The two manipulation check questions were randomly selected in terms of what was presented for each vignette. The remaining two items that participants were asked per scenario were outcome variable items. The outcome items were asked with the purpose of measuring the participants' perceptions of the scenario and were rated 0-7, with 0 having the least amount of weight attributed to the response. The first item related to the degree of perceived offensiveness i.e., 'If you were Alex (victim in scenario) how offended would you feel?' This item was rated from 'Not offended at all' (0) to 'Very offended' (7). The second item related to perceived level of cyberbullying behaviour within the scenario i.e., 'Would you consider this story to be cyberbullying?' This item was rated from 'Not cyberbullying' (0) to 'Definitely cyberbullying' (7). Evaluating behaviour that is displayed in vignettes using a rating scale has been used in other cyberbullying research studies with young people (Horner et al., 2015; Menesini et al, 2012; Palladino et al., 2017; Talwar et al., 2014; Tong & Talwar, 2020).

5.2.4 Procedure

5.2.4.1 School based data collection

The College of Business, Law, and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Nottingham Trent University granted a favourable ethical review, no. 2019/113, for the research study. All schools provided Head Teacher consent (Appendix B) prior to data collection. Schools were given the initial option of using the online survey or paper questionnaire. Two out of the four schools decided to administer the paper booklet to students. For these schools, a researcher was present during data collection and administered the paper booklet to the students. The remaining two schools were provided with a link to send to students who took part in the study during their tutor time. The link provided participants with an online survey which was produced using Qualtrics.

Parental consent was attained prior to data collection (Appendix G). Letters were sent to parents which provided information about the study and the option to opt their child out of the study by using a slip provided at the bottom of the letter. Students were provided information about the study prior to receiving the questionnaire (Appendix H). Within the information sheet, all participants were informed that was no wrong or right

answers to the questions, that their personal information was not required, and their response would remain anonymous and confidential. Participants were also informed of how to withdraw their responses after taking part in the study. Before the questionnaire was provided, participants indicated by check/tick boxes if they understood the information sheet and gave their consent to participate. A debrief sheet was provided at the end of the study (Appendix I). Due to the sensitive nature of the survey, the information sheet and the debrief included appropriate lines of support for those participants who may have been affected by taking part in the study.

5.2.4.2 Online data collection during covid-19 pandemic

Alternative methods of data collection were administered for Study 2 due to schools being closed during the Covid-19 pandemic between March and September 2020. This method of data collection was approved by the College of Business, Law, and Social Sciences research ethics committee at Nottingham Trent University no. 2020/151. Online data collection was obtained by advertising the study on social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn). The advertisement was aimed at parents and initially informed them of a brief overview of the study with a link for more information. The link led parents to a mini online survey, using the Qualtrics online survey platform, which presented a comprehensive information sheet (Appendix H) of the research with regards to the expectations of the study in terms of their child. At the end of the information sheet was a consent section, where parents were asked if they were over the age of 18, if they fully understood the information page, and if they gave consent for their child to take part in the study. Once parents gave consent, parents were asked for their email address so the researcher could send them a link to the survey, which they in turn could then give to their child. The procedure for the remainder of the online survey is identical to the school data collection procedure. An addition of a financial incentive was used for those participants who took part in the online version of the study. The financial incentive involved all participants being included in a raffle to win 1 of 5 £20 Amazon vouchers.

5.3 Data analysis

A cumulative link generalized mixed model, also referred to as a multilevel ordinal logistic regression model, was selected to analyse the parameters in the model based on the design of study. This multilevel model allowed both the participants and vignettes to be treated as random effects, as opposed to fixed effects. Random effects within the model were partially crossed as not all scenarios were viewed by all the participants, deeming the design a fractional factorial survey design. Participants were randomly allocated one of four possible subsets of multi-dimensional scenarios using the Latin Square formula, with each participant receiving 12 of the possible 96 scenarios of the vignette universe. This enabled the vignettes to have a balanced representation of all factors (i.e., gender, humour scenario, type of cyberbullying, audience, and repetition) and their respective dimensions across the dataset. Participants and vignettes were required to be modelled as random effects to generalize beyond the participants and vignettes sampled. The multilevel approach also handles imbalance arising from the fractional design or occasional missing ratings for vignettes.

A completely balanced design could be assured if all possible scenarios within the vignette universe were responded to. However, the design for this study would not allow this because: a) the huge size of the vignette universe, b) projected participants recruitment and the participant characteristics, notably age, which limit the amount of data it is feasible to collect in a single session, and c) missing ratings (which may occur if individuals did not assign ratings to all vignettes). Multilevel models potentially allow us to estimate the effects of the dimensions (factors) of interest correctly in fractional designs whilst also incorporating random effects to handle the correlation between responses to the same vignette or from the same person (Auspurg & Hinz, 2015; Baguley et al., 2022). The main drawback of a fractional design is that lower order effects (e.g., main effects) may be aliased with higher order effects (e.g., two-way, three-way or higher order interactions). The recommended solution in the literature is to drop some or all higher-order effects and focus on lower order main effects and interactions (Auspurg & Hinz, 2015; Baguley et al., 2022). This is usually reasonable because higher order effects are usually not the focus of substantive interest and also typically account for relatively little variance in practice.

Multilevel modelling was chosen for this study because it considers the repeated observations of each participant in relation to the multiple dimensions within the vignettes and the two outcome variables. If intra-respondent correlation (Field & Wright, 2011) and the non-orthogonal nature of the vignettes (Baguley et al., 2022) is not accounted for in the model, then there is a high risk of Type I errors from the analysis; this is a consequence of ignoring sources of error variance in the model or spuriously inflating effective sample size when dimensions are correlated. Traditional regression techniques that would usually be applied to this dataset would need to assume that the intra-respondent responses were independent and factor dimensions and outcome variables are orthogonal. In this vignette design, this would not be theoretically appropriate as the outcome of ignoring the correlation between participant responses would lead to underestimating standard errors of regression coefficients and in turn, a Type I error (Baguley, 2012; 2018). The cumulative link mixed model utilises random crossed effects because it allows for random intercepts for participants and random intercepts for vignettes. The model also potentially allows random slopes for the two outcome variables, which allows the fixed effects to vary for each outcome variable. By modelling random effects, the variance within the data from the perspective of the participants and the vignettes is managed more effectively and the risk of underestimating regression coefficient standard errors is reduced (Baguley, 2012;2018, Judd et al., 2012).

5.4 Results

5.4.1 Multi-Level Model

Multilevel models were employed to investigate the relationship between five predictor variables (gender, audience, repetition, cyberbullying behaviour, and humour scenario) and the two outcome variables (perceived offensiveness and perceived cyberbullying). Owing to participants only being able to respond to a subset of the possible vignette universe for this study, the design was a fractional factorial design 2 x 2 x 2 x 3 x 4. The cumulative link mixed model (clmm) function of the ordinal package (Christensen, 2018) in R (R Core Team, 2020) was used to carry out analysis, with the view to consider random intercepts for the participants and the vignettes and random slope for the

outcome variables. Utilizing this model accounts for the variance between participants and the vignettes, and hence inferences generalize beyond the people and vignettes sampled. The two dependent variables, perceived offensiveness, and perceived level of cyberbullying were rated on a 0-7 point Likert-style scale. The fractional factorial design limits the effects that can be included in the model as some higher order interaction effects are aliased with lower effects (see Baguley et al., 2022.). In this case we are limited to testing main effects and most two-way effects, although there are insufficient cells in the design to estimate the humour scenario by cyberbullying behaviour interaction (which uses 6 d.f. in the model). All other two-way and lower order effects were estimated in the two-way model excluding the humour scenario by cyberbullying behaviour interaction. Tests of main effects were based on dropping predictors from the main effects only model (analogous to Type II SS tests in ANOVA).

Table 5.1 presents the intercept-only model, the main effect of each predictor and the two-way model. The rating type (cyberbullying or offensiveness) was included as a random effect in the model (for participants) to allow separate variances to be estimated for each rating and to account for the anticipated correlation between ratings from the same person. The default parameterisation of the model is to treat one rating as an intercept and model the difference between that and the other rating (including the variances and correlation between the intercept and this difference). It is possible to use matrix algebra to obtain the estimates for each rating and the correlation between ratings. For the null model in study two these variances are 3.694 and 3.630 and the correlation between ratings is estimated .8765. All subsequent models therefore included the rating type as a random effect. The default parameterization was preferred because re-parameterizing the model led to convergence issues (likely because of the high correlation between ratings).

Null			*Variance*	*SD*	*Correlation*
	Participant	Intercept	3.69	1.92	
	Rating difference		0.90	0.95	-0.27
	Vignette	Intercept	0.74	0.86	
No. of groups	352 pps	40 vignettes			
Main effects					
	Participant	Intercept	3.60	1.90	
	Rating difference		0.91	0.95	-0.32
	Vignette	Intercept	0.12	0.35	
No. of groups	352 pps	40 vignettes			
Two-way					
	Participant	Intercept	3.65	1.91	
	Rating difference		0.88	0.94	-0.32
	Vignette	Intercept	0.88	0.25	
No. of groups	352 pps	40 vignettes			

Table 5-2 displays the Wald Chi-squared statistic (χ^2) and the *p*-value for effect within the main effect model and the significant interactions within two-way model. All factors were dummy coded using 0/1 treatment contrasts in R which presents the difference between each level of a factor in relation to the intercept of the baseline level which is indicated in the coefficient column of Table 5-4.

Table 5-2. Wald Chi-square tests for main effects and two-way interactions and p-value statistics

Coefficients	df	χ^2	p
Rating type	1	36.759	< .001
Gender	1	18.636	< .001
Audience	1	15.808	< .001
Repetition	1	24.730	< .001
Humour scenario	3	141.0825	< .001
Cyberbullying behaviour	2	59.6795	< .001
Rating type x Gender	1	8.41	0.003
Rating type x Repetition	1	66.178	< .001
Gender x Repetition	1	8.678	0.003
Gender x Humour scenario	3	20.155	< .001
Audience x Repetition	1	4.769	0.028
Audience x Humour scenario	3	8.860	0.031
Repetition x Humour scenario	3	15.494	0.001

The main effects suggest several possible relationships between the independent variables and the dependant variables. However, given the presence of several statistically significant interactions these predictors are considered in further detail below. The means and standard deviations for each factor can be viewed in Table 5-3 for the perceived offensiveness and perceived cyberbullying. In relation to the outcome variables (scale of 0-7), various inferences can be made from the descriptive statistics and respective factors.

In general terms, perceived offensiveness is scored across all factor dimensions as higher than perceived cyberbullying. In terms of gender, on average males rate the vignettes lower than females across all factors for both outcome variables. This finding indicates that females perceive the vignettes overall as more severe than males. Means for the audience dimension and repeated dimension within a vignette consistently have higher mean ratings for both outcome variables. Denigration is consistently rated as the least severe dimension of the cyberbullying behaviour factor and harassment is rated as the most severe dimension across both outcome variables. The humour scenario factor findings indicate the lowest level of 'Banter' is consistently assigned with lower ratings and 'Cyberbullying', the highest level of severity within the factor, is assigned with higher

ratings. 'Offensive joke' and 'Joke cyberbullying' display similar means, suggesting that these dimensions may be perceived with similar severity. The standard deviations indicate consistent dispersion of assigned ratings are relative to the mean.

Table 5-3. Means and Standard Deviations for all factors used in analysis

Perceived Offensiveness	Factor	Male	Female	Total
	Humour scenario			
	Banter	3.91 (1.47)	4.50 (1.24)	4.20 (1.38)
	Offensive joke	4.43 (1.43)	4.99 (1.22)	4.72 (1.35)
	Joke Cyberbullying	4.41 (1.48)	5.17 (1.22)	4.80 (1.41)
	Cyberbullying	4.67 (1.41)	5.48 (1.13)	5.10 (1.34)
	Audience			
	No Audience	4.21 (1.42)	4.92 (1.08)	4.81 (1.31)
	Audience	4.48 (1.38)	5.11 (1.17)	4.58 (1.31)
	Repetition			
	No Repetition	4.27 (1.33)	4.86 (1.12)	4.58 (1.26)
	Repetition	4.42 (1.41)	5.18 (1.09)	4.82 (1.31)
	Cyberbullying Behaviour			
	Denigration	3.95 (1.44)	4.68 (1.23)	4.33 (1.38)
	Outing	4.44 (1.38)	5.04 (1.10)	4.75 (1.27)
	Harassment	4.67 (1.38)	5.36 (1.12)	5.03 (1.30)
Perceived Cyberbullying				
	Humour scenario			
	Banter	3.68 (1.60)	3.96 (1.43)	3.83 (1.52)
	Offensive joke	4.25 (1.45)	4.67 (1.34)	4.47 (1.41)
	Joke Cyberbullying	4.27 (1.46)	4.73 (1.32)	4.50 (1.40)
	Cyberbullying	4.58 (1.40)	5.20 (1.26)	4.90 (1.36)
	Audience			
	No Audience	4.06 (1.44)	4.52 (1.25)	4.30 (1.37)
	Audience	4.31 (1.33)	4.74 (1.28)	4.54 (1.32)
	Repetition			
	No Repetition	3.92 (1.51)	4.23 (1.43)	4.08 (1.47)
	Repetition	4.45 (1.34)	5.04 (1.17)	4.76 (1.26)
	Cyberbullying Behaviour			
	Denigration	3.88 (1.38)	4.33 (1.33)	4.12 (1.37)
	Outing	4.23 (1.40)	4.58 (1.30)	4.41 (1.36)
	Harassment	4.46 (1.41)	5.02 (1.24)	4.75 (1.27)

Table 5-4 reports the degrees of freedom, log odds, standard errors, and confidence intervals for each effect of independent variables on the dependant variables and

significant interactions for the two-way model. Dummy coding was also adopted to estimate the coefficients provided in Table 5-4. Due to the dummy coding of factors limiting the interpretation of three- and four-dimension factors (i.e., humour scenario and cyberbullying behaviour) estimate marginal means will be used to interpret the significant interactions.

Table 5-4. Coefficients of the two-way model with interaction effects

	Coefficient	Log odds	SE	95% CI	
Thresholds					
0|1		-3.5673	0.2696	-4.094	-3.038
1|2		-2.2843	0.2619	-2.797	-1.771
2|3		-0.9549	0.2593	-1.463	-0.446
3|4		0.2772	0.2590	-0.230	0.784
4|5		1.6607	0.2597	1.151	2.169
5|6		3.2317	0.2614	2.719	3.744
6|7		4.7684	0.2638	4.251	5.285
Rating type (Offensiveness)		0.942	0.137	0.672	1.212
Gender (Male)		-0.371	0.236	-0.835	0.092
Audience (No audience)		-0.173	0.257	-0.678	0.330
No Repetition (Repetition)		1.737	0.239	1.267	2.207
Humour scenario (d.f. = 3)					
Banter (CB)		2.239	0.245	1.757	2.721
Banter (Joke CB)		1.455	0.275	0.914	1.995
Banter (Offensive joke)		1.964	0.270	1.435	2.493
Cyberbullying behaviour (d.f. = 2)					
Denigration (Harassment)		0.646	0.221	0.212	1.079
Denigration (Outing)		0.403	0.225	-0.037	0.844
DV (Offensiveness) x Gender (Male)		-0.377	0.130	-0.632	-0.122
DV (Offensiveness) x Repetition (Repetition)		-0.685	0.084	-0.850	-0.520
Gender (Male) x Repetition (Repetition)		-0.247	0.084	-0.412	-0.082
Gender (Male) x Banter (CB)		-0.400	0.118	-0.632	-0.168
Gender (Male) x Banter (Joke CB)		-0.280	0.116	-0.509	-0.052
Gender (Male) x Banter (Offensive Joke)		-0.195	0.115	-0.421	0.030
Audience (No audience) x No Repetition (Repetition)		-0.404	0.185	-0.768	-0.041
Audience (No audience) x Banter (CB)		-0.474	0.267	-0.998	0.050
Audience (No audience) x Banter (Joke CB)		-0.086	0.305	-0.686	0.512
Audience (No audience) x Banter (Offensive Joke)		-0.768	0.323	-1.403	-0.134
Repetition (Repetition) x Banter (CB)		-0.635	0.267	-1.160	-0.110
Repetition (Repetition) x Banter (Joke CB)		-0.499	0.268	-1.026	0.027
Repetition (Repetition) x Banter (Offensive Joke)		-0.675	0.266	-1.198	-0.153

Significant relationships have emerged between predictor variables in relation to the dependent variables, which are considered in the model as one dependent variable with two levels (i.e., perceived offensiveness and perceived cyberbullying). In the text, this dependent variable is identified as DV. Addressing both dependent variables as one variable allows the analysis to go further than if they were modelled separately as it

considers the difference between how offensive the scenarios were perceived and to what extent the scenarios were viewed as cyberbullying in relation to the other variables included in the model. Therefore, there are also significant relationships between predictor variables and the dependant variables individually, which means that some of the effects of predictors only occur for one of the dependent variables as opposed to both dependent variables. The findings involve interaction effects between two factors that each both have two dimensions (2 x 2). For these results, simple main effects testing has been implemented to interpret what the interactions are highlighting. Some interaction effects involve factors with more than two dimensions, such as humour scenario. As a 2 x 3 or 2 x 4 factorial design has multiple degrees of freedom, the statistical power of using simple main effects tests for these interactions becomes inefficient. Therefore, interaction effects will be explored further with an interaction contrast (Abelson & Prentice, 1997) to capture the particular pattern within the interaction. This is a 1 d.f. contrast that captures a particular pattern of ratings on the log odds scales. An interaction contrast tests whether the observed cell means are consistent with a pattern specified by the chosen contrast coefficients after stripping out the influence of the main effects. A pattern within the ratings can numerically be identified by a percentage, which indicates the percentage of interaction deviance accounted for by the interaction contrast, along with a p-value. Note that the primary focus here is therefore on the proportion of the interaction effect accounted for by the interaction contrast, rather than the p-value of the contrast (see Abelson & Prentice, 1997), which is likely to be statistically significant for any contrast somewhat resembling the observed pattern. Thus, to further explore interactions with multiple d.f., these patterns were coded as a set of contrast coefficients and ran an interaction contrast to determine whether the observed data are well described by this pattern. The next section of the results will first present the significant interaction between predictors and the outcome variables and then will move into the interactions between predictor variables in relation to the combined outcome variables.

5.4.2 Interaction effects

Dependent Variable x Gender: Main effects suggest that females rate the vignettes with higher scores than males and perceived offensiveness is more likely to be assigned ratings than perceived cyberbullying. Figure 5-1 shows a significant interaction between gender and both outcome variables which suggests that females, M = 5.11, 95% CI [4.93, 5.30], are significantly (p < .0001) more likely to rate perceived offensiveness more highly than males, M = 4.45, 95% CI, [4.24, 4.65]. Females, M = 4.73, 95% CI [4.54, 4.93], also significantly (p = 0.013) rate perceived cyberbullying more highly than males, M = 4.30, 95% CI [4.09, 4.52]. For males there is no significant difference (p = 0.115) between perceived cyberbullying, M = 4.30, 95% CI [4.09, 4.52] and perceived offensiveness, M = 4.45, 95% CI [4.24, 4.65), which suggests that males may perceive cyberbullying and offensiveness as more similar constructs. Overall, these findings suggest that females are driving the main effects for higher outcome variables ratings but to a greater extent for perceived offensiveness specifically. Furthermore, females significantly (p <.0001) rated the vignettes more highly for perceived offensiveness, M = 5.11, 95% CI [4.93, 5.30] than they did for perceived cyberbullying, M = 4.73, 95% CI [4.54, 4.93], indicating that females were more likely to rate the vignettes as more offensive than cyberbullying. Note that all interaction figures depicts a dimension of the variable on the x-axis and the y-axis depicts the linear prediction on the log odds scale, which was obtained by the emmeans package in R (Lenth, 2022).
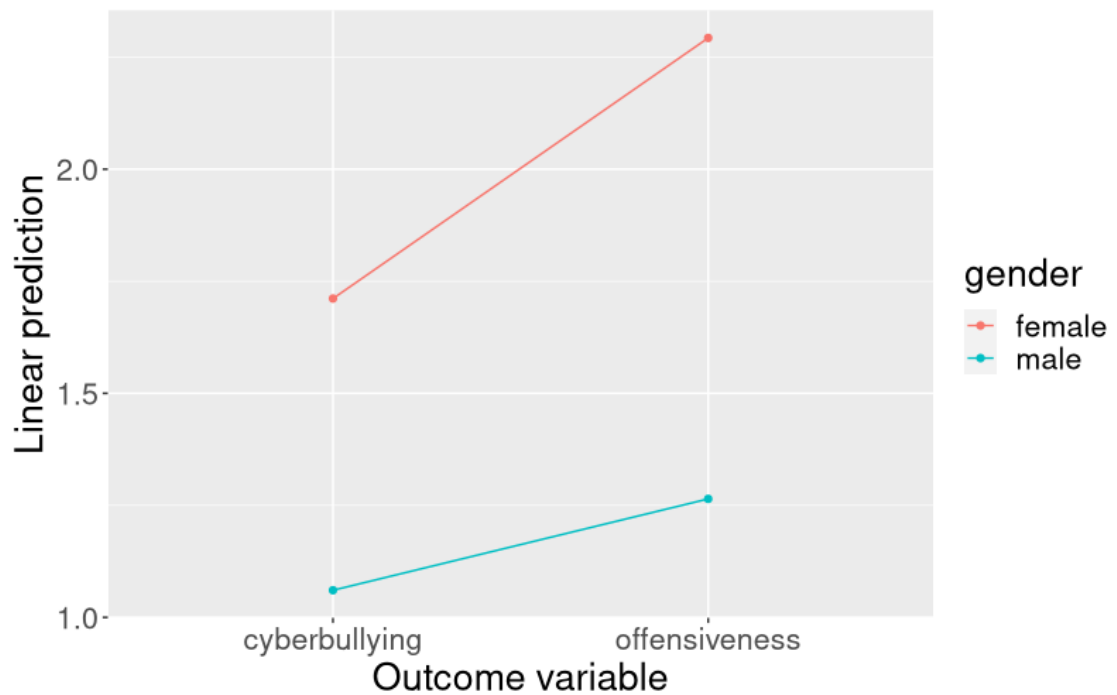
Figure 5-1. Dependent Variable x Gender interaction effect

Dependent Variable x Repetition interaction: The main effect of repetition suggests that vignettes that include repetition as a dimension predict greater ratings for the outcome variables. Figure 5-2 indicates that for perceived offensiveness significantly (p = 0.02) higher ratings can be predicted when repetition, M = 4.87, 95% CI [4.72, 5.03] is present in the vignette, compared to no repetition, M = 4.69, 95% CI [4.53, 4.85]. Significant (p <.0001) effects can be found for perceived cyberbullying, whereby higher ratings can be predicted when repetition, M = 4.84, 95% CI [4.68, 5.00] is present in the vignette, compared to no repetition, M = 4.20, 95% CI [4.03, 4.36]. These findings support the main effect for repetition, indicating that vignettes which involve a repetitive dimension are perceived more severely. However, no repetition as a dimension significantly (p <.0001) predicted lower ratings for perceived cyberbullying, M = 4.20, 95% CI [4.03, 4.36], compared to perceived offensiveness, M = 4.69, 95% CI [4.53, 4.85]. These results indicate that when an act in a vignette occurs for the first time, the vignette is more likely to be perceived as more offensive than as cyberbullying.

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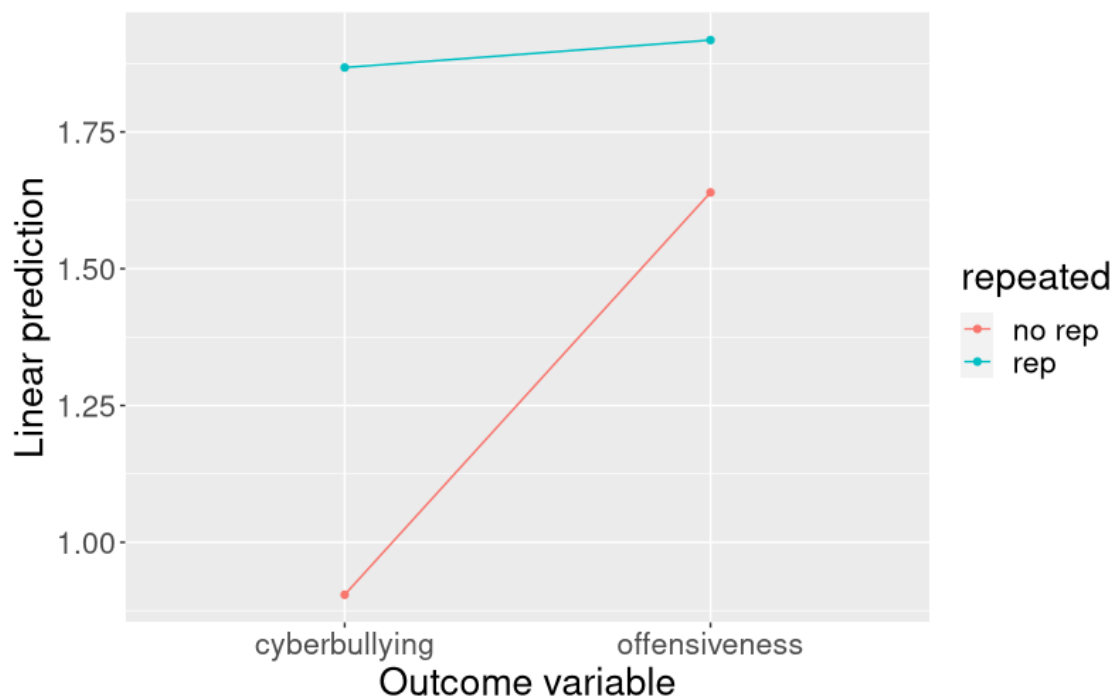
Figure 5-2. Dependent Variable x Repetition interaction effect

Gender x Repetition: Main effects for gender and repetition suggest that females assign higher ratings than males and the repeated dimension is rated with higher scores than no repeated dimension. The interaction effects displayed in Figure 5-3 for the gender and repetition factors suggests that females report the vignettes more highly than males overall, but to a greater extent for vignettes that involve repetition. For instance, for the non- repeated dimension, females significantly (p = 0.002) rate the vignettes more highly, M = 4.68, 95% CI [4.48, 4.88], in comparison to males, M = 4.20, 95% CI [3.99, 4.42] and females significantly (p <.0001) rate the vignettes more highly with repetition, M = 5.17, 95% CI [4.98, 5.35], in comparison to male predicted ratings for repetition M = 4.55, 95% CI [4.34, 4.75]. However, both females and males also significantly rate vignettes more highly if repetition is involved in the vignettes. Females significantly (p <.0001) give lower ratings for the no repetition dimension, M = 4.68, 95% CI [4.48, 4.88], than for the repetition dimension, M = 5.17, 95% CI [4.98, 5.35], and males also significantly (p <.0001) rate the no repetition dimension, M = 4.20, 95% CI [3.99, 4.42], lower than the repetition dimension, M = 4.55, 95% CI [4.34, 4.75]. These findings support the repetition main effect, indicating that vignettes that involve repetition predict higher ratings compared to vignettes without repetition. However, the

interaction effect between the variable dimensions suggest that females are more likely to rate the repeated dimension as more severe than males.
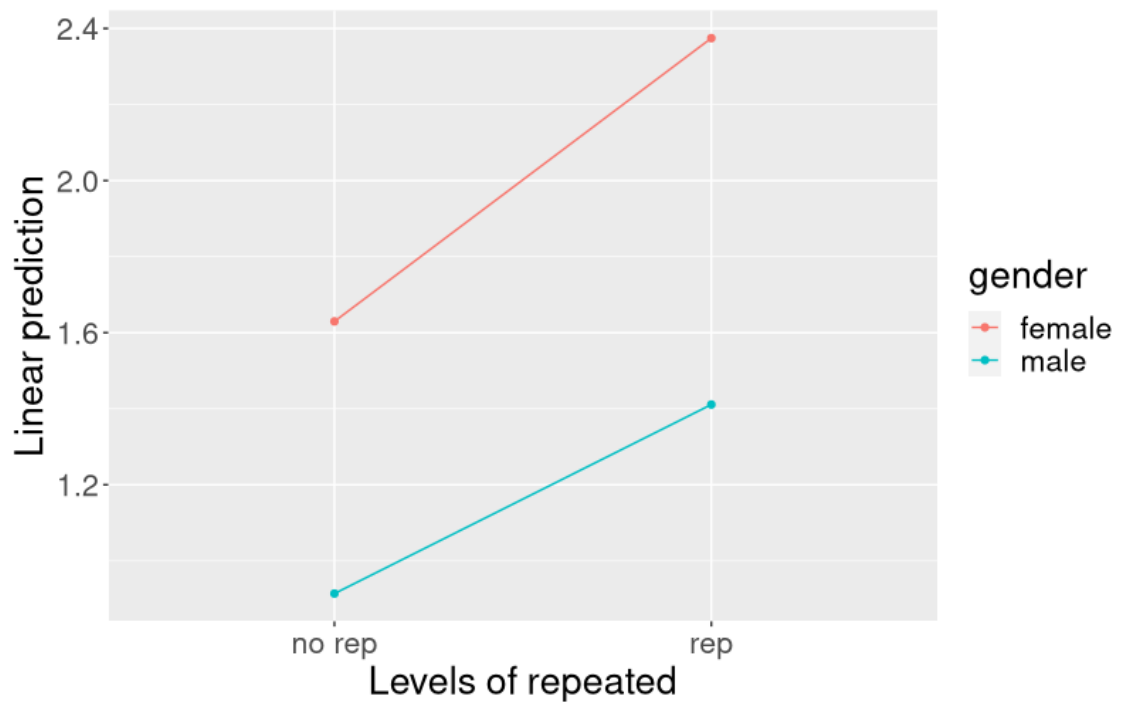
Figure 5-3. Gender x Repetition interaction effect

Gender x Humour scenario: An interaction between gender and humour scenarios suggests overall, females are assigning higher ratings than males for all humour scenario dimensions for both dependent variables. Specifically, Figure 5-4 suggests that banter dimension of the humour scenario factor is more likely to be rated with higher scores by females, as opposed to males. Although the remaining dimensions i.e., offensive joke, joke cyberbullying and cyberbullying, are assigned with greater ratings by females, the extent is less for these levels between females and males. 75.2% of the interaction deviance can be accounted for, $\chi^2(1) = 9.431$, $p = .002$, by the banter level between females and males. As this is a percentage of deviance, it would be suggested that overall, females are more likely than males to assign higher ratings for the banter dimension for both Dependent variables.
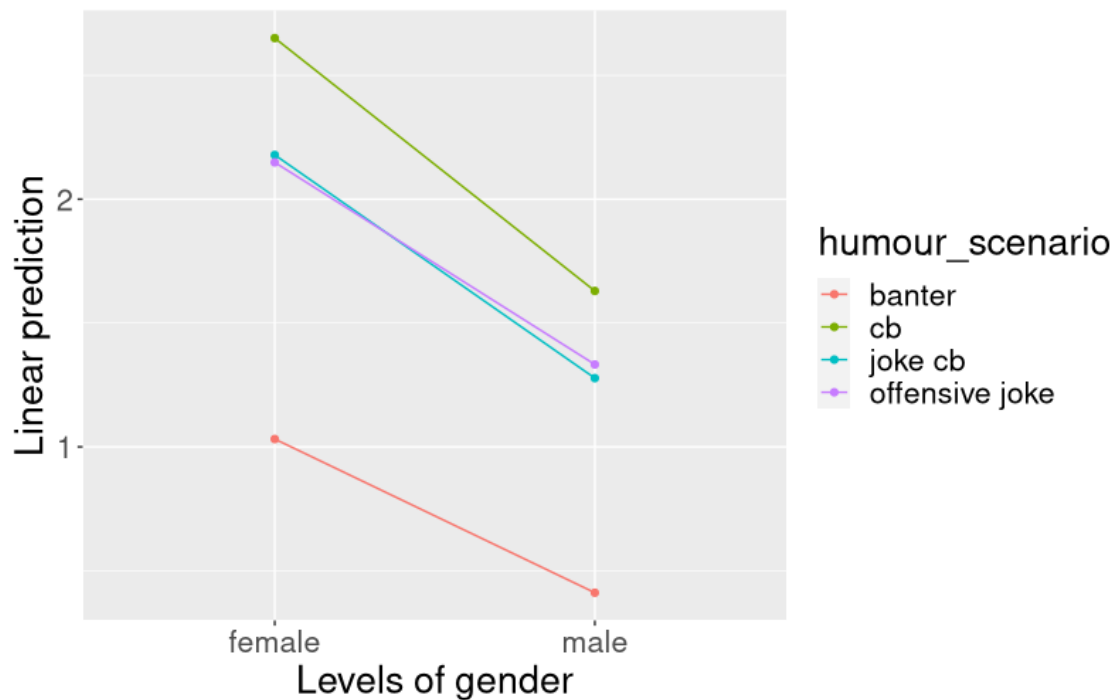
Figure 5-4. Gender x Humour scenario interaction effect

Audience x Repetition: The interaction between audience and repetition displayed in Figure 5-5 indicates a relationship between the combination of the audience and repetition dimensions. A significantly (p <.0001) larger audience effect is presented when repetition is present, *M* = 5.07, 95% CI [4.91, 5.24], compared to when there is no repetition, *M* = 4.53, 95% CI [4.35, 4.71], suggesting that the effect of audience is markedly greater when an act is repeated within a vignette. When there is no audience present in the vignettes, the DV ratings significantly (*p* = .0006) increase from no repetition, *M* = 4.36, 95% CI [4.18, 4.54], to repetition, *M* = 4.64, 95% CI [4.47, 4.82]. This suggests that the main effect of repetition is still present. When there is no repetition of an act within a vignette there is no significant (*p* = 0.20) difference between ratings for audience, *M* = 4.53, 95% CI [4.35, 4.71], and no audience, *M* = 4.36, 95% CI [4.18, 4.54]. However, when repetition is included in the vignettes, audience, *M* = 5.07, 95% CI [4.91, 5.24], as opposed to no audience, *M* = 4.64, 95% CI [4.47, 4.82], significantly (*p* <0.0001) predicts higher ratings for overall severity perception of the vignettes. This suggests that the audience main effect is being driven by the dimension of repetition and that the audience dimension ratings are increased by the presence of repetition.
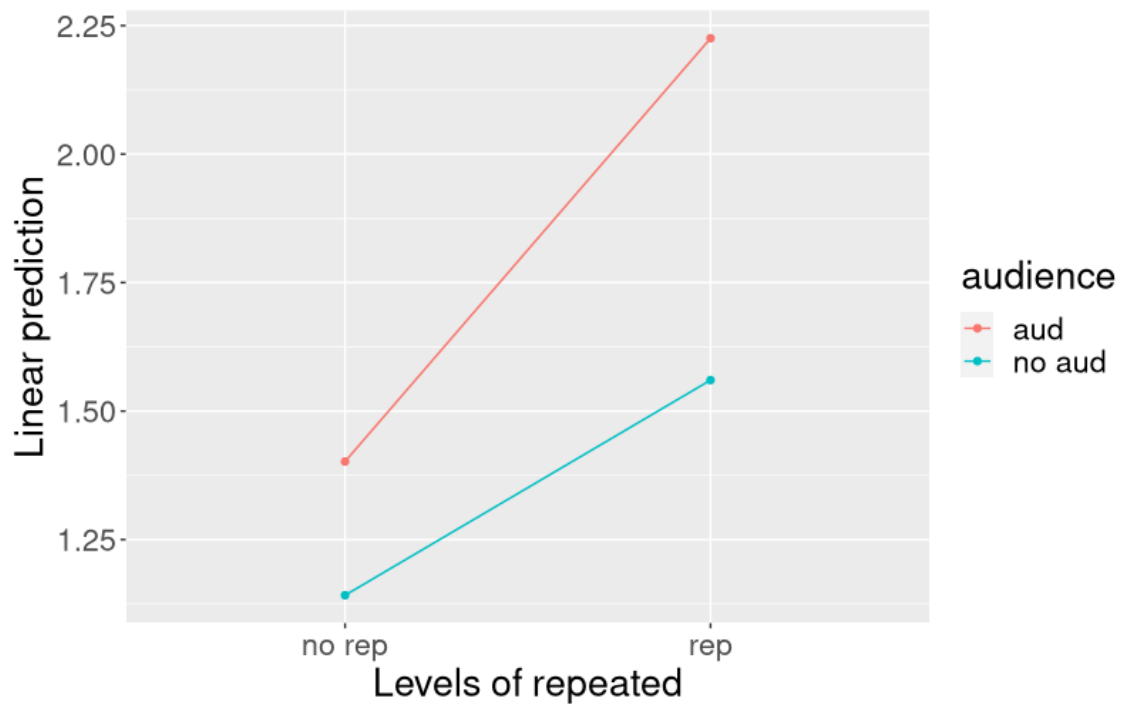
Figure 5-5. Audience x Repetition interaction effect

Audience x Humour Scenario: The interaction suggests that having an audience increases the ratings for both outcome variables for humour scenario factor levels offensive joke and cyberbullying and to a much lesser extent for joke cyberbullying and banter. Figure 5-6 shows the audience and humour scenario interaction. This interaction contrast, $\chi^2(1)$ = 9.302, p < .001, accounts for 87.6% of the interaction deviance, indicating that the data are very well-described by the proposed pattern. As this is the percentage of deviance, it would be suggested that overall, the presence of an audience is more likely to be assigned higher ratings for the outcome variables if the vignette involves the offensive joke and cyberbullying humour scenario dimensions.
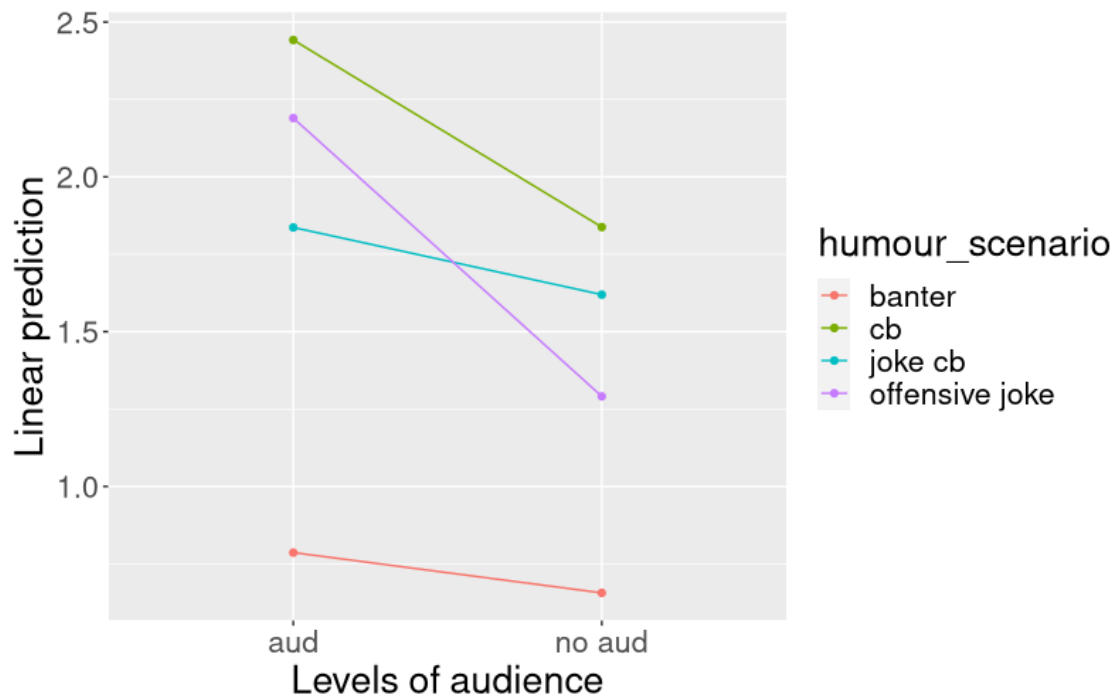
Figure 5-6. Audience x Humour Scenario interaction effect

Repetition x Humour scenario: Figure 5-7 shows the repetition and humour scenario interaction. The interaction between the repetition and humour scenario factors suggests that repetition has a greater impact on the outcome variables if the banter dimension is present in the vignette. The interaction suggests that having repetition increases the ratings for both outcome variables for humour scenario factor dimension banter and to a lesser extent for offensive joke, joke cyberbullying and cyberbullying. To further explore this interaction, we coded this pattern as a set of contrast coefficients and ran an interaction contrast to determine whether the observed data are very well described by this pattern. The interaction contrast, $\chi^2(1) = 7.568$, $p = .0059$, accounted for 94.1.% of interaction effect deviance, indicating that the interaction effect is largely determined by the greater repetition effect for banter relative to offensive joke, joke cyberbullying, and cyberbullying.
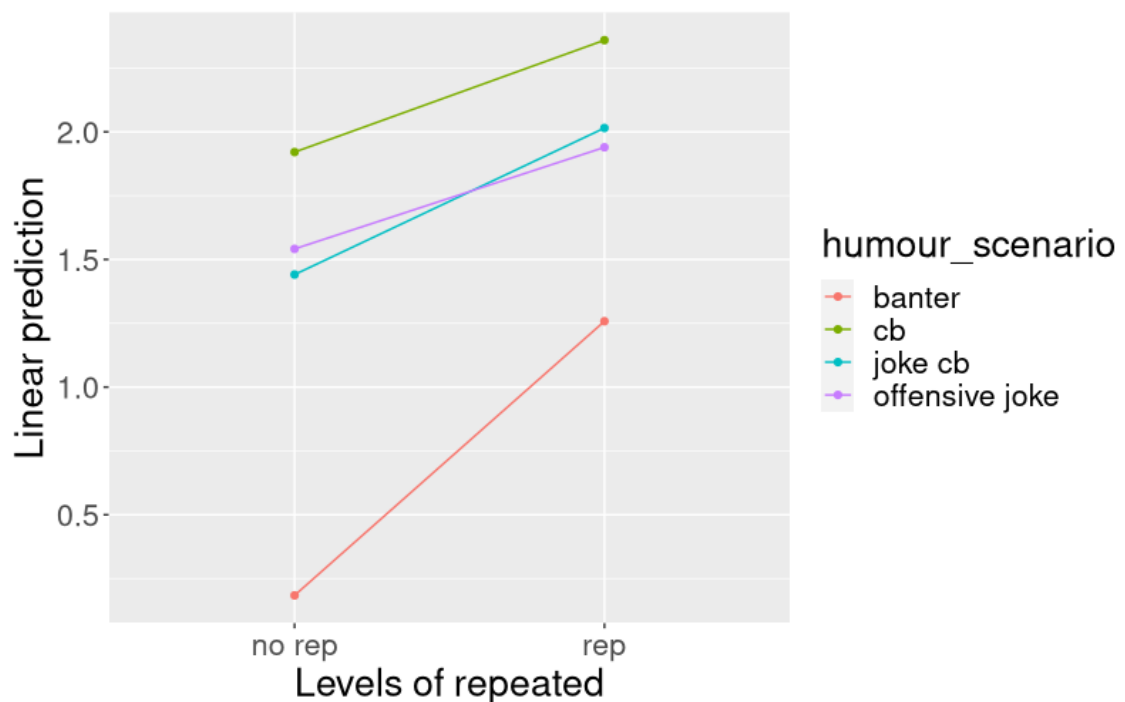
Figure 5-7. Repetition x Humour Scenario interaction effect

Covariate analysis

Covariate analysis was required for Study 2 because the full dataset is a combination of data that were collected at two time points, with one time point occurring during a Covid-19 pandemic. As societal behaviour was affected to such a great extent due to the at this time, it was considered to be a possible confound. Table 5-5 displays the demographic information for both sets of data.

Table 5-5. Demographic covariate information for dataset used for Study 2

Dataset 1 – Pre pandemic		Female	Male	Total
	N	138	155	293
Age	mean	13.06	13.33	13.33
	SD	1.07	1.22	1.16
Dataset 2 – During pandemic				
	N	47	16	63
Age	mean	13.53	13.00	13.40
	SD	1.83	1.55	1.76

Covariate analysis involved grouping the two datasets into a variable and including it into the two-way model to test the effects of the groups, pre-pandemic and during pandemic, on all factors within the model. The coefficient plot displayed in Figure 5-8

identifies the two models, the two-way model and the two-way model with the pandemic variable included. Findings indicate that the pandemic covariate had a minimal impact on the overall results of the two-way model. Furthermore, results suggest that there was a significant difference between the pandemic variable groups, which indicates the during pandemic group rate the vignettes as more severe than the pre pandemic group, $\chi^2(1) = 10.575$, $p = < .001$.
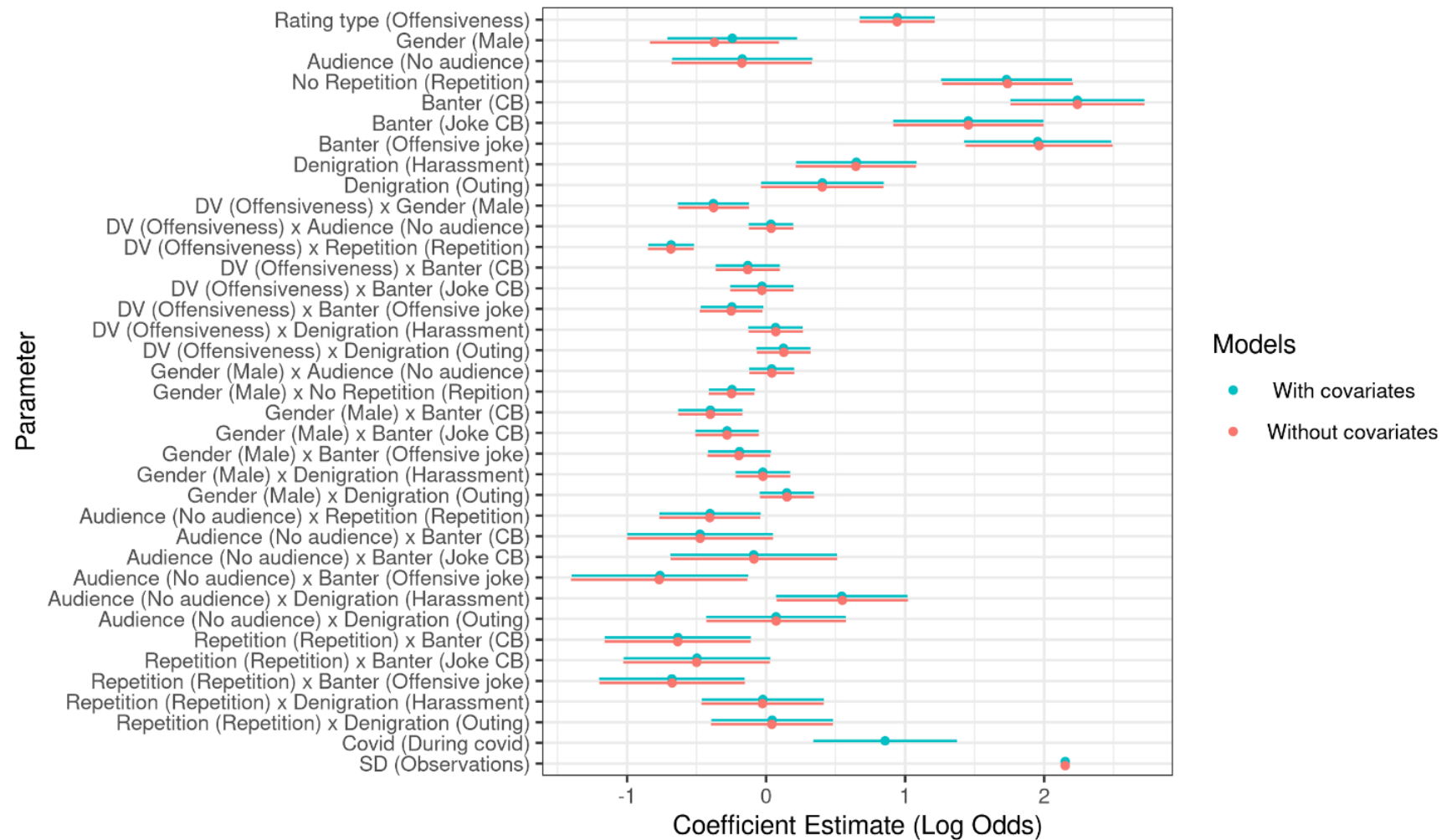
Figure 5-8. Dot whisker plot of pre and during pandemic covariate

5.5 Discussion

5.5.1 Study 2 Research questions and objectives

The aim of the Study 2 was to address research questions 2 and 3 by employing hypothetical vignettes to explore the relationship between humorous cyberbullying scenarios and severity perception, involving perceptions of offensiveness and how much an act is appraised to be cyberbullying.

RQ2. What factors influence how young people perceive the use of online aggressive humour that targets others?

RQ3. What factors influence how young people differentiate between humorous intent and cyberbullying?

To achieve this, the study applied research objectives 2, 3 and 4.

Research objective 2: Investigate the relationship between the variables of interest, which emerge from Study 1, and perceived **offensiveness** to gain a greater understanding of how humour impacts offensive perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying.

Research objective 3: Investigate the relationship between the variables of interest, which emerge from Study 1, and perceived cyberbullying to gain a greater understanding of how humour impacts the **identification of cyberbullying**.

Research objective 4: Examine the **gender difference** within research objectives 2 and 3.

Research objectives 2, 3, and 4 involved examining the potential effect of five factors upon the two outcome variables (i.e., perceived offensiveness and perceived cyberbullying). The five factors which were incorporated into the model were gender, presence of an audience, if the behaviour was repeated, the type of cyberbullying, and degree of humorous behaviour. Sequentially, the following section will address and discuss findings for each exploratory factor that was included in the model.

5.5.2 Gender

Results of Study 2 suggest females perceive the scenarios as more offensive and more likely to perceive the scenarios as cyberbullying activity than males. In addition, females were also found to perceive the scenarios as more offensive in comparison to perceiving the scenarios as cyberbullying. This suggests that for females, offensiveness is not a concrete factor needed to identify cyberbullying that is contextually humoristic. Males on the other hand, displayed no significant difference in their perception between the outcome variables, which suggests that males' perceptions of offensiveness align with their perception of the scenarios and identifying them as cyberbullying. This gender difference finding contributes a great deal to the literature which widely suggests from a traditional (Mishna, 2004) and cyberbullying (Dredge et al., 2014; Menesini et al., 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010; Pieschl et al., 2015) perspective that higher severity perception indicates identification of bullying and cyberbullying behaviours. Findings from this study suggest that females are more likely to perceive aggressive humour as offensive, even if the behaviour was perceived as not being cyberbullying. This suggests that for females, humour may be creating ambiguity around how to perceive aggressive behaviours that are humorous. For males, these findings indicate that aggressive humour is normalised to the extent that they are generally perceived as not offensive and therefore not as cyberbullying (Odenbring & Johansson, 2021; Thornberg & Delby, 2019). These findings in general suggest that the idea of humour being gendered, extends to the online environment.

There are multiple avenues of literature to consult from these findings. The overarching comprehension that females perceive online aggression depicted in the scenarios as more severe than males is replicated in the literature (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Campbell et al., 2013; Pettalia et al., 2013). When broadly considering online interaction, females have reported to perceive online aggression, not just cyberbullying, as more severe than males. A mixed methods study with British adolescents aged between 11 and 14 years old found that females, compared to males, were more likely to interpret online communication and "feel bad" despite not perceiving the event as cyberbullying activity (Bauman & Newman, 2013). Moreover, when specifically considering cyberbullying, Pettalia et al. (2013) support these findings with a sample of

Canadian adolescents aged 12 to 15 years old. Females in this study, irrespective of their cyberbullying involvement as victim or perpetrator, perceived cyberbullying as being more hurtful for a hypothetical victim than males. Research concerning victim only perspectives have found similar findings. A large-scale, cross-sectional study conducted in Australia with students aged 9-19 years old (mean age of 13.96), reported that female victims of traditional bullying and cyberbullying rated their experiences had a greater impact on their lives and perceived them to be harsher than male victims (Campbell et al., 2013). These findings suggest that female victims perceive cyberbullying as more severe than male victims, which could possibly mean that experiencing cyberbullying may elevate perceptions of severity – but only for females. As participant cyberbullying experiences were not included in Study 2, testing this possible rationale for the study's findings could not be explored. However, it would appear to be a plausible line of investigation as findings from Campbell et al. (2013) would suggest that participant experience would need to be controlled for when measuring severity perception of cyberbullying. Participant cyberbullying experiences is therefore included in the design and statistical model for Study 3 of this thesis.

A general view of the prominent gender differences in severity perception of cyberbullying and online aggression has been attributed to the indirect nature of cyberbullying (Card et al., 2008; Simmons, 2002). Cyberbullying is a general form of indirect bullying that has no physical contact, but allows people to 'out' others, exclude them from social groups, impersonate others, or share explicit information/media that may affect their reputation (Beran & Li, 2008; Ronis & Slaunwhite, 2019), which are all indirect ways to bully. Adolescent females are generally considered in the literature to be more inclined to participate in more relational and social forms of aggression (Bjorkqvist et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2010; Salmivalli & Kaukiainen, 2004), which can spill over into the digital world (Foody et al., 2019). For example, research conducted in Canada with participants aged 11-16 years old reported that females were more likely than males to have experienced relational forms of cyberbullying such as having rumours spread about them online or impersonation, whereas male youth were more likely than female youth to have been threatened online (Mishna et al., 2010). In consideration of this evidence, victims with previous experience of indirect cyberbullying (Bauman & Newman, 2013) report greater distress in comparison to those

who have no previous experience. A possible explanation for the gender differences in this study could be attributed to the idea that females experience indirect cyberbullying more than males (Ackers, 2012; Campbell et al., 2012; Sourander et al., 2010) and therefore perceive greater distress due to their previous experiences and understanding (Lucas-Molina et al., 2016). Consequently, some researchers have argued that relational bullying experiences that females encounter may lead to a blanket perception of bullying being more distressing in general (Camodeca et al., 2002, Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). These findings may have serious implications in term of females perceiving cyberbullying as more severe and therefore, experiencing more negative effects (Campbell et al., 2012). For example, Kowalski et al. (2014) report from a meta-analysis that the relationship between cybervictimisation and depression is greater in relation to females but not males suggesting that females are more susceptible to experiencing depression. On these grounds, findings from this Study indicate that females are more likely than males to experience negative outcomes from humoristic cyberbullying because they perceive them as more offensive even if their experiences are not perceived as cyberbullying.

5.5.3 Audience

The audience variable alone was not found to significantly predict greater rating perceptions for both outcome variables. However, exploratory results indicate that public cyberbullying may increase the severity perception of humorous cyberbullying if the behaviour is repeated, which is demonstrated by the significant interaction between the audience variable and repetition variables. Research has reported inconclusive findings as to how audience contributes to the perceived severity or impact of an act of cyberbullying, which has left the role of audience within cyberbullying as an ambiguous construct. Longitudinal research (Sticca & Perren, 2013) suggests that public cyberbullying is perceived by young people as being the most severe form of bullying in comparison to traditional bullying and private cyberbullying. Public cyberbullying has also been reported as being perceived as highly severe by adolescents in interview-based research (Ševčíkova et al., 2012) and cross-sectional research (Chen & Cheng, 2017; Pieschl et al., 2015), which has led some academics to suggest it should be

acknowledged within operational aspects of research and therefore the cyberbullying definition (Kofoed & Staksrud, 2019; Lucas-Molina et al., 2016; Peter & Peterman, 2018; Thomas et al., 2015). Explanations for the increased harshness of public cyberbullying is that cyberbullying with an audience leads to a contextual collapse (Vitak, 2012) that exposes the target to peer judgement (Horner et al., 2015), which can be highly embarrassing for the victim (Dredge et al., 2014) and can perpetuate the incident of victimisation (Dooley et al., 2009).

Alternatively, researchers have reported contradictory findings which portray public cyberbullying having minimal impact on young people's perceptions of severity (Campbell et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2015; Menesini et al., 2012; Palladino et al., 2017). Findings of this study support this literature as results indicate that audience as a construct within the vignettes did not predict greater severity perception. However, the results indicate severity perception of the vignettes was increase by audience if the behaviour had been repeated. This finding can be viewed from two viewpoints from the literature. Firstly, repetition has received strong support for being a firm criterion within the cyberbullying definition (Langos, 2012; Pieschl et al., 2015; Slonje & Smith, 2008), suggesting that cyberbullying and the perceived offensiveness of cyberbullying can be linked to the requirement for the behaviour to be repeated for identification purposes. Furthermore, repetition has been related to the intent criterion of the cyberbullying definition as it indicates the difference between a joke and the intention to cause harm through the online interaction (Langos, 2012; Menesini et al., 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010; Palladino et al., 2017). Considering this within the humoristic context of the vignettes, it seems viable to surmise that a single humoristic yet offensive interaction that is public may be considered as a joke but if that behaviour is repeated, it is more likely to be perceived as offensive and as cyberbullying behaviour. This perspective considers audience to be more of an important contextual factor which may increase the perceived severity of an act of cyberbullying.

An alternative perspective considered from the literature views repetition and audience to be similar concepts and therefore difficult to distinguish between in terms of conceptualisation. For instance, participants in Nocentini et al.'s (2010) focus group study reported that public cyberbullying may constitute as being repetitive due to the high amount of bystanders who potentially witness the incident in a perpetual way

(Dooley et al., 2009). Findings of this study contradict this perspective as both concepts were modelled within the analysis and were both found to interact, which demonstrates that the impact of audience in terms of severity perception is dependent on the act being repeated beforehand. Previous research which has reported an audience effect considered public cyberbullying as a single two-level factor (private vs public) (Sticca & Perren, 2013). As highlighted by Palladino et al. (2017), this methodological approach fails to account for any variance in severity perception which may be attributed to interactions between audience and other factors, such as repetition. Considering the reported evidence demonstrating repetition to be a firm reinforcer of intentionality (Fernández-Antelo & Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2018; Nocentini et al., 2010; Palladino et al., 2017), the influence that repetition has on public cyberbullying in terms of severity perception suggests that audience may also indirectly relate to how adolescents appraise intentionality. In conclusion, in conjunction with repetitive cyberbullying, audience increases the perceived severity of an incident a great deal for adolescents and consequently functions within the concept cyberbullying to some degree.

5.5.4 Repetition

There are two interaction findings related to the repetition variables within the model. The first interaction concerns the relationship between repetition and both dependent variables, as there was a significant difference between the levels of repetition and both outcome variables. The second interaction concerns gender differences between the levels of repetition. Both interactions will be discussed separately.

5.5.4.1 Dependent variables x Repetition

Findings from this study report that those hypothetical vignettes which contain repetition, as opposed to no repetition, will be rated with greater ratings for both outcome variables. Additionally, results illustrate there is a difference between both outcome variables in relation specifically to the no repetition dimension in that a single incident can be simultaneously perceived as highly offensive yet less likely to be perceived as cyberbullying. In the context of vignettes, it can be viewed that one directed act from one individual to another that is aggressive and humoristic in nature,

can still be perceived as offensive but less likely as cyberbullying. This general concept aligns with literature which considers repetition of an aggressive online interaction to be considered as a definitional criterion of cyberbullying (Alipan et al., 2020; Langos, 2012; Menin et al., 2021; Pieschl et al., 2015). In the context of the hypothetical humoristic vignettes utilised in this study, the clear indication that repetition does play a role during severity perception is supported by findings of Study 1 and by research which suggests that repetition helps to distinguish between a single joke and repetitive cyberbullying as it displays intent to cause harm (Acker, 2012; Langos, 2012; Menesini et al., 2012). This suggests that from a victim or bystanders' perspective, repetition aids with identifying if the incident is cyberbullying or a joke. Furthermore, there is some merit in considering how recognising repetition helps with evaluating perpetrator intent (Fernández-Antelo & Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2018), which can be ambiguous in the online environment (Baas et al., 2013). Without social indicators and social context, online humour social interactions can be difficult to interpret for young people from a victim, perpetrator, and bystander perspective (Aoyama et al., 2011; Pelfrey Jr., & Weber, 2014), especially if humour is involved in the interaction. From this, it could be supposed that an aggressively humorous, first-time online interaction may be perceived as ambiguously offensive by the recipient but if the act is repeated again, it becomes more apparent that the act has harmful intent. This study demonstrates that repetition can be a clear indicator of severity of an incident in terms of offensiveness and if the incident is cyberbullying, which could be applied in future interventions concerning cyberbullying identification.

The finding that the concept of repetition is used by adolescents to recognise aggressive online acts as cyberbullying is unsubstantiated to some extent within the literature. For instance, some researchers consider repetition to being a subsidiary definitional cyberbullying criterion (Smith et al., 2013) or a potentially irrelevant construct within the context of online communication and cyberbullying (Kofoed & Staksrud, 2019; Lucas-Molina et al., 2016; Peter & Peterman, 2018). Further rationale for both of these viewpoints is derived from the proposition that one act of online aggression has the ability to be harmful (Dredge et al., 2014; Vandebosch & VanCleemput, 2008) and one incident also being viewed by multiple bystanders, which could be viewed as repetitive incidents (Dooley et al., 2009; Dredge et al., 2014;

Nocentini et al., 2010). The findings of this study should be considered within the boundaries of the vignettes, which are contextually based on humoristic cyberbullying. This means that repetition of an attack of online aggression is more likely to be recognised as cyberbullying if the attack was contextually humoristic, therefore the dimension of repetition could be more related to the humorous form of cyberbullying. Additionally, the hypothetical vignettes used for this study clearly identified repetition by stating that the victim in the scenario had or had not been previously targeted by the perpetrator before. Therefore, results concerning repetition in this study pertain to these two dimensions and not to how many bystanders witnessed the event, which was controlled for by the audience factor. Consequently, these findings may go some way to evidence that the construct of repetition in the online environment is applicable within the definition of cyberbullying if the event is for the purpose of a joke.

5.5.4.2 Gender x Repetition interaction

The exploratory angle of the analysis revealed an interaction effect between repetition and gender. Results indicate that although males and females rated the vignettes with repetition as more severe, females were much more inclined to rate the vignettes as higher severity if repetition was present. This suggests that females use repetition more than males as an indicator of severity. As previously stated, evidence demonstrates that a repeated act of targeted online aggression is perceived as more offensive than a single act and young people recognise the construct of repetition in the cyberbullying definition (Fernández-Antelo & Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2018; Nocentini et al., 2010; Palladino et al., 2017; Pieschl et al., 2015). This finding should be considered within the humoristic context of the vignettes. Consequently, this leads to two potential explanations. Firstly, this finding may be a reflection of females' susceptibility to perceive aggressive humour as more severe than males because females struggle more to identify the interaction as benign, and without harmful intent. Due to this, females may rely more on indicators of intent, such as repetition (Menesinin et al., 2012), which leads them to perceive repetitive online interactions that use aggressive humour as having intent to cause harm and therefore are more severe. Secondly, it may be possible that males are more prone to experiencing aggressive humour (Bergen, 2020; Henriksen

& Bengstsson, 2018; Kowalski, 2003) than females and therefore are more desensitised to experiencing these types of interactions. Although it would appear that females and males use repetition to aid their appraisal of the situation from these findings, males may not need to use repetition to the same extent as females because they are more likely to perceive the interaction as benign. Both explanations suggest that these findings indicate a gender bias of aggressive humour severity perception, which requires further investigation.

5.5.5 Cyberbullying Type

There were no findings from analysis that demonstrate a relationship between severity perception of humoristic cyberbullying and type of cyberbullying behaviour. Furthermore, no interaction between cyberbullying type and any of the other variables in the model was found. Previous literature has indicated varying outcomes when attempting to explore a link between specific forms of cyberbullying to higher severity perception ratings. For example, Pieschl et al. (2015) found outing to be the most consistently distressing type of cyberbullying reported by participants. Chen and Cheng (2017) however, reported impersonation to be the most severe type of cyberbullying. Furthermore, Chen and Cheng (2017) discussed their findings in terms of higher severity perception for types of cyberbullying being mediated by the presence of an audience. Despite having the capability to test this assumption, no such relationship between type of behaviour and audience effect was found in this Study.

A potential explanation for finding no relationship between perceived severity and type of cyberbullying is that severity perception of humoristic scenarios is a more complex and nuanced challenge. The vignettes used within this study were designed to depict the three types of cyberbullying selected for this study (i.e., outing, denigration, and harassment). However, the vignettes were designed and based on qualitative findings of Study 1 to ensure that they depicted realistic scenarios. This led to the vignettes involving cyberbullying behaviours that aligned with a specific type of cyberbullying but also behaviours that are perpetrated using different types of formats such as text/verbal, media (photos and video), or a combination of both. For example, one of the harassment vignettes involved making insults about a victim's photo, one of

the outing vignettes was based on a secret being shared in a group chat and one of the denigration vignettes involved making negative comments on a video that had been taken of a victim. Research has consistently demonstrated that visual cyberbullying (photos and videos) is perceived as more severe than text-based cyberbullying (Nocentini et al., 2010; Pieschl et al., 2013; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2008). Although this Study may have been restricted by the design to control for the varying ways in which different types of cyberbullying can be perpetrated, future research may produce further insight into severity perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying.

5.5.6 Humour scenarios

The humour scenario variable was designed to be utilised within the vignettes as an exploratory variable to test if varying degrees of aggressive humour have relationships with the other variables within the experimental framework. The manipulation within the humour scenario variable involved interactions between in-group members and out-group members in order to incorporate social context. The outcome of analysis determined three interactions between a specific level or levels of the humour scenario variable and three other variables (i.e., gender, audience, and repetition). Each interaction will be discussed separately.

5.5.6.1 Gender x Humour Scenario

The relationship found between gender and humour scenario demonstrates that females are more likely than males to perceive the lowest level of aggression within the banter variable as being more severe. The main aim of the banter level within the humour scenario variable was to demonstrate an aggressive humour interaction between friends. Previous literature indicates that aggressive humour between friends is an acceptable and benign interaction because group norms dictate the understanding that there is no intent to cause harm (Gorman & Jordan, 2015; Odenbring & Johansson, 2021). The interaction between gender and humour scenarios result suggests for the online environment, former research findings may be more applicable to males. This result potentially is a precursor to the gender findings discussed earlier (section 5.5.2), which outlines how females perceive online banter or teasing as more severe and are

more likely to perceive the hostile humour as offensive than perceive it as an actual act of cyberbullying. Essentially, this finding alongside this interaction results suggest that hostile humour behaviours such as banter and teasing are gendered to the extent that males and females perceive this type of humour differently.

This interaction outcome indicates that males are more inclined to evaluate hostile humour between friends as benign and therefore humorous. Moreover, for females, hostile humour is not normalised within friendship groups and so appraisals of this behaviour can lead to perceiving the violation of identity as malign and therefore not humorous. This raises two contrasting questions concerning the significance of intentionality. Are females struggling to perceive the intent behind the banter, or do females perceive the intent as benign from the perpetrators perspective but feel offended for other reasons? Females have been reported to perceive teasing between non-friends as more severe males (Jones et al., 2005; Slater & Tiggeman, 2011). It also makes logical sense that females perceive teasing or banter more offensively as young males are more likely to tease one another and use aggressive humour (Dowling, 2013; McGhee & Lloyd, 1981; Rose et al., 2016), which may normalise the process of interpreting aggressive humour as benign (Gorman & Jordan, 2015; Odenbring & Johansson, 2021). This interaction finding which depicts females as perceiving banter as more severe than males supports this gender difference of hostile humour interpretation. Moreover, it contributes to this understanding by illustrating that for females, the online environment impacts on the severity perception of hostile aggression, even when the interaction occurs between friends. However, the vignettes can only indicate that there is a difference in perception between males and females and so it is unclear to what extent this difference is and what factor(s) are potentially creating this difference.

The BVT (Warren & McGraw, 2015; 2016) framework considers perceptual differences of violations based on group norms and socially accepted behaviour. With regard to this gender differences interaction, this finding suggests that male and female group norms differ to the extent that they perceive online hostile humour differently. A form of psychological distance and/or social distance could potentially be creating ambiguity during the appraisal of the violation for females, which perhaps influences females to perceive the banter that is occurring in vignettes as more offensive than

benign. What can be inferred from implementing BVT to this finding is that social context such as in-group commitment is less likely to impact female's appraisal of hostile humour as being benign, as demonstrated by the higher degree of severity perception for banter that is between friends. In line with social distance related to closeness to content, it could be proposed that the online environment has created a degree of ambiguity. Therefore, the intent of the friend who committed the banter is unclear, leading to the identity violation being perceived as more malign than benign. Additionally, this may relate to the spatial/geographical distance between the friends in the vignettes which involves the lack of social indicators (Brown et al., 1987) and contextual cues (Sproull & Kiesler, 1991). Potentially, there is a high chance that a combination of these factors are mediating one another for females more than they are males, which this research study has been unable to test. However, what can be clearly viewed from this interaction finding is that severity perceptions of aggressive humour for females are less likely to be mediated by the social construct of friendship groups than males. To the author's knowledge, this has not been reported in any previous literature to date.

5.5.6.2 Audience x Humour Scenario

The humour scenario and audience relationship indicates that the presence of an audience within a vignette is more likely to have an impact on severity perception if the interaction involves the offensive joke and cyberbullying humour scenario dimensions. This suggests that if an audience is present, offensive jokes and cyberbullying are more likely to be perceived as more severe. This interaction should be considered within the context of what these levels depict separately. The offensive joke level across the vignettes portrays a complex social interaction that involves a hostile humoristic event between a perpetrator and a victim. The perpetrator is unknown to the victim but is known to a friend of the victim. The perpetrator knows the victim through a friend, who shares the content with the perpetrator that the joke is based on. This social situation that involves an out-group member being brought into in-group banter was described in the focus groups conducted in Study 1, as a common issue that arises between friends that links friendly banter to unfriendly, offensive banter. This social situation is

ambiguous as there is a social connection between the victim and the perpetrator and therefore the perception of the violation is dependent on the social norms of the individuals concerned (i.e., whether it is acceptable). This interaction suggests that having an audience skews these social norms to the extent that having unknown bystanders witness the interaction makes the interaction more severe or offensive.

Contextually, there is limited comparable literature that supports this interaction as there are multiple complex aspects to unpick within the interaction that need to be considered (i.e., the social roles of the individuals involved in the incident and the element of hostile humour). The interaction displays a clear association between the social incident depicted in the vignette and an audience witnessing that event in terms of its perceived severity. Young people have been found to rate public cyberbullying as being much worse than private cyberbullying in previous literature (Sticca & Perren, 2013). This literature supports this interaction finding, as the cyberbullying level as well as the offensive joke level was also found to be perceived as more severe if the event occurred with an audience present. Public, as opposed to private, cyberbullying can potentially mean greater damage to a victim in terms of the unlimited amount of people who are viewing the incident. When an attack is disseminated so widely, the victim loses control over the situation in terms of who can see the attack, which leads to a convergence of the online and offline communities. This loss of control has been reported to be the key cause to the devastation for the victim (Sticca & Perren, 2013; Ševčíkova et al., 2012) and may be linked to why participants perceived the offensive joke level as much more severe when an audience was present. If the context of the social situation is taken into account, an audience may be representing where the line of acceptability is drawn. In this interaction, the audience effect is demonstrating that when there is no audience, severity is lower, and the victim of the attack views the hostile humour as less harmful and more benign. This could be due to social commitment created by the link between social groups (e.g., an individual who is friends with both the victim and the perpetrator). When there is no audience in this situation, the wider online community cannot view the attack, which means that the misdemeanour initially created by the friend is viewed as more acceptable. This finding demonstrates the importance of social context of online communication, especially when aggressive humour is involved.

Public cyberbullying, although potentially damaging, is a complex and ambiguous social construct to consider. Researchers logically postulate that cyberbullying that is committed with an audience has clear intent to cause harm due to its potential to cause greater harm, and therefore it is assumed that a victim of public cyberbullying perceives the interaction as offensive (Fernández-Antelo et al., 2020; Festl, 2016). Evidence for this rationale can be viewed from research that reports that young people perceive public cyberbullying to be highly severe (Pieschl et al., 2015; Sticca & Perren, 2013; Ševčíkova et al., 2012). However, Fernández-Antelo et al. (2020) found that behaviours that look like public cyberbullying can be prosocial and harmless. Their cross-sectional study involved a large sample of 2,148 Spanish adolescents aged between 12 and 16 years old and aimed to explore the perceptual structure of cyberbullying from a victims' perspective. Using Exploratory Factor Analysis, the result depicted that public cyberbullying was an important factor that is used to identify if a behaviour is cyberbullying, which aligns with previous literature that found the same outcomes for both public and private cyberbullying (Pieschl et al., 2015; Sticca & Perren, 2013). Another factor that emerged from the analysis integrated forms of aggressive behaviour that involves verbal aggression, spreading false rumours, or visual publication and dissemination of media as being behaviours that are fun and harmless and serve to promote social relationships. This kind of behaviour perhaps aligns with the definitions of teasing and banter behaviour (Dynel, 2008; Kowalski et al., 2001; Mills & Babrow, 2003) as it presents a social interaction that involves both play and aggression. Fernández-Antelo et al. (2020) suggest that this factor may be related to the strength of the peer the group. This explanation is supported by the interaction found between audience and offensive joke as the hostile humour between friends (i.e., the banter level), was found not to be impacted by an audience being present, and so more acceptable and perceived as less offensive. However, an increase in severity was reported when an out-group member was introduced to in-group banter and that banter was made public by the out-group member. Here, by making the banter public, the line of acceptability may have been crossed and the act has perhaps transformed from harmless banter to hurtful public cyberbullying.

5.5.6.3 Repetition x Humour Scenario

The interaction effect between repetition and humour scenario means that the lowest level of the humour scenario variable, banter, is more likely to be rated with higher scores for perceived offensiveness and as cyberbullying when repetition is present. This interaction suggests there is a meaningful shift of perception between single acts of banter and repetitive banter, providing further support for repetition being a clear indicator of increased severity overall. What this finding also demonstrates is that repetition is an indicator of perceived severity between friends, as the banter level involves hostile humour that is between friends. From a BVT (Warren & McGraw, 2015) perspective, a humorous interaction that involves a violation of identity (i.e., banter or teasing) that occurs between friends is perceived as benign and is therefore more likely to be perceived as humorous. If that violation becomes repetitive, then the interaction is perceived as more malign and so offensive. Within the framework of BVT, receiving repeated online teasing by a friend crossed the line between benign and malign.

This interaction indicates that there is line within a friendship between offensive banter and friendly banter that is crossed when hostile humour is repeated. As previously discussed for the multiple interactions that involve repetition, a strong argument for this finding suggests repetition of an act represents intentionality of the perpetrator to cause harm through cyberbullying (Baas et al., 2013; Nocentini et al., 2010; Palladino et al., 2017). This interaction contributes to these arguments as it demonstrates that appraisals of online banter and teasing between friendships is also potentially mediated by repetition. Previous literature generally supports the consensus that face-to-face banter and teasing between members of the same social group is a prosocial, benign activity (Gorman & Jordan, 2015; Keltner et al., 2001; Odenbring & Johanson, 2021). It is unclear how repetitive teasing may change that dynamic, as there is limited research that has considered the complexity of repetitive teasing within the social structure of friendships. Findings from Study 1 did report that participants felt that repetitive banter could turn into banter that is offensive between friends. A focus group study with young people also identified that repetitive online jokes between friends may indicate more severity from a victims' perspective (Baas et al., 2013). There are clear differences between the online and face-to-face environment which may alter how

banter between friends is perceived. For instance, the main difference is the lack of verbal and nonverbal redressive cues (Brown et al., 1987; Sproull & Kiesler; 1991), which are usually used to evaluate the intent of the perpetrator (Dehue et al., 2008). Without these, it could be viewed that repetition becomes a more significant characteristic to use to appraise an incident of aggressive humour.

The findings of this interaction indicate that online teasing and banter becomes more severely perceived by the victim when the act becomes repetitive. To an extent, this finding supports the definition of bullying and cyberbullying (Olweus, 2013) as it confirms that a one-off event is more likely to be a joke than an act of intentional aggression. There is some uncertainty around this type of situation being perceived as cyberbullying as the event involves two friends who are assumed to be of equal power, which has been conceptualised as a rationale for why banter between friends is viewed as harmless (Vandebosch & Van Cleeput, 2008). Within this assumption, it would be viewed that friends of equal power would communicate with one another if the banter became overly offensive due to repetition, and the recipient of the banter would inform their friend to stop their offensive behaviour. Evidence from Study 1 of this thesis suggests that banter between friends that is perceived by the recipient as offensive can be harmful because in some contexts, a young person is unable to communicate their feeling of being offended. In this instance, the reluctance to voice their feelings is based on fear of rejection from the friendship group, which is viewed by Olweus (2013) as a power imbalance. This potentially could explain why adolescents in Douglass and colleagues' (2016) study reported negative consequences of racist teasing that was reported to be general prosocial behaviour between friends. This form of bullying and cyberbullying within friendships is quite an ambiguous and hidden form of inter-relational aggression to experience (from a victim's perspective) or equally, recognise (from a perpetrator's perspective). Findings from this interaction, however, potentially suggest that online banter becomes cyberbullying between friends when the banter is repeated. Due to a lack of research concerning this area of adolescent social interaction it is unclear if this explanation reflects the real-world experiences of young people. It is evident that this finding and potential explanation of it warrant further research. If a young person is experiencing repetitive teasing by a friend and feel they are unable to

communicate that, then they will likely continue experiencing that stream of offensive content, potentially leading to an even greater negative impact.

5.6 Conclusion

Multilevel modelling of the vignette data revealed a number of findings. A key finding from this Study suggests that online aggressive humour is gendered, as females perceive the hypothetical vignettes with greater severity than males overall. Furthermore, females perceived the vignettes as more offensive than they do as cyberbullying behaviour. Alternatively, males were found to have lower severity perception of the vignettes, indicating that aggressive humour may be more of a common place and normalised social construct for males. These findings are supported in the literature (Bauman & Newman, 2013) and are discussed in relation to the previous literature, which rationalises how females may be at greater risk of experiencing the negative outcomes of online hostile humour as they are more likely to perceive this interaction as more offensive (Campbell et al., 2012; Kowalski et al., 2014). Audience alone was not found to increase severity perception in this Study. However, audience was found to have a relationship with repetition, which indicates that audience can increase the severity of online aggressive humour behaviours when the interaction had been repeated previously.

Repetition as a single variable was found to increase severity perceptions of the vignettes and was also found to be a factor that is more likely to be used by females to perceive aggressive humour as more severe. The humour scenario variable, which involved manipulations of perpetrator group membership, was found to have relationships with gender, audience, and repetition. The findings from these relationships suggest that the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim is central to evaluating the severity of an online aggressive humour interaction, which is a highly variable and complex process.

In summary, gender, repetition, repetitive public interactions, and social relationships were all found to be factors which influence how young people appraise cyberbanter and cyberteasing. Study 3 will attempt to explore and validate these findings with an older sample population through replication

Chapter 6 – Study 3

6.1 Introduction

Chapter 6 provides the entirety of the third and final study of this thesis. Study 3 achieves three purposes. First, Study 3 replicates the design of Study 2, and so enhances the viability of the hypothetical vignettes which were developed for the purpose of exploring severity perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying. Second, Study 3 investigates an older age group and so provides findings which can be compared between a younger (11- to 16-year-old) and an older (16- to 21-year-old) population. Finally, Study 3 incorporates an additional three constructs into the initial Study 2 design with the aim of controlling for any influence they may have on the factors within the model. These constructs are: 1) the role of cyberbullying victims and perpetrators, and 2) the impact of having an aggressive humour style. This chapter initially reviews and evaluates age-related cyberbullying literature and continues on to examine literature related to the role of cyberbullying victims and perpetrators, and aggressive humour styles. Despite a lack of research attention for older adolescents and emerging adults (Cassidy et al., 2013), this population do experience and perpetrate cyberbullying (Beebe, 2010; Watts et al., 2017). Further research attention is required in this field of literature to gain greater understanding of the motivations attributed to cyberbullying – in particular humour and fun (Guerra et al., 2011; Harrison, Hulme, & Fox, 2022; Postigo et al., 2019).

Initially, cyberbullying literature concerning older sample populations is reviewed, covering prevalence rates and the similarities and differences between findings for younger and older populations. A shift of literature focus leads to examining an individual differences perspective of humour styles (Martin et al., 2003). An overview of humour styles follows on to a concentrated consideration for aggressive humour style literature and relevant topic areas of aggressive humour behaviours, teasing and banter, and cyberbullying. This literature provides an argument for including a measure of aggressive humour style in the Study 3. The overall literature review ends with a comprehensive summary and evaluation of previous experience of cyberbullying roles, victims and perpetrators, and severity perceptions of cyberbullying. As research demonstrates conflicting findings concerning the relationship between having been involved as a victim or perpetrator of cyberbullying and severity perception of

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experiencing cyberbullying (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Cheng & Cheng, 2017), Study 3 aims to contribute to this area of literature from the contextual standpoint of online aggressive humour by including a valid measure of cyberbullying victimisation and perpetrator.

The literature review leads onto a methodology section which provides details of the design, participants involved in the study, the instruments used to measure the three new constructs and the procedure of the study. Results of the multilevel analysis and all main and interaction effects are summarised, including a covariate analysis of the additional constructs. A discussion of the duplicate results, new results, and covariate analysis findings are reviewed alongside previous literature.

6.1.1 Age differences

To gain a greater understanding of cyberbullying as a construct, exploratory research needs to be considered from a broad perspective. Researching cyberbullying in terms of different age groups is highly beneficial to understanding how the behaviour evolves as young people develop. Although there is a distinct focus on child and adolescent activity in the literature, cyberbullying is an aggressive behaviour which occurs post adolescence and can have damaging effects on mental health (Kowalski et al., 2012; Skilbred-Fjeld et al., 2020). Some age differences between traditional bullying and cyberbullying have been identified, with traditional bullying victimisation being reported to gradually reduce between the ages of 12-17 (Ortega et al., 2009) and cyberbullying to peak at around 14 years old (Ortega et al., 2009; Sumter et al., 2012). Alternative research has reported inconclusive findings concerning the relationship between age and cyberbullying (Campbell, 2013; Camerini et al., 2020). Furthermore, although cyberbullying may peak during adolescence, cyberbullying is a highly prevalent behaviour to experience as a young adult (Beebe, 2010; MacDonald & Roberts-Pittman, 2010; Watts et al., 2017). As the majority of cyberbullying research concerns the younger population, a great deal of cyberbullying prevalence research findings concerns adolescent activity as opposed to the emerging adult population. Therefore, a gap in the cyberbullying literature concerning older adolescents and emerging adults is present (Cassidy et al., 2013). Study 3 of this thesis aims to contribute to this field of literature

by exploring severity perceptions of online aggressive humour with an older adolescent and emerging adult population.

One of the issues related to this gap in the literature pertains to how the age range of adolescents is conceptualised. A scoping review of 159 cyberbullying studies found that different studies define the age range of adolescence differently, with studies stating adolescence ends variously at 15, 17, or 18 years old (Brochado et al., 2017). This suggests that research considers the age range of adolescents to have blanket coverage of varying ages due to the variation in the definition of an adolescent, when some research only reports findings up to the age of 15 (Brochado et al., 2017). The 'emerging adults' group, starting at the age of 18 is also considered as an under researched area (Cassidy et al., 2013; Kowalski et al., 2012). Although there is some conceptual variation within the literature, the transitional period between adolescence and young adulthood, considered to be approximately 25 years old (Beran et al., 2012), covers a broad developmental stage. Cyberbullying studies that recruit participants at 18 years old and upwards generally obtains samples from universities (as undergraduate focused research) or consider cyberbullying behaviours in the workplace (Kowalski et al., 2019).

Evidence suggests that emerging adults are involved in cyberbullying, with an American undergraduate study finding approximately half the participants reporting being a victim of cyberbullying once or twice during their time at university (Beebe, 2010) and 22.5% of Turkish participants in Dilmac's (2009) study reporting perpetrating cyberbullying at least once during their time at university. However, similar to adolescent research (Brochado et al., 2017; Kowalski et al., 2019), prevalence rates generally vary according to cultural differences, definitional use, scales used, and what recall cut-off points were used within scales. In a general sense, Kowalski et al. (2019) suggests there are similar role frequencies between adolescents and undergraduates with a greater weight for victimisation than perpetration. The literature provides a strong argument demonstrating the longevity of victimisation, with victims of school cyberbullying tending to also be victims of cyberbullying at higher education institutions (Beran et al., 2012; Chapell et al., 2006; Selkie et al., 2015). For instance, a study conducted with Canadian and American University students (mean age of 21.1), reported victims of online and offline bullying were more likely to be victims during college, with the same relationship reported for perpetrators (Beran et al., 2012). A

relationship was also demonstrated with the type of bullying used by perpetrators online or offline, illustrating continuity of perpetrator preference. Comparable longitudinal results were reported for a younger age group which tracked cyberbullying behaviours with Australian participants aged between 14 and 15 years old, and again when they were 18-19 years old (Hemphill & Heerde, 2014). Findings from this study identified that cyberbullying perpetration in later adolescence was predicted by traditional bullying perpetration at early adolescence. Literature has also considered the cyberbully/victim role, with findings demonstrating a connection between cyberperpetrators as adolescents experiencing victimisation as emerging adults (Ak et al., 2015; Kraft & Wang, 2010). This continuation of experiences as a victim or perpetrator suggests that despite the behaviour having prevalence rates that peak and trough, the behaviour can be attributed to individuals who seem to be inherently predictable with how they are involved with bullying and cyberbullying as they age.

Considerably high prevalence rates for cyberbully/victims have been identified for young adults in some research, such as Brack and Caltabiano (2014) who reported 62% to identify with this role. Although some research reports males to be both victims and perpetrators of cyberbullying (Akbulut & Eristi, 2011), other research reports males identifying more closely with the perpetrator role and females as more likely to be the victims (Dilmaç, 2009; Skilbred-Fjeld et al., 2020). No clear gender differences have been reported for undergraduate aged participants as contrasting findings allude to alternative possibilities, however, some inferences can be found from the limited research that has focused on gender differences.

Faucher et al. (2014) conducted an extensive 100 item survey study to explore possible gender differences of cyberbullying experiences with a Canadian undergraduate sample of 1,733 participants. In this Study 25.4% of the males and 23.8% of the females reported to having been victims of cyberbullying in the last year while 6.6% of males and 4.5% of females reported to have perpetrated cyberbullying in the same timeframe. More females reported that they were victimised by a friend or an acquaintance, and more males reported they were victimised by a stranger. Same gendered perpetration was found to be more common for those victims who knew the individual who cyberbullied them, with females stating that the perpetrator was someone who was considered to be a friend. Females also reported to be more likely

to be cyberbullied on social networking sites and text messages than males, who reported to be more likely to be victimised in non-course related blogs, forums, gaming, or chat room. Females in the Faucher et al. (2014) sample had a greater propensity to report the negative impacts of their victimisation experiences, with the greatest difference reported for mental health issues for females. Finally, females and males were both asked for their perceived reasons for their victimisation. Amongst an array of possible motivations, including interpersonal issues, physical appearance, difference in opinion/beliefs, some stated that the behaviour was "meant as a joke" (Faucher et al., 204; p. 5). These findings are highly insightful and enlightening for the current programme of research as they demonstrate compelling evidence for gender differences concerning cyberbullying experiences. Faucher and colleagues' (2014) findings also highlight the element of humour as a potential motivation for perpetrating cyberbullying, which the present thesis aims to explore in greater depth. Study 3 will provide greater understanding of which factors, such as gender differences, may increase the severity perception of humoristic cyberbullying of older adolescents and emerging adults.

6.1.2 Humour styles

Incorporating humour styles within this thesis is important; exploring this as an individual differences factor may explain why some individuals are more inclined to interpret hostile humour as more or less severe. Research with adolescents have found that young people benefit from having a 'good sense of humour' because they are liked more by their peers (Sherman, 1988). However, defining what this type of humour style is and what it may look like is complex. The most salient theoretical model of individual humour styles is proposed by Martin et al. (2003) who developed a contemporary characteristics approach to humour that incorporates individual differences. Their initial approach involved an extensive literature review that covered the association between well-being and humour, with the main types of humour that have been identified being adaptive or maladaptive. The result of this extensive work led to Martin and his colleagues identifying four humour styles: *self-defeating*, *aggressive*, *self-enhancing,* and *affiliative*. The first two styles are related to maladaptive aspects of humour and the

remaining two styles are related to adaptive aspects of humour. The adaptive humour styles are described by Martin et al. (2003) to be accepting and understanding of the self and others, whereas the maladaptive styles are viewed as potentially damaging to the self or others.

Self-defeating humour involves using excessive self-deprecating and ingratiating humour with the aim to be accepted by others more socially. Those who use self-defeating humour tend to put themselves down or allow themselves to be the butt of others' jokes. The second maladaptive humour style – aggressive humour – involves behaviour such as ridicule, teasing, and disparagement to intentionally put others down and hurt them to achieve superiority over others. Individuals with self-enhancing humour styles have a humorous perspective that is maintained consistently, even through adversity and stressful situations. Self-enhancing humour can be used to demonstrate confidence within a social setting, which may aid peer acceptance and, in turn, greater self-esteem. Finally, those with an affiliative humour style apply humour and adaptive jokes within positive social interactions, such as banter, in the attempt to build and maintain positive relationships with others in a non-hostile way. Martin et al. (2003) developed the Humour Style Questionnaire (HSQ) to assess an individual's score for each humour style. Since the scale was made available, over 150 studies (Kuiper, 2020) have utilised the questionnaire to explore the multidimensional construct of humour alongside various individual differences factors. These evidence good psychometric properties of the HSQ construct validity for the humour styles model and support that the four humour styles are individual constructs that are separate from one another (Kazarian & Martin, 2004; Kuiper et al., 2004; Kuiper, 2020; Saroglou & Scariot, 2002). A smaller amount of humour style research has been carried out with young people. An increase of research can be attributed to the development of the Child Humour Style Questionnaire (Fox et al., 2013), which is primarily based on the foundations of the HSQ (Martin et al., 2003).

The HSQ has been used to investigate a host of numerous relationships between the four humour styles and other factors. Gender differences research identifies males as consistently reporting that they participate in greater levels of aggressive humour than females (Martin et al., 2003), which supports previous literature that outlines male tendencies to appreciate hostile forms of humour (Crawford & Gressley, 1991; Prerost,

1995). Males having more inclination to have aggressive humour styles may also suggest why males in Study 2 perceived the hypothetical vignettes as overall lower in severity than females. A recent systematic review of 77 articles concerning adults over the age of 18 confirms a stable pattern of higher scores for an aggressive humour style for males over females (Hoffman et al., 2020). Additionally, no further gender differences were found relating the three other humour styles (i.e., affiliative, self-enhancing, and self-deprecating), suggesting that both genders score similarly on these styles. Relationships have been reported between humour styles and varying internal and external factors. For instance, lower levels of depression have been associated with greater scores for affiliative and self-enhancing humour styles and lower scores for self-defeating humour style (Hugelshofer et al., 2006). Higher reported self-esteem has also been reported to be predicted by affiliative, self-enhancing, and aggressive humour styles and a lower degree of self-defeating style (McCosker & Moran, 2012).

The two types of teasing (prosocial and antisocial), sit in different constructs of humour style (Martin et al., 2003). Affiliative for instance is part of the prosocial form of humour style, as this type of inter relational humour is used in a prosocial manner, to positively build and maintain close relationships. Whereas aggressive humour, tends to be associated more with using humour to dominate others antisocially, and create humour that is at the expense of others, despite how it may make the victim feel. Where affiliative humour ends and aggressive humour begins is ambiguous (Klein & Kuiper, 2006). In some contexts, it can be difficult to evaluate this difference if it is expressed with an element of hostility and aggression, such as banter and teasing, predominantly due to the nature of humour itself.

A great deal of literature concerning these adaptive and maladaptive styles of humour provides evidence to suggest that they are two separate constructs. Research with adults indicates that abusive prosocial teasing has been reported to be a form of behaviour that characterises group membership acceptance, based on the premise that this behaviour would not be directed at out-group members (Gorman & Jordan, 2015; Haugh, 2017; Plester & Sayers, 2007). Affiliative teasing has also been demonstrated as being a tool that allows collaborative relationships and downplaying assumed cultural differences and stereotypes (Bell, 2007; Marra & Holmes, 2007). Using a desirable type of humour, such as affiliative humour, enables a pleasant interaction that generally

leads to peer acceptance (Hampes, 2006; Klein & Kuiper, 2006). Children with an affiliative humour style may be more popular than others as they are proficiently skilled with knowing how to apply humour within the social context in order to promote in-group cohesion (Klein & Kuiper, 2006). Indirectly, peer acceptance has been linked to a better understanding of social norms and rules (Ladd, 1999), which may also facilitate an enhanced understanding of existing effectively within peer groups. However, having enhanced social skills may facilitate indirect bullying behaviours such as rumour spreading and encouraging exclusion of others (Sutton et al., 1999), which can be difficult to detect (Crick et al., 1997). Conversely, the social skills that are required to be perceived as affiliative and dominant by others may be where affiliative humour and aggressive humour perhaps overlap.

The dimension of maladaptive humour styles has been explored alongside cyberbullying. Sari (2016) conducted research with Turkish adolescents aged 15-18 years old showing that cyberbullying perpetration was predicted by aggressive humour style. An Indonesian study with adolescents aged between 16- and 18-years old has also reported corresponding results with the same research method (Qodir et al., 2019). Klein and Kuiper (2006) suggest from their findings that having an aggressive humour can mean enhanced social skills, which together can enable an individual to humiliate their peers or friends indirectly in order to achieve greater status (Martin et al., 2003). Research has reported links between aggressive and affiliative humour which identifies gender differences. A Canadian, self-report study conducted with undergraduate students aged between 18 and 22 years old reported a positive relationship between perceived social support from peers and aggressive humour for males (Dyck & Holtzman, 2013). Females, however, had lower perceived social support associated with higher scores for aggressive humour. The researchers attempted to explain their findings by suggesting that for males, aggressive humour may be normative and, in this sense, comparable to affiliative humour, therefore illustrating how some affiliative humour can also be aggressive humour (Dyck & Holtzman, 2013). Support for this can be found from longitudinal research that suggests popularity and status for adolescent males can be attributed to prior socially aggressive and dominant behaviours (Pelligrini & Bartini, 2001). Again, this could be a possible explanation for the gender differences reported in Study 2 concerning a lower severity perception of humoristic cyberbullying for males.

Replicating Study 2 with an older age group in Study 3 may confirm the assumption that for males, aggressive humour in many respects is for the same purpose of affiliative humour and therefore is a normalised behaviour.

Humour can be viewed within the literature as being an essential skill that reduces the vulnerability of being victimised (Fox et al., 2015; Klein & Kuiper, 2006), therefore it may mediate how an individual is accepted and perceived in their peer group. Higher social status has been attributed to greater humour production, comprehension, and mirth (Maten, 1986). Affiliative humour has been reported to be positively associated with self-perceived social competence, whereas self-defeating humour has been found to be negatively associated with self-perceived social competence (Fox et al., 2013). Researchers have proposed that self-defeating humour use may reflect a lower degree of self-esteem, which in turn may attract a bi-directional relationship with victimisation (Klein & Kuiper, 2006; Smith et al., 2001). This is an important consideration to view alongside hostile humorous behaviours such as teasing, which has been theorised as being potentially internalised by victims (Rose & Abramson, 1992) and may lead to developing a self-defeating humour style (Fox et al., 2015; Klein & Kuiper, 2006).

Research has explored the relationship between humour styles and peer victimisation involvement, suggesting prosocial humoristic behaviours may have long term positive outcomes. Longitudinal research conducted with British adolescents aged 11-13 years old indicated that those who had greater use of affiliative humour over approximately 10 months showed decreased offline peer victimisation (Fox et al., 2015). However, self-defeating humour style increased the likelihood of being victimised. Furthermore, greater earlier peer victimisation was found to be associated with a decrease of aggressive and affiliative humour styles for males later on. This suggests that experiencing peer victimisation may be impactful for males in terms of their prosocial and antisocial humour styles development. In a general sense, this research highlights a number of considerations related to this thesis. First, findings from Fox et al. (2015) demonstrate a possible link between the role of being a victim and the impact it may have on humour style, which in turn may impact a victim's perceived severity of humour if hostile humour such as teasing is being internalised (Rose & Abramson, 1992). Second, it highlights the need to control for previous history of victimisation and perpetration

and aggressive humour style as these factors may have an influence on severity perception. Findings from Study 3 will contribute to understanding why some individuals are more inclined to interpret hostile humour as more or less severe, which will allow research to identify those who may be more at risk of experiencing the negative outcomes of such behaviours (Rose & Abramson, 1992).

6.1.3 Participant roles and perceived severity

A limited amount of research has demonstrated that previous involvement in cyberbullying, as a victim or perpetrator, may influence perceived severity of cyberbullying behaviours. Findings indicate those who have experienced cyberbullying as a victim are more likely to appraise an episode of cyberbullying with more distress (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Pieschl et al., 2015). However, research findings are inconsistent in this area of research. For example, Chen and Cheng (2017) reported the non-involved population in their study to have the highest severity perception ratings in comparison to the victim, bully, and bully/victim groups. Other studies have also reported no significant findings associating previous cyber experience with higher severity perception for cyberbullying (Pieschl et al., 2013). Additionally, Giménez-Gualdo and colleagues (2015) found that participants who identified as cyberbullies believed their victims experienced more distress than cybervictims actually reported. Study 3 of this thesis will expand this area within the literature by providing further insight of adolescents' perceptions of cyberbullying severity from main roles distinguished in cyberbullying (i.e., victim or perpetrators).

Considering the inconclusive findings of previous research, further exploration is needed concerning victims' and perpetrators' severity perceptions of cyberbullying. One of the salient considerations to incorporate into this exploration are gender differences, as research indicates that females generally perceive cyberbullying or online aggressive behaviours to be more harmful than males. Literature concerning adolescents consistently affirms females to have greater severity perception of cyberbullying than males (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Pettalia et al., 2013). Furthermore, cross-sectional research with older, undergraduate American participants (mean age of 24.95) suggests females have a greater propensity to perceive cyberbullying as a more severe issue than

males (Sobba et al., 2019). Sobba et al. (2019) propose that this may be due to females potentially experiencing cyberbullying more than males. Many previous studies concerning the roles of cyberbullying have focused on previous experience of victimisation or perpetration and have failed to account for any gender differences related to the roles. However a large-scale, cross-sectional study conducted in Australia with students aged 9 to 19 (mean age of 13.96) showed that female victims of conventional bullying and cyberbullying reported that their experiences had a greater impact on their lives, and perceived them to be harsher than male victims (Campbell et al., 2013).

Further support for this finding can be found in a study with young Canadian adolescents aged 11-17 years old (Nordahl et al., 2013). In this cross-sectional study, all participants had reported that they had been cyberbullied. Females reported experiencing significantly higher levels of anxiety, externalising behaviours, and depression than males for name calling and threats. Together these findings suggest that female victims perceive cyberbullying as more severe than male victims, which could possibly mean that experiencing cyberbullying may elevate perceptions of severity for females (Nordahl et al., 2013). Study 3 will contribute to this line of investigation by examining severity perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying which include gender differences of the victim and perpetrator roles.

6.1.4 Rationale for Study 3

As young people develop from early adolescence onwards, aggressive humour behaviours such as banter and teasing evolve to become less obviously aggressive and more playful and prosocial (Keltner et al., 2001; Warm, 1997). This change in behaviour, in some research, can also be seen for bullying, with cyberbullying experiences declining from the age of 14 years old (Otega et al., 2009; Sumter et al., 2012), although general prevalence findings related to age are inconclusive (Camerini et al., 2020). Nevertheless, aggressive humour and cyberbullying are reported to be experienced by those who are older, whether that be older adolescence (Hemphill & Heerde, 2014), or emerging adulthood (Balkrishnan, 2015). As a great deal of literature has considered the younger age groups (Kowalski et al., 2019), little is known regarding the cyberbullying

perceptions of older adolescents and emerging adults. Exploring this age group is important as there is a strong argument for the longevity of cyberbullying experiences, indicating that those involved in bullying or cyberbullying during early adolescence, carry on being involved as they grow older (Hemphill & Heerde, 2014). By investigating the perceptions of this older group, Study 3 will provide some insight around their experiences of cyberbullying.

Aggressive humour (i.e., for a joke) (Guerra et al., 2011; Harrison et al., 2022; Postigo et al., 2019), has been reported to be a factor related to why cyberbullying is perpetrated. Aggressive humour as a social interaction is commonly viewed as an ambiguous behaviour (Kowalski, 2003; Kruger et al., 2006), but combined with the online environment, the harshness of aggressive humour can be extremely difficult to interpret (Baas et al., 2013; Ging & Norman, 2016). It is unclear if this behaviour meets the requirements for intentionality concerning the definitional aspect of cyberbullying, as teasing and banter can be prosocial or antisocial depending on the relational context (Odenbring & Johanson, 2021). Irrespective of this, as evaluating the severity of these behaviours when they occur online can be hindered by ambiguity (Baas et al., 2013), the criterion of intention may effectively be made redundant in situations where hostile humour is used. This suggests that the perception of victim may need to be taken into account, as although teasing or banter may not meet the requirements to be defined as cyberbullying, they can be perceived as severe and offensive to some young people who may therefore experience the negative outcomes that can be attributed to cyberbullying victimisation. By investigating this premise with an older participant sample, Study 3 will incorporate the role of age in severity perceptions of online interactions that involve aggressive humour.

Study 2 demonstrated that multiple factors impact the severity perception of varying degrees of aggressive humour interactions online. Primarily, male participants perceive hostile humour generally as less severe than females indicating that aggressive humour is a normalised behavioural experience for this gender. Factors such as repetition, audience, and social context were also reported in Study 2 to be attributed to influencing severity perception, with the format of aggressive behaviour (i.e., denigration, harassment, or outing), being found to have minimal impact. A key aim of Study 3 is to explore if these findings are consistent with an older age group, which

may provide further understanding of severity perception for the later adolescent and emerging adult population. Replicability of research findings is highly valuable as it provides support for the initial research findings, which infers confidence to other researchers and stakeholders that those findings are not simply circumstantial (Plucker & Makel, 2021).

Furthermore, Study 3 will incorporate three additional variables to extend the exploration of severity perception; previous experience of being a victim of cyberbullying, previous experience of perpetrating cyberbullying, and aggressive humour style. The history of cyberbullying experience in terms of victim (Nordahl et al., 2013; Pieschl et al., 2015) or perpetrator (Giménez-Gualdo et al., 2015) has been suggested to have possible impact on severity perception. Although findings are inconclusive, some research suggests that victims are more likely to perceive cyberbullying as more severe (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Pieschl et al., 2015). Due to this, it is prudent to control for any possible influence of the role of victim or perpetrator within the model. Additionally, higher ratings for aggressive humour styles have been reported to be related to cyberbullying perpetration (Sari, 2016) and also to gender, with males consistently showing a more aggressive humour style than females (Hoffman et al., 2020). In view of this literature, it is plausible to assume that those who score highly for cyberbullying perpetration may more likely be male, which could attribute to lower severity perception scores for males in Study 2. Therefore, including aggressive humour style into the model will allow the study to consider if having this style of humour can account for any variation in the model in terms of severity perception. Incorporating these three variables within the model will allow a comprehensive inquiry of severity perception for this age group.

6.1.5 Study 3 Research questions and objectives

Study 3 addresses research questions 4 and 5 of this thesis:

RQ4. What factors influence how older adolescents and emerging adults perceive the use of online aggressive humour that targets others?

RQ5. What factors influence how older adolescents and emerging adults differentiate between humorous intent and cyberbullying?

To effectively approach the research questions, the purpose of Study 3 is to replicate findings of Study 2, with the same objectives, with an older sample and covariates (aggressive humour style, CB victimisation, and CB perpetration). Therefore, Study 3 aligns with thesis research objectives outlined for Study 2 (2, 3, 4) and three additional objectives for the three covariates (5, 6, and 7):

<u>Research objective 2</u>: Investigate the relationship between the variables of interest, which emerge from Study 1, and perceived **offensiveness** to gain a greater understanding of how humour impacts offensive perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying.

<u>Research objective 3</u>: Investigate the relationship between the variables of interest, which emerge from Study 1, and perceived cyberbullying to gain a greater understanding of how humour impacts the **identification of cyberbullying**.

<u>Research objective 4</u>: Examine the **gender difference** within research objectives 2 and 3.

<u>Research objective 5</u>: Investigate the effect of having an **aggressive humour** style on older adolescents' and emerging adults' perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying.

<u>Research objective 6</u>: Investigate the effect of experiencing **cyberbullying victimisation** on older adolescents' and emerging adults' perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying.

<u>Research objective 7</u>: Investigate the effect of experiencing **cyberbullying perpetration** on older adolescents' and emerging adults' perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying.

6.1.6 Study 3 Hypotheses

The hypotheses for Study 3 have been developed based on the findings of Study 2. As no age-related findings can be drawn from the literature in terms of humoristic cyberbullying behaviours, no direct predictions in relation to age were made, and findings are therefore viewed as exploratory from this perspective.

Study 3 will therefore explore the following hypotheses:

Main effects:

> H3.1: Females will rate both outcome variables, perceived offensiveness and perceived as cyberbullying, on average higher than males.

> H3.2: Repetition within a vignette will predict higher ratings for both outcome variables.

Interactions:

> H3.3.1: The difference in ratings for offensiveness and cyberbullying will be greater on average for females than for males.

> H3.3.2: The difference in ratings between perceived cyberbullying and perceived offensiveness is only significant when the scenario represents repetition and not in scenarios with no repetition.

> H3.4: The effect of repetition will be greater for females than it is for males.

> H3.5: There will be a significant difference between audience and no audience rating when there is repetition, but not when there is no repetition in the scenario.

> H3.6.1: Females will rate the vignettes higher for the banter dimension within the humour scenario factors relative to the remaining dimensions; offensive joke, joke cyberbullying and cyberbullying.

> H3.6.2: When an audience is included in a vignette there will be higher ratings for the humour scenario factor dimensions offensive joke and cyberbullying than the remaining dimensions banter and joke cyberbullying.

> H3.6.3: When repetition is included in a vignette there will be higher ratings for the banter dimension in the humour scenario factor relative to the remaining dimensions; offensive joke, joke cyberbullying and cyberbullying.

Study 3 incorporated three additional covariates into the model; 1) cyberbully victim, 2) cyberbully perpetrator, and 3) aggressive humour style. Including these covariates allowed Study 3 to explore the potential of any confounding relationship these variables may have with the independent variables in the model, in relation to the two outcome variables. The covariates to the model were selected based on the findings of Study 2 and previous literature.

H3.7: Previous involvement, as a victim or perpetrator of cyberbullying, will influence severity perception (in terms of both outcome variables) of the hypothetical vignettes.

H3.8: Higher ratings for aggressive humour styles will predict lower severity perception ratings (in terms of both outcome variables) of the hypothetical vignettes.

6.2 Methods

6.2.1 Design

Study 2 is a cross-sectional 4 x 3 x 2 x 2 (Humour scenario [banter, offensive joke, joke cyberbullying, cyberbullying], Cyberbullying behaviour [denigration, outing, harassment], Audience [audience, no audience], and Repetition [repetition, no repetition]) fractured, factorial design. The design implemented for this study is mixed effects, which incorporates repeated and independent measures. Repeated measures will be used to investigate the multiple factors within the vignettes as participants are exposed to all the treatment conditions. The multivariate model also incorporated gender to explore the possible differences between males and females in relation to other independent variables and the outcome variables. For this gender effect, an independent measures factor was included to consider the differences between these two groups.

Covariate analysis was considered in the analysis by including instruments to measure cyberbullying victimisation, cyberbullying perpetration, and aggressive humour style measures within the model. Covariates were not included in the main experimental manipulation but were considered in a follow-up analysis to explore any possible adjustments in the model that were associated by the presence of the covariates.

6.2.2 Participants

Four hundred and seventy-nine participants were recruited for Study 3. All data obtained was cleaned, with those participants (N=55) who consistently failed to respond to the questionnaire as a whole being removed, as with Study 2. Within the demographic

questions, participants were asked for their gender as this variable was required for the analysis. Three participants indicated that their gender was 'other' and four indicated that they 'preferred not to say'. Responses for these participants were not included in the analysis due to the design of the study attempting to measure a gender bias between the female and male groups. Given the small size of the sample identifying as 'other', it was not appropriate to consider this as an additional gender category within the analysis. Those participants who refrained from indicating their gender could not be categorised as either female or males and were not included in the analysis.

Following data cleaning, responses from four hundred and seventeen (M_{age} = 17.14, SD_{age} = 1.11) participants were included in the analysis for Study 3 (87% response rate). Participants were aged 16-21 years old and consisted of 307 (73.6%) females (M_{age} = 17.22, SD_{age} = 1.12) and 110 (26.4%) males (M_{age} = 16.95, SD_{age} = 1.05). At 73.6%, females are clearly overrepresented in the sample. Three approaches were taken during participant recruitment: targeted, online, and research participation scheme. As the survey was anonymous, it is unclear what the most successful approach was during the recruitment. Targeted recruitment involved contacting a number of educational institutions. Professional educators at over 500 sixth forms and colleges were emailed by the principal investigator. The email explained the nature of the online survey and provided a survey link to forward onto their students if they felt it was appropriate. The online recruitment approach involved publicly posting a survey link and a short reference to the study on numerous occasions on the following social networking sites: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Finally, Study 3 also recruited undergraduate students from Nottingham Trent University by using a Psychology Department Research Participation Scheme.

6.2.3 Materials

6.2.3.1 Dependent measures

The same format as Study 2 was used in Study 3 in terms of how the dependent variables were measured. To recap, participants were provided with 1 of 4 possible sets of 12 scenarios. Vignette development information can be viewed in the vignette development (5.2.3.2) and vignette set development (5.2.3.3) subheading of Study 2.

The 4 sets of 12 scenarios were the same sets that were produced for Study 2 of this thesis. Scenarios were gender specific, meaning that participants were gender matched with sets of scenarios in terms of the gender of the characters in the scenarios. Identical to Study 2, each scenario involved four questions for the participant to answer. Two items were for the purpose of manipulation check and two items aimed to measure perceived aspects of the scenario. For the same purpose of Study 2, manipulation check items were utilised in order to encourage participants to read and differentiate between each scenario (Betts et al., 2022). These items required a closed response to a factual based question regarding the scenario. There were four possible manipulation check questions a participant could receive.

1. Which character in the short story may have felt offended?
2. Which character in the short story may have offended someone else?
3. Did many people see what happened in the short story?
4. Is this the first time this situation has happened between the two characters?

The two manipulation check questions were randomised in terms of what was presented. The remaining two items that participants were asked per scenario were outcome variable items. The outcome items were asked with the purpose to measure the participants' perception of the scenario and were rated 0- 7, with 0 having the least amount of weight attributed to the response. The first item related to the degree of perceived offensiveness i.e., 'If you were Alex (victim in scenario) how offended would you feel?' This item was rated from 'Not offended at all' (0) to 'Very offended' (7). The second item related to perceived level of cyberbullying behaviour within the scenario i.e., 'Would you consider this story to be cyberbullying?' This item was rated from 'Not cyberbullying' (0) to 'Definitely cyberbullying' (7).

6.2.3.2 Cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration

The Florence Cyberbullying-Cybervictimisation Scale (FCBVs) (Palladino et al., 2015) was utilised to measure participant experiences of cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration for this study as covariate variables. This instrument is separated into two scales for victimisation and perpetration, each containing 14 items. The scales were

individually introduced to the participant, the victimisation scale read 'In this questionnaire you will be asked questions about Cyberbullying. In the last 2-3 MONTHS, how often has someone done the following things to you? For each behaviour cross the number that best described how often these things were DONE TO YOU'. The FCBVs comprises of items that cover four types of behaviour for both scales which include 4 items for written-verbal behaviours (e.g., "Receiving threatening and insulting text messages"), 3 items for visual behaviours (e.g., "Receiving videos/photos/pictures of embarrassing or personal situation by mobile phone"), 4 items for impersonation acts (e.g., "Somebody stole my personal information (image/photos) in order to reuse them"), and 3 items for exclusion behaviours (e.g., "Being excluded from an online group"). Each item is evaluated on a 5-point scale, where 1 = "never", 2 = "once or twice", 3 = "one or two times a month", 4 = "once a week", and 5 = "several times a week".

The perpetration scale was a similar format, reading 'In the last 2-3 MONTHS, how often have you done the following things to someone? For each behaviour cross the number that best describes how often these things were DONE BY YOU'. Items from the victimisation scale are replicated in the perpetration scale, except they are worded to reflect the scale's aim. For example, for written-verbal behaviours the item is worded "Sending threatening and insulting text message". Higher scores indicated higher frequency of cyberbullying victimisation and cyberbullying perpetration. Mean scores were calculated for each scale. The original study undertaken by Palladino et al. (2015) reported acceptable internal consistency reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging between .63 and .79 for the victimisation scale and between .70 and .85 for the perpetration scale. For the present study, reliability coefficients were found to be acceptable (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011), with .86 reported for the victimisation scale and .90 reported for the perpetration scale.

6.2.3.3 Aggressive humour style

The Child Humour Style Questionnaire (Child HSQ) (Fox et al., 2013) was implemented in the study to measure the construct of humour style. The Child HSQ is an adaptation of the adult HSQ developed by Martin et al. (2003) and consists of 24 items in total. The

Child HSQ has four sub-scales, with six items per subscale, corresponding to four types of humour styles: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive, and self-defeating. Although all participants responded to all Child HSQ items, for the purpose of this study only findings of the aggressive humour style subscale were used within the covariate analysis. The aggressive subscale contains three negatively worded items which were reverse coded. An item example of the subscale for aggressive humour style is "When I tell jokes I'm not worried if it will upset other people". Each item is evaluated on 4-point scale, where 1 = "strongly disagree", 2 = "disagree", 3 = "agree", and 4 = "strongly agree". Higher scores indicated higher levels of aggressive humour style tendencies. Mean scores were calculated for the aggressive humour style subscale. For the aggressive humour style subscale, the original study by Fox et al. reported reliability coefficients, Cronbach's alpha, for the entire sample of primary and secondary school students as .74. The original scale also identified a clear four factor structure using confirmatory factor analysis. For the present study, the reliability coefficient for aggressive humour style was found to be an acceptable at .72.

6.2.4 Procedure

Study 3 utilised online methods and a research participation scheme to collect data. This study was granted a favourable ethical review by the College of Business, Law, and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Nottingham Trent University no. 2020/257 and no. 2020/285. The advertisement posted on social media provided a brief overview of the study and provided a link to the study as well as a quick response code. Targeted advertisement was also emailed to professional educators at over 500 sixth forms and colleges using email address that were obtained from the institution websites. The email explained the nature of the online survey and provided a survey link to forward onto their students if they felt it was appropriate. The link led the participant to an online survey which was developed using Qualtrics. Additionally, the Qualtrics link was accessed by participants were also recruited from a Nottingham Trent University Psychology Department research participation scheme. Undergraduate students obtain credits by taking part in research. A number of credits is required in order to conduct research as part of undergraduate final year projects. Participants who took part in

Study 3 through the Research Participation Scheme were provided with 4 credits once they had come to the end of the questionnaire.

Once a participant had clicked on the link to the online survey, they were provided with an information sheet (Appendix H), which enabled participants to make a formative decision to consent to taking part in the study. The information sheet outlined participant rights regarding withdrawal responses and clearly explained that participants should not feel obligated to answer all questions. The information sheet also clearly outlined the online survey was anonymous, and their responses were bound by confidentiality. Participants were asked for their consent before beginning the questionnaire by checking/ticking a box indicating that they have understood the information and would consent to participating. A debrief sheet was provided at the end of the study (Appendix I). The information sheet and debrief included appropriate sources of support due to the sensitive nature of the survey. A financial inventive was used for Study 3, which involved all participants being included in a raffle to win 1 of 5 £20 Amazon vouchers.

The structure of study involved 3 elements, including the vignettes, the cyberbullying questionnaires, and the aggressive humour style questionnaire. To ensure that participant response rates obtained maximum potential, the flow of the overall questionnaire sectioned the 12 scenarios into 3 groups of 4 scenarios and integrating the 3 scales in between the sets of 4 scenarios (i.e., 4 scenarios, cyberbullying victimisation scale, 4 scenarios, cyberbullying perpetration scale, 4 scenarios, aggressive humour style questionnaire).

6.2.5 Data analysis and multilevel modelling

As with Study 2, multilevel modelling was utilised in Study 3. Three covariates were included in Study 3, which involved running a 2-way model twice, once without the covariates and again with the covariates. Carrying out this analysis simply displays any confounding influence that the covariate may have on the overall model.

6.3 Results

6.3.1 Multi-Level Model

Analysis of the vignettes for Study 3 is identical to the analysis run in Study 2, which involved multilevel models to investigate the relationship between five predictor variables (gender, audience, repetition, cyberbullying behaviour, and humour scenario), and the two outcome variables (perceived offensiveness and perceived cyberbullying). The two dependent variables, perceived offensiveness and perceived level of cyberbullying were rated on a 7-point likert-style scale. Similar to Study 2, the fractional factorial design limits the effects that can be included in the model as some higher order interaction effects are aliased with lower effects (Baguley et al., 2022). In this case the researcher is limited to testing main effects and most two-way effects, although there are insufficient cells in the design to estimate the humour scenario by cyberbullying behaviour interaction (which uses 6 d.f. in the model). All effects were estimated in the two-way model excluding humour scenario by cyberbullying behaviour interaction, but tests of main effects were based on dropping predictors from the main effects only model (analogous to Type II SS tests in ANOVA).

Table 6-1 presents the intercept-only model, the main effect of each predictor and the third model which included the two-way interactions. As in Study 2, rating type (cyberbullying or offensiveness) was included as a random effect in the model (for participants) to allow separate variances to be estimated for each rating and to account for the anticipated correlation between ratings from the same person. Using matrix algebra, the variances for each rating in the null model are 2.889 and 3.101 and the correlation between ratings is estimated .9648.

Table 6-1. Random effects for each model (null, main effects, two way)

Null			Variance	SD	Correlation
	Participant	Intercept	3.58	1.90	
		Rating difference	0.26	0.51	0.24
	Vignette	Intercept	2.03	1.42	
No. of groups	420 pps	40 vignettes			
Main effects					
	Participant	Intercept	3.29	1.81	
	Rating difference		1.02	1.01	-0.51
	Vignette	Intercept	0.34	0.59	
No. of groups	416 pps	40 vignettes			
Two-way					
	Participant	Intercept	3.45	1.86	
	Rating difference		1.08	1.04	-0.53
	Vignette	Intercept	0.18	0.43	
No. of groups	416 pps	40 vignettes			

Table 6-2 shows Wald chi-squared statistic (χ^2) and the *p*-value for the effect within the main effect model and the significant interactions within the two-way model. All factors were dummy coded using treatment contrasts in R which presents the difference between each level of a factor in relation to the intercept of the baseline level which is indicated in the coefficient column of Table 6-4.

Table 6-2. Wald Chi-square tests for main effects and two-way interactions and p-value statistics

Coefficients	df	χ^2	p
Rating type	1	21.63	< .001
Gender	1	39.66	< .001
Audience	1	15.48	.001
Repetition	1	39.38	< .001
Humour scenario	3	274.38	< .001
Cyberbullying behaviour	2	69.36	< .001
Rating type x Repetition	1	82.464	< .001
Rating type x Humour scenario	3	29.274	< .001
Rating type x Cyberbullying behaviour	2	8.45	.014
Gender x Audience	1	24.295	< .001
Gender x Humour scenario	3	21.272	< .001
Audience x Repetition	1	5.285	0.021
Audience x Humour scenario	3	11.385	< .001
Repetition x Humour scenario	3	9.283	0.025

The main effects suggest a number of possible relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variables. However, as there are several statistically significant interactions present, these predictors are considered in further detail below. The means and standard deviations for each factor can be viewed in Table 6-3 for the perceived offensiveness and perceived cyberbullying dependent variables. In relation to the scale of 0-7 that the outcome variables were measured, various inferences can be made from the descriptive statistics and respective factors. In general terms, perceived offensiveness is scored across all factor dimensions as higher than perceived cyberbullying. In terms of gender, on average males rate the vignettes lower than females across all factors for both outcome variables. Means for the audience dimension and repeated dimension within a vignette have consistently higher mean ratings for both outcome variables. Denigration is consistently rated as the least severe dimension of the cyberbullying behaviour factor and harassment is rated as the most severe dimension across both outcome variables. The humour scenario factor findings indicate the lowest level of 'Banter' is consistently assigned the lowest ratings of severity and 'Cyberbullying', the highest level of severity within the factor, to be assigned with higher ratings. 'Offensive joke' and 'Joke cyberbullying' have similar mean scores, suggesting

that these dimensions may be perceived with similar severity. The standard deviations of all factor dimensions suggest reasonable homogeneity of variance across all factors for both dependent variables, suggesting that the dispersion of assigned ratings are consistently close relative to the mean.

Table 6-3. Means and Standard Deviations for all factors used in analysis

Perceived Offensiveness	Factor	Male	Female	Total
	Humour scenario			
	Banter	3.37 (1.45)	4.09 (1.44)	3.91 (1.47)
	Offensive joke	4.82 (1.25)	5.42 (1.04)	5.26 (2.13)
	Joke Cyberbullying	4.69 (1.28)	5.42 (1.14)	5.23 (1.22)
	Cyberbullying	5.10 (1.23)	5.82 (1.07)	5.63 (1.16)
	Audience			
	No Audience	4.45 (1.16)	5.05 (1.10)	4.89 (1.15)
	Audience	4.53 (1.21)	5.32 (1.01)	5.10 (1.12)
	Repetition			
	No Repetition	4.21 (1.19)	4.94 (1.05)	4.75 (1.14)
	Repetition	4.77 (1.16)	5.43 (1.02)	5.26 (1.10)
	Cyberbullying Behaviour			
	Denigration	4.02 (1.30)	4.73 (1.17)	4.54 (1.23)
	Outing	4.53 (1.24)	5.20 (1.01)	5.02 (1.12)
	Harassment	4.90 (1.15)	5.63 (1.09)	5.44 (1.15)
Perceived Cyberbullying				
	Humour scenario			
	Banter	2.85 (1.54)	3.55 (1.63)	3.38 (1.63)
	Offensive joke	4.35 (1.53)	5.07 (1.25)	4.88 (1.35)
	Joke Cyberbullying	4.44 (1.57)	5.13 (1.37)	4.96 (1.45)
	Cyberbullying	4.97 (1.40)	5.74 (1.09)	5.54 (1.23)
	Audience			
	No Audience	4.05 (1.41)	4.70 (1.30)	4.54 (1.35)
	Audience	4.24 (1.36)	5.02 (1.09)	4.82 (1.22)
	Repetition			
	No Repetition	3.62 (1.40)	4.37 (1.33)	4.18 (1.38)
	Repetition	4.67 (1.39)	5.37 (1.11)	5.19 (1.22)
	Cyberbullying Behaviour			
	Denigration	3.68 (1.53)	4.44 (1.28)	4.24 (1.38)
	Outing	4.10 (1.34)	4.75 (1.23)	4.58 (1.28)
	Harassment	4.66 (1.40)	5.41 (1.20)	5.23 (1.28)

Table 6-4 reports the degrees of freedom, log odds, standard errors, and confidence intervals for each effect of independent variables on the dependent variables and significant interactions for the two-way model. Treatment contrasts were also applied to the coefficients provided in Table 6-4. Due to the dummy coding of factors limiting the interpretation of three- and four-dimension factors (i.e., humour scenario and cyberbullying behaviour), estimated marginal means will be used to interpret the significant interactions.

Table 6-4. Coefficients of the two-way model with interaction effects

Coefficient	Log odds	SE	95% CI	
Thresholds				
0|1	-2.5157	0.3359	-3.174	-1.857
1|2	-1.2914	0.3328	-1.944	-0.639
2|3	-0.1699	0.3322	-0.821	0.481
3|4	0.8678	0.3323	0.216	1.519
4|5	2.1296	0.3330	1.477	2.782
5|6	3.5542	0.3341	2.899	4.209
6|7	5.0506	0.3356	4.393	5.708
Rating type (Offensiveness)	0.888	0.121	0.650	1.126
Gender (Male)	-1.193	0.242	-1.669	-0.717
Audience (No audience)	-0.277	0.388	-1.037	0.483
No Repetition (Repetition)	2.026	0.361	1.318	2.734
Humour scenario (d.f. = 3)				
Banter (CB)	3.913	0.364	3.200	4.627
Banter (Joke CB)	2.155	0.409	1.352	2.958
Banter (Offensive joke)	3.256	0.400	2.471	4.041
Cyberbullying behaviour (d.f. = 2)				
Denigration (Harassment)	1.318	0.328	0.674	1.962
Denigration (Outing)	0.254	0.344	-0.401	0.910
DV (Offensiveness) x Repetition (Repetition)	-0.713	0.078	-0.867	-0.559
DV (Offensiveness) x Banter (CB)	-0.450	0.111	-0.668	-0.232
DV (Offensiveness) x Banter (Joke CB)	-0.272	0.107	-0.484	-0.061
DV (Offensiveness) x Banter (Offensive joke)	-0.271	0.106	-0.480	-0.062
DV (Offensiveness) x Denigration (Harassment)	-0.150	0.093	-0.333	0.032
DV (Offensiveness) x Denigration (Outing)	0.222	0.092	0.042	0.403
Gender (Male) x Audience (No audience)	0.420	0.085	0.253	0.588
Gender (Male) x Banter (CB)	-0.500	0.124	-0.743	-0.257
Gender (Male) x Banter (Joke CB)	-0.213	0.121	-0.451	0.024
Gender (Male) x Banter (Offensive Joke)	-0.165	0.120	-0.401	0.071
Audience (No audience) x Repetition (Repetition)	-0.661	0.287	-1.225	-0.097
Audience (No audience) x Banter (CB)	-0.963	0.413	-1.774	-0.153
Audience (No audience) x Banter (Joke CB)	0.217	0.466	-0.697	1.131
Audience (No audience) x Banter (Offensive Joke)	-1.178	0.491	-2.142	-0.214
Repetition (Repetition)x Banter (CB)	-0.885	0.414	-1.697	-0.073
Repetition (Repetition)x Banter (Joke CB)	-0.372	0.415	-1.186	0.441
Repetition (Repetition)x Banter (Offensive Joke)	-0.817	0.413	-1.626	-0.007

Statistically significant effects between all predictor variables are present. There are also statistically significant interactions between predictors and the DVs (rating type), which means that some effects of factor dimensions differ in relation to each outcome variable. The findings involve interaction effects that have two factors that each both

have two levels (2 x 2). For these results, simple main effects testing has been implemented to interpret what the interactions are highlighting. Some interaction effects involve factors with more than two levels, such as humour scenario. As a 2 x 3 and 2 x 4 factorial designs have multiple degrees of freedom, the statistical power of using simple main effects tests for these interactions becomes inefficient. Therefore, interaction effects will be explored further with an interaction contrast (Abelson & Prentice, 1997) to capture the particular pattern within the interaction. This is a 1 d.f. contrast that captures in a particular pattern of ratings on the log odds scales. An interaction contrast shows if levels of one factor account for the difference between the levels of another factor. A pattern within the ratings can numerically be identified by a percentage which indicates how big this deviance is, along with a *p*-value. To further explore this interaction, the analysis involved coding this pattern as a set of contrast coefficients and ran an interaction contrast to determine whether the observed data are well described by this pattern. The next section of the results will first present the significant interaction between predictors and the outcome variables and then will move into the interactions between predictor variables in relation to the combined outcome variables.

6.3.2 Interaction effects

Dependent Variable x Repetition interaction: Figure 6-1 suggests that main effect of repetition within a vignette suggests higher predicted ratings for both outcome variables for the repeated dimension. In terms of perceived offensiveness, significantly (p = 0.0007) higher ratings can be predicted when repetition, M = 5.14, 95% CI [4.96, 5.32], is present in the vignette, compared to no repetition, M = 4.75, 95% CI = [4.56-4.94]. Significant (p <.0001) effects can be found for perceived cyberbullying, whereby higher ratings can be predicted when repetition, M = 5.14, 95% CI [4.94, 5.33], is present in the vignette, compared to no repetition, M = 4.24, 95% CI [4.02, 4.46]. These findings support the main effect for repetition, indicating that vignettes which involve a repetitive dimension are perceived more severely. Significantly (p <.0001) lower ratings were found for perceived cyberbullying, M = 4.24, 95% CI [4.02, 4.46] if repetition was not present in the vignette compared to perceived offensiveness, M = 4.75, 95% CI [4.56,

4.94]. These finding suggest that the perceived offensiveness is more likely to be assigned higher ratings than cyberbullying if a vignette contains no repetition. Note that the y-axis on all interaction figures depicts a dimension of the variable on the x-axis and the y-axis depicts the linear prediction on the log odds scale, which was obtained by the emmeans package in R (Lenth, 2022).
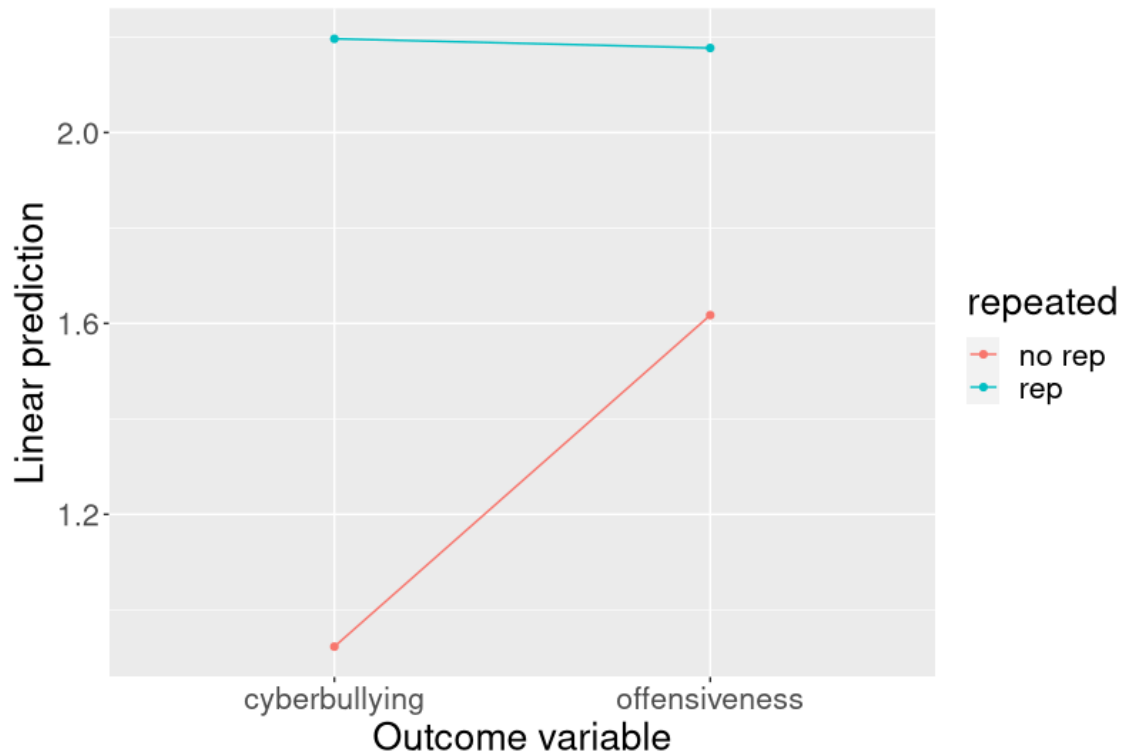
Figure 6-1. Dependent Variable x Repetition interaction effect

Dependent Variable x Humour scenario interaction: Across the humour scenario levels, ratings were scored more highly for the perceived offensiveness dependent variable compared to the perceived cyberbullying outcome variable. Figure 6-2 shows an interaction which suggests that this effect is higher for the banter level of the humour scenario factor compared to the other three levels within this factor, offensive joke, joke cyberbullying and cyberbullying. An interaction contrast coding for this pattern greater effect of banter relative to the other scenarios, $\chi^2(1) = 14.12$, p = .0001, accounts for 79.5% of the interaction deviance suggesting that the banter dimension alone has a much greater likelihood of being assigned a higher rating for offensiveness than cyberbullying.
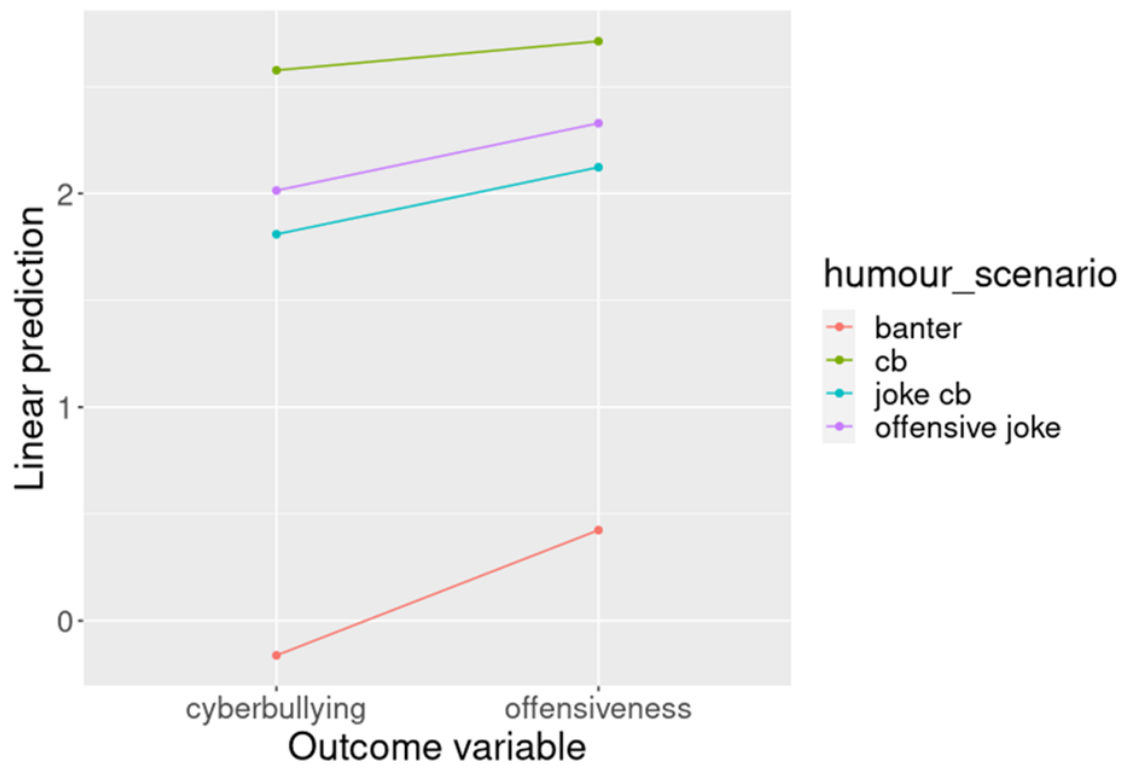
Figure 6-2. Dependent Variable x Humour scenario interaction effect

Dependent Variable x Cyberbullying behaviour interaction: As suggested in the main effect between the outcome variables, perceived offensiveness ratings were significantly higher than perceived cyberbullying ratings. This result is also found in terms of cyberbullying behaviours and how this is reflected between the outcome variables, i.e., all three cyberbullying behaviours are predicted to score more highly for perceived offensiveness rather than cyberbullying, which can be viewed in Figure 6-3. However, ratings for outing behaviour increase more significantly for perceived offensiveness compared to perceived cyberbullying. Interaction contrast significantly, χ^2 = 13.82, p = .0002, account for 85.95% of the difference between perceived cyberbullying and perceived offensiveness ratings suggesting that outing has a great likelihood of being rated more highly for offensiveness.
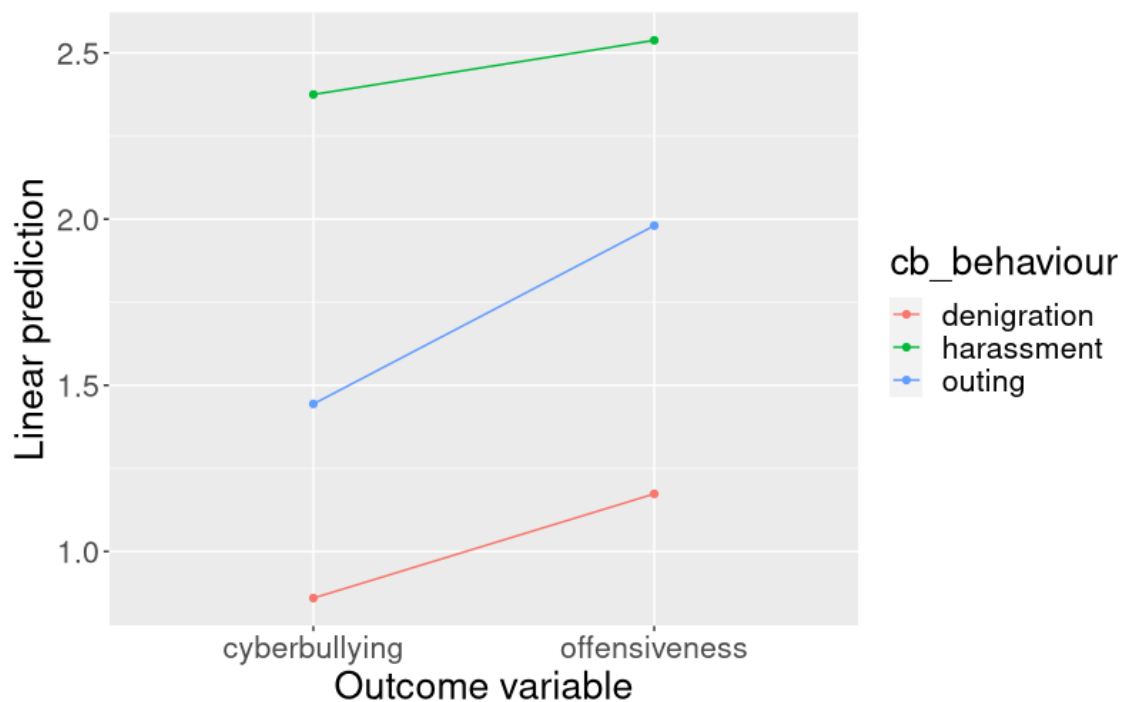
Figure 6-3. Dependent Variable x Cyberbullying behaviour interaction effect

Gender x Audience interaction: Main effects suggest that audience overall predicted higher scores for both dependent variables and that females are more likely to rate both dependent variables with greater ratings. However, a significant interaction is present between gender and audience. Figure 6-4 displays that females, M = 5.45, 95% CI [5.28, 5.61], are significantly (p <.0001) more likely to rate both dependant variables higher than males, M = 4.54, 95% CI [4.27, 4.81], if audience is present. The same applies (p <.0001) if there is no audience for females, M = 4.98, 95% CI [4.97, 5.17], and for males, M = 4.30, 95% CI [4.01, 4.58]. Furthermore, simple main effects testing indicates that although there is a significant (p <.0001) effect for females in terms of audience, M = 5.45, 95% CI [5.28, 5.61], and no audience, M = 4.98, 95% CI [4.79, 5.17], there is no significant (p = 0.13) difference between audience, M = 4.54, 95% CI [4.27, 4.81], and no audience, M = 4.30, 95% CI [4.01, 4.4.58], for males. This suggests that audience has a limited effect on males than it does for females in terms of severity perception of the vignettes.
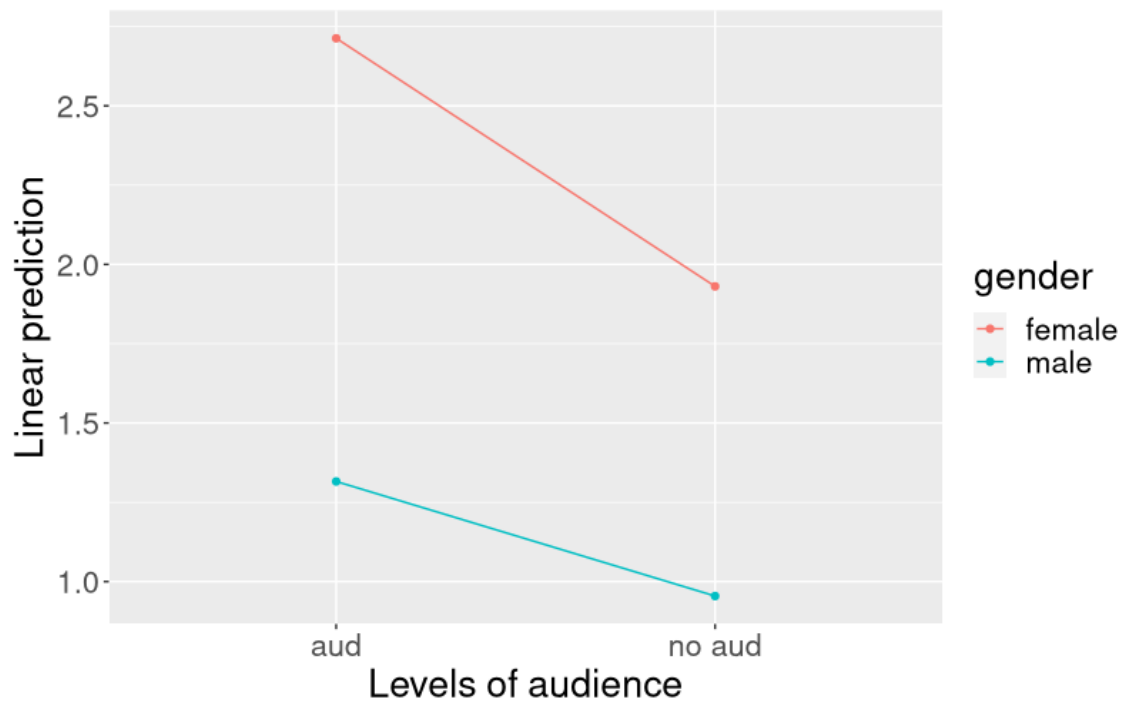
Figure 6-4. Gender x Audience interaction effect

Gender x Humour scenario: An interaction between gender and humour scenarios suggests overall, females are assigning higher ratings for all humour scenarios for both dependent variables. Specifically, Figure 6-5 suggests that banter and offensive joke levels of the humour scenario factors are more likely to be rated with higher scores by females, as opposed to males. Although joke cyberbullying and cyberbullying levels are both associated with greater ratings by females, the extent is less for these levels between females and males. 57.6% of the interaction deviance can, χ^2 = 9.82, p = .001, be accounted for by the banter level between females and males. As this is a percentage of deviance, it would be suggested that overall, females are more likely than males to assign higher ratings for the banter and offensive joke dimension for both DVs.
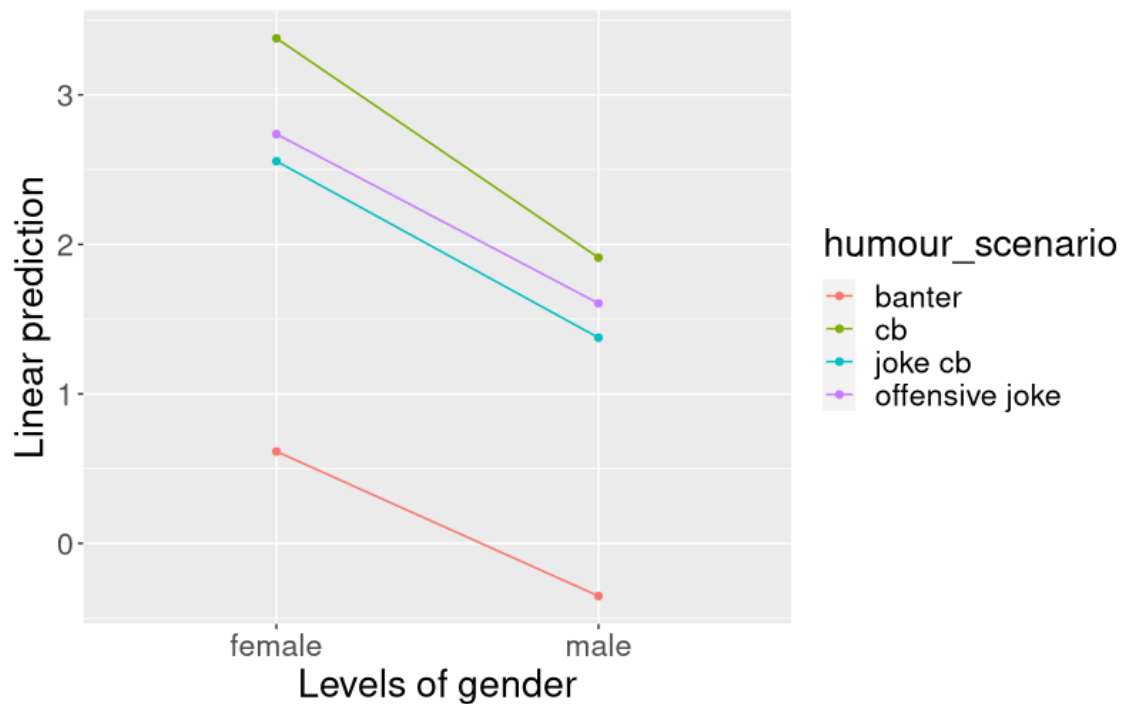
Figure 6-5. Gender x Humour scenario interaction effect

Audience x Repetition: The difference in both outcome variables between audience and repetition changes across the dimensions of both factors. The interaction depicted in Figure 6-6 displays a significantly (p <.0001) there was a larger audience effect when repetition is present, M = 5.42, 95% CI [5.21, 5.63], compared to when there is no repetition, M = 4.57, 95% CI [4.33, 4.80], suggesting that the effect of audience is markedly greater when an act is repeated within a vignette. However, when there is no audience, the DV ratings significantly (p = .01) increase from no repetition, M = 4.42, 95% CI [4.17, 4.67], to repetition, M = 4.85, 95% CI [4.62, 5.09]. This suggests that the main effect of repetition is still present. When there is no repetition of an act within a vignette there is no significant (p = 0.746) difference between ratings for audience, M = 4.57, 95% CI [4-33, 4.80], and no audience, M = 4.42, 95% CI [4.17, 4.67]. However, when repetition is included in the vignettes, audience, M = 5.42, 95% CI [5.21, 5.63], as opposed to no audience, M = 4.85, 95% CI [4.62, 5.09], significantly (p = 0.0001) predicts higher ratings for overall severity perception of the vignettes. This suggests that the audience main effect is being driven by the repetition dimension within the vignettes and that the audience dimension ratings are increased by the presence of repetition.
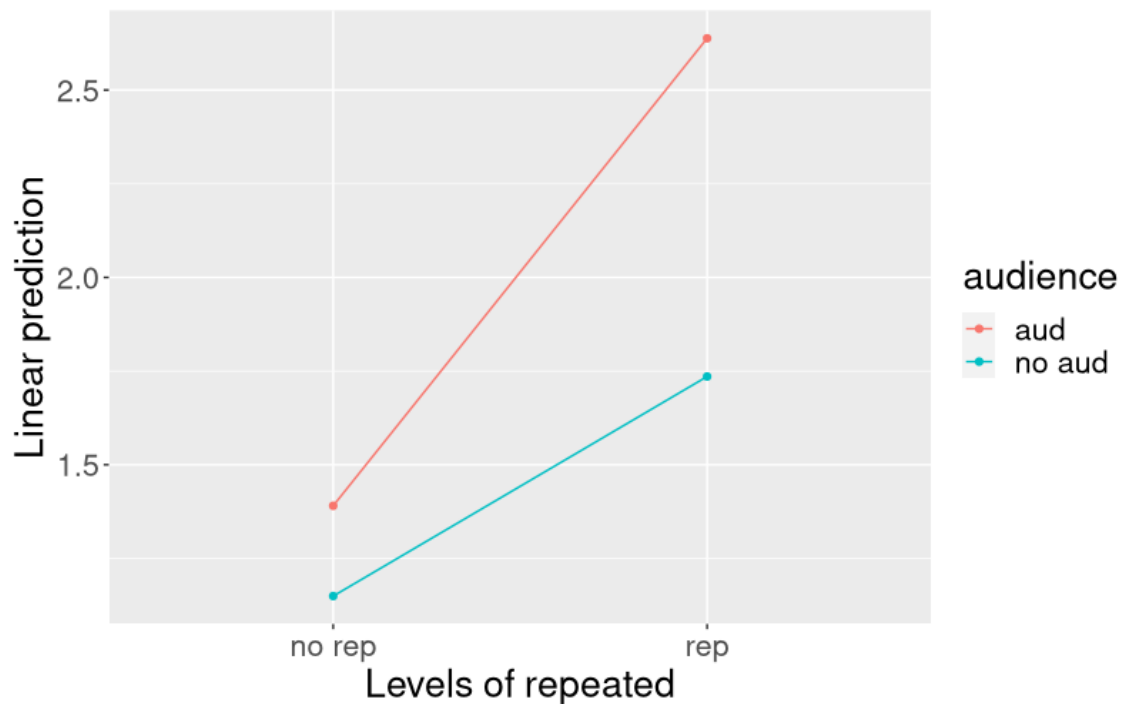
Figure 6-6. Audience x Repetition interaction effect

Audience x Humour scenario interaction: Figure 6-7 depicts the audience and humour scenario factors interaction. This interaction suggests that audience has a more predominant impact on the outcome variables for the offensive joke and cyberbullying dimensions in the humour scenario factor, and to a lesser extent for joke cyberbullying and banter. An interaction contrast was run to determine whether the observed data are well described by this pattern of the audience effect on the humour scenario dimensions. This contrast, $\chi^2 (1) = 16.16$, p < .001, accounts for 96.8% of deviance of the interaction, indicating that the data are very well-described by the proposed pattern and the interaction effect is largely determined by the presence of an audience effect for offensive joke and cyberbullying but not for banter or joke cyberbullying.
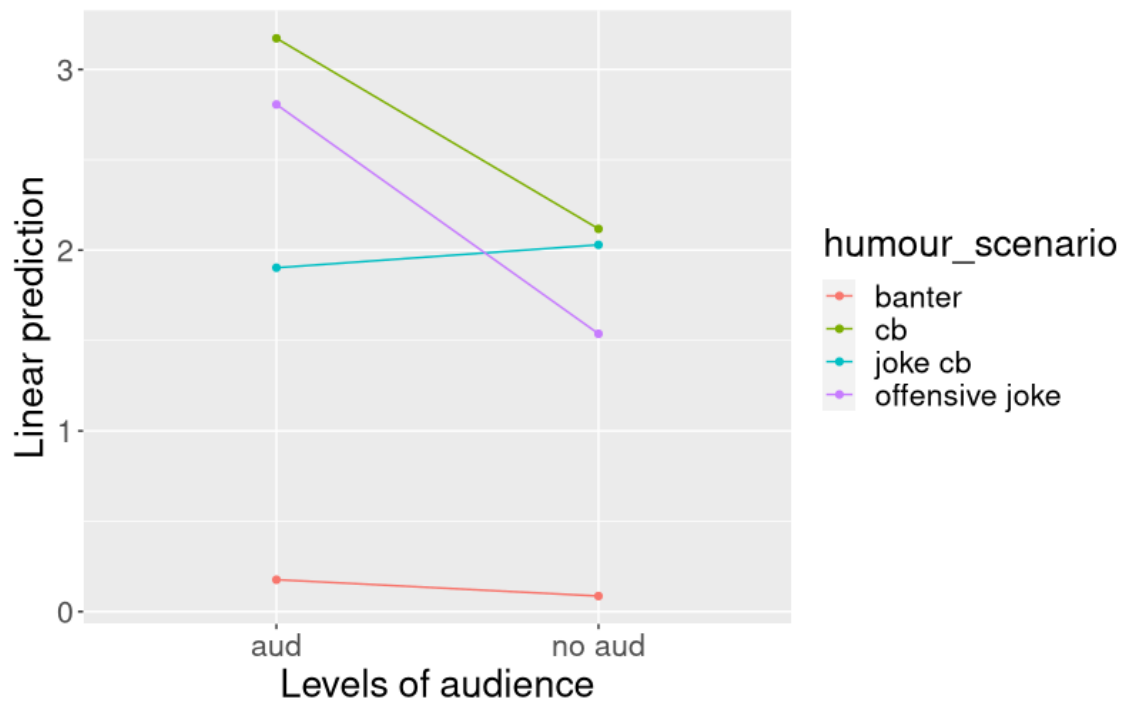
Figure 6-7. Audience x Humour scenario interaction effect

Repetition x Humour scenario: The interaction between repetition and humour scenario factors suggests that repetition has a greater impact on the outcome variables for the banter and joke cyberbullying dimensions within the humour scenario factor. Figure 6-8 shows the repeated and humour scenario interaction. The interaction suggests that having repetition increases the ratings for both outcome variables for humour scenario factor levels joke cyberbullying and banter but to a lesser extent for offensive joke and cyberbullying. To further explore this interaction, this pattern was coded as a set of contrast coefficients and ran an interaction contrast to determine whether the observed data are well described by this pattern. The interaction contrast, $\chi^2 (1) = 5.14$, p = .02, accounted for 86.0% of interaction effect deviance, indicating that the interaction effect is largely determined by the greater repetition effect for joke cyberbullying and banter relative to offensive joke and cyberbullying.
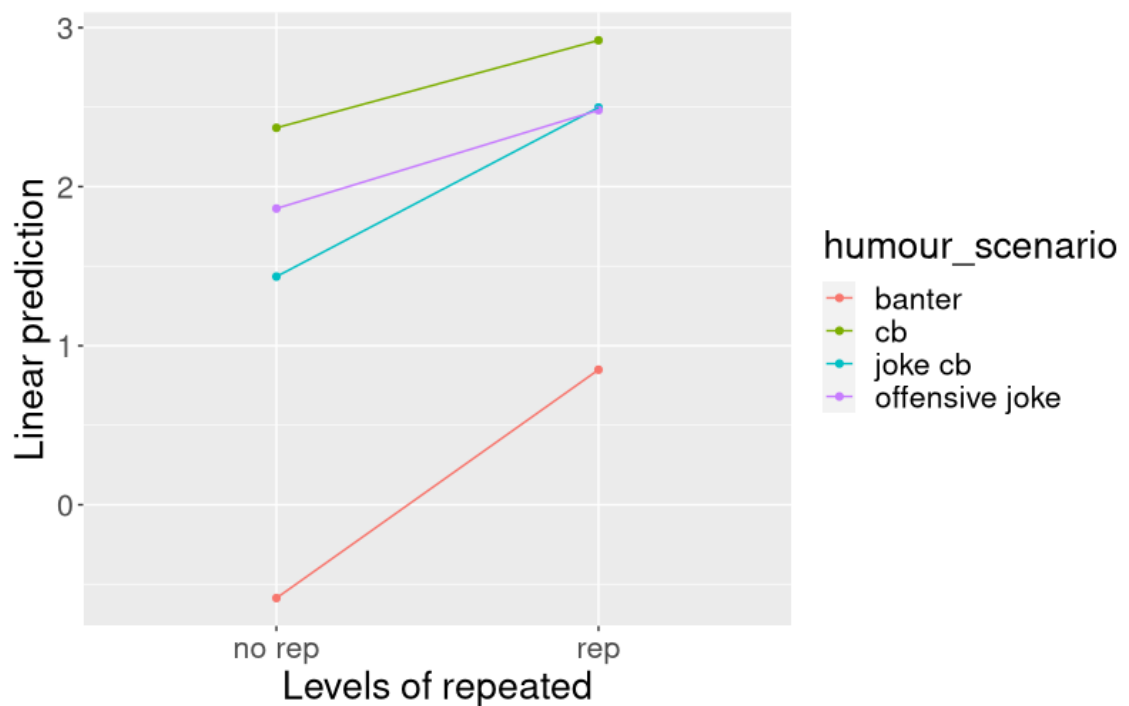
Figure 6-8. Repetition x Humour scenario interaction effect

6.3.3 Covariate analysis

A covariate analysis was conducted on the two-way interaction model to test for confounding effects of three variables. The covariate analysis involved including cyberbullying victim scores, cyberbullying perpetrator scores, and aggressive humour style scores. Table 6-5 provides the descriptive statistics for the three covariates. From the means and standard deviations, several inferences can be made. In terms of the cyberbullying scales, males score more highly than females for victim scores and males also score more highly than females for perpetrator scores. Aggressive humour was scored more highly by males than females. The standard deviations suggest the dispersion of data points is close to the mean.

Table 6-5. Means and Standard Deviations for all covariates used in analysis

Scale		N	Mean	SD
Victim				
	Females	307	1.33	0.36
	Males	110	1.44	0.53
	Overall	417	1.35	0.42
Perpetrator				
	Females	296	1.10	0.19
	Males	108	1.29	0.57
	Overall	404	1.15	0.34
Aggressive humour style				
	Females	307	2.46	0.35
	Males	107	2.63	0.42
	Overall	414	2.50	0.38

The correlation matrix in Table 6-6 displays the correlations between demographic and covariate variables. Results suggest that 6 out of the 10 possible correlations were statistically significant and were greater or equal to $r(419)$= .124, $p < .05$ (two-tailed). Results from the covariate variables, which involve cyberbullying behaviour scales and an aggressive humour scale suggest that the victim and perpetrator responses are strongly correlated $r(406) = .620$, $p < .001$, two tailed, indicating that victims of cyberbullying tend to also rate the perpetrator scale more highly. Furthermore, participant responses with higher scores for an aggressive humour style, also tend to rate the perpetrator scale with moderate correlation, $r(403) = .308$, $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Table 6-6. Correlation matrix for covariates used in the two-way model

	Age	Gender	Victim	Perpetrator	Aggressive
1. Age	-				
2. Sex	.124*	-			
3. Victim	-.014	.121*	-		
4. Perpetrator	.060	.209***	.620***	-	
5. Aggressive	.018	.301***	.091	.308***	-

*= <.05, ***=<.001

The coefficient plot displayed in Figure 6-9 identifies the two models, the two-way model and the two-way model with covariates included. Findings indicate that the three covariates had a minimal impact on the overall results of the two-way model and

therefore are not confounds. Furthermore, aggressive humour style was found to be a significant predictor of the outcome variables, $\chi^2(1) = 61.70$, p <.0001, suggesting that higher scores for aggressive humour style predicted both lower perceived offensiveness and lower perceived cyberbullying. Victim and perpetrator scale scores were not found to be significant predictors of the outcome variables.
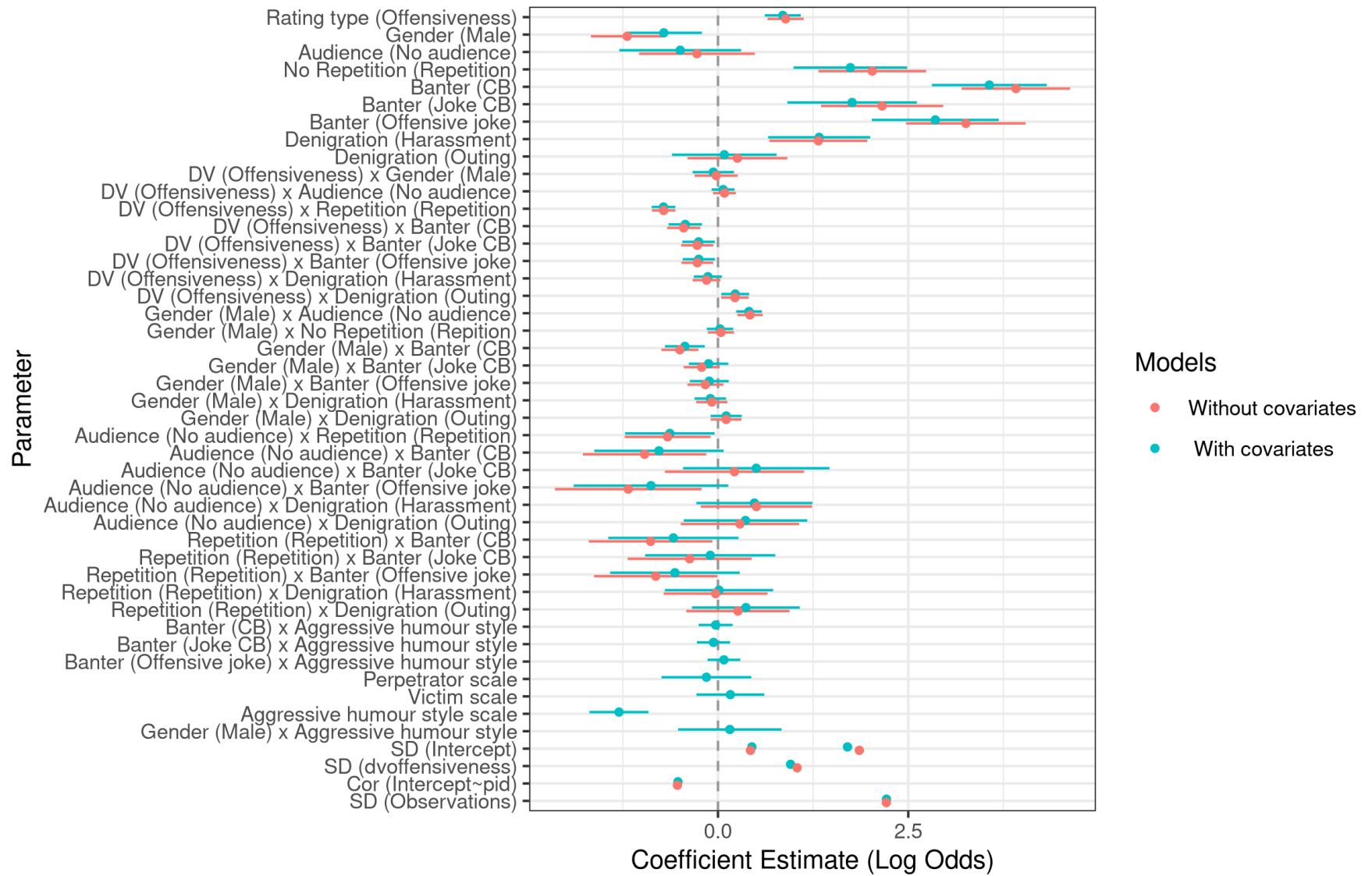
Figure 6-9. Coefficient plot of the two-way model with covariates

6.4 Discussion

6.4.1 Study 3 Research questions and objectives

The first aim of the Study 3 was to address research questions 4 and 5 by replicating Study 2 with an older participant age group. Accordingly, Study 3 employed vignettes to explore the relationship between humorous cyberbullying scenarios and severity perception, which involves perceptions of offensiveness and how much an act is appraised to be cyberbullying. To achieve this, the study applied research objectives 2, 3 and 4, which entailed examining the potential effect of four factors: audience, repetition, cyberbullying behaviour, and humour scenario, as well as gender differences upon the perceived severity.

Hypotheses stated with regards to main effects (H3.1, H3.2) were all found in Study 3. For the purposes of clarity, Table 6-7 presents both sets of interactions found in Study 2 and 3. The non-highlighted interactions depict the interactions that each study found independently for each study. Interactions that Study 3 report that are different to Study 2 will be acknowledged and discussed in the following discussion. The asterisked (*) interactions, of which there are three, display the interactions that were found in both studies. As Study 2 has already attempted to discuss the main effects and interactions of Study 2, these will not be considered in the discussion for Study 3. It must be acknowledged that replicated main effects and interactions reported by Study 3 (16-21) are with an older sample population to Study 2 (11-16). This provides evidence that these replicated findings are not due to chance and can be attributed to a comprehensive age group that covers early adolescence to emerging adulthood developmental timeframes.

Table 6-7. Comparison of Study 2 and 3 interaction findings

Study 2	Hypotheses	Study 3
DV x Gender	H3.3.1	Gender x Audience
DV x Repetition*	H3.3.2	DV x Repetition*
Gender x Repetition	H3.4	DV x Humour scenario (banter)
Audience x Repetition*	H3.5	Audience x repetition*
Gender x Humour scenario (banter)	H3.6.1	Gender x Humour Scenario (banter, offensive joke)
Audience x Humour scenario* (offensive joke and cyberbullying)	H3.6.2	Audience x Humour scenario* (offensive joke and cyberbullying)
Repetition x Humour scenario (banter)	H3.6.3	Repetition x Humour scenario (banter, joke CB)
-		DV x Cyberbullying type

6.4.2 Gender

Support for H3.1 can be evidenced by the overall main effect of gender and the two interactions that contain gender as a variable. The main effect of gender demonstrates that females perceive the vignettes as more severe than males. As this finding was discussed in Study 2 (section 5.5.2), this finding will not be reviewed in Study 3 discussion. Unlike Study 2, Study 3 did not find an interaction between gender and the dependent variables, therefore, it could be inferred that there is no significant gender difference between perceptions of offensiveness or perceiving the vignettes as cyberbullying and H3.3.1 is not fully supported by the findings of Study 3.

The gender main effect for Study 3 was found to be enhanced depending on the levels of audience (having an audience), and humour scenario (banter and offensive jokes). As the gender and audience interaction was not reported in Study 2, it was not hypothesised. This interaction will be discussed within the audience section (6.4.3.1) within the discussion. The gender and humour scenario interaction, although has been previously discussed in Study 2 (section 5.5.6.1), will be further discussed under hypothesis H3.6.1 (section 6.4.6.2) in light of this interaction being found to be extended in Study 3.

6.4.3 Audience

Study 2 and 3 report the same interaction between audience and repetition. An interaction finding between audience and repetition is found in Study 3 which supports the hypothesis (H3.5) that predicts that audience presence will increase both outcome variables ratings only when repetition is also present. This interaction was discussed in Study 2 (section 5.5.3). Audience was also found to interact with gender, which was not predicted for Study 3 as it was not reported in Study 2. This interaction will be discussed below.

6.4.3.1 Gender x Audience

From findings reported in Study 3, audience can be viewed as a main effect. However, the gender and audience interaction would suggest that this is being driven by gender. The gender and audience interaction demonstrates a significant effect for females in terms of audience but less for males. This suggests that audience has a more limited effect on males than it does for females in terms of severity perception of the vignettes, indicating that for females, having an audience creates greater severity perception. This interaction between gender and audience was not found in Study 2. However, the sample in Study 2 was younger, which may explain this disparity. Relatedly, previous literature reported a gender difference for severity perception of audience, with literature generally indicating that audience can increase the severity perception of cyberbullying (Sticca & Perren, 2013). This suggest that this finding could be related to the humour context of the vignettes and age of the sample. What was reported in Studies 2 and 3 was an interaction between repetition and audience, with audience creating greater effects of severity perception when the behaviour is repeated. This interaction was attributed to both constructs, repetition and audience, being potentially conflated due to the similarity of their presentation online (i.e., one act being repetitively shared or viewed by others). Therefore, this finding may reflect a shift in perception as adolescents develop and perhaps use ICT differently to interact. For instance, female undergraduate students are more likely to use social networking sites (SNS) than males (Thompson & Lougheed, 2012) and so are at greater risk of experiencing public attacks. Females also use SNS differently to males; cross-sectional

research with young people (aged 12-16 years old) in England reported that although males do use SNS, they tend to use them to play games, whereas females are more likely to use SNS share media or comment on other people's shared media (Gray, 2018). Research with young adolescents (Lenhart & Madden, 2007) and emerging adults (Pempek et al., 2009) has demonstrated similar findings with females having a greater preference to share photos on SNS.

An explanation for this gender difference has been linked to a greater desire for females to express their identity online (Pempek et al., 2009). This may account for the gender and audience interaction, as females may consider a public attack as a more explicit attack on their identity, which would be considered as more severe and impactful on how they are perceived. Online identity is based on what a user chooses to disclose to others (Marwick, 2013). This means that a SNS profile represents, to varying degrees, the customised identity of the person who owns the profile in terms of the descriptive personal information, preferences, and interests and the media that they share (Hu et al., 2014; Manago et al., 2008). Females and males have been reported to present themselves differently in SNS, with females divulging more content related to relationships and feelings compared to males who express more content related to status and technology (Sveningsson-Elm, 2007). Females also post more photographs online of family or friends compared to males who post photos and information regarding sports, objects, or outdoor settings which may reflect status (Bond, 2009; Tifferet & Vilnai-Yavetz, 2014). Females spend more time managing how their SNS profile is received by viewers (McAndrews & Jeong, 2012) because they are more concerned with how they appear online (Manago et al., 2008) and are more likely to disclose more information (Hollenbaugh & Everett, 2013) and personal experiences on their SNS profile (Lenhart & Fox, 2006). Posting more media content that is personally related to them may perhaps leave them more exposed to receiving aggressive humour or general attacks to their identity. These findings may therefore contribute to the notion that females will perceive public jokes made at their expense online as more severe because of the impact it may have on their identity. As most individuals communicate online with people they know offline (Staude-Müller et al., 2012), the connection between the virtual and real worlds could lead to a victim feeling helpless

and unable to control the situation and so having a larger impact on the individual than private jokes (Staude-Müller et al., 2012; Sticca & Perren, 2013).

6.4.4 Repetition

Support for H3.2 can be evidenced by the reported main effect which demonstrates that vignettes that included repetition (i.e., the perpetrator had targeted the victim previously) augmented severity perception overall (i.e., both outcome variables). Furthermore, a replicated interaction was found which suggests that without repetition, lower ratings were reported for perceived cyberbullying compared to perceived offensiveness (H3.3.2). This interaction was discussed in Study 2 (section 5.5.4.1). The gender and repetition interaction hypothesis (H3.4) which suggests that females will assign greater ratings for vignettes that included repetition was not reported in Study 3 and so is not supported.

6.4.5 Cyberbullying type
6.4.5.1 DV x cyberbullying type

An interaction between type of cyberbullying the outcome variables was reported from the model. This interaction was not predicted for Study 3 as it was not reported in Study 2, however, type of cyberbullying was left in the model for Study 3 for exploratory purposes. The outcome variable interaction with cyberbullying behaviour variable indicates that outing, as a type of cyberbullying, has a greater likelihood of being rated more highly for offensiveness, than it does for cyberbullying. Put differently, all three levels of cyberbullying type (harassment, outing, and denigration) were more likely to be perceived as offensive than as cyberbullying, but outing was more likely to be perceived as offensive than the other levels. This interaction should be considered within the context of the humoristic vignettes, therefore, outing another individual in a humoristic manner could be deemed as more offensive. Contextually, the general theme of the two master vignettes that involved outing behaviour involved sharing another person's information without their permission (i.e., a secret or media). A small amount of previous literature has considered the specific types of cyberbullying in relation to severity perception, with literature mainly considering how the medium in which the

type of cyberbullying was administered (i.e., through text messages, emails, phone calls, chat-room media, or websites) (Chen et al., 2012; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Smith et al., 2006).

From the literature that does explore severity perception of cyberbullying types, outing has been reported to be considered as more serious and offensive. For instance, from cross-sectional findings with Ecuadorian students (aged 16-18 years old), Pieschl et al. (2015) found outing behaviours to be the most distressing type of behaviour in comparison to denigration, harassment, and impersonation. Despite these types of cyberbullying found to be less widespread, denigration, outing, and impersonation were found to be the most distressing forms of cyberbullying for the German participants (aged 10-25 years old) who participated in a cross-sectional study (Staude-Müller et al., 2012). Whereas common behaviour, such as harassment, sexual harassment, and flaming were perceived as less distressing. This area of research is still awaiting further empirical evidence to indicate if a specific type of cyberbullying is consistently perceived as the most severe. Based on the findings of the present study, humoristic aggressive online behaviours are generally perceived as more offensive if they involve outing.

Experimentally contextualising cyberbullying within the framework of humour is unknown territory for previous research. As this interaction connects the concept of offensiveness, and not perceiving the behaviour as cyberbullying, with outing behaviours that are contextualised as humoristic, a potential explanation should be drawn from how this type of cyberbullying is viewed within the context humour. It could be possible that humour has had an impact on this particular type of cyberbullying, as realistically, outing may be more difficult to perceive as a joking behaviour. This may explain why it is an uncommon behaviour to perpetrate against another (Staude-Müller et al., 2012). Sharing private information that belongs to other people without permission could be perceived as explicitly more offensive because it is more of a universally agreed upon offense, regardless of any known or unknown intent. For this age group, there may be an understanding around this clear violation of privacy and trust between friend and non-friends.

6.4.6 Humour scenario

Similar to findings in Study 2, Study 3 reported a number of interactions which included the humour scenario factor. As viewed in Table 6-7, the same interaction for humour scenario and audience was reported for both Study 2 and Study 3, supporting hypothesis H3.6.2. This hypothesis predicted that when an audience is included in a vignette, significantly greater ratings for both outcome variables will be predicted for the humour scenario factor dimensions offensive joke and cyberbullying than the remaining dimensions banter and joke cyberbullying. As this interaction was discussed in Study 2 it will not be discussed in Study 3.

6.4.6.1 Dependent Variables x Humour scenario

An interaction between humour styles and the outcome variables was reported from the model. This interaction was not predicted as it was not found in Study 2. The outcome variable and humour scenario interaction suggest that the banter dimension of the humour scenario variable alone has a much greater likelihood of being assigned a higher rating for offensiveness than as cyberbullying. Essentially, this reflects how banter, which in the vignette involves aggressive humour between friends, is much more likely to be perceived as offensive than as cyberbullying. Interpretation of the interaction demonstrates that although there is potential for aggressive humour to be offensive, banter is much less likely to be perceived as cyberbullying, which may be attributed to the interaction occurring between friends. This finding could be attributed to several possible explanations. Potentially it may represent a shift in maturity concerning the perception of banter, with this age group perhaps having learnt more advanced skills in interpreting the ambiguities of behaviours such as banter and teasing, face-to-face and online. Having greater experience of banter during development could lead to more insight into whether aggressive humour is either banter or cyberbullying. Also, the use of aggressive humour declines during adolescence (Keltner et al., 2001; Warm, 1997), due to the development of these skills which could mean that older adolescents are more equipped to recognise if banter is cyberbullying or playful banter.

As previous literature has suggested (Guerra et al., 2011; Harrison et al., 2022; Postigo et al., 2019), some cyberbullying is perpetrated for the purpose of a joke. Aggressive humour such as teasing and banter is also motivated by humour for prosocial affiliative purposes between friends. However, the online landscape of these interactions is changed by the lack of social indicators (Baruch, 2005), which in the face-to-face environment is utilised to recognise if aggressive humour is prosocial or antisocial (Dehue et al., 2008; Keltner, 2009). Additional factors also have strong potential to impact how aggressive humour is recognised, such as social distance and spatial distance, which conceivably impact how aggressive humour is interpreted. The violating aspect of banter and teasing, for instance, is harder to perceive as benign, which makes the evaluation of the behaviour debateable. Differentiating between humorous or cyberbullying behaviour is problematic for young people (Baas et al., 2013). As this interaction was found for the older age group and not the younger age group in Study 2, this interaction would suggest that older adolescents and the emerging adult group are more equipped to recognise banter between friends as being a more stable interaction that is prosocial.

6.4.6.2 Gender x Humour scenario

The interaction between gender and humour scenario variables was reported and discussed in Study 2. The findings of the interaction reported in Study 2 outlined that females were more likely to report the first dimension of the humour scenario, banter, as more severe than the other levels, offensive joke, joke cyberbullying, and cyberbullying, than males. This finding led to hypothesis H3.6.1, which predicts the same finding for Study 3. Study 3 also reports this interaction, however, in addition to banter, females also reported offensive jokes as significantly more severe than males, therefore, the gender and humour scenario interaction reported in Study 3 partially supports H3.6.1 but also extends this finding. Firstly, the similarity between both interactions reported in Study 2 and Study 3 should be acknowledged. This finding suggests that for both younger and older populations, females are more likely to perceive the hypothetical vignettes as more severe for the lowest level of the humour scenario variable, banter. This dimension within the variable depicts offensive humour between

members of the same friendship group. This interaction is discussed in Study 2 (section 5.5.6.1). Building on this, Study 3 finds that females rate banter and the next ascending level, offensive joke, with higher severity than do males. Interpretation of this interaction should primarily acknowledge the age difference between both samples used for both studies. The offensive joke level within the humour scenario variable depicts a scenario that involves a different social context to banter, in that it includes an online aggressive humour transgression between an in-group and out-group member. This type of aggressive humour, for older females, was perceived as potentially more severe than for younger females who took part in Study 2.

The offensive joke level within the humour scenario variable depicts a unique and complex situation. In an offensive joke scenario, a victim's information is shared online to others unknown to the victim by a perpetrator. The perpetrator, who is friends with a friend of the victim, has been given access to that information by the friend of the victim. Within these hypothetical vignettes, the purpose of sharing that information is for a joke. The offensive joke scenario represents a violation of a victims' privacy. The interaction reported in Study 3 indicates that older females perceive this violation as more severe than males. Privacy has been defined as "the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others" (Westin 1967, p. 7). Theoretically, once that information has been shared with other members of a friendship group, they become co-owners of that information (Petronio, 2002). Boundaries dictating disclosure of that information are negotiated within the social context of the friendship group (Altman, 1975). However, it is suggested that the physical boundaries which are installed in the offline world are more difficult to translate in the online world (Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011) due to the affordances of the internet such as persistence, replicability, scalability, searchability (boyd, 2010), and shareability (Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011).

There is mixed consideration concerning the gendered perspective of online disclosure. One side of the argument suggests that the societal gendered expectation for females is to maintain online privacy and refrain from sharing private information (Petronio, 2002), which can be viewed in research that has found females to have greater privacy management on social media than males (Child & Starcher, 2017; Quinn & Papacharissi, 2018). Potentially, this may be an explanation for interaction findings of

gender and humour scenario, as disclosure of private information by a third party would be viewed incongruent to the social norm upheld by this expectation. Another side of the argument suggests that online behaviour by females is dictated by their expected social role of being highly communal (Eagly & Wood, 1991; Eagly et al., 2000). In the digital context, this involves greater self-disclosure (Xie & Kang, 2015), social connectivity (Kimbrough et al., 2013), and posting media (Hargittai, 2007). If females are self-disclosing information online more than males, they could be more at risk of third parties sharing their information with negative intent. Potentially, this may be a rationale as to why the older females in Study 3 reported greater severity perception for the offensive joke level, as compared to younger females in Study 2. The interaction finding of Study 3 between gender and humour scenario contributes to this debate by including the manner and humour, in which this privacy violation is perpetrated. The dynamic of humour, therefore, may indicate for females, that because the privacy violation was for the purpose of a joke, that there is negative intent by the perpetrator. This potential theoretical perspective provides an avenue for future research.

6.4.6.3 Repetition x humour scenario

The interaction between repetition and humour scenario variables was reported and discussed in Study 2. Although repetition increased the severity ratings for all levels of humour scenario, the findings of the interaction reported in Study 2 outlined that repetition, relative to no repetition, was more likely to be perceived with higher severity for the first level of the humour scenario variable, banter, than the other levels, offensive joke, joke cyberbullying, and cyberbullying. This interaction led to predicting the same interaction for Study 3 (H3.6.3). Study 3 also reports the main effects of repetition increasing the severity ratings for all levels of humour scenario and reports a similar interaction. However, in addition to banter, repetition was also reported to be significantly more severe for the joke cyberbullying level. Therefore, H3.6.3 is partially support by the repetition and humour scenario findings. The joke cyberbullying dimension depicts a cyberbullying scenario that includes a victim being targeted by an unknown perpetrator, with the motivation for the incident stated as being for a joke. The findings of this interaction suggest that online hostile humour, which repeatedly

targets an individual by a member of an out-group is perceived with greater severity than a one-off attack.

As the interaction between repetition and humour scenario was found with the older sample in Study 3, it is plausible to suggest that in the digital world, older adolescents and emerging adults have developed a greater awareness around communicating online. Repetition could be a factor which has developed as a firm indicator of antisocial cyber teasing or cyber banter, if it was perpetrated by an unknown individual. As previously reported in Study 2 (sections 5.5.4 and 5.5.6.3), this interaction provides strong evidence for the inclusion of repetition within the cyberbullying definition (Olweus, 2013), and its mediating influence on the perception of intentionality (Ackers, 2012; Langos, 2012; Menesini et al., 2012). From a developmental perspective, teasing as a construct has been reported to be a behaviour which is perceived differently from childhood to early adolescence (Keltner et al., 2001). Between the ages of 11-13 years old, young people begin to view teasing as a prosocial behaviour as well as an antisocial behaviour (Warm, 1997), whereas younger youth view teasing fundamentally in a literal sense as a negative behaviour (Mills, 2018; Warm, 1997). One of the arguments for this prominent age shift of teasing perception relates to the proposal that adolescents at this age develop the ability to understand nonliteral communication such as sarcasm and irony (Ackerman, 1983; Keltner et al., 2001). Without social markers being available online, recognising irony and sarcasm can be difficult (Baas et al., 2013; Dehue et al., 2008) and other means of identifying harmless or hurtful behaviours are needed. Findings of this interaction suggest repetition seems to be a factor that is considered by older individuals to appraise online hostile humour. Qualitative interview research has reported that older adolescents (15- to 16-year-olds) demonstrate a greater degree of understanding of the concept of teasing, in comparison to younger age groups (7- to 8-year-olds and 11- to 12-year-olds) (Mills, 2018). The older adolescents demonstrated that they were more mindful of causing offensive especially within teasing interactions between friends. This degree of mindfulness could be attributed to the interaction finding of Study 3 as severity perception ratings increased for the banter and joke cyberbullying levels if the hostile humour was repeated. In this sense, older adolescents and emerging adults could have developed an understanding that repetitive attacks of hostile humour from a friend or stranger are clearly viewed

with greater severity and with negative intent, perhaps due to the lack of social indicators (Baruch, 2005; Kiesler et al., 1984; Madlock & Westerman, 2011).

6.4.7 Covariate analysis

6.4.7.1 Cyberbullying victim and perpetrator role

The victim and perpetrator scales that were included in the model were found to have minimal impact on the variables included in the two-way model in relation to the outcome variables, offensiveness and cyberbullying. Furthermore, neither scale was found to have a significant relationship with the outcome variables themselves. These findings in general show a lack of support for H3.7, which predicts that previous involvement of cyberbullying, either as a victim or perpetrator, would influence severity perceptions of the vignettes. The prediction for the role of the cyberbully victim and perpetrator was based on research that reported a relationship between experiencing cyberbullying as a victim or perpetrator and severity perception. Victims of cyberbullying have been found to have a greater degree of severity perception of cyberbullying (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Pieschl et al., 2015), which is especially the case for female victims (Campbell et al., 2013). However, as no relationship was found in the two-way model between gender and either victimisation or perpetration scales. An explanation for the lack of gender differences may be due to the lack of statistical power that is generated by the sample being predominantly female (73.62%). Additionally, a lack of support for the role of perpetrator was also apparent. Previous research has indicated that perpetrators may overestimate the harm that victims experience from being attacked (Giménez-Gualdo et al., 2015), and has also considered perpetrators to potentially underestimate their victims' experiences due to the remote nature of cyberbullying (Smith et al., 2008). A potential explanation for both victim and perpetrator scales providing limited impact on severity perception may stem from the difference between Study 3 and previous research, which is the context of humour. Perhaps the cyberbullying scenarios were evaluated differently by victims and perpetrators compared to previous research, because of the degree of ambiguity that the humour introduced to the vignettes. As evidenced by the findings of Study 3, aggressive humour is nuanced by relationships, gender, type of cyberbullying, audience,

and repetition. Using cross-sectional methods, previous research has demonstrated a relationship between cyberbullying roles and self-reported perceptions of severity (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Pieschl et al., 2015). By using this approach, specific factors are ignored, which may impact the variation of severity perception for victims and perpetrators. As Study 3 has found minimal differences in the model after controlling for cyberbullying roles, it is inconclusive whether any differences exist regarding the severity perception of humoristic cyberbullying between cybervictims and cyberperpetrators.

6.4.7.2 Aggressive humour style covariate

H3.8 refers to higher ratings for aggressive humour styles predicting lower ratings for both outcome variables, perceived offensiveness and cyberbullying. Findings from the covariate analysis primarily support this hypothesis, as no difference was found between the outcome variables and so it is inferred that lower ratings for both outcome variables can be attributed to higher ratings for aggressive humour style. These findings suggest that having an aggressive humour style may mediate the perception of hostile humour in terms of evaluating how offensive it is and perceiving the behaviour as cyberbullying activity. This logically makes sense for an individual who has more of an aggressive style of humour to perceive aggressive humour with less severity, as their preference of humour could potentially be normalised (Cuadrado-Gordillo & Fernández-Antello, 2020). The rationale as to why this is the case within the context of cyberbullying, however, is unknown to the current field of cyberbullying research. For young people, cyberbullying perpetration has been reported to be related to having an aggressive humour style (Sari, 2016). Taking this into account, having an aggressive humour style may lead to a blindness with regards to how their aggressive humour online is perceived by those it is directed at. For instance, Wu et al. (2016) found empathy is positively correlated with all humour styles; self-defeating, self-enhancing, and affiliative, except for an aggressive style, which was negative correlated with empathy. This suggests that those with an aggressive humour style may lack empathetic tendencies. The findings of Study 3 support to this interpretation, demonstrating that those with an aggressive

humour style may perceive aggressive humour as less severe within the context of online interactions.

6.5 Conclusion

Multi-level modelling of the dataset for Study 3 reports multiple findings, with some interactions being replicated which were reported in Study 2 and some interactions found only for Study 3. Overall, a gender difference can be viewed in terms of severity perception of the hypothetical vignettes, with females reporting greater severity perceptions than males. Repetition was also found to be a factor which indicates greater severity perception overall. Study 3 shows that audience mediates severity perceptions of the hypothetical vignettes for females, which is in contrast to findings in Study 2, which found the same relationship but for repetition. The rationale for perhaps why older females in Study 3 consider public forms of targeted online hostile humour as harsher could be viewed in relation to female preference of ICT and SNS usage. An interaction that can only be attributed to Study 3 relates to both outcome variables, perceived offensiveness and perceived cyberbullying, as well as the type of cyberbullying. Study 3 reports that the older sample perceives all three forms of cyberbullying with greater offensiveness than as cyberbullying behaviours. However, the interaction depicts outing to have the greatest relationship with offensiveness than harassment and denigration. The interpretation of this interaction is considered within the contextual, humoristic nature of hypothetical vignettes. Similar to Study 2, the humour scenario variable, which involved manipulations of perpetrator group membership, was found to have relationships with gender, audience and repetition. However, some differences can be observed. Furthermore, humour scenario was also found to interact with both outcome variables, indicating that the first dimension of the humour scenario, banter, alone has a much greater likelihood of being assigned a higher rating for offensiveness than as cyberbullying. The findings from these interactions suggest that the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim is highly significant to evaluating the severity of an online aggressive humour interaction.

A covariate analysis of the additional variables (i.e., experience of cyberbullying victimisation, cyberbullying perpetration, and aggressive humour style) reports how

these potentially confounding variables impact the hypothetical vignettes model. Firstly, results report evidence that previous experience of cyberbullying, victimisation, or perpetration, plays a minimal role in hostile humour severity perception. Aggressive humour style was found to impact severity perception, indicating that higher aggressive humour style scores reflect lower severity perception ratings for the vignettes. Considering that the vignettes portrayed aggressive online humour behaviours, contextually, this finding suggests that those with an aggressive humour style may view their own online hostile humour actions as less severe. The implications of this finding concerning aggressive humour style are considered alongside other individual attributes such as empathy. Overall, the findings of Study 3 are considered to be highly impactful as they report multiple relationships, with some replicating those of Study 2, between variables which impact the severity perception of online hostile humour behaviours, such as cyber banter.

Chapter 7 – General Discussion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will primarily focus on the key findings of this thesis and discuss each finding in line with the aim of the thesis and research questions: a) experiencing and interpreting aggressive, online humour b) gender and severity perception, c) audience and repetition, and d) aggressive humour style and humoristic cyberbullying. The chapter will discuss how the main findings significantly contribute to the cyberbullying and humour fields of literature by demonstrating how they extend previous research. An evaluation will be provided of the strengths and limitations of the methodologies applied within the three studies carried out for this thesis and will include appropriate future research considerations. Finally, key findings will be attributed to potentially beneficial implications.

7.2 Experiencing and interpreting aggressive, online humour

Focus groups carried out for Study 1 of this thesis provided clarity and insight into how young people experience aggressive humour that is contextually related to cyberbullying. Study 1 addressed RQ1 which concerns how young people interpret and experience humour within the context of cyberbullying. The research objective for Study 1 was to qualitatively investigate young people's perceptions of how humour and cyberbullying are related and experienced. Four themes emerged from the reflective thematic analysis carried out on the data:

      1) Banter as a social interaction,

      2) Online Misinterpretation,

      3) "Bad" banter and cyberbullying, and

      4) Severity perception.

The general narrative of the themes depicts a framework of how young people experience online aggressive humour, such as banter, and the principal considerations made in the attempt to translate an interaction as harmless fun or harmful attacks. Banter was described as a humorous social interaction that mainly occurs between friends. The interaction is based on being offensive but with no intent to cause harm,

and so is perceived as humorous. This is supported by the Benign Violation Theory (McGraw & Warren, 2010), which proposes that something is perceived to be humorous when it is simultaneously perceived as a violation that is benign. In the case of banter, the violation is the threat to the banter receiver's identity, which is perceived as being innocuous because the banter has come from a friend and hence represents interpersonal familiarity (Keltner et al., 1998; 2001). Previous research has explored aggressive humour behaviours and has found that offensive teasing is standard practise within friendship groups and is used to build and maintain relationships (Jones et al., 2005; Keltner et al., 2001; Odenbring & Johansson, 2021). Despite the ambiguity that can originate from the contrast between aggression and play (Kowalski et al., 2001), behaviours such as teasing and banter between friends is firmly viewed by the literature (Dynel, 2008) and the findings of Study 1 as a prosocial behaviour.

The majority of the literature concerning teasing and banter behaviours is considered in the physical context. Findings of Study 1 expand this field of literature with further insight into how online aggressive humour behaviours are perceived within friendships. Analysis of the focus group content demonstrated that aggressive humour online does occur between friends, although they can be more difficult to interpret as harmless by the recipient. This is reflected in findings from Ging and Norman (2016) who investigated online offensive humour between friends from semi-structured interviews with 14- and 15-year-old Irish females. In this study, participants described the difficulty to interpret ambiguous aggressive behaviour between friends, with the line between innocuous behaviours and intentionally aggressive behaviours being particularly grey and more susceptible to misinterpretation. Furthermore, a common outcome of ambiguous interactions was online conflict such as 'flaming'. This was established as being highly likely for the participants as the interaction could happen remotely and not face-to-face. Focus groups findings from Study 1 support the conflict aspect and online disinhibition element of this research as flaming was reported to be an outcome of misinterpreting online banter, as was behaving more harshly online.

Study 1 also extends this research by contributing an additional theoretical perspective from the theme of "Bad" banter and cyberbullying. This theme suggests some recipients of banter, who have felt offended by the interaction, may choose group allegiance within the decision to challenge banter. This indicates that status within

friendship groups may facilitate the normalisation of hostile humour behaviour. Furthermore, in the online environment, where banter is more likely to be ambiguous (Baas et al., 2013; Baldasare et al., 2012), this normalisation is also likely to occur, but for potentially more aggressive behaviours. Adding to this is the concept that humour can be euphemistically used as a cover for aggressive humour, which reinforces the normalisation of aggressive behaviours. By classifying aggressive humour such as teasing and banter as "just a joke", the perpetrator is able to relinquish any responsibility of harm and sets a precedent of what is acceptable from their perspective (Rawlings, 2019). This is potentially important to consider from a recipient's perspective as they may still experience the negative outcome of that behaviour. This was found in Douglass et al.'s (2019) research which found teasing between friends to have negative consequences, despite the view that teasing between friends is harmless. In a general sense, findings from Study 1 suggest that the premise of banter between friends being concretely deemed as prosocial may not be as straight forward as previously proposed (Dynel, 2008).

How young people interpret banter was a key finding from Study 1. Participants demonstrated a clear understanding for how online communication lacks social cues or social context online and identified it as an issue that can lead to misinterpretation, which has been supported in the literature previously (Baas et al., 2013; Baldasare et al., 2012). Furthermore, participants proposed that without social indicators or context, evaluating what is acceptable is left to an individual's perspective of what is acceptable in relation to their personality or sense of humour. This suggests that there are differences in how individuals perceive banter in a physical group setting and in a remote, isolated position, which are important to account for in order to understand how ambiguous aggressive humour can be perceived. From a perpetrator's perspective, being more inclined to behave more harshly online was discussed as a potential issue of interpreting online banter. This in turn is linked to the Online Disinhibition Effect (ODE) (Suler, 2004), which rationalises why individuals may behave differently online than they would offline. Without any immediate repercussion, or the possibility of physical retaliation, users may feel braver online, and more inclined to be harsher (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Pelfrey Jr., & Weber, 2014) and so may behave differently online as they would usually offline (Brown et al., 2006; Ritter, 2014). Researchers have postulated that

online interactions lack the mediation of cognitive moral engagement within their actions, which allows them to behave more aggressively (Barlett, 2015; Bauman & Yoon, 2014; Suler, 2004). As put forward in the introduction to chapter 5 (section 5.1.3), the ODE also may align with psychological distancing (Trope & Liberman, 2010), specifically spatial distancing. Spatial distancing concerns the spatial proximity affordances of the internet which allow users to perceive their own actions as being less aggressive than they are. Therefore, spatial distance may blind the awareness of how user actions may be impacting others. Findings from Study 1 contribute to this field of literature by providing a young person's perspective of using hostile humour within the context of the affordances of the online environment. Participants were clearly able to acknowledge and demonstrate an awareness of an increase of aggressiveness in relation to banter in the online world. Consequently, Study 1 findings explain how the experience of online banter could potentially be harsher owing to online disinhibition (Suler, 2004) while remote communication and banter become more ambiguous online because of fewer social indicators and impoverished context.

7.3 Severity perception

From the three studies reported in this thesis, several factors were identified as having an impact on the severity perception of online aggressive humour used within cyberbullying activity for young people and emerging adults. These factors were identified through the focus groups in Study 1, which were then experimentally tested in Study 2 and 3. RQ2 and RQ3 were addressed by Study 2 by investigating the identified factors and exploring how they influenced young people's (aged 11-16) perceptions of online aggressive humour and how they influenced differentiation between humorous intent or cyberbullying. The identified factors were gender, repetition, audience, type of cyberbullying, relationships, and humour style. The three research objectives for Study 2 (2 and 3) concerned investigating the relationship between the identified factors and perceptions of offensiveness and perceived cyberbullying behaviour. Additionally, Study 2 included gender as a factor as research objective (4) to account for any gender bias that could exist.

Study 3 replicated the design and methodology of Study 2 with an older sample of older adolescents and emerging adults (16-21 years old). Study 3 essentially had the same research questions but were descriptively adapted for the older sample age (RQ4 and RQ5). Study 3 also had the same research objectives as Study 2 (research objective 3, 4 and 5). Findings of Study 2 and 3 indicated that several of the factors interacted with outcome variables separately, i.e., offensiveness and perceptions of cyberbullying, and interacted with each other when the outcome variables were combined. For that reason, the factors will be briefly discussed independently and then the context of these interactions will be considered.

7.3.1 Gender and severity perception

One of the most salient findings from the quantitative research portion of this thesis relates to gender. Severity perception differences between a number of variables in Study 2 and 3 have been found to be attributed to gender differences. The overarching results indicate that males perceive the severity of online aggressive humour to be lower than females. Within the framework of the Benign Violation Theory (McGraw & Warren, 2010), this would suggest that males are more likely to perceive the violation of aggressive humour as benign, as opposed to being malign. This standpoint also suggests that for males, the social norms which are used to evaluate the contrast between benign and malign are more compatible with teasing and banter, despite how ambiguous it may be. This aligns with hegemonic practises of masculinity, which derive from cultural ideals and societal norms that shape how males should behave (Connell, 1987). Contextually, teasing and banter coincides with hegemonic, hetero-normative masculinity which legitimises male aggressive behaviour (Ringrose, 2006; Ringrose & Renold, 2010). Supporting this premise, researchers have theorised that humour is gendered to the extent that aggression for males is more commonplace and part of the daily routine (Henriksen & Bengstsson, 2018). Teasing behaviours have been masculinised as being an integrative part of becoming a man (McCann et al., 2010; Sulkowski et al., 2014). This may be due to males experiencing aggressive humour more during childhood (Bergen, 2020, Kowalski, 2003). Not being offended by a direct attack of harmless or hurtful teasing, is a general conformity to societal gender norms (Sulkowski et al., 2014). The

pressure to conform to gender norms has been argued to be the most prevalent during adolescence (McHale et al., 2004; Clasen & Brown, 1985) and so perhaps males have learnt that they will be ridiculed if they respond with negative emotions (Eder et al., 1995).

From a similar approach, females perceiving aggressive humour as more severe than males is supported by the concept of social roles (Eagly, 1987; Eagly et al., 2000). Principally, this theory rationalizes how men and women learn what the expected gendered social norms are by observing and socially interacting with others, or in other words, social construction has led to sex differences in "response to the particulars of the local situations and histories" (Wood & Eagly, 2002, p. 700). Female roles are categorised as involving emotion, relational, and conflict averse, and more interpersonal, whereas masculine, male roles are categorised as confrontational, direct, and public (Hine & Leman, 2013). Indeed, males and females have been reported to demonstrate different prosocial behaviours, which align with the stereotypes of gendered roles (Carlo et al., 2003), with females tending to be more communal and empathetic and males more performance based, and goal driven (Eagly, 2009).

Gendered roles have also been reflected in how females and males use the ICT. Longitudinal research with a young German sample, 8- to 16-year-olds, found that females use social media more to socialise with friends and for schoolwork, whereas males are more likely to be involved with more entertainment purposes such as gaming and music (Pfetsch, 2012). Literature suggests that aggressive behaviours that conform to gender specific patterns may link to an underlying socially desirable goal of status within friendship group. For instance, females who initiate relationally aggressive behaviours such as rumour spreading and exclusion behaviours towards others in a social group are perceived as having greater social power and social standing (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Owens et al., 2000). This suggests that although aggressive behaviours are perceived as more acceptable, this may be dependent on gender normative roles (i.e., banter and teasing aligning more with male roles). This concurs with research that suggests that males appraise humour as more valuable than females in terms how they positively perceive others as being popular (Closson, 2009; Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006). Findings from Study 2 and 3 empirically extend this theoretical perspective to the online

context and support the premise of gendered aggressive humour roles which evidently exist in the online environment.

7.3.2 Repetition and audience

A key finding related to severity perception of humoristic cyberbullying were the roles of repetition and audience and the relationship between these factors. Repetition of an act of cyberbullying and hostile humour were described as factors which may enhance severity perception in the focus groups in Study 1. Repetition was rationalised as increasing severity perception because it creates greater transparency of the perpetrator's intent to harm. Participants rationalised, as Ackers (2012), Langos (2012) and Menesini et al. (2012) also explain, that a one-off episode could be a joke, which would be perceived as having less intent, but multiple episodes would demonstrate a purposeful attack. Previous studies have experimentally tested repetition within severity perception of cyberbullying (Menesini et al., 2012). However, how the constructs of humour and repetition coincide has generally been an assumption, which was based on Olweus's (2013) conceptualisation of teasing within the traditional bullying framework. A great deal of cyberbullying research has therefore, based their inclusion of the repetition dimension on minimal evidence. Study 2 and 3 go some way to provide empirical support of the inclusion of repetition within the cyberbullying definition by providing evidence that repetition increases severity perception of online aggression behaviours that are humoristic. These findings suggest that repetition can be used as an indicator of negative intent behind cyberbullying perpetration but also of cyberteasing and cyberbanter behaviours that are ambiguously integrated into humorous interactions.

Alternative perspectives regarding repetition within the cyberbullying literature outline that a single online attack may still be harmful to a victim (Dredge et al., 2014), especially if multiple people view that attack (Dooley et al., 2009; Nocentini et al., 2010). Findings from Study 2 and 3 moderately support this proposition. Firstly, results from Study 2 and 3 indicate that without repetition, a single incident of online aggressive humour can still be perceived as highly offensive, despite it not being classified as cyberbullying. As these findings were reported by both studies, this would strongly

suggest that intention is not required for a single incident to be perceived as offensive. The implications of this finding suggest that a degree of distress may be experienced by the victim from an online aggressive humour interaction. Secondly, Study 2 and 3 report public incidents as being perceived more severely if the incident was repeated, suggesting that an audience alone does not predict greater severity perceptions but along with repetition, the audience exacerbates the perceived harshness of an incident. This suggests that conceptually, audience and repetition together represent a situation where severity perception increases due to the collaboration of a repetitive attack that is viewed by an audience. Without the clear intention that repetition signifies, an incident that occurs once with an audience, is perceived as less severe and perhaps more as an unintended offense intended as a joke. This potentially may be due to the nature of relationships that young people have online, as most adolescents (Ging & Norman, 2016; Ringrose, 2012) and emerging adults (Pempek et al., 2009) know the peers who will potentially see online public attacks. A possible explanation may also derive from perceptions of the victim themselves in terms of status. A single attack implies that an individual has only been targeted once, and so they are not a solid victim who is consistently targeted. If an individual is repetitively targeted, with an audience, this may certify that they are being cyberbullied within the context of a joke and are therefore of lower status. The relationship between audience and repetition within the framework of humoristic cyberbullying is a meaningful contribution to overall cyberbullying literature as it contextualises why intention and an audience are an important factor for cyberbullying identification.

7.3.3 Aggressive humour style and humoristic cyberbullying

Study 3 explored if there were any confounding effects of previous experiences of cyberbullying victimisation, and cyberbullying perpetration and aggressive humour style scores in relation to the outcome variables. The addition of these covariates was captured in research objectives 5, 6, and, 7 to enable Study 3 to further investigation and address RQ4 and RQ5. A key finding from Study 3 was the relationship between having an aggressive humour style and perceiving the vignettes with less severity overall. Contextually, the implications of this result signify an important contribution to

the field of cyberbullying literature. Firstly, this finding could potentially be assigned to those participants in previous research who reported no impact from cyberbullying perpetration (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Otega et al., 2012). Participants in previous cyberbullying research have attributed greater severity appraisal of online aggressive behaviours with an increase of negative outcomes for victims, in terms of themselves or others (Chen et al., 2015; Chen et al., 2015b). This may mean that having an aggressive humour style mediates severity perception, which in turn negates the negative consequences of cyberbullying victimisation. To what extent an aggressive humour style cushions the negative impact is a question for future research. Secondly, having an aggressive humour style has also been considered to be more attributable to males, as opposed to females (Hofman et al., 2020). Therefore, the lower severity perception related to having an aggressive humour style may explain why males in both Study 2 and 3 were found to overall have lower perceived severity of the hypothetical vignettes. Finally, cyberbullying perpetration has been found to predict having an aggressive humour style (Sari, 2016; Qodir et al., 2019). Considering these research findings in light of the finding of Study 3, suggests that cyberbullying perpetrators are more likely to perceive their actions with less severity. This is a complex finding as it highlights potential issues between severity perception and empathy: if an individual has low severity perception of their own actions, are they aware of the impact of their actions on others? The relationship between empathy, having an aggressive humour style and severity perception is considered in greater depth in the future research section of this chapter (section 7.6).

7.4 Evaluation of thesis methodology

7.4.1 Strengths

A core strength of the methodology used to carry out the research reported in this thesis stems from the mixed methods approach that is utilised to address the research questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The complex concept of humour within the phenomena of cyberbullying is a highly understudied area of research. Humour has been identified as a construct that plays a role within cyberbullying activity (Huang & Chou, 2010) and motivates cyberbullying perpetration (Englander, 2008; Raskauskas & Stoltz,

2007). However, hostile humour has received minimal attention in terms of how it impacts severity perception of cyberbullying and the possible interplay of factors which may mediate the interpretation of perceiving humoristic cyberbullying. Furthermore, although the construct of aggressive humour has been considered from an individual differences perspective (Fox et al., 2013; Martin et al., 2003) and bullying/cyberbullying perspective (Baas et al., 2013; Douglass et al., 2019; Kuiper et al., 2006; Sari 2016) to an extent that warrants further investigation, the construct has received little focus in terms of the role that aggressive humour can play within cyberbullying and the perceived severity of that role. In order to gain a coherent understanding of the context of humour within cyberbullying, the research initially employed focus groups to gain a perspective from young people in a more tailored manner. The focus groups used in Study 1 were instrumental to producing realistic and conceptually meaningful hypothetical vignettes for Study 2 and 3, which enabled the thesis to empirically test factors that may impact severity perception of humoristic cyberbullying instances. In addition, Study 3 was able to strengthen the findings from Study 2 by replicating a substantial number of results and introduce control variables. Consequently, Study 3 provided highly meaningful and consistent results which contribute to a neglected body of literature.

There are many benefits to conducting a blend of both qualitative and quantitative research methods to achieve the aim of a research project. The general objective of applying a mixed methods approach to this thesis was to enable the project to account for restrictions that are attributed to either method, if they were to have been conducted independently (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Greene, 2007). For instance, the focus groups were required to collect data that could be attributed to an in-depth and accurate understanding of young people's perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying (Carey, 2015; Creswell, 2003). Humour has been reported as a construct which plays a role in cyberbullying (Baas et al., 2013; Baldasare et al., 2012) but is unresearched in terms of a concentrated investigation, which warrants a participant focused methodology that gives a voice to that participant group (Mishna et al., 2004; Dennehy et al., 2020). Findings of the focus group were able to be utilised to inform the direction and design of the quantitative Studies 2 and 3, which is a main benefit of mixed methods designs, as it allows the project to oversee how each studies converge and corroborate

one another (Greene et al., 1989; Hemming, 2008). Indeed, the realistic link between the qualitative focus group study and the quantitative vignette studies can very easily be viewed as the cornerstone of the entire research project. By conducting focus groups in Study 1, the remaining studies were enabled to explore multiple relationships between identified factors and severity perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying not only based on what literature is available but also from a concentrated and rich dataset (Doyle et al., 2009). The combination of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies has enabled this thesis to obtain a comprehensive exploration young people's experiences, perspectives and severity perceptions of humoristic cyberbullying, which enhances the ability for thesis findings to be attributed to any future research, interventions or strategies that involve reducing or managing cyberbullying as a phenomenon (Crivello et al., 2009; Fevre et al., 2010).

The use of the fractional design and multi-level modelling utilised in Study 2 and 3 is a key strength of this thesis. As presenting the full vignette universe of 96 scenarios to each participant was not a viable option, the fractional design element enabled both studies to feasibly explore a large number of effects, in terms of main effects and two-way effects. The fractional design additionally permitted the vignette universe to be broader and include more relevant and realistic variables (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Atzmüller & Steiner, 2010), which enabled the vignettes to be more realistic. To viably analyse the outcome of the fractional design, which becomes unbalanced due to participants only responding to a subset of the vignette universe, multi-level modelling was utilised, which handled the imbalance and inevitable missing ratings (Baguley et al., 2022). Multilevel models allowed Study 2 and 3 to estimate the effects of the identified factors correctly in the fractional design whilst also incorporating random effects to handle the correlation between responses to the same vignette or from the same person (Auspurg & Hinz, 2015; Baguley et al., 2022). Traditional regression approaches would have failed to account for the intra-respondent correlation that existed between responses from the same participants (Field & Wright, 2011) and non-orthogonal relationship between factor dimensions and outcome variables (Baguley et al., 2022), creating a high risk of Type I errors (Baguley, 2012; 2018).

7.4.2 Limitations

The findings from the research conducted for this thesis are extensive and contribute a great deal to the cyberbullying body of literature, with important implications for future research. There are, however, a number of important limitations to consider whilst interpreting the research. These limitations can be viewed in main topic areas of hypothetical vignettes, social desirability and sample population.

7.4.2.1 Hypothetical vignettes

The experimental design of Study 2 and 3 of this thesis heavily relied on the reliability and validity of the vignettes. Experimental vignettes have been evidenced as a highly enriched and viable research method (Aguinis & Bradley, 2014; Atzmüller & Steiner, 2010) and a more ethically viable methodology (Collett & Childs, 2011) when researching sensitive topics with young age groups, which otherwise could involve re-creating behaviours in a laboratory or real-life setting. However, there are limitations to using hypothetical vignette methodology to consider alongside the findings of Study 2 and 3. The main criticism of hypothetical vignette methodology is how realistic the vignettes depict a true to life scenario (Hughes & Huby, 2002). This limitation was overcome and managed to a great extent by using data from focus groups to assist with the development of the master vignettes to ensure that the underlying storyline was as realistic as possible (Wason et al., 2002). Incorporating the various levels of independent variables into a vignette can be problematic as it can impact the plausibility of the storyline. Again, to tackle this, vignette development involved information from the focus groups to affirm the realism of the vignettes. There are potentially, however, some confounding variables which future research may want to include. For instance, research suggests that cyberbullying for young people begins in the physical context (Subrahmanyam et al, 2006) and with peers that they know (Ging & Norman, 2016; Pempek et al., 2009), therefore, some factors manipulated in the vignettes, such as audience, may be over simplistic and may not have fully captured the complexity and accuracy of a real-life scenario.

Another limitation to consider related to the vignettes, is their degree of humoristic authenticity. The vignettes were designed to be as realistic as possible, in

terms of the content, but one of the aims of the vignettes was to depict a scenario to participants that would portray a humorous situation. Participants in Study 2 and 3 rated the scenarios based on how offensive they were and how much they perceived the scenarios as cyberbullying activity. Although the vignettes were developed based on what participants in Study 1 had described as online banter, to what degree the scenarios are perceived as humorous is unknown. If this was measured, then a possible link could have been demonstrated between how funny the scenarios were perceived alongside their perceptions of the two outcome variables. For example, within the framework of the Benign Violation Theory (McGraw & Warren, 2010) the gender difference findings reported in Study 2 and 3 would suggest that males are more likely than females to perceive the violation of banter as simultaneously benign and offensive. However, as humour was not included as an outcome variable it is more difficult to make that connection between humour and perceived offensiveness. As the survey utilised in Study 2 and 3 was substantial and participants in Study 2 were younger adolescents, adding a third outcome variable was not a practical option, however, this could be something for future research to consider.

7.4.2.2 Social desirability

Study 1 compromised of a focus groups and Study 2 and Study 3 collected online self-report data which entailed using a variety of approaches to reach the target sample population. Study 2 aimed to collect data from young adolescents aged between 11 and 16 and Study 3 aimed to recruit participants transitioning between older adolescents and emerging adults, aged 16–21. Recruitment strategies included directly approaching multiple educational establishments, social media platforms and a research participant scheme linked to the university. Social desirability bias is one of the most salient issues related to focus group research (Nabors et al., 2001) and self-report measures (Furnham, 1986). For some participants, answering items with a perceived socially unacceptable response can be difficult as it presents themselves unfavourably (Nederhof, 1985). Adolescents have been suggested to be particularly prone to social desirability bias in the focus groups setting, as they may feel more inclined to agree with the group than voice their own opinion (Nabors et al., 2001). Additionally, both the

hypothetical vignettes and instruments utilised in Study 2 and 3 are open to social desirability bias (King & Brunner, 2000) due to the social sensitivity that surrounds cyberbullying. Social desirability bias is an important consideration to take into account as it can lead to reporting confounding relationships between variables, which can make the results void (King & Brunner, 2000).

As standard practise, all studies took measures to accommodate social desirability across responses. Primarily, participants were clearly informed that responses would remain completely anonymous. For the focus groups, this entailed informing participants that discussions made during the focus groups would be anonymised by using pseudonyms and to not discuss the content of the focus groups for confidentiality purposes. Participants in the self-report studies were informed that their personal details would not be required, and their responses would be attributed to a unique identifier. All participants were also reassured that there are no right or wrong answers to ensure that participants felt they had free range to response to questions without adhering to predisposed understanding of what a right or wrong way of responding to the questions (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2020). An additional aspect to consider as a limitation is the potential differences of social desirability bias between the paper questionnaire and online survey that occurred in Study 2. Although research has reported contrasting evidence between social desirability and these two approaches to obtaining self-report responses. For example, a meta-analysis of 51 studies has reported that the effect size between online and offline surveys is close to zero for social desirability (Dodou & Winter, 2014).

7.4.2.3 Sample population

All participants across the assembly of studies conducted for this thesis were self-selected, which essentially means that they chose to take part in the research and so were perhaps motivated to take part. On one hand, this can be viewed as a positive aspect of self-selection sampling as it may mean that participants are proactive with providing a deeper level of insight into the constructs that were considered in the studies (Sharma, 2017). The downside to self-selection sampling is a possible inherent bias within the sample, which may mean that the outcome of the analysis only reflects

those who were committed to taking part in the study and not the general population for both the focus group study (Collier & Mahoney, 1996) and the self-report studies (Bethlehem, 2010; Duffy, 2002).

In the context of this study, a bias may exist for those who volunteered to take part in the research, as they may have experienced cyberbullying to a greater extent compared to the general population, thus creating an unrealistic variance in the sample responses. Previous victimisation (Bauman & Newman, 2013; Pieschl et al., 2015) and perpetration (Giménez-Gualdo et al., 2015) experiences of cyberbullying has been reported to impact on severity perception of cyberbullying activity. Based on this research, Study 3 of the thesis controlled for cyberbullying victimisation and perpetration, which was found to make negligible difference to the model findings. However, Study 1 and 2 made no attempt to control for previous cyberbullying experience of the participants who volunteered to take part. This may not be as much of an issue as previously reported (Bethlehem, 2010; Duffy, 2002). Research has considered the possible impact of volunteer participants and have found that these samples can deliver more transparent data and reduce the risk of incomplete datasets (Gosling & Vazire, 2004). Self-selection samples obtained by online surveys has also been found to be more favourable than using educational institution subject pools or other methods such as interception, where users of a website are randomly selected (Wright & Marsden, 2010). Nevertheless, the potential for self-selection bias to occur within the samples used across the studies for this thesis should be accounted for when interpreting the outcomes of the results.

A further potential limitation which may have arisen for Study 2 and 3 is the intrusion of malicious software applications called bots. Bots are automatic survey-takers which have been produced by an individual with the aim to receive the financial compensation of taking part in online surveys (Dupuis et al., 2019). Bots create fraudulent and redundant data that have low validity and quality and increase the potential for Type I and II error (Huang et al., 2015; McGonagle et al., 2016). As the financial incentive for Study 2 and 3 was a random draw, and not a financially beneficial outcome for every participant who took part in the survey, bots can be viewed as not a limitation for the research conducted for this thesis.

7.5 Implications and future research

This section of the chapter concerns the implications of the findings from the research conducted for this thesis. Implications relating to interventions will be discussed in line with key findings. Implications relating to definitional theoretical insights provided by this thesis will also be addressed.

7.5.1 Interventions

The findings from the multiple interactions between factors in Study 2 and 3 represent how arbitrary the definition of cyberbullying is, not just on the basis of the necessity for the three specific criteria but for gender differences. Gender biases of severity perception found in these studies pose considerably important implications. Principally, the gendered humour findings reported in Study 2 and 3 illustrate aggressive humour as being more normal and more acceptable for males and adds to the bigger proposition that society could be encouraging young males to be aggressively humoristic. Furthermore, as severity perceptions are lower for males than they are for females, this would suggest that males have a more normalised view of aggressive humour, which could be why aggressive humour styles are more commonly reported to be linked with males (Hofman et al., 2020). This should be acknowledged by key figures who are present in young people's environment during social development, who are normative influencers of aggressive behaviour such as parents (Hinduja & Patchin, 2013; Pabian & Vandebosch, 2013) and educational institutions (Casas et al., 2013; Guo, 2016; Kowalski et al., 2014). Due to a lack of understanding or education concerning the underlying attributes of cyberbullying, teachers have been reported to be unable to provide appropriate support to victims who have approached them (Ittel et al., 2013). In a general sense, findings from both Study 2 and 3 suggest that interventions and preventative strategies may be more effective if they were gender sensitive. Females may need more support as their tendency to perceive greater severity may mean they are at a greater risk of experiencing negative outcomes. Furthermore, males may need additional support with developing empathy skills and encouragement to consider how their behaviour may impact others.

From an overarching perspective, interventions and preventative programmes would also benefit from raising awareness of the lack of social indicators and context in the online environment. It may be prudent to raise awareness around how misinterpretation of online communication can be created by the lack of nonverbal cues (Baruch, 2005). Nonverbal redressive messages such as facial gestures, eye contact and tone of voice, are used in face-to-face teasing to mitigate any potential hurt that could be experienced by the receipt (Dehue et al., 2008; Kelter, 2009; Kruger et al., 2006; Shapiro et al., 1991) and so determines the difference between a malign or benign tease. The effectiveness of the redressive cues can lead to a tease being perceived as prosocial or antisocial (Madlock & Westerman, 2011). One line of potential support could come from building an understanding around the prosocial uses of emoticons and emojis and how they can be utilised to facilitate correct interpretation (Dresner & Herring, 2010), especially for humour (Adams, 2012), sarcasm (Filik et al., 2016) and indicating positive attitudes within humour (Skovholt et al., 2014). Although participants in Study 1 did highlight how emojis can be ambiguous themselves, perhaps shedding light on the potential for online misinterpretation may lead to a greater understanding of how the nonverbal and decontextualised nature of the internet can create an environment that is primed for potential confusion.

Participants who took part in the focus groups for Study 1 expressed a clear understanding of the implications related to the decontextualization and lack of social indicators present in online communication. This understanding seemed to have little impact on the prevalence of experiencing ambiguous altercations that were humorous in nature. Young people have been found to display a lack of understanding concerning misinterpretation of online communication that can lead to flaming (Zilka, 2021). This would suggest that interventions and preventative workshop content should clearly outline these issues associated with cyberbullying and humour, alongside the potential outcomes associated with misinterpretation. From this content, strategies involving communicating with other individuals (e.g., friends, parents, or teachers) may be helpful with how to interpret these ambiguous interactions. Literature indicates that young people could benefit from being more aware of the absence of nonverbal redressive messages and social context cues. Van Royen et al. (2017) experimentally considered how self-censorship could be encouraged by reflective messages and a time delay

presented prior to posting a hurtful online comment. The time delay and reflective messages significantly reduced the participants' intention to harass online, reducing perpetration behaviours. These findings suggest tailored reflective messages or encouraging young people to give themselves more time to consider their actions could be a possible strategy to support adolescents to consider their online banter in relation to how it may be perceived. The internet has become an integral part of society and general daily routine for people of all ages, young people especially (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Having a more sensitive approach to how young people and emerging adults may be experiencing or interpreting hostile humour may aid their ability to manage and assist victims who approach them.

7.5.2 Cyberbullying conceptualisation

The findings of this thesis do suggest that the cyberbullying definition remains in a phase of development. For instance, if females perceive aggressive, humorous online interactions as more severe than males, then this may mean that females are more likely to experience the negative outcomes of these types of interactions as their perception is unrecognised in the current cyberbullying definition. From these results, it seems plausible for the cyberbullying definition to incorporate an element that involves if the victim has perceived the interaction as being harmful to them, which has been suggested by some researchers (Dredge et al., 2014; Fernández-Antelo & Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2020; Naylor et al., 2006; Thornberg & Delby; 2019; Vandebosch & Van Cleeput, 2008). However, a possible outcome of this could be greater ambiguity of cyberbullying identification as perceiving offense to the extent that a behaviour is perceived as cyberbullying is subjective and highly variable. This is evidenced by the findings of this thesis and the numerous studies that have reported contrasting findings of multiple different factors related to identifying cyberbullying activity such as gender (Bauman & Newman, 2013), power perceptions (Menin et al, 2021), types and mediums of cyberbullying (Chen and Cheng, 2017; Menesini et al., 2011), repetition (Alipan et al., 2020; Menin et al., 2021) and audience (Sticca & Perren, 2013).

A clear finding of this thesis is that cyberbullying, although a similar construct to bullying, is a great deal more nuanced and complex because of the additional

affordances the internet provides. This may mean that the three criteria of the cyberbullying definition represent alternative functions (Law et al., 2012), which essentially rejects the notion that cyberbullying is an extension of traditional bullying. For instance, cyberbullying can be perpetrated in various ways, which opens up additional avenues to impact individuals depending on their individual characteristics. Study 2 reported that females perceive aggressive humour as more offensive, more so when it is repeated. However, in Study 3, with an older sample, females perceived aggressive humour as more offensive when there was an audience. The implications of the research carried out for this thesis in relation to the cyberbullying definition therefore are that future research needs to be guided by the most recent literature and from a contemporary methodological standpoint. In context, this would entail researchers to thoroughly consider and select cyberbullying instruments that represent current online behaviours, account for potential confounding variables (i.e., individual differences, and incorporate contemporary research designs along with appropriate statistical analyses). A main outcome of this thesis adds to general argument that the lack of consensus for a cyberbullying definition is hindering further advancement within the literature (Kofoed et al., 2019; Law et al., 2012).

7.6 Future research

There are many aspects of the findings of the current thesis which future research could consider. A key finding from Study 2 and 3 concerned the influence of audience on severity perception. A handful of contrasting research have explored the role of audience in cyberbullying, leaving this unique attribute of ICT as an understudied area for future research. Due to the nature of the hypothetical vignettes, minimal information was provided in the scenarios around who the audience was that would view the aggressive humour interaction. This feature of the vignettes meant that how this element was perceived by the participant was open to interpretation and therefore could be highly variable. Future research could consider the context of audience in much greater depth. For instance, do severity perceptions of cyberbullying change if contextual collapse occurs, where an audience consisted of different types of relationships such as friends, family or strangers (Vitak, 2012). Furthermore, are there

factors which may be linked to audience which may alter how audience is perceived, such as how cyberbullying is carried out in public? Recent research with a large sample of Israeli adolescents found that public cyberbullying rarely occurs in mobile instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp (Aizenkot, 2020). Participants reported in the cross-sectional study that WhatsApp was more vulnerable to private forms of cyberbullying. Whereas visual forms of cyberbullying, such as posting pictures or videos has been reported to be more severe than other forms of cyberbullying (Chen et al., 2012; Menesini et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2008), but are these forms perceived differently in the public context then in the private context? Finally, future research could also explore differences in severity perception of public cyberbullying for individual characteristics such as gender, popularity status and previous history of cyberbullying involvement as victim, perpetrator or cyberbully/victim. Findings from this thesis consider the context of humour within cyberbullying in relation to individual aspects such as gender and age, which contribute to public cyberbullying literature. However, not all cyberbullying is perpetrated for the purpose of a joke. Future research may benefit from utilising a similar approach to exploring perceived severity of public cyberbullying where the ambiguity of humour is removed.

The contribution of findings of Study 3 represents significant development of the role of aggressive humour style in relation to the severity perception of cyberbullying activity. Study 3 reported that higher scores for aggressive humour styles predicted lower severity perceptions for the vignettes in terms of both outcome variables combined. Existing literature suggests that this key finding could be further explored in relation to the construct of empathy. The psychosocial construct of empathy has been explored within the cyberbullying field of research. Empathy encompasses the understanding and sharing of perceived emotion with other individuals (Eisenberg & Strayer, 1990). Contemporary research considers empathy to involve cognitive and affective components (Zoll & Enz, 2005). Cognitive empathy refers to the ability to intellectually understand and perceive the position of another individual, which incorporates the construct of "Theory of Mind" (Davis, 1983). Affective empathy involves an individual's ability to congruently feel how another individually is feeling emotionally (Zoll & Enz, 2005). Research looking at the relationship between empathy and aggressive humour style has found aggressive humour style to be negatively

correlated with perspective-taking and empathetic concern with an undergraduate American sample (Hampes, 2010). Halfpenny and James (2020) also found a negative correlation between aggressive humour style and affective empathy, with younger British participants aged 9-11. These findings indicate that a deficit of empathy is related to those with an aggressive humour style. Furthermore, lower levels of empathy have also been found to predict cyberbullying perpetration (Ang & Goh, 2010; Brewer & Kerslake, 2015). A link has also been demonstrated between empathy and attitudes towards cyberbullying perpetration. Doane et al. (2014) reported cross-sectional findings from a sample of American emerging adults aged 18 – 23, which found lower empathy regarding cyberbullying victims predicted more positive attitudes towards cyberbullying perpetration. If findings from Study 3 are aligned with the outcomes of previous literature concerning empathy, aggressive humour style and cyberbullying perpetration, it would seem plausible to surmise that contextually, a lower severity perception of online aggressive humour is mediated by an aggressive humour style, due to lower levels of empathy, or perhaps affective empathy (Halfpenny & James, 2020). Although cyberbullying perpetration was not found to impact severity perception of the hypothetical vignettes, previous research suggests cyberbullying perpetration tendencies may be related to the triad of aggressive humour style, empathy and cyberbullying perpetration. Specifically, lower empathy predicting cyberbullying perpetration attitudes (Doane et al., 2014) and behaviour (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015), cyberbullying perpetration predicting aggressive humour style (Sari, 2016) and lower empathy predicting association with aggressive humour style (Halfpenny & James, 2020; Hampes, 2010). Findings from Study 3, therefore, suggest further explicit research exploration of the aggressive humour style and empathy relationship within cyberbullying perpetration.

An alternative train of future research could be to continue exploring how emojis and emoticons can help to interpret online interaction. A key finding from the current thesis suggests that misinterpretation of an aggressive humoristic online interaction is a main precursor to perceiving offense. Therefore, the development of strategies to aid the interpretation of these types of communication is highly important and perhaps detrimental to supporting young people to be empowered to interpret ambiguous interactions. Emoji and emoticon research in the field of cyberbullying

literature is still in an infancy stage. The use of emojis has been reported by young people to be a popular and highly influential tool to use on SNSs as a way of providing a clearer depiction of the emotion felt by the sender and assist the interpretation of the message by the receiver (Zilka, 2021). Future research should begin to build a clearer picture of the construct of emojis and how they can be embedded in preventative and interventions programmes. Furthermore, as participants who took part in the focus groups explained in Study 1, the role of emojis and emoticons is present in aggressive humoristic interactions. Identifying how this role is used in cyberbullying activity will enable this field of literature to expand and reflect the construct of cyberbully with greater depth.

7.7 Original contribution to knowledge

A significant and unique aspect of this thesis is the analysis that was used to approach the data and the methodology that was implemented to collect the data. Using a mixed methods design has allowed this thesis to explore the role of humour within the context of cyberbullying with a coherently synthesised and meaningful perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, implementing multilevel modelling to treat the participants and hypothetical vignettes as random effects in Study 2 and 3 has advanced the cyberbullying literature by producing findings that have rigour and can be generalised beyond the participant and vignettes (Baguley et al., 2022). Replicating Study 2 with an older sample population in Study 3 provides insight into the similarities and differences of severity perceptions of online hostile humour. Moreover, replicating Study 2 also allows Study 3 to confidently verify and validate findings of Study 2 by offering evidence of reliability and rigour (Plucker & Makel, 2021). The lack of replicability in terms of cyberbullying research has been proposed to be an issue by Olweus and Limber (2018) as it may contribute to confusion around the construct of cyberbullying and in turn, complications with preventative and intervention programs.

Contextually humoristic cyberbullying is a field of literature that has been paid minimal research attention. Considering persistent concerns regarding the validity and suitability of the cyberbullying definition (Campbell & Bauman, 2018; Kofoed & Staksrud, 2019; Lucas-Molina et al., 2016; Peter & Petermann, 2018; Thomas et al.,

2015), the need for further research, which uses rigorous methods of investigation, is still apparent (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012; Patchin & Hinduja, 2015; Ittel et al., 2013). For example, many researchers have tested the significance and value of repetition and audience within their studies in the attempt to measure if repetition is a valid criterion of cyberbullying and if audience should be included in the definition as an independent construct (Alipan et al., 2020; Langos, 2012; Menin et al., 2021; Pieschl et al., 2015). Findings of this thesis have substantially contributed to these areas of cyberbullying research.

Firstly, findings from this thesis outline that repetition is an important predictor of perceived offensiveness and of cyberbullying identification. Findings from Study 2 and 3 go further to support the significance of repetition by including the context of humour. Although humour has been stated to distinguish between intentional, harmful cyberbullying and unintentional harmless cyberbullying (Langos, 2012; Nocentini et al., 2010), findings of this thesis provide strong evidence to support this. Secondly, audience has received wide acknowledgement as a possible criterion of cyberbullying (Kofoed & Staksrud, 2019; Lucas-Molina et al., 2016; Peter & Petermann, 2018), however, Study 2 and 3 results suggest that although it can enhance severity perception, audience as a lone factor has insubstantial impact on how young people and emerging adults identify cyberbullying behaviour. Nonetheless, findings from Study 3 extend previous research findings and go further to contribute to this field of literature. Study 3 found audience to be perceived as much more severe for the older adolescent and emerging adult females in Study 3 and not for Study 2, with the younger sample. This suggests that audience is potentially more impactful for females who are socially transitioning from their mid teenage years through to their early adulthood, which suggests that cyberbullying may look differently and mean something different depending on gender and stage of social development. This may mean that the rigidity of the cyberbullying definition is failing to address the nuances of individual differences and complexities of the online environment. This thesis arguably has provided an original contribution to the cyberbullying body of literature by highlighting the role of audience within the context of humoristic cyberbullying.

Intentionality as a criterion of cyberbullying has previously been reported to be a clear indicator of cyberbullying perpetration (Cuadrado-Gordillo & Fernández-Antelo,

2016; Talwar et al., 2014). This criterion stipulates that the perpetrator must have the intent to cause harm to the victim through their online aggressive behaviour. As Olweus (2013) outlines, "if it can be implied or assumed that the perpetrator(s) knows or understands that the exerted behaviour is or will be perceived as unpleasant and maybe distressing or harmful by the targeted person" (p. 757) this indicates that the awareness of the perpetrator classifies intentionality from the victims' perspective. However, focus group findings from Study 1 clearly establish that condition of the online setting, i.e., limited social indicators and decontextualization, and the behaviour involves humour, recognising intentionality is ambiguous. In other words, perceiving the intentionality of a perpetrator online is more complex process than perceiving intentionality offline, especially if the context of the behaviour is humoristic. Findings of Study 2 and 3 not only explore this complex process to a degree that has scarcely been considered in the literature, both studies rigorously examine potential viable factors which may interplay with one another within that process. Implementing this approach has enabled the findings of the thesis to provide deep insight and coherent understanding into young people and emerging adults' approach to evaluating the intentionality of online humoristic aggressive behaviours in relation to their perceived severity.

Outside of the contribution that this thesis may add to the continual debate concerning the cyberbullying definition, findings from Study 3 yield important insights that add to the extensive literature concerning factors related to aggressive humour style (Martin et al., 2013). Greater ratings for aggressive humour style were found to be associated with lower ratings of perceived severity for the hypothetical vignettes. In a rudimental sense, this finding demonstrates that individuals who have an aggressive humour style are more likely to perceive their online banter or teasing as more benign than potentially those who are not inclined towards having an aggressive humour style. Although future research is needed to explore this inference, the implications of what this may mean is difficult to ignore. One of the important elements of this finding to consider is the difference between perceptions of aggressive humour style behaviours online and offline. With the increased ambiguity and difficulty of perceiving aggressive humour online, and the inclination for those individuals with aggressive humour styles to perceive their behaviours with less severity, a perfect storm is created. Moreover, considering that males were consistently reported across Study 2 and 3 to rate the

hypothetical vignettes with a lesser degree of severity, gender could arguably be considered to play a prominent role. The findings from Study 2 and Study 3 therefore, provides an original contribution to literature by drawing attention to the potential of this perfect storm occurring and the harmful consequences that may be experienced as an outcome.

7.8 Conclusion

This mixed methods thesis demonstrates that the perceived severity of online aggressive humour by adolescents and emerging adults can be influenced by a range of factors, some in isolation and some in tandem with one another. The combination of the online environment having a lack of nonverbal redressive cues and social context cues, alongside the general ambiguity of hostile humour, online banter or teasing can be misinterpreted and therefore may occur more frequently than previously considered. Aspects of these findings challenge and support the cyberbullying definition, and therefore substantially contribute to the growing body of literature that is building a theoretical framework around cyberbullying as a phenomenon. The prospects of future research leading from the findings of this thesis are expansive and are imperative to the future understanding of the role of humour within cyberbullying behaviours.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Study 1 Question schedule

<u>Question schedule</u>

Starting with a general question:

1. Please can we start off with talking about the social network sites, which ones do you use at the moment? For example, Facebook.
    a) Which network sites do you use the most?

2. Has anyone heard about cyberbullying?
    a) Would anyone be able to tell me what cyberbully means to them?
    b) Could anyone give me an example of cyberbullying?

3. Please could you describe some of the differences between face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying?
    a) Which one do you think happens more? And why?

More specific questions:

Statement prompt to be printed and handed out to the focus group members:

Some students have said that one of the reasons why they cyber bullied someone was because it was a joke.

4. What do you think about the statement?

5. From your experience, why do you think students cyberbully another person as a joke?
    a) From your experience, could anyone give me example of this happening?
    b) What would you think are the reasons why students who do this?

6. Please can anyone tell me if they have heard of Banter?

Definition prompt: *The playful and friendly exchange of teasing remarks*
    a) What does banter mean to you?
    b) How can you have banter online?
    c) How does banter differ between friends or brothers and sisters and people who you just know?
    d) How could banter could go too far or go bad?

7. How can jokes made online about other people sometime be considered to fun?
    a) What would be the main reasons a joke became obvious bullying?
    b) Is a joke still funny if it offends someone? Why?

Cool down question

8. We are now at the end of the focus groups. Would anyone like to add or mention anything else?

Prompts to be used as appropriate

Can you or anyone tell me more about that?

Does anyone else share that view?

Is that the same as other people's experience?

Would someone else be prepared to share their experience of that?

Does anyone feel there is more to add about this?

Does everyone feel that this description captures everything on this discussion?

Appendix B: Study 1 Head Teacher consent form

Head Teacher Consent Form

Study Title:
Exploring the role, perception, and interpretation of humour in Cyberbullying from the perspective of young people

Name of Researcher:
Oonagh Steer

Please tick box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet and the materials for the above study and that I have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
I understand that the participation of the students is voluntary, that students are free to withdraw at any time and without giving any reason, and that their non-verbal behaviour will be monitored for refusal to take part.	
I understand that I, the students or their parents can request that the student's data not be included after the study has taken place by contacting Oonagh Steer or Dr. Lucy Betts and that any data asked to be withdrawn 4 weeks after the day of data collection can only be applied directly to PhD work and not academic publications or presentations.	
I understand that data collected during this study will be confidential and will not be given to the children's parents, teachers or classmates.	
I agree that the students can take part in this study.	

_____   _____   _____
Head Teacher   Date   Signature

Researcher	Date	Signature

Appendix C: Study 1 Parent information and consent letter

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am writing to inform you that {school name} has been asked to take part in research regarding cyber bullying. The school has been approached by a PhD researcher, Oonagh Steer, from Nottingham Trent University. The research will be supervised by Dr. Lucy Betts. The aim of the research concerns the views and experiences of cyber bullying from a young person's perspective.

The reason for writing to you is to request your permission for your son / daughter to take part in the study. The study will involve focus groups with 5 or 6 participants. The focus group will be asked a number of questions around the topic of their experiences of cyber bullying. More specifically, the topic will involve questions around joking, intentions of others and the impact of cyber bullying. The focus group will take approximately around an hour.

Involvement in the study is entirely voluntary. If you agree that your child can take part, they are able to decide to withdraw from the study at any time, before or during. If this was to occur, no data generated up until that point will be used and the student will be expected to attend usual timetable. Data can also be withdrawn after the focus group has taken place, for instance if it is felt they regret saying something. Specific comments would not be included in the research if requested before a 4 week time period after the focus group has taken place. If comments are asked to be withdrawn after 4 weeks, your comments can only be used in PhD work and in no subsequent academic publications or presentations. For this to happen {name of teacher} will need to be informed so Oonagh Steer can be contacted.

Once the data has been collected, we may use some quotes of what the young people say in reports or publications about the study but this will only be to evidence our conclusions. We will make sure that they cannot be identified by any quotes by changing their name and all other identifying details about you to anonymise the quotes.

There is no apparent risk to the young people who participate in the focus groups. However, some safeguarding measures will be implemented. Firstly, your son / daughter will be made aware that they can talk to {name of teacher} should they have any concerns. This member of staff should be contacted if a student wants to withdraw their comments. If any concerns arise during the focus group about experiences in of cyber bullying, the school will be made aware. If a student would like to leave the focus group part way through this is totally fine, {member of staff} will check in on that student during the day and provide an opportunity to talk. Moreover, if any student is visibly distressed or upset the focus group will be terminated immediately and support will be offered by {name of teacher}. The research has been approved by the College of Social Sciences, Business and Law Research Ethics Committee at Nottingham Trent University and will adhere to British Psychological Society guidelines.

If you agree for your son / daughter to take part in the study, please return the slop below to the school by {insert date}. Consent then enables the possibility of the name of your child being randomly selected to take part in the focus group.

Should you have any questions concerning this study please contact:

Oonagh Steer: Doctorate School, Department of Psychology, Nottingham Trent University, 50 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, NG1 4FQ. Email: Oonagh.steer@ntu.ac.uk

Lucy Betts: Chaucer Room 4001, Department of Psychology, Nottingham Trent University, 50 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, NG1 4FQ. Email: lucy.betts@ntu.ac.uk

Yours, faithfully,

Name

Headteacher

_____

I would like my son / daughter to take part in the research concerning young people's experiences of cyber bullying.

Name of student: ....

Class: ....

Signed by: .... Parent/Guardian

Information sheet for the study –
Exploring the role, perception, and interpretation of humour in Cyberbullying from the perspective of young people

This study aims to find out more about how young people view and experience cyber bullying. Specifically, the study would like to look at cyber bullying alongside other aspects such as jokes, banter, intentions of others and the impact of cyber bullying. The research is being conducted by Oonagh Steer from Nottingham Trent University as part of a PhD project.

This information sheet is an invitation for you to take part in the research which involves participating in a focus group and talking as a group about your experiences of cyber bullying. Please spend some time reading through the following information. Also, please ask if anything is unclear, if you have any questions, or if you would like to know more.

The study is only being carried out with young people at secondary schools. A focus group will have between 5-6 participants. During the focus group you will be asked to talk about what you think about cyber bullying and other topics such as banter and intentions of others and the impact of cyber bullying.

The discussion will be recorded so that we can capture your views accurately. The focus group should only take up to an hour, but this may be a little more or less depending on what members of the groups have to say.

Your participation in the research is entirely up to you and is voluntary and there are no right or wrong answers. If you decided to take part and then changed your mind that would also be fine. During the focus groups, participants do not have to answer the questions and can choose to leave at any time. You can also withdraw specific comments if you regret having said something in particular, this would not be included in the research if requested before a 4 week time period after the focus group has taken place. If comments are asked to be withdrawn after 4 weeks, your comments can only be used in PhD work and in no other academic publications or presentations. To do this you should contact **{name of teacher}** who will then contact Oonagh Steer for you.

The research may use some quotes of what you have said in the focus group but this will only be to evidence our conclusions. You will not be able to be identified by any quotes as your name will be changed. Your identity will be anonymised which means that identifying details about you will not be presented in the findings of the research.

It must be made clear that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed for this study as the other people in the group will be aware of what is said in the focus groups. Therefore, it is very important that people do not repeat or discuss with anyone anything you hear within these discussions. If the research team have significant concerns about student experiences in school, the school will be made aware.

At the end of the focus group, a debrief form will be handed out to each participant. The debrief form will provide helpful information and will state that **{name of teacher}** is aware of the focus group research and is who you can speak to for any support or if you

have any further questions. This person is the same person to speak with if you wish to withdraw your comments from the study.

There is no direct benefit for you to take part in this study. If you do decide to be a participant in this study it will greatly inform Oonagh Steer and the wider academic audience about young people's experiences of cyber bullying.

Appendix E: Study 1 Debrief form

Thank you for taking part in the research. This study forms a part of a PhD project, which contributes to our overall wider understanding of cyber bullying.

The title of the research is: Exploring the role, perception, and interpretation of humour in Cyberbullying from the perspective of young people.

The study aimed to understand cyber bullying from a young person's point of view.

Please note down your unique word/name which will identify who you are. You will need use this word if you do not want parts of your data to be used in the research findings. In order to do this, please contact **{name of teacher}** who will then contact Oonagh Steer.

Please do not hesitate to speak with **{name of teacher}** if you would like to talk to someone or some support after the focus group has taken place or if you have any further questions about the research.

There are no foreseen negative consequences of taking part in this research. However, if you do feel upset by the research you may want to contact the following organisations:

Bullying UK which offers advice and support (http://www.bullying.co.uk/, tel: 0808 800 2222)

Beatbullying (http://www.beatbullying.org/) is "all about young people helping and supporting each other online." Mentors who are trained young people offer to listen and support.

Childline (http://www.childline.org.uk, tel: 0800 1111) offers help and advice about a range of issues

The Cybersmile Foundation (http://www.cybersmile.org/, tel: 0845 6887277) which is a charity dedicated to cyberbullying and offering support to those who have experienced cyberbullying.

Youth2youth (http://www.youth2youth.org.uk/helpline/) is run by young people offer support for all problems.

Appendix F: Six master vignettes (A, B, C, D, E, F)

Scenario A – Denigration

	Banter	Offensive joke	Joke CB	CB
No audience/ No repetition	For a joke, Alex posts a video to some friends in a group chat that involves Alex messing around, dancing in a childish way. Bob, who was in the group chat then privately messages Alex over WhatsApp and teases him about the video. This is the first time Bob has done something like this to Alex.	For a joke, Alex posts a video to some friends in a group chat that involves Alex messing around, dancing in a childish way. The video is then sent by Bob to his friend Dave, who wasn't in the group chat and who Alex doesn't know very well. Dave then makes negative comments to Alex about the video by directly messaging him through Instagram. This is the first time Bob has done something like this to Alex.	As a joke, Stewart videos Alex without him knowing whilst messing around with his friends, dancing in a childish way. Stewart then directly messages Alex over Instagram and sends him the video. Stewart then makes negative comments to Alex about him in the video. This is the first time Stewart has done something like this to Alex.	Stewart videos Alex without him knowing whilst messing around with his friends, dancing in a childish way. Stewart then directly messages Alex over Instagram and sends him the video. Stewart then makes negative comments to Alex about him in the video. This is the first time Stewart has done something like this to Alex.
No audience/ Repetition	For a joke, Alex posts a video to some friends in a group chat that involves Alex messing around, dancing in a childish way. Bob, who was in the group chat then privately messages Alex over WhatsApp and teases him about the video. This is not the first time Bob has done something like this to Alex.	For a joke, Alex posts a video to some friends in a group chat that involves Alex messing around, dancing in a childish way. The video is then sent by Bob to his friend Dave, who wasn't in the group chat and who Alex doesn't know very well. Dave the makes negative comments to Alex about the video by directly messaging him through Instagram. This is not the first time Bob has done something like this to Alex.	As a joke, Stewart videos Alex without him knowing whilst messing around with his friends, dancing in a childish way. Stewart then directly messages Alex over Instagram and sends him the video. Stewart then makes negative comments to Alex about him in the video. This is not the first time Stewart has done something like this to Alex.	Stewart videos Alex without him knowing whilst messing around with his friends, dancing in a childish way. Stewart then directly messages Alex over Instagram and sends him the video. Stewart then makes negative comments to Alex about him in the video. This is not the first time Stewart has done something like this to Alex.
Audience/ Repetition	For a joke, Alex posts a video to some friends in a group chat that involves Alex messing around, dancing in a childish way. Bob, who was in the group chat, then teases Alex about the video in the group chat where all group members can see the comments. This is not the first time Bob has done something like this to Alex.	For a joke, Alex posts a video to some friends in a group chat that involves Alex messing around, dancing in a childish way. The video is then sent by Bob to his friend Dave, who wasn't in the group chat and who Alex doesn't know very well. Dave then posts the video on Instagram for all his followers to view. Followers of Dave negatively comment on the video. This is not the first time Bob has done something like this to Alex.	As a joke, Stewart videos Alex without him knowing whilst messing around with his friends, dancing in a childish way. Stewart then posts the video on his Instagram for all his followers to see the video. Followers of Stewart negatively comment on the video. This is not the first time Stewart has done something like this to Alex.	Stewart videos Alex without him knowing whilst messing around with his friends, dancing in a childish way. Stewart then posts the video on his Instagram for all his followers to see the video. Followers of Stewart negatively comment on the video. This is not the first time Stewart has done something like this to Alex.
Audience/ No repetition	For a joke, Alex posts a video to some friends in a group chat that involves Alex messing around, dancing in a childish way. Bob, who was in the group chat, then teases Alex about the video in the group chat where all group members can see the comments. This is the first time Bob has done something like this to Alex.	For a joke, Alex posts a video to some friends in a group chat that involves Alex messing around, dancing in a childish way. The video is then sent by Bob to his friend Dave, who wasn't in the group chat and who Alex doesn't know very well. Dave then posts the video on Instagram for all his followers to view. Followers of Dave negatively comment on the video. This is the first time Bob has done something like this to Alex.	As a joke, Stewart videos Alex without him knowing whilst messing around with his friends, dancing in a childish way. Stewart then posts the video on his Instagram for all his followers to see the video. Followers of Stewart negatively comment on the video. This is the first time Stewart has done something like this to Alex.	Stewart videos Alex without him knowing whilst messing around with his friends, dancing in a childish way. Stewart then posts the video on his Instagram for all his followers to see the video. Followers of Stewart negatively comment on the video. This is the first time Stewart has done something like this to Alex.

Scenario B – Denigration

	Banter	Offensive joke	Joke CB	CB
No audience/ No repetition	For a joke, Sally edits a photo she has of herself and her friend Jessica to make them look funny and sends the photo to Jessica and their other friend Fiona over WhatsApp. Fiona messages them back in the group chat and teases Sally and Jessica about the edited photo. This is the first time that Fiona has done something like this to Sally.	For a joke, Sally edits a photo she has of herself and her friend Jessica to make them look funny and sends the photo over group chat to Jessica and their other friend Fiona. Fiona adds Molly to the group chat, who isn't known by Jessica and Sally. Molly then negatively comments on the photo to Sally in the group chat. This is the first time that Fiona has done something like this to Sally.	For a joke, Amanda screen shots a photo she has seen on Sally's Instagram and edits the photo to make Sally look funny. Amanda then sends the edited photo to Sally over direct message on Instagram. Amanda makes negative comment on the photo. This is the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Sally.	Amanda screen shots a photo she has seen on Sally's Instagram and edits the photo to make Sally look funny. Amanda then sends the edited photo to Sally over direct message on Instagram. Amanda makes negative comment on the photo. This is the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Sally.
No audience/ Repetition	For a joke, Sally edits a photo she has of herself and her friend Jessica to make them look funny and sends the photo to Jessica and their other friend Fiona over WhatsApp. Fiona messages them back in the group chat and teases Sally and Jessica about the edited photo. This is not the first time that Fiona has done something like this to Sally.	For a joke, Sally edits a photo she has of herself and her friend Jessica to make them look funny and sends the photo over group chat to Jessica and their other friend Fiona. Fiona adds Molly to the group chat, who isn't known by Jessica and Sally. Molly then negatively comments on the photo to Sally in the group chat. This is not the first time that Fiona has done something like this to Sally.	For a joke, Amanda screen shots a photo she has seen on Sally's Instagram and edits the photo to make Sally look funny. Amanda then sends the edited photo to Sally over direct message on Instagram. Amanda makes negative comment on the photo. This is not the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Sally.	Amanda screen shots a photo she has seen on Sally's Instagram and edits the photo to make Sally look funny. Amanda then sends the edited photo to Sally over direct message on Instagram. Amanda makes negative comment on the photo. This is not the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Sally.
Audience/ Repetition	For a joke, Sally edits a photo she has of herself and her friend Jessica to make them look funny and sends the photo to Jessica and their other friend Fiona over WhatsApp. Fiona adds two of their other friends to the group chat who then can see the edited photo. Members of that group chat then tease Sally and Jessica about the edited photo. This is not the first time that Fiona has done something like this to Sally.	For a joke, Sally edits a photo she has of herself and her friend Jessica to make them look funny and sends the photo on group chat to Jessica and their other friend Fiona. Fiona adds Molly to the group chat, who isn't known by Jessica and Sally. Molly then posts the photo on Instagram for all her followers to see. Fiona's followers negatively comment on the photo. This is not the first time that Fiona has done something like this to Sally.	For a joke, Amanda screen shots a photo she has seen on Sally's Instagram and edits the photo to make Sally look funny. Amanda then posts the edited photo on her Instagram for all her followers to see, including Sally. Amanda's followers negatively comment on the photo. This is not the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Sally.	Amanda screen shots a photo she has seen on Sally's Instagram and edits the photo to make Sally look funny. Amanda then posts the edited photo on her Instagram for all her followers to see, including Sally. Amanda's followers negatively comment on the photo. This is not the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Sally.
Audience/ No repetition	For a joke, Sally edits a photo she has of herself and her friend Jessica to make them look funny and sends the photo to Jessica and their other friend Fiona over WhatsApp. Fiona adds two of their other friends to the group chat who then can see the edited photo. Members of that group chat then tease Sally and Jessica about the edited photo. This is the first time that Fiona has done something like this to Sally.	For a joke, Sally edits a photo she has of herself and her friend Jessica to make them look funny and sends the photo on group chat to Jessica and their other friend Fiona. Fiona adds Molly to the group chat, who isn't known by Jessica and Sally. Molly then posts the photo on Instagram for all her followers to see. Fiona's followers negatively comment on the photo. This is the first time that Fiona has done something like this to Sally.	For a joke, Amanda screen shots a photo she has seen on Sally's Instagram and edits the photo to make Sally look funny. Amanda then posts the edited photo on her Instagram for all her followers to see, including Sally. Amanda's followers negatively comment on the photo. This is the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Sally.	Amanda screen shots a photo she has seen on Sally's Instagram and edits the photo to make Sally look funny. Amanda then posts the edited photo on her Instagram for all her followers to see, including Sally. Amanda's followers negatively comment on the photo. This is the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Sally.

Scenario C – Outing

	Banter	Offensive joke	Joke CB	CB
No audience/ No repetition	Jo is messaging in a group chat on Snapchat to her friends. Jo tells the group a secret that is personal but also funny. One of Jo's friends, Amanda, directly messages Jo to joke and tease her about the secret. This is the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Jo.	Jo is messaging in a group chat on Snapchat to her friends. Jo tells the group a secret that is personal but also funny. For a joke, one of Jo's friends, Amanda, then tells her friend Becky, who Jo doesn't know, about the secret. Becky then directly messages Jo and makes negative comments her about secret. This is the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Jo.	Sarah has been told a secret about Jo who is a girl in her year that she doesn't know. The secret about Jo is personal. For a joke, Sarah then messages Sarah directly over Snapchat and makes negative comment on her secret. This is the first time Sarah has done something like this to Jo.	Sarah has been told a secret about Jo who is a girl in her year that she doesn't know. The secret about Jo is personal. Sarah then messages Sarah directly over Snapchat and makes negative comment on her secret. This is the first time Sarah has done something like this to Jo.
No audience/ Repetition	Jo is messaging in a group chat on Snapchat to her friends. Jo tells the group a secret that is personal but also funny. One of Jo's friends, Amanda, directly messages Jo to joke and tease her about the secret. This is not the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Jo.	Jo is messaging in a group chat on Snapchat to her friends. Jo tells the group a secret that is personal but also funny. For a joke, one of Jo's friends, Amanda then tells her friend Becky, who Jo doesn't know, about the secret. Becky then directly messages Jo and makes negative comments her about secret. This is not the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Jo.	Sarah has been told a secret about Jo who is a girl in her year that she doesn't know. The secret about Jo is personal. For a joke, Sarah then messages Jo directly over Snapchat and makes negative comment on her secret. This is not the first time Sarah has done something like this to Jo.	Sarah has been told a secret about Jo who is a girl in her year that she doesn't know. The secret about Jo is personal. Sarah then messages Sarah directly over Snapchat and makes negative comment on her secret. This is not the first time Sarah has done something like this to Jo.
Audience/ Repetition	Jo is messaging in a group chat on Snapchat to her friends. Jo tells the group a secret that is personal but also funny. One of Jo's friends, Amanda, then jokes and teases Jo about the secret on the group chat. This is not the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Jo.	Jo is messaging in a group chat on Snapchat to her friends. Jo tells the group a secret that is personal but also funny. For a joke, one of Jo's friends, Amanda then tells her friend Becky, who Jo doesn't know, about the secret. Becky then screen shots the conversation and posts it on her Snapchat story for her friends to see. Jo then sees her secret on other people's Snapchat story and they are negatively commenting on her. This is not the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Jo.	Sarah has been told a secret about Jo who is a girl in her year that she doesn't know. The secret about Jo is personal. For a joke, Sarah then posts Jo's secret on her Snapchat story for all of her friends to see. Jo then sees her secret on other people's Snapchat story, and they are negatively commenting on her. This is not the first time Sarah has done something like this to Jo.	Sarah has been told a secret about Jo who is a girl in her year that she doesn't know. The secret about Jo is personal. Sarah then posts Jo's secret on her Snapchat story for all of her friends to see. Jo then sees her secret on other people's Snapchat story and they are negatively commenting on her. This is not the first time Sarah has done something like this to Jo.
Audience/ No Repetition	Jo is messaging in a group chat on Snapchat to her friends. Jo tells the group a secret that is personal but also funny. One of Jo's friends, Amanda, then jokes and teases Jo about the secret on the group chat. This is the first time that Amanda has done something like this to jo.	Jo is messaging in a group chat on Snapchat to her friends. Jo tells the group a secret that is personal but also funny. For a joke, one of Jo's friends, Amanda then tells her friend Becky, who Jo doesn't know, about the secret. Becky then screen shots the conversation and posts it on her Snapchat story for her friends to see. Jo then sees her secret on other people's Snapchat story and they are negatively commenting on her. This is the first time that Amanda has done something like this to Jo.	Sarah has been told a secret about Jo who is a girl in her year that she doesn't know. The secret about Jo is personal. For a joke, Sarah then posts Jo's secret on her Snapchat story for all of her friends to see. Jo then sees her secret on other people's Snapchat story and they are negatively commenting on her. This is the first time Sarah has done something like this to Jo.	Sarah has been told a secret about Jo who is a girl in her year that she doesn't know. The secret about Jo is personal. Sarah then posts Jo's secret on her Snapchat story for all of her friends to see. Jo then sees her secret on other people's Snapchat story and they are negatively commenting on her. This is the first time Sarah has done something like this to Jo.

Scenario D – Outing

	Banter	Offensive joke	Joke CB	CB
No audience/ No repetition	John is messaging in a group chat with his friends. John sends his friends a photo that displays something personal but also funny. His friend, Will, directly messages John and teases him about the photo. This is the first time Will has done something like this to John.	John is messaging in a group chat with his friends. John sends his friends a photo that displays something personal but also funny. For a joke, John's friend, Will, adds his friend Glen to the group chat. Glen directly messages John and makes negative comments about his personal photo. This is the first time Will has done something like this to John.	Glen is looking at John's Instagram profile and finds a personal but funny photo of John. Glen and John are not friends but follow each other on Instagram. For a joke, Glen then directly messages John and makes negative comments about the photo. This is the first time Glen has done something like this to John.	Glen is looking at John's Instagram profile and finds a personal but funny photo of John. Glen and John are not friends but follow each other on Instagram. Glen then directly messages John and makes negative comments about the photo. This is the first time Glen has done something like this to John.
No audience/ Repetition	John is messaging in a group chat with his friends. John sends his friends a photo that displays something personal but also funny. His friend, Will, directly messages John and teases him about the photo. This is not the first time Will has done something like this to John.	John is messaging in a group chat with his friends. John sends his friends a photo that displays something personal but also funny. For a joke, John's friend, Will, adds his friend Glen to the group chat. Glen directly messages John and makes negative comments about his personal photo. This is not the first time Will has done something like this to John.	Glen is looking at John's Instagram profile and finds a personal but funny photo of John. Glen and John are not friends but follow each other on Instagram. For a joke, Glen then directly messages John and makes negative comments about the photo. This is not the first time Glen has done something like this to John.	Glen is looking at John's Instagram profile and finds a personal but funny photo of John. Glen and John are not friends but follow each other on Instagram. Glen then directly messages John and makes negative comments about the photo. This is not the first time Glen has done something like this to John.
Audience/ Repetition	John is messaging in a group chat with his friends. John sends his friends a photo that displays something personal but also funny. His friend, Will, teases John about the photo in the group chat. This is not the first time Will has done something like this to John.	John is messaging in a group chat with his friends. John sends his friends a photo that displays something personal but also funny. For a joke, John's friend, Will, adds his friend Glen to the group chat. Glen posts the photo on his Instagram and his follower make negative comments about his personal photo. This is not the first time Will has done something like this to John.	Glen is looking at John's Instagram profile and finds a personal but funny photo of John. Glen and John are not friends but follow each other on Instagram. For a joke, Glen then saves the photo and posts it on his Instagram for his followers to see and makes negative comments about the photo. This is not the first time Glen has done something like this to John.	Glen is looking at John's Instagram profile and finds a personal but funny photo of John. Glen and John are not friends but follow each other on Instagram. Glen then saves the photo and posts it on his Instagram for his followers to see and makes negative comments about the photo. This is not the first time Glen has done something like this to John.
Audience/ No Repetition	John is messaging in a group chat with his friends. John sends his friends a photo that displays something personal but also funny. His friend, Will, teases John about the photo in the group chat. This is the first time Will has done something like this to John.	John is messaging in a group chat with his friends. John sends his friends a photo that displays something personal but also funny. For a joke, John's friend, Will, adds his friend Glen to the group chat. Glen posts the photo on his Instagram and his follower make negative comments about his personal photo. This is not the first time Will has done something like this to John.	Glen is looking at John's Instagram profile and finds a personal but funny photo of John. Glen and John are not friends but follow each other on Instagram. For a joke, Glen then saves the photo and posts it on his Instagram for his followers to see and makes negative comments about the photo. This is the first time Glen has done something like this to John.	Glen is looking at John's Instagram profile and finds a personal but funny photo of John. Glen and John are not friends but follow each other on Instagram. Glen then saves the photo and posts it on his Instagram for his followers to see and makes negative comments about the photo. This is the first time Glen has done something like this to John.

Scenario E – Harassment

	Banter	Offensive joke	Joke CB	CB
No audience/ No repetition	Jack and his friend are messaging about another friend from school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. Jack is teasing Ben. For a joke, Jack then adds Ben to the group chat and continues to tease Ben. This is the first time Jack has done something like this to Ben.	Jack and his friend are messaging about another friend from school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. Jack is teasing Ben. Jack then adds his friend Harry to the group chat, who Ben doesn't know. Harry then finds Ben and adds him to the chat and makes negative comments about Ben. This is the first time Jack has done something like this to Ben.	Jack and his friend are messaging about another student at school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. Jack is making negative comments about Ben. For a joke, Jack then adds Ben to the group chat and continues to make negative comments about him. This is the first time Jack has done anything like this to Ben.	Jack and his friend are messaging about another student at school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. Jack is making negative comments about Ben. Jack then adds Ben to the group chat and continues to make negative comments about him. This is the first time Jack has done anything like this to Ben.
No audience/ Repetition	Jack and his friend are messaging about another friend from school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. Jack is teasing Ben. For a joke, Jack then adds Ben to the group chat and continues to tease Ben. This is not the first time Jack has done something like this to Ben.	Jack and his friend are messaging about another friend from school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. Jack is teasing Ben. Jack then adds his friend Harry to the group chat, who Ben doesn't know. Harry then finds Ben and adds him to the chat and makes negative comments about Ben. This is not the first time Jack has done something like this to Ben.	Jack and his friend are messaging about another student at school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. Jack is making negative comments about Ben. For a joke, Jack then adds Ben to the group chat and continues to make negative comments about him. This is not the first time Jack has done anything like this to Ben.	Jack and his friend are messaging about another student at school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. Jack is making negative comments about Ben. Jack then adds Ben to the group chat and continues to make negative comments about him. This is not the first time Jack has done anything like this to Ben.
Audience/ Repetition	Jack and his friend are messaging about another friend from school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. Jack is teasing Ben. For a joke, Jack then adds Ben and 4 of their other friends to the group chat and continues to tease Ben. This is not the first time Jack has done something like this to Ben.	Jack and his friend are messaging about another friend from school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. Jack is teasing Ben. Jack then adds his friend Harry to the group chat, who Ben doesn't know. Harry then finds Ben and adds him and 4 of his friends to the chat and makes negative comments about Ben. This is not the first time Jack has done something like this to Ben.	Jack is messaging in a group chat about another student at school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. There are many people from school in the group chat. Jack is making negative comments about Ben. For a joke, Jack then adds Ben to the group chat and continues to make negative comments about him. This is not the first time Jack has done anything like this to Ben.	Jack is messaging in a group chat about another student at school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. There are many people from school in the group chat. Jack is making negative comments about Ben. Jack then adds Ben to the group chat and continues to make negative comments about him. This is not the first time Jack has done anything like this to Ben.
Audience/ No Repetition	Jack and his friend are messaging about another friend from school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. Jack is teasing Ben. For a joke, Jack then adds Ben and 4 of their other friends to the group chat and continues to tease Ben. This is the first time Jack has done something like this to Ben.	Jack and his friend are messaging about another friend from school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. Jack is teasing Ben. Jack then adds his friend Harry to the group chat, who Ben doesn't know. Harry then finds Ben and adds him and 4 of his friends to the chat and makes negative comments about Ben. This is the first time Jack has done something like this to Ben.	Jack is messaging in a group chat about another student at school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. There are many people from school in the group chat. Jack is making negative comments about Ben. For a joke, Jack then adds Ben to the group chat and continues to make negative comments about him. This is the first time Jack has done anything like this to Ben.	Jack is messaging in a group chat about another student at school, Ben, who isn't in the group chat. There are many people from school in the group chat. Jack is making negative comments about Ben. Jack then adds Ben to the group chat and continues to make negative comments about him. This is the first time Jack has done anything like this to Ben.

Scenario F – Harassment

	Banter scenario	Offensive joke/CB scenario	Joke CB scenario	CB
No audience/ No repetition	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Ellie has her privacy settings so only her follower can see her account. For a joke, one of her friends, Molly, directly messages Ellie and makes teasing comments about the photo. This is the first time Molly has done something like this to Ellie.	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Ellie has her privacy settings so only her follower can see her account. For a joke, one of her friends, Molly, saves the photo and sends it in a direct Instagram message to Ellie and teases her about it. This is the first time Molly has done something like this to Ellie.	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Becky knows Ellie but they aren't close friends. For a joke, Becky directly messaged Ellie over Instagram and make negative comments on Ellie's photo. This is the first time Becky has done something like this to Ellie.	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Becky knows Ellie but they aren't close friends. Becky directly messaged Ellie over Instagram and make negative comments on Ellie's photo. This is the first time Becky has done something like this to Ellie.
No audience/ Repetition	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Ellie has her privacy settings so only her follower can see her account. For a joke, one of her friends, Molly, directly messages Ellie and makes teasing comments about the photo. This is not the first time Molly has done something like this to Ellie.	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Ellie has her privacy settings so only her follower can see her account. For a joke, one of her friends, Molly, saves the photo and sends it in a direct Instagram message to Ellie and teases her about it. This is not the first time Molly has done something like this to Ellie	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Becky knows Ellie but they aren't close friends. For a joke, Becky directly messaged Ellie over Instagram and make negative comments on Ellie's photo. This is not the first time Becky has done something like this to Ellie.	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Becky knows Ellie but they aren't close friends. Becky directly messaged Ellie over Instagram and make negative comments on Ellie's photo. This is not the first time Becky has done something like this to Ellie.
Audience/ Repetition	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Ellie has her privacy settings so only her follower can see her account. For a joke, one of her friends, Molly, makes teasing comments about the photo that Ellie's followers can see. This is not the first time Molly has done something like this to Ellie.	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Ellie has her privacy settings so only her follower can see her account. For a joke, one of her friends, Molly, posts the selfie on her Instagram account and makes teasing comments about the photo that her followers can see. Molly's followers then make negative comments about her photo. This is not the first time Molly has done something like this to Ellie.	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Becky knows Ellie but they aren't close friends. For a joke, Becky makes negative comments on Ellie's photo for everyone to see. This is not the first time Becky has done something like this to Ellie.	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Becky knows Ellie but they aren't close friends. Becky makes negative comments on Ellie's photo for everyone to see. This is not the first time Becky has done something like this to Ellie.
Audience/ No Repetition	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Ellie has her privacy settings so only her follower can see her account. For a joke, one of her friends, Molly, makes teasing comments about the photo that Ellie's followers can see. This is the first time Molly has done something like this to Ellie.	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Ellie has her privacy settings so only her follower can see her account. For a joke, one of her friends, Molly, posts the selfie on her Instagram account and makes teasing comments about the photo that her followers can see. Molly's followers then make negative comments about her photo. This is the first time Molly has done something like this to Ellie.	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Becky knows Ellie but they aren't close friends. For a joke, Becky makes negative comments on Ellie's photo for everyone to see. This is the first time Becky has done something like this to Ellie.	Ellie has posted a selfie of her and her family on her Instagram account. Becky knows Ellie but they aren't close friends. Becky makes negative comments on Ellie's photo for everyone to see. This is the first time Becky has done something like this to Ellie.

Appendix G: Study 2 Parental information and consent

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am writing to inform you that **{school name}** has been asked to take part in research regarding cyber bullying. The school has been approached by a PhD researcher, Oonagh Steer, from Nottingham Trent University. The research will be supervised by Dr. Lucy Betts. The aim of the research concerns the views cyber bullying from a young person's perspective in relation to the context of humour. The findings of this research will be used for a PhD research project and for academic publications

The reason for writing to you is to request your permission for your child/ward to take part in the study. The study will involve asking students to complete a questionnaire pack that is anticipated to take between 25-30 minutes. Within the pack will be 12 alternative cyberbullying scenarios for the students to read and answers questions about.

An information sheet will be provided at the beginning of the questionnaire pack explaining the aims of the study and what the study entails. The information sheet will also explain that involvement in the research is entirely voluntary. If you agree that your child/ward can take part, they are able to decide to withdraw from the study at any time, before or during. If this was to occur, no data generated up until that point will be used. Data can also be withdrawn after the questionnaire pack has been completed by the student. Answers would not be included in the research if requested to be withdrawn before a 4 week time period after the study has taken place. If answers are asked to be withdrawn after 4 weeks, student answers can only be used in PhD work and in no subsequent academic publications or presentations. For this to happen **{name of teacher}** will need to be informed in order to contact Oonagh Steer. Contact details will also be provided in order for students to directly contact the researchers if they would like to withdraw their answers or have any further questions.

The information sheet will also encourage students who may have been affected by their participation in the study to talk to a nominated member of staff at the school or a known person who they can speak with. A list of supportive organisations will also be provided at the end of the study in a debrief form in order to make students aware of channels of support of which they may not know. At the beginning of the study students will also be asked to provide consent that they want to take part in the research to ensure they have made a fully informed decision.

Your child/ward's name will not be required for the research. Age and gender will be asked of each student. Each participant will be provided with a unique questionnaire code which will be the only way for a student to be identified within the data. This unique questionnaire code will be needed as a reference if a student wishes to withdraw their answers from the research after the study has taken place.

There is no apparent risk to the young people who participate in this study. However, some safeguarding measures will be implemented. Firstly, your child/ward will be made aware that they can talk to **{name of teacher}** should they have any concerns. This member of staff should be contacted if a student wants to withdraw their comments. If a student would like to leave during the completion of the questionnaire this is totally fine, nor is it expected that all

questions are to be answered if a student chooses not to do so. Moreover, if any student is visibly distressed or upset whilst completing the questionnaires, the study will be terminated immediately and support will be offered by **{name of teacher}.** The research has been approved by the College of Social Sciences, Business and Law Research Ethics Committee at Nottingham Trent University and will adhere to British Psychological Society guidelines.

If you do not agree for your child/ward to take part in the study, please return the slip below to the school by **{insert date}.**

Should you have any questions concerning this study please contact:

Oonagh Steer: Doctorate School, Department of Psychology, Nottingham Trent University, 50 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, NG1 4FQ. Email: Oonagh.steer@ntu.ac.uk

Lucy Betts: Chaucer Room 4001, Department of Psychology, Nottingham Trent University, 50 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, NG1 4FQ. Email: lucy.betts@ntu.ac.uk

Yours, faithfully,

Name

Headteacher

_____

I would **not** like my child/ward to take part in the research concerning young people's views of cyber bullying within the context of humour.

Name of student: ....

Class: ....

Signed by: .... Parent/Guardian

Information sheet for the study – Exploring the role, perception, and interpretation of humour in Cyber bullying from the perspective of young people

Aims of the study

This study aims to understand how cyber bullying and humour may be connected from a young person's point of view. We want to understand how joking with other people online in a negative way could be connected with how young people use the internet. The research is being carried out by Oonagh Steer from Nottingham Trent University as part of a PhD research project. The findings of this research will be used for a PhD research project and for academic publications.

Invitation

This information sheet is an invitation for you to take part in the research which involves reading and answering some questions. Please spend some time reading through the following information. Also, please ask your parent/guardian if anything is unclear or if you have any questions. Contact details are below if you would like to email me directly.

What will it involve?

The study is only being carried out with young people aged between 11-16 years old. The online survey will ask you to read 12 short cyberbullying stories and answer some questions about them. The survey is also made up of different, smaller questionnaires which are about cyber bullying behaviour and styles of humour. The study should take between 25-30 minutes to complete. Taking part in the research is your choice and is voluntary. There are no right or wrong answers. If you do not want to answer a question you can tick the 'prefer not to say' option. If you decided to take part and then change your mind that would also be fine. During the study, you may choose not to answer all of the questions and can choose to stop filling out the questionnaires at any time and your answers will not be saved or used in the research. The online survey can be completed on a computer or smart phone in one sitting or you can take a break whenever you need and come back to it. You just need to use the <u>same</u> computer/smart phone you started the survey on.

Withdrawing your answers

You can stop taking part during the study and your answers will not be included in the study. If you would like to withdrawn your answers after taking part your answers would not be included in the research if you ask to do this before a 4 week time period. If you ask to withdraw your answers after 4 weeks, your answers can only be used in PhD work and in no other public reports for other researchers to see. To do this you will need to ask your parent(s) to email me or you can email me to let me know. You will need to tell me what your <u>unique questionnaire word</u> is that you choose at the beginning of the study. Please know that all personal email address that I receive emails from will be kept confidential and will not be shared.

The study does not need to know your name. Only your age and gender will be asked. At the beginning of the study you will be asked to choose a word that will then become your unique questionnaire word which will link to your data and tell us what your

answers were. You will need to write down your unique questionnaire word and keep it safe or remember it in case you would like to withdraw your answers at a later date. All answers you provide will remain confidential at all times.

Contact details

Email: oonagh.steer@ntu.ac.uk or lucy.betts@ntu.ac.uk

Address: Department of Psychology, Nottingham Trent University, 50 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, NG1 4FQ.

Phone number: 0115 848 5558

Are there any risks?

Some people may find answering questions about cyber bullying distressing and may want some support or would like to talk about how cyberbullying has affected them or someone they know. If this is the case please know that this is ok and there are many people who you can talk to such as, a family member, a trusted person or a friend.

You could also contact the Childline helpline 0800 1111 to speak with someone anonymously or look at their website (https://www.childline.org.uk/). You can also find some support online from Cyber Smile (http://www.cybersmile.org/) who offer guidance to people who experience cyber bullying or online harassment.

At the end of the study, a debrief form will be presented to each participant. The debrief form will give you further helpful information if you feel that the research has affected you in any way and you would like to talk to someone.

Is there a reward for taking part?

There is no individual reward for you to take part in this study. However, all participants, even those who don't answer all the questions or later decide to withdraw, will have a chance of winning a £20 Amazon voucher.

Appendix I: Study 2 and 3 participant debrief sheet

Debrief form

Thank you for taking part in the research. This study is part of a PhD research project, which helps our overall understanding of cyber bullying. The study aimed to understand how cyber bullying and humour may be connected from a young person's point of view. We wanted to understand how joking with other people online in a negative way could be connected with how young people use the internet. We also wanted to look at young people's opinions on cyberbullying situations.

Please note down your **unique questionnaire word**. You will need use this word if you do not want your questionnaire to be used in the research and want to withdraw your answers. If you want to do this, please contact **(nominated teacher)** who will then contact Oonagh Steer. If you wish to contact Oonagh Steer or her supervisor, Dr Lucy Betts, contact details are below. If you would like to take your questionnaire answers out of the study without anyone else knowing, please send a letter to the address below. This letter should say that you wish to withdraw from the research study and have only your unique questionnaire code, not your name.

Email: oonagh.steer@ntu.ac.uk or lucy.Betts@ntu.ac.uk

Address: Department of Psychology, Nottingham Trent University, 50 Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, NG1 4FQ.

Landline number: 0115 848 5558

If you would like to talk to somebody about some of the things that were mentioned in the study you could speak to **(nominated teacher)**. This could include how cyberbullying may have affected you or something that you may want to report. You could also talk about something you may have said or done online that you could be worried about. If you wanted to talk to somebody outside of your school about any cyber bullying issues you could try to speak to someone you know. There are also many support websites you could have a look at which could help. Some websites have been mentioned below. Please know that there many ways that you can be supported if cyberbullying is affecting you in any way.

Bullying UK which offers advice and support (http://www.bullying.co.uk/, tel: 0808 800 2222)

Beatbullying (http://www.beatbullying.org/) is "all about young people helping and supporting each other online." Mentors who are trained young people offer to listen and support.

Childline (http://www.childline.org.uk, tel: 0800 1111) offers help and advice about a range of issues

The Cybersmile Foundation (http://www.cybersmile.org/, tel: 0845 6887277) which is a charity dedicated to cyberbullying and offering support to those who have experienced cyberbullying.

Youth2youth (http://www.youth2youth.org.uk/helpline/) is run by young people offer support for all problems.