



Who fears being laughed at? The location of gelotophobia in the Eysenckian PEN-model of personality

Willibald Ruch*, René T. Proyer

Department of Psychology, University of Zurich, Binmühlestr. 14/7, 8050 Zurich, Switzerland

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 14 July 2008

Received in revised form 21 December 2008

Accepted 7 January 2009

Available online 3 February 2009

Keywords:

Extraversion
Gelotophobia
Laughter
Neuroticism
PEN-model
Psychoticism

ABSTRACT

The first empirical studies on the fear of being laughed at (gelotophobia; Ruch & Proyer, 2008a,b) indicated that it is a valid and useful new individual differences variable. The aim of the present paper is to examine where in the Eysenckian PEN-model gelotophobia can be located. Based on the available literature, gelotophobes are expected to be introverted, neurotic high P individuals. About $N = 230$ participants, completed the revised form of the EPQ R, all items from precursors of the P scale, and a gelotophobia questionnaire. Gelotophobes could be described as introverted, scoring higher in the older (more clinically oriented) versions of the P scale. Social desirability did not contribute substantially to gelotophobia. A stepwise multiple regression analysis showed that the Eysenckian superfactors explained 37% of the fear of being laughed at when older P scales were included. Gelotophobia can be well located in and predicted by established personality variables. However, not all of the variance is accounted for by personality.

© 2009 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Usually people react positively towards the friendly smiling and laughter of others. They interpret laughter as an expression of joy or as an affiliative signal in social interactions. However, there are people that feel unease or get suspicious when hearing others laughing. For them laughter is negatively connoted and presumably used by others as a strategy to put them down. One of the main characteristics of persons who extensively fear being laughed at (“gelotophobes”; *gelos* = Greek for laughter) is that they are not able to appreciate laughter or smiling in a positive way (Ruch & Proyer, 2008a, 2008b). Gelotophobia was first only studied among clinical groups as it was initially observed in psychotherapists’ single-case studies (Titze, 1995, 1997) but soon evidence emerged that it is of relevance among non-clinical samples as well. Therefore, Ruch and Proyer (2008b) suggested that the fear of being laughed at should also be studied as an individual difference phenomenon at a sub-clinical level. A growing body of research underlines the usefulness and validity of the concept in the realm of normality (Papousek et al., submitted for publication; for an overview see Ruch, 2009).

One of the main characteristics of gelotophobes is the misinterpretation of smiling and laughter by others as rude and offensive acts. The interpretation of laughter-related situations seems to be troublesome for gelotophobes. They tend to screen their environ-

ment for potential sources of derision and persons that might ridicule them. Their conviction of actually being ridiculous and therefore being laughed at often accompanies their vigilant behavior (Ruch & Proyer, 2008a).

1.1. The subjective assessment of gelotophobia

In the first empirical study on gelotophobia Ruch and Proyer (2008a) separated groups of clinically diagnosed gelotophobes from shame-based and non-shame based neurotics (see Nathanson, 1992), and controls by means of a 46-item questionnaire in a discriminant function analysis. Especially, items that dealt with the core symptoms of gelotophobia (i.e., sensitivity towards the laughter of others, feeling of unease while hearing the laughter from others, or feeling of clumsiness and awkward movements in laughter-related situations) yielded the highest discriminative power. The questionnaire converged well with the (independently given) clinical diagnoses by psychotherapists familiar with the concept. By means of factor analyses it was shown that the concept is best represented by a single-factor solution.

In a follow-up study, Ruch and Proyer (2008b) developed an economic 15-item version of the questionnaire that contains the core items of gelotophobia only. Furthermore, they empirically derived cut-off points indicating slight, pronounced, and extreme expressions of gelotophobia. For deriving the cut-off scores the following criteria were considered: (1) the answer format of the questionnaire (the scale mid point is 2.50 and a person with this score has agreed to at least half of the items); (2) a score of two standard

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +41 44 635 75 20; fax: +41 44 635 75 29.
E-mail address: w.ruch@psychologie.uzh.ch (W. Ruch).

deviations above the mean in a group of normal controls; and (3) the score at which the distribution curves of normal controls and diagnosed gelotophobes intersected. These criteria converged well and scores above 2.50 in the questionnaire indicate that the person suffers from at least slight expressions of gelotophobia. Using these cut-off scores Ruch and Proyer noticed that there was a considerable number of normal controls that exceeded the cut-off scores. In their sample of normal controls 6.83% showed slight expressions of gelotophobia. 4.82% even exceeded the cut-off point (score > 3.00) indicating pronounced expressions of the fear of being laughed at. Overall, 11.65% of the German normal controls showed signs of gelotophobic symptoms in this sample underscoring that there is ample variation in the fear of being laughed at in randomly drawn samples from the normal population. A research program was set up to study gelotophobia as an individual difference phenomenon among normals in different countries. Analyses of samples stemming from 73 countries of all continents showed that the fear of being laughed at existed everywhere (Proyer et al., 2009). Overall, there are no gender differences and the fear of being laughed at seems to remain stable across the life span.

1.2. The personality of gelotophobes

It may be assumed that a predisposition for gelotophobia exists which interacts with eliciting conditions. Personality traits might determine who will cope well with incidents of being laughed at and who will develop the symptoms described. Therefore, gelotophobia should be studied in connection with comprehensive models of personality such as the Eysenckian PEN-model of personality. The PEN system is a factor analytically based descriptive taxonomy of personality containing the three superfactors Psychoticism, Extraversion, and Neuroticism (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985; see Furnham, Eysenck, and Saklofske (2008) for an overview). It assumes a hierarchical arrangement of personality characteristics with Psychoticism (versus Impulse Control), Extraversion (versus Introversion), and Neuroticism (versus Emotional Stability) located at the highest level. They are referred to as types (or second-order factors) in factor analytic terms) as opposed to traits (or first-order factors) defining them. The type concept of Psychoticism, or P, is made up of traits like aggressive, cold, egocentric, impersonal, impulsive, antisocial, unempathic, creative, and tough-minded. The traits, whose intercorrelations give rise to the type concept of Extraversion, or E, are sociable, lively, active, assertive, sensation-seeking, carefree, dominant, surgent, and venturesome. Finally, Neuroticism, or N, is made up of traits like anxious, depressed, guilt feelings, low self-esteem, tense, irrational, shy, moody, and emotional (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985). These superfactors were extracted from different inventories and show a high degree of generalization across different cultures.

Based on the previously given descriptions of the types, several hypotheses on the relations between personality and the fear of being laughed at can be derived. Persons that fear being laughed at are expected to score higher in N as traits like anxious or shy might be of relevance here. Furthermore, one might expect that less lively and less sociable persons have difficulties in sharing the social aspects of humor and those are probably less prone to appreciate the positive effects of laughter and humor. Therefore, one might expect that gelotophobes are rather introverted than extraverted. As the experiential world of gelotophobes also comprises paranoid ideas (e.g., of being suspicious when other people laugh) it is expected that gelotophobes score higher in P. Overall, gelotophobes can be predicted as being introverted, neurotic high P individuals.

These hypotheses are in line with information from two different sources. Firstly, based on the observations by Titze (1995, 1997) it is possible to set up a model of putative causes and consequences of gelotophobia (see Ruch and Proyer (2008a) for an overview). In short,

Titze traces the causes of the fear of being laughed at back to early shame-experiences and failing interactions between infant and caretakers in infancy and repeated and intense experiences of traumatic experiences of being laughed at/ridiculed in childhood, youth, and adulthood. The consequences are quite diverse and reach from social withdrawal to avoidance of being laughed at/ridiculed to lack of liveliness and joy. Several of the consequences can easily be related to the types of the PEN-model. For example, traits of N like anxious, low self-esteem, tense, shy, moody, and emotional may be used in the description of gelotophobes. People who fear being laughed at seem to lack at least four of the components of E, namely being sociable, lively, carefree and surgent. Finally, P seems to be less related to consequences of gelotophobia but more so to interpretations of laughter-related situations in daily life. Nevertheless, the core symptom of typically attributing laughter to be maliciously directed at oneself suggests a positive correlation with Psychoticism. This element of a paranoid tendency makes the PEN-model the best suiting background for the study of the personality correlates of gelotophobia. For this reason, in the present study the PEN-model was preferred over alternative models of personality.

The second source of information is empirical studies that have been conducted so far. For example, a study on emotional experiences of gelotophobes suggested that they seem to be less prone to experience emotions of joy but being higher in the experience of shame and fear than non-gelotophobes (Platt & Ruch, 2009). Thus, a lower inclination to joy and positive emotions suggests higher scores in N and lower scores in E in the PEN-model. The study by Platt (2008) seems to provide support for the assumption of a higher relation between gelotophobia and P. In a scenario-test, gelotophobes were not able to differentiate between playful teasing situations among friends and mean-spirited bullying type of ridicule. Their emotional reactions to both types of situations were the same. This suggests that they expect something malicious behind laughter-related situations even if friends display the laughter in a good-spirited manner. This, again, might be interpreted as a hint for paranoid tendencies among gelotophobes. The hypothesis of higher P scores will be tested primarily utilizing the earlier Psychoticism scales (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1968, 1972) as they contained several clinically oriented symptom saturated items including ones relating to paranoid tendencies. While the more recent P scales (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975, 1991) are more applicable to normal adults, they lack clinical items and hence it is doubtful whether the P scales of the EPQ and EPQ-R will yield substantial correlations.

Thus, the aim of this study was to examine the relationship between gelotophobia and the PEN-model. The participants completed the subjective measure for gelotophobia (GELOPH), the EPQ-R and older forms of the P scale (i.e., precursors of the present EPQ-R P scale). The latter ones were used to focus on the gelotophobia–Psychoticism relation. As gender might contribute to these relations, all analyses were performed for the total sample and split by gender.

2. Method

2.1. Research participants

The sample consisted of $N = 230$ participants ($M = 34.17$, $SD = 14.39$) between 17 and 91 years. The male:female ratio was about 1:1 with 106 males (46.09%) and 124 females (53.91%). $n = 119$ participants were students and 111 were adult volunteers.

2.2. Instruments

The GELOPH<15> (Ruch & Proyer, 2008b) is a 15-item questionnaire for the subjective assessment of gelotophobia. All items are

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات