If Love Is the Treasure, Laughter is the Key: Shared Laughter, Attachment, and Closeness

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Shared Laughter & Intimacy

Previous studies suggest shared laughter to be an indicator of **relationship well-being** (Kurtz et al., 2015; Kurtz & Algoe, 2017)

- Shared laughter is more likely to occur in **closer** than distant relationships (Smoski & Bachorowski, 2003)

- Humor in relationships promote "**disclosure and responsiveness**" (Fraley and Aron, 2004) , which are essential for **intimacy** (Reis & Shaver, 1988)

The Importance of Considering Attachment

- **Shared laughter** impacts recipients to **varying degrees**, suggesting its moderation by individual characteristics. (Howland and Simpson, 2013)

- **Anxiously attached** individuals **require more time, affection, and self-disclosure** to perceive **closeness** in their romantic partnerships. (Hudson and Fraley, 2017)

Study Aims & Hypotheses

1) **On days** when individuals report **more shared laughter than their own average** (within-person effect), they will report **more closeness.**

2) Individuals **higher in attachment anxiety** will report **less closeness.**

3) Individuals **higher in anxious attachment** will show **weaker relations** between shared laughter and closeness.

Methods & Measures

- Recruitment took place during COVID-19 from Aug 2020 to April 2021
- **108 cohabiting romantic couples** in NYC/NJ area were included in the analysis
- Couples completed a **baseline survey**
  - General Anxious Attachment measured with **The Experiences in Close Relationship Scale** (Wei et al., 2007)
- and a **14-day dyadic daily diary**
  - Assessed daily amount of shared laughter (Shrout et al., 2018)
  - Assessed daily reports of physical and emotional closeness/intimacy (Shrout et al., 2018)

Analytic Plan

- We ran **two dyadic multilevel model in R** using brms to simultaneously model women's and men's associations between shared laughter and reports of **(1) daily emotional intimacy** and **(2) daily physical intimacy**
  - Predictors: time, within-subjects shared laughter, between-subjects shared laughter, between-subjects attachment anxiety, within-subjects shared laughter x attachment anxiety
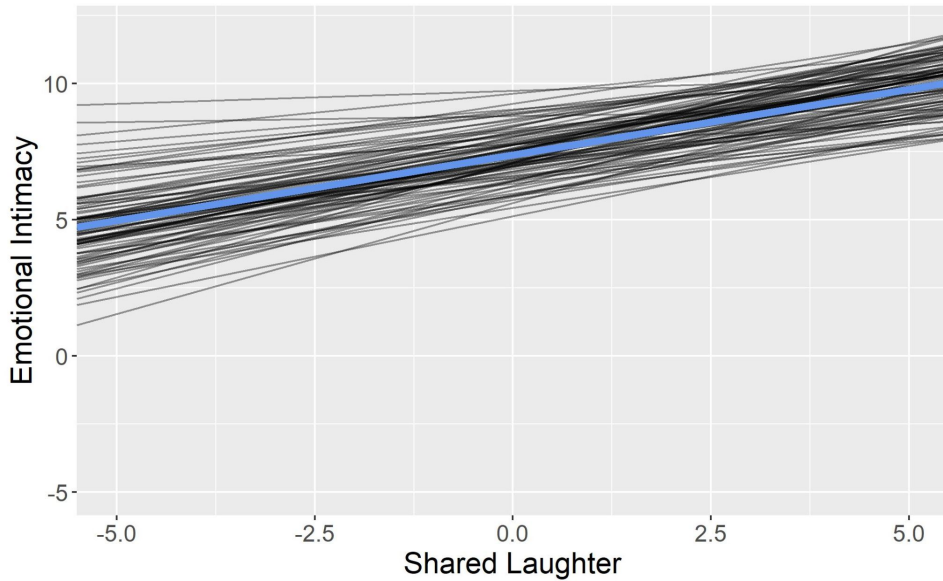- Random intercepts & slopes of time and shared laughter were estimated to explore **heterogeneity** of effects

Hypothesis 1: Main effect of Closeness

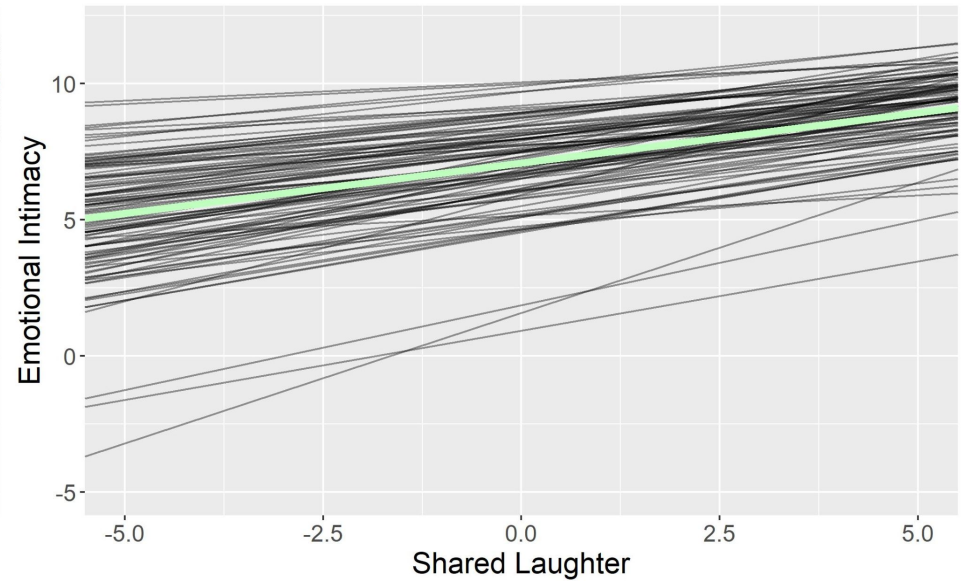On days when individuals report more shared laughter than their own average, they will report more closeness.

Emotional Intimacy

Female

Male

Intercept = 7.38 (CI = 7.15, 7.62)
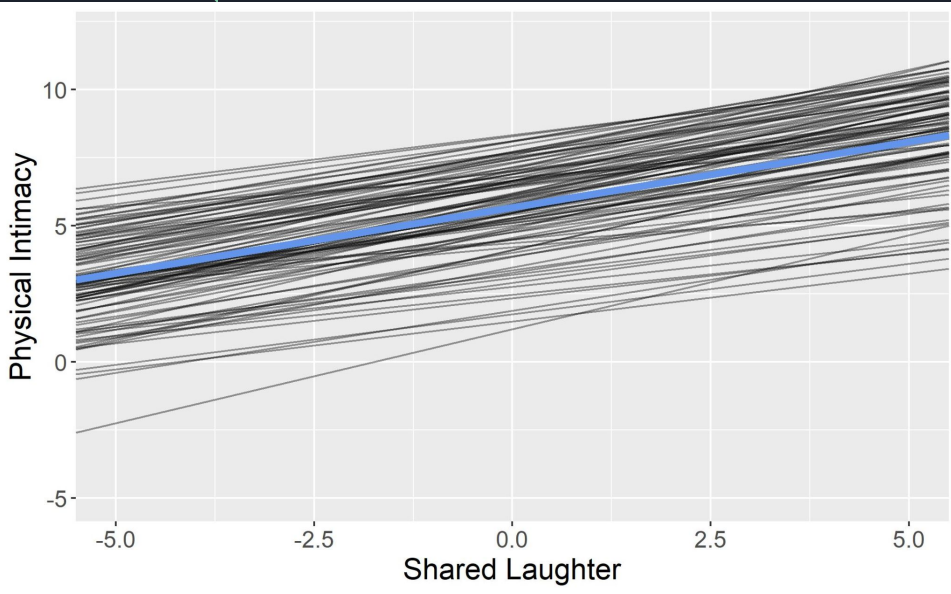β = 0.48 (CI = 0.40, 0.56)

Intercept = 7.08 (CI = 6.69, 7.46)
β = 0.37 (CI = 0.29, 0.45)

Physical Intimacy

Female

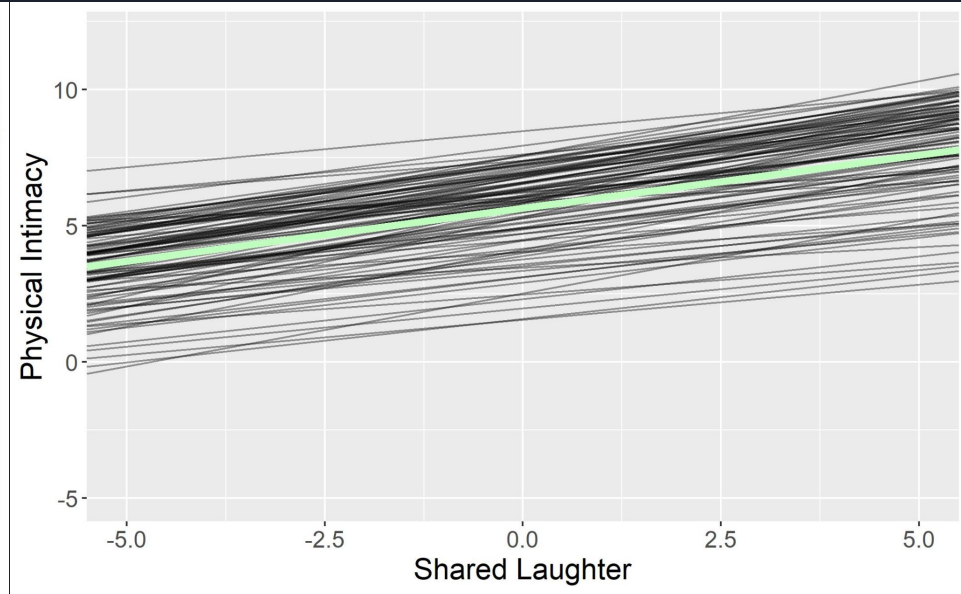Male

Intercept = 5.67 (CI = 5.27, 6.07)
β = 0.48 (CI = 0.40, 0.56)

Intercept = 5.64 (CI = 5.27, 6.02)
β = 0.39 (CI = 0.31, 0.47)

Hypothesis 2: Main Effect of Anxious Attachment

Individuals who score higher on attachment anxiety will report less relationship closeness.

- **Females (but not males) higher in attachment anxiety reported significantly less emotional intimacy** ($\beta = -0.1457$, CI = -0.2519, -0.0376)
- There was no significant relationship between attachment anxiety and physical intimacy for males or females

Hypothesis 3: Anxious Attachment & Shared Laughter Interaction

Individuals higher in anxious attachment will show weaker relationships between shared laughter and closeness (e.g. they will not get the same benefits of shared laughter)

- There was **no significant interaction for males or females for either emotional or physical intimacy** (estimates near 0 for all interaction effects)

Discussion & Implications

- On days when male and female partners experience **more shared laughter** than they normally do, they report concurrent **increases in emotional AND physical intimacy** in their relationships

- Shared laughter may be a critical component to enhancing relationship quality and may be explored as a **therapeutic tool for couples struggling with intimacy**

Limitations & Future Directions

- Examine and quantify the **heterogeneity** in the findings more closely

- Excluded **18 non-heterosexual couples** from analyses

- Attachment anxiety was assessed generally (**not relationship specific attachment**)

Thank you!

Results: Emotional Intimacy

Emotional Intimacy				
Variable	Estimate	Est. Error	L-95% CI	U-95% CI
Female Partners				
Intercept	7.3827	0.1215	7.1482	7.6231
Time	-0.0127	0.0164	-0.0448	0.0196
Shared laughter (w)	0.4817	0.0391	0.4031	0.5555
Shared laughter (b)	0.6122	0.0674	0.4820	0.7466
Anxious attachment (b)	-0.1457	0.0549	-0.2519	-0.0376
Shared laughter (w) x Anxious attachment	0.0154	0.0161	-0.0158	0.0471
Male Partners				
Intercept	7.0763	0.1965	6.6900	7.4602
Time	0.0337	0.0195	-0.0043	0.0722
Shared laughter (w)	0.3690	0.0415	0.2869	0.4499
Shared laughter (b)	0.4068	0.0972	0.2149	0.5979
Anxious attachment (b)	-0.1325	0.1059	-0.3410	0.0733
Shared laughter (w) x Anxious attachment	-0.0103	0.0216	-0.0534	0.0321

Results: Physical Intimacy

Physical Intimacy				
Variable	Estimate	Est. Error	L-95% CI	U-95% CI
Female Partners				
Intercept	5.6692	0.2029	5.2660	6.0681
Time	0.0362	0.0222	-0.0077	0.0802
Shared laughter (w)	0.4818	0.0398	0.4031	0.5584
Shared laughter (b)	0.4580	0.0984	0.2682	0.6535
Anxious attachment (b)	-0.0811	0.0715	-0.2230	0.0599
Shared laughter (w) x Anxious attachment	-0.0036	0.0157	-0.0345	0.0277
Male Partners				
Intercept	5.6449	0.1910	5.2680	6.0168
Time	0.0267	0.0207	-0.0135	0.0678
Shared laughter (w)	0.3898	0.0402	0.3103	0.4684
Shared laughter (b)	0.6080	0.0832	0.4456	0.7700
Anxious attachment (b)	-0.0707	0.0811	-0.2309	0.0911
Shared laughter (w) x Anxious attachment	-0.0187	0.0199	-0.0572	0.0209