



Impulsivity, attribution and prison bullying: Bully-category and perpetrator–victim mutuality

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ABSTRACT

The current study explores bullying behaviours among adult male prisoners, examining its relationship with aggression attribution and impulsivity. Employed are two separate methods of analysis to determine how this may influence results. Participants were 102 prisoners. All completed a revised version of the Direct and Indirect Prisoner behaviour Checklist (DIPC-R), the Barratt Impulsivity Scale: Version II (BIS-12) and the Expressive Aggression Scale (EXPAGG). Analysis included categorical analysis with prisoners placed into one of four groups (pure bully, pure victim, bully/victim and not-involved), and factorial analysis where perpetration and victimisation were assessed as continuous variables and evidence of interactions explored. It was predicted that perpetration would be associated with higher instrumental attributions and higher impulsivity than non-perpetration. It was predicted that a factorial analysis would demonstrate no interactions between perpetration and victimisation across aggression variables, questioning the utility of a distinct 'bully–victim' group. Bullies were found to have higher instrumental attribution scores than non-bullies, with no differences for expressive attribution. Victims were more impulsive than non-victims with evidence that perpetration moderated this relationship. A categorical analysis demonstrated that bully/victims were more impulsive, at least in relation to pure bullies. Results suggested that it was the *combined* effect of indirect and direct aggression which promoted differences between victims and bullies in relation to attribution and impulsivity. Results are discussed with reference to previous research concerning prison bullying, with directions for future research focused on exploration of perpetrator–victim mutuality using a range of variables and distinct methods of analysis.

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As an area of academic study, the examination of bullying behaviour among prisoners has had a brief history in comparison to the study of bullying occurring in other settings, such as schools. The first studies exploring prison bullying were published in 1996 (Ireland & Archer, 1996; Connell & Farrington, 1996), with a marked increase in research since 1999. Since this date, there have been 24 studies published (e.g. Palmer & Farmer, 2002; Ireland & Archer, 2004; Palmer & Thakordas, 2005; Ireland & Monaghan, 2006). Prison-based research has moved in recent years from a focus on the nature and extent of bullying to an examination of five core areas of interest; refining methods of measurement; recognising the role of the social and physical environment; distinguishing between the different groups involved; predicting group membership and, finally, linking prison research into the wider aggression literature and theory base (Ireland & Qualter, 2006). It is these latter three areas

that the current study is focused on, namely an exploration of the groups involved and their distinguishing characteristics, and how prison bullying research can be aligned more to the aggression literature.

Whereas school-based bullying research has developed more closely alongside the wider aggression field, clearly defined as a specific subsection of aggression (Olweus, 1996), prison research has developed differently. The latter has utilised methods of measurement that encapsulate a wide range of behaviours, not all of which have been immediately identified as aggression i.e. indirect aggression such as ostracising and spreading rumours, and other forms of more direct aggression such as theft (Ireland & Archer, 1996; Archer, Ireland & Power, 2007). The focus on the full remit of behaviours that can be classified as aggression has led to prison researchers opting for broad definitions of bullying, an example of which has been offered by Ireland (2002) as follows:

"An individual is being bullied when they are the victim of direct and/or indirect aggression happening on a weekly basis, by the same perpetrator or different perpetrators. Single incidences of aggression can be viewed as bullying, particularly where they are

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severe and when the individual either believes or fears that they are at risk of future victimisation by the same perpetrator or others. An incident can be considered bullying if the victim believes that they have been aggressed towards, regardless of the actual intention of the bully. It can also be bullying when the imbalance of power between the bully and his/her victim is implied and not immediately evident (p. 26)."

Addressing definitional issues concerning bullying are a separate paper on their own, although it is suffice to say that even within the more heavily researched areas of bullying study (e.g. schools) there remains no universally accepted definition (Smith & Brain, 2000). This has led some to argue that a fixed, measurable definition of bullying may not exist (Ireland, 2005a), and instead that we should be focusing on defining bullying by what motivates it as opposed to how it manifests itself.

What is particularly interesting, however, is the afore mentioned issue of prison bullying not tending to be researched alongside standard aggression, or aggression-related, measures. A number of studies involving adults and children have found that bullies show the expected higher scores on measures of direct aggression, such as violent crime (Farrington, 1993), proactive and reactive aggression (Roland & Idsøe, 2001), and physical aggression (Craig, 1998). This evidence base suggests, therefore, that there are expected links between aggression and bullying worthy of further examination. Extending the exploration of aggression related variables to prison bullying is of interest, particularly with a view to confirming if the behaviour examined within prisons can be linked more broadly into the aggression literature. There is a risk that research conducted within forensic (prison) samples may develop in isolation from the wider academic research base unless there is a concerted effort to align forensic research with aggression research.

To date only three studies have begun to explore the role of aggression in prison bullying (Ireland & Archer, 2004; Palmer & Thakordas, 2005; Archer et al., 2007). All have reported a relationship between aggression and bullying. Ireland and Archer (2004) found, among young and juvenile prisoners, that all four subscales of the Aggression Questionnaire (AQ; Buss & Perry, 1992) were moderately correlated with measures of different forms of bullying. Similar findings were reported in a study of adult offenders (Palmer & Thakordas, 2005). Both Ireland and Archer (2004) and Palmer and Thakordas (2005) also employed a participant group-classification approach to explore how aggression measures related to bullying behaviour, whereby prisoners were classified into one of four categories; pure bullies (sole perpetrators); pure victims (sole victims); bully/victims (mutual perpetrator–victim category) and those not-involved. This approach has been commonly applied to prison (see Ireland, 2002) and school-based studies (e.g., Baldry & Farrington, 1998; Boulton & Smith, 1994; Craig, 1998; Unnever, 2005). In Ireland and Archer (2004) prisoners classified as pure bullies or bully/victims reported higher levels of physical and verbal trait aggression than other prisoners, with bully/victims reporting higher levels of hostility and anger than the other categories. In Palmer and Thakordas (2005), categorical differences were limited to the hostility subscale with bully/victims presenting with higher levels of hostility than those not-involved.

In a more recent study among adult prisoners, Archer et al. (2007) extended exploration of bullying behaviour and aggression related-variables to an assessment of aggressive attributions using the EXPAGG (Expressions of Aggression), and impulsivity. Both pure bullies and bully–victims showed significantly higher values than the not-involved category with regards to impulsiveness. Only bully–victims showed higher expressive attributions than the not-involved category.

A relationship between aggression variables and bullying should not be surprising if theories outlined to explain prison bullying are supported. Ireland (2004) postulated, for example, that within prisons, pure bullies may be largely proactive aggressors (i.e. planned/controlled) whereas bully/victims may display aggression driven more by reactive motives (i.e. by negative emotions such as anger, fear, hostility). Ireland (2004) cited the findings of Ireland and Archer (2004), where bully/victims presented with higher levels of anger and hostility, as supporting evidence for this. It was further theorised that aggression demonstrated by bully/victims may be motivated by a drive to prevent their own future victimisation by communicating to their peer group that they are not 'easy targets'. This was extended further in 2005 with the development of the Applied Fear Response [AFR] model (Ireland, 2005b). This model described how fear can drive reactive responses to bullying, with such responses (particularly those by bully/victims) including aggression towards others.

The AFR model argued further that reactive responses can be both immediate and delayed, with the latter occurring sometime after the provocation. However, although reactive aggression in this instance was thought to be driven primarily by a negative emotion (e.g. fear), it does arguably have a proactive goal, namely that of aggressing towards peers in order to communicate that they are likely to fight back in the future. In this way, reactively-aggressing can be considered an attempt to restore self-image and to prevent the stigmatization that being labeled as a victim who does not fight back is likely to carry (Ireland, 2004). Thus, the aggression of bully/victims may be mixed motive (Bushman & Anderson, 2001) and not easily classified as *either* reactive or proactive.

Furthermore, if it was accepted that those reporting *both* perpetration and victimisation (i.e. bully/victims) were more likely to demonstrate reactive motivations in relation to their use of aggression than the more proactively-motivated perpetrator (i.e. pure bullies), predictable differences in aggression attribution should also be evident. The question would then become whether or not aggression attributions would relate more to expressive attributions (i.e. a loss of control) or instrumental attributions (i.e. that the aggression was necessary). These two types of attribution have been routinely researched in the aggression literature (e.g. Campbell, Muncer, McManus & Woodhouse, 1999), with instrumental beliefs found to associate more with measures of aggression than expressive beliefs (Archer & Haigh 1997; Smith & Waterman, 2006), and particularly with physical aggression (e.g., Alexander, Allen, Brooks, Cole & Campbell, 2004; Archer & Graham-Kevan, 2003; Ramirez, Andreu, & Fujihara, 2001). On the basis of this it could be argued that *both* perpetrator groups (i.e. pure bullies and bully/victims) should be expected to hold more instrumental attributions than the other groups (i.e. pure victims and those not-involved).

It has further been suggested that bully/victims may be more likely to hold expressive attributions than pure bullies. This is based on the findings of Archer et al. (2007) which has offered some confirmation for increased expressive attributions among bully/victims, but only in comparison to those not-involved and not in comparison to other perpetrators. As noted, there is evidence that bully/victims demonstrate higher levels of hostility (Ireland & Archer, 2004; Palmer & Thakordas, 2005) and anger (Ireland & Archer, 2004) which would equate more with expressive attributions, although increased anger was not found by Palmer and Thakordas (2005). Evidence of increased impulsivity could provide further evidence for an expectation for higher expressive attributions, since such attributions focus on reduced control. Impulsiveness has been consistently associated with higher levels of direct aggression (Barratt, 1994; O'Connor, Archer, Hair, & Wu, 2002; Smith & Waterman, 2006), and involves a lack of inhibition and the inability to delay immediate responses to a situation. There has been some support for increased levels of impulsivity among bully/

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