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Bullying in Prisons: The Importance of Perceived Social Status, Prisonization, and Moral Disengagement

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Research has focused on the environmental causes of bullying in prison, but neglected the intrinsic characteristics of bullies. Although the importance of social status in prison has been noted as one factor that may influence bullying, no empirical research has yet addressed this. The main aim of this study was to investigate whether the perceived importance of social status in prison motivates bullying, with the subsidiary aim of exploring whether moral disengagement and prisonization influence the relationship. A total of 132 adult male prisoners were interviewed and categorized as a bully, victim, bully/victim or not involved. The prevalence of bullying was high, with over half the prisoners being both a victim and perpetrator of bullying. As predicted, bullying was positively related to the perceived importance of social status; prisoners involved in bullying valued social status more than those who were not. Furthermore, moral disengagement mediated the relationship between bullying and social status. Prisonization was also related to the perceived importance of social status, moral disengagement and bullying. It is concluded that a desire to achieve social status in prison may contribute to bullying. Furthermore, prisonized attitudes may instill values such as social status into prisoners and may also help facilitate cognitive distortions such as moral disengagement, which in turn, may serve to maintain involvement in bullying activity. Aggr. Behav. 32:490–501, 2006. © 2006 Wiley-Liss, Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

The last decade has seen a surge of interest regarding bullying amongst prisoners [Ireland, 2000; Levenson, 2000]. In 1999, the requirement that all prisons should have an anti-bullying strategy became mandatory [Home Office Prison Service, 1999], demonstrating a commitment to deal with bullying nationwide. However, many questions still remain unanswered regarding bullying in prison.

Bullying is a subsection of aggressive behaviour [Ireland et al., 1999], which can include direct aggression, such as physical, verbal and sexual abuse and indirect aggression such as ridiculing, ostracizing and rumour spreading [Ireland and Archer, 1996]. Several researchers have defined bullying. Most definitions support the five key elements identified by Farrington [1993], that bullying must (a) involve physical, psychological or verbal abuse, (b) involve an imbalance of power, (c) be unprovoked, (d) be repeated and (e) be intended to cause fear or harm to the victim. However, it is difficult to apply such a definition to a prison sample [Ireland and Ireland, 2003]. For example, repeated aggression may be unfeasible given the movement of prisoners within and between prisons [Beck and Ireland, 1995]. Furthermore, there are behaviours specific to the prisoner subculture, which do not start off involving an imbalance of power such as "baroning" whereby goods are lent to prisoners, yet failure to repay loans can result in the manipulation of others [Ireland and Ireland, 2003]. In view of such difficulties, the current study adopted the broader definition proposed by Ireland [2002a] which states:

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

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> individual either believes or fears that they are at risk of future victimization 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)

Bullying impacts upon individuals [Blaauw et al., 2001] and the prison, creating disruptions that allow inmates to gain power and subvert prison rules [Home Office Prison Service, 1993]. However, bullying poses problems beyond the confines of the establishment. If prisoners are not challenged about their bullying behaviour within the prison, they may continue to exploit people upon release and so are unlikely to live law-abiding lives [Levenson, 2000]. Therefore, it is important to better understand bullying behaviour so that interventions can be targeted appropriately.

Some attempts to explain prison bullying have been explicated through environmental causes, namely the deprivation of material goods [Ireland, 2000], high population density [Levenson, 2000], hierarchical structure of prisons [Ireland, 2000], inmate subculture [Ireland, 2002a] and the attitudes of peer groups [Ireland, 2000]. However, environmental factors alone cannot account for bullying since not all prisoners are involved; it is most likely that there is an interaction between the environment and the inherent characteristics of the individuals within it [Ireland, 2002a].

Over the past few years, there has been a wealth of empirical research into the intrinsic characteristics of prisoners who bully, beyond demographic characteristics such as age, offence type and criminal history [Ireland, 2001; O'Donnell and Edgar, 1998b]. Research has shown how certain aspects of assertiveness relate to bullying involvement and that in general, bullies tend to have higher overall assertiveness than other bully categories whilst victims have the lowest overall assertiveness [Ireland, 2002b]. Attachment style and emotional loneliness have also been found to relate to bullying [Ireland and Power, 2004]. Prisoners who are both bullies and victims tend to have higher avoidant scores and emotional loneliness scores than other bully categories [Ireland and Power, 2004].

Other research has found that compared to victims, bullies hold a more positive belief about the use of aggression [Ireland and Archer, 2002], are less empathetic [Ireland, 1999b] and are more likely to respond aggressively to conflict situations [Ireland, 2002a]. While many of these factors may facilitate such behaviour, they fail to address the motivation behind bullying.

Bullying is a social phenomenon [Salmivalli et al., 1996]. It was once said that societies based on capitalist economic structures ''are concerned only with winners, with little interest in those who are disadvantaged'' [Gilbert, 1994, p. 371]. Bullying is one way in which an individual can be regarded as a winner [Ireland, 2000]. As Ireland [2002a] states:

> ''Status is a valuable commodity in a prison in that it enables prisoners who possess it to make demands of those who do not and secure greater access to resources. Successfully bullying others is one way of guaranteeing status among peers.'' (p. 89)

Social hierarchy seems to be inherent in the prison system and prisons appear to be encouraging such a social system as bullies are given high status by both prisoners and staff [Ireland, 2002a]. One personal characteristic behind bullying may be the perceived need to gain social status in prison.

Closely linked to issues of status and hierarchy within the prison system is the process of prisonization. Prisonization refers to ''the adoption of the folkways, mores, customs and general culture of the inmate subculture'' [Clemmer, 1940, p. 270]. The process of prisonization is not determined by a single factor but governed by the interaction between deprivation in the prison environment [Paterline and Petersen, 1999] and the importation of pre-prison experiences into the inmate subculture [Zingraff, 1980].

Prisonization influences the behaviour and relationships between prisoners [Wing, 2003]. Inmates who embrace the social hierarchy of the prison culture and strongly identify with inmate norms may be more likely to value social status, because maintaining one's own position in the prison society is a central aspect of prisonization [Paterline and Petersen, 1999].

Research also suggests that the inmate subculture is important in explaining bullying behaviour [Ireland, 2000]. Individuals who are not integrated into an inmate ''social system'', such as a gang, and live on the periphery of the inmate subculture with non-conformist attitudes, increase their risk of being bullied [Wooldredge, 1998]. Therefore, being a victim of bullying may be more common for inmates who show higher levels of institutional maladjust-

ment. Similarly, bullying may be more prevalent amongst inmates who are prisonized and who bully as a source of social psychological gratification.

It has been considered whether delinquency is associated with less advanced levels of moral reasoning [Blasi, 1980]. However, no clear relationship has been established [Jennings et al., 1983]. It is likely that the regulation of conduct involves far more than moral reasoning [Bandura et al., 1996]. Another aspect of morality that may be relevant to bullying is moral disengagement, which involves the "cognitive restructuring of inhumane conduct into a benign or worthy behaviour" [Bandura, 2002, p. 101].

In the social cognitive theory of the moral self [Bandura, 1991], "moral agency is manifested in both the power to refrain from behaving inhumanely and the proactive power to behave humanely" [Bandura, 1999, p. 1]. People regulate their actions by the sanctions they apply to themselves [Bandura et al., 2001]. Negative self-sanctions serve for actions that violate their moral standards and positive self-reactions for conduct in line with their own moral standards [Bandura et al., 2001]. However, such self-regulatory mechanisms do not operate unless they are activated and there are a variety of psychosocial processes by which moral self-sanctions are selectively disengaged from inhumane conduct [Bandura, 1999].

There are eight mechanisms of moral disengagement [Bandura, 2002]. The most powerful set of disengagement practices focuses on redefining harmful conduct as worthy by moral justification, sanitizing language and exonerating social comparison. People tend not to engage in harmful conduct until they have justified the morality of their actions to themselves, making their behaviour personally and socially acceptable [Bandura, 1999]. Similarly, the use of sanitizing language camouflages pernicious activities [Bandura, 1999] enabling harmful conduct to appear respectable or benign [Bandura, 1999; Lutz, 1987]. For example, civilians killed by a bomb attack are described as "collateral damage" [Gambino, 1973]. Advantageous comparison is another way of making harmful behaviour appear acceptable [Bandura, 2002], because how behaviour is viewed is coloured by what it is compared against [Bandura, 1999]. For example, someone may say "I only hit him once, other people would have beaten him up".

Another set of disengagement mechanisms focuses on minimizing the role of the perpetrator in causing harm through diffusion and displacement of responsibility, distorting or disregarding the effects of one's actions and through the attribution of blame and dehumanization of the victim [Bandura, 2002]. Under displaced responsibility, individuals consider their actions to stem from the orders of authorities, rather than themselves, providing people with a self-exemption from carrying out inhumanities [Milgram, 1974]. Similarly, diffusion of responsibility makes everyone responsible thus no one feels personally accountable [Zimbardo, 1995]. Furthermore, distorting or disregarding the consequences of one's actions enables individuals to distance themselves from the harm caused [Bandura, 1999]. The last two disengagement mechanisms are dehumanization and the attribution of blame, which operate on the recipient of detrimental acts [Bandura, 2002]. Dehumanization strips people of their human qualities and feelings making it far easier to victimize them [Kelman, 1973]. Blaming victims for bringing suffering on themselves also serves to make people's injurious actions appear acceptable [Bandura, 2002].

Research has begun to consider the role of such disengagement mechanisms in harmful behaviour [Bandura et al., 1996, 2001]. Moral disengagement has been found to influence aggressive and delinquent behaviour both directly and by reducing prosocial behaviour, guilt and by fostering aggression [Bandura, 1999, 2002; Bandura et al., 1996]. However, research needs to explore how this aspect of morality may influence prison bullying.

A limited number of European studies have considered the use of moral disengagement amongst children in bullying situations [Menesini et al., 2003]. Children show higher levels of moral disengagement emotions and motives when asked to put themselves in the role of the bully compared with a victim or an outsider [Menesini et al., 2003].

The present study explored the relationship between bullying, the perceived importance of social status, moral disengagement and prisonization. Since this research was largely exploratory, only male prisoners were interviewed as an initial investigation. A sample of 132 adult male prisoners took part in the study. Five questionnaires were administered to each prisoner by interview. The questionnaires measured levels of prisonization, moral disengagement, social desirability, their experience of being bullied and bullying others and their perceived importance of social status.

The primary aim was to explore whether the desire to attain and maintain social status in prison relates to bullying. We predicted that prisoners involved in bullying would value social status more than prisoners who are not.

The study also investigated whether moral disengagement and prisonization mediate the relationship between bullying and social status. It was predicted that prisoners involved in bullying would show higher levels of moral disengagement compared to prisoners not involved. Further, it was predicted that moral disengagement would positively relate to the perceived importance of social status, since prisoners with strong beliefs about social status may morally disengage to maintain this belief. If this is the case, then we expected that moral disengagement would mediate the relationship between bullying and social status.

We also predicted that prisoners who show high levels of prisonization were more likely to value the importance of social status in prison and also be more involved in bullying than those who are less prisonized. In this way, prisonization may mediate the relationship between bullying behaviour and social status.

METHOD

Participants

Initially, 149 male prisoners were approached to take part in the study, of which three refused and 14 were later removed from the analyses as they had been at the establishment for less than 2 months. The final sample comprised 132 adult male prisoners from six prisons across three counties in the UK. Sixty-three were from three category B prisons (medium security level), 31 were from a category C prison (medium/low security) and 38 were from two category D prisons (low-security resettlement prisons). Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 69 years ($M = 35.36$, SD = 9.98); 70 per cent were of white ethnic origin and 30 per cent were of non-white ethnic origin. The entire sample was sentenced: 30 per cent were serving for a drug-related offence, 29 per cent for a violent offence, 28 per cent for an acquisitive offence and 13 per cent for other offences (e.g. firearm offences, deception). The average sentence length was 7.07 years (SD = 4.75).

Measures

Demographic questions. Prisoners were asked to report their age, offence, ethnic origin, sentence length, age of first conviction, time spent in the current prison, number of times they had moved prisons during this sentence, number of times they had been in prison in their lifetime and the total time they had spent in penal establishments.

Organizational Structure and Prisonization Scale [OSPS; Thomas and Zingraff, 1974]. The OSPS comprises eight statements relating to how prisoners feel about being in prison, such as "It's a good idea to keep yourself to yourself in prison as much as you can". Prisoners rated how much they agreed with each statement on a five-point Likert scale ("strongly disagree" "disagree" "neither agree nor disagree" "agree" and "strongly agree").

Direct and Indirect Prisoner Behaviour Checklist [©DIPC; Ireland, 1999a][1]. The DIPC measures direct and indirect forms of bullying. Only items measuring direct bullying were included since research identifies direct bullying as a predominantly male phenomenon [Ireland and Archer, 1996] and also to prevent the interview schedule from becoming too lengthy for participants' sakes. The DIPC addresses different types of direct bullying behaviour, namely verbal/psychological, physical, theft-related and sexual. Prisoners were asked to report incidents that had occurred in the past 6 months. This timeframe was chosen in order to control for cognitive effects such as memory. Twenty-five questions addressed behaviours experienced by prisoners such as, "Other prisoners have threatened me with violence", and 26 questions concerned behaviours that they had engaged in, for example, "I have verbally threatened another prisoner". The usual method of scoring for the DIPC is simply a "present" or absent" response. However, in order to obtain a more precise response, this was altered to five possible responses of varying behavioural frequencies. On a five-point Likert scale prisoners rated how many times they had experienced or engaged in a behaviour ranging from "never" to "more than 20 times". On the basis of the DIPC, prisoners were classified into four bully categories. If they reported at least one "bully" item and no "victim" items they were classified as "pure bullies"; if they reported at least one "bully" item and one "victim" item they were classified "bully/victims"; if they reported at least one "victim" item and no "bully" items they were classified "pure victims"; and if they reported no "bully" or "victim" items they were classified as "not involved" [Ireland, 1999b].

Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement Scale [Bandura et al., 1996]. The Moral Disengagement Scale consists of 32 items, with each of the eight mechanisms represented by a subset of four items. This study used a later version of the scale

[1]Permission to use the DIPC was obtained from Dr. Jane L. Ireland.

[Bandura et al., 2001] which required prisoners to rate their degree of acceptance of moral exonerations on a five-point Likert scale ranging from ''strongly disagree'' to ''strongly agree''. The wording in 17 of the items was adjusted for adult prisoners as the original scale was designed for children [Bandura et al., 1996]. For example, ''Insults among children do not hurt anyone'' was adapted to, ''Insults among prisoners do not hurt anyone''.

Social Status Scale. The basic premise for measuring the importance of social status comes from Festinger's theory of social comparison, which suggests that people have the need to evaluate their opinions and abilities through self-evaluation [Festinger, 1954], and that other people serve as a basis for such comparison [Wood, 1989]. Social comparison is shaped by social influence, a major source of which is reference groups. In a prison environment the only reference group are other prisoners, and within the hierarchy of the prisoner subculture, importance is attached to being able to dominate others if acceptance and status are to be gained [Ireland and Ireland, 2003], primarily from higher status groups of offenders [O'Donnell and Edgar, 1998a].

Currently, there is no recognized scale for measuring the perceived *importance* of social status amongst prisoners. A questionnaire was created to assess the importance prisoners attach to social status. Eleven items were designed to question prisoners' attitudes towards other prisoners, the importance of other prisoners' attitudes towards themselves, and the general importance prisoners attach to social status in prisons. The questions address issues of dominance and respect since previous research reveals these as important aspects of the prisoner subculture and status structure within prisons [Ireland, 2000, 2002a; Ireland and Ireland, 2003]. For example, items include, ''It is important to me that other prisoners don't see me as weak'', ''Other prisoners look up to you if you can sort out prisoners who are weak or disliked'' and ''One of the most important things in prison life is being respected by other prisoners''. The word ''status'' was not included in any of the questions because of its subjectivity. Prisoners rated on a five-point Likert scale how much they agreed with the statements from ''strongly disagree'' to ''strongly agree''.

MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status [Adler et al., 2000]. To assess any discrepancy between prisoners' perceived and desired status, an adapted version of the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status was used. The instrument comprises a drawing of a ladder with a visual 10-point scale from the bottom to the top. Prisoners rated where they believed their social status ranked on the scale and also where they would like to be. The score representing where prisoners felt they were on the ladder of social status was later subtracted from that representing where prisoners aspired to be. The greater the value, the more dissatisfied they were with their perceived status in prison.

Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability Scale [Crowne and Marlowe, 1960]. This study relies on self-report so it was necessary to identify participants who may show a tendency to respond in a socially desirable manner. The Marlowe–Crowne Social Desirability Scale consists of 33 items describing both acceptable but improbable behaviours, and items deemed unacceptable but probable, such as ''There have been times when I took advantage of someone''. Prisoners rated on a five-point Likert scale how much they agreed with each statement.

Procedure

A sample of prisoners was obtained using a systematic random sampling method, whereby every fifth individual from the prison list of prisoners' names was selected from each establishment. There was no predetermined order in the list.

Questionnaires were administered by interview, so as not to eliminate prisoners with literacy difficulties, to avoid poor response rates and ensure that prisoners had the opportunity to ask questions. The interviews took place in a quiet room, without the presence of any staff in order to guarantee the anonymity of each prisoner. Before the interview began, the consent form was read aloud to participants who were then asked to sign to confirm their voluntary participation. The form highlighted the nature of the research, the anonymity of all participants in the write up and their right to withdraw at any time. Following the interview, a debrief sheet was read aloud to the participant who then kept a copy. The debrief reiterated the aims of the study and informed the participant how to withdraw from the study if they wanted to do so. It also provided a support line if they were distressed by any aspect of the interview.

Once all the interviews had been conducted the results were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analyses and multivariate statistics in SPSS.

RESULTS

Reliability analyses of each scale confirmed that items on the OSPS [Thomas and Zingraff, 1974] had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .66$), as did items on the Social Status Scale ($\alpha = .75$). The Social Desirability Scale [Crowne and Marlowe, 1960] had high internal consistency ($\alpha = .82$) similar to the Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement Scale [Bandura et al., 1996] ($\alpha = .90$). Furthermore, the Direct and Indirect Prisoner Behaviour Checklist [DIPC Ireland, 1999a] had high internal consistency for both victims' ($\alpha = .84$) and perpetrators' ($\alpha = .90$) reports of bullying.

Prior to analysing the results, the data were screened for outliers and any violations of assumptions, although no alterations needed to be made.

Classification

Out of 132 prisoners, 84 (63.6 per cent) reported being a perpetrator of bullying whilst 106 (80.3 per cent) reported being a victim of bullying in the last 6 months. The most prevalent type of direct bullying was verbal/psychological (46.2 per cent) followed by physical (23.8 per cent), theft-related (23.5 per cent) and sexual (6.5 per cent). To establish whether there was a relationship between being a perpetrator and a victim of bullying, a Pearson's Product Moment correlation analysis was conducted using prisoners' total bullying and total victimization scores. Perpetration of bullying positively related to being a victim of bullying, $r(130) = .41$, $P < .001$. Table I shows the frequency and percentage of prisoners in the four classifications of bullying.

Demographic Variables

A one-way GLM analysis was conducted on all continuous demographic variables, with bullying classification as the independent variable. The variables included: age, length of sentence, time spent in the current prison, number of times a prisoner had moved prisons during this sentence, number of times they had been in prison, age of first conviction, and the total time spent in penal establishments. The main effect of age of first conviction was significant, $F(3, 128) = 5.88$, $P < .01$, $\eta^2 = .12$, power = .95. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD found that pure victims were older ($M = 28.23$, SD = 14.87) at first conviction than bully/victims ($M = 20.12$, SD = 7.80, $P < .01$). There was also a trend for pure bullies to be younger ($M = 18.67$, SD = 6.25) than pure victims at first conviction ($M = 28.23$, SD = 14.87, $P = .07$). The mean difference between pure bullies and pure victims was −9.57.

TABLE I. Overall Categorization of Bullying Behaviour

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Pure bully (1)	9	6.8
Bully/victim (2)	75	56.8
Pure victim (3)	31	23.5
Not involved (4)	17	12.9

There was also a significant main effect of the total time spent in prison, $F(3, 128) = 5.55$, $P < .01$, $\eta^2 = .12$, power = .94. Post hoc analyses using Tukey's HSD revealed that bully/victims had spent more time in a prison ($M = 7.32$, SD = 6.61) than pure victims ($M = 3.30$, SD = 3.18, $P < .01$), and those not involved ($M = 2.83$, SD = 3.04, $P < .05$). Pure bullies did not differ from other categories although the average amount of time they had spent in a prison was the longest ($M = 8.29$, SD = 9.39). None of the remaining main effects were significant.

To see if there were differences in bullying involvement with respect to type of offence, offences were categorized as either violent (e.g. murder, GBH) or non-violent (e.g. deception, fraud) (28 per cent vs. 72 per cent). An independent samples *t*-test revealed no differences in bullying involvement according to type of offence, $t(130) = -.80$ ns. Similarly, an independent samples *t*-test revealed no difference between white (70 per cent) and non-white (30 per cent) ethnic origins in their involvement in bullying, $t(130) = -1.20$ ns.

It was also interesting to note that the perceived importance of social status in prison was correlated with the number of times the person had been in prison, $r(130) = .19$, $P < .05$, age of first conviction, $r(130) = -.19$, $P < .05$, and the total time spent in penal establishments, $r(130) = .19$, $P < .05$.

Bullying and the Perceived Importance of Social Status

Bullying was positively related to the perceived importance of social status in prison, $r(130) = .32$, $P < .001$. However, being a victim of bullying also had a positive relationship with the perceived importance of social status, $r(130) = .21$, $P < .05$. Therefore, a one-way GLM analysis was conducted on social status scores, with bullying classification as the independent variable. The main effect of bullying classification was significant, $F(3, 128) = 5.22$, $P < .01$, $\eta^2 = .11$, power = .92. As shown in Table II, a post hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD found that bully/victims valued social status more

TABLE II. Mean Social Status Score Overall and by Bullying Classification

Overall	Pure bullies	Bully/victim	Pure victim	Not involved
29.15	29.33_{ab}	30.51_{b}	27.45_{a}	26.18_{a}
(5.15)	(4.74)	(5.24)	(4.37)	(4.36)
$n = 132$	$n = 9$	$n = 75$	$n = 31$	$n = 17$

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses. Marginal means without a shared subscript (a or b) differ from each other by Tukey HSD at $P < .05$.

TABLE III. Mean Moral Disengagement Score Overall and by Bullying Classification

Overall	Pure bullies	Bully/victim	Pure victim	Not involved
80.55	86.78_{b}	84.05_{b}	72.00_{a}	77.41_{ab}
(15.13)	(10.52)	(15.07)	(14.30)	(12.41)
$n = 132$	$n = 9$	$n = 75$	$n = 31$	$n = 17$

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses. Marginal means without a shared subscript (a or b) differ from each other by Tukey HSD at $P < .05$.

than pure victims or those not involved. The mean difference between bully/victims and pure victims was 3.06 and between bully/victims and those not involved was 4.33. Pure victims and those not involved only differed from bully/victims, and pure bullies did not differ from any other group.

The adapted MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status [Adler et al., 2000] measured the discrepancy between where prisoners perceive they are in the social hierarchy of prison, and where they would like to be. This measure did not relate to the perceived importance of social status, $r(130) = .07$, $P = .41$ or with other variables that correlated with status such as bullying, $r(130) = -.06$, $P = .51$, moral disengagement, $r(130) = .05$, $P = .54$ or prisonization, $r(130) = .12$, $P = .16$. However, this measure had a positive relationship with being a victim of bullying, $r(130) = .44$, $P < .001$. Prisoners who have more experience of being a victim of bullying are more dissatisfied with their position in the social hierarchy of prison and would like to have a higher social status than they believe they do. Experience of being a victim was also related to the number of times people had moved prisons during their sentence, $r(130) = .28$, $P < .01$.

Bullying and Moral Disengagement

Total bullying scores positively related to levels of moral disengagement, $r(130) = .31$, $P < .001$. A one-way GLM analysis was conducted on moral disengagement scores, with bullying classification as the independent variable. The main effect of bullying classification was significant, $F(3, 128) = 6.01$, $P < .01$, $\eta^2 = .12$, power = .95. As shown in Table III, a post hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD revealed that pure bullies and bully/victims had higher levels of moral disengagement than pure victims, although pure bullies and bully/victims did not differ from each other. Prisoners classified as not involved did not differ from any other category.

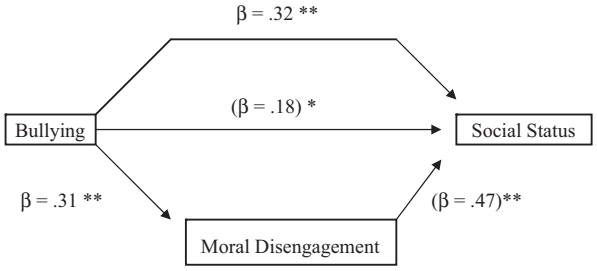

Fig. 1. Mediation of the bullying–social status relationship by moral disengagement. *Note*: *$P < .05$, **$P < .01$. Beta weights are shown; betas in parentheses are controlling for the other variable.

Moral Disengagement and the Perceived Importance of Social Status

Moral disengagement positively related to the perceived importance of social status, $r(130) = .53$, $P < .001$. In view of this, and the relationship found between bullying and moral disengagement, a mediational analysis was carried out to examine whether moral disengagement mediates the relationship between bullying and social status. All four criteria of regression were met in the absence of multicollinearity; bullying behaviour had a significant bivariate relationship with moral disengagement and with social status, and moral disengagement predicted social status independently of bullying (see Figure 1). Finally, as indicated by the Sobel z-test, when controlling for moral disengagement a significant change was found in the relationship between bullying and the perceived importance of social status ($z = 3.17$, $P < .01$) demonstrating that moral disengagement mediates the relationship. All these results were consistent with a pattern of partial mediation, whereby moral disengagement partially accounts for the relationship between bullying and the perceived importance of social status, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Prisonization, Social Status and Bullying

Prisonization had a positive relationship with the perceived importance of social status, $r(130) = .23$,

TABLE IV. Mean Prisonization Score Overall and by Bullying Classification

Overall	Pure bullies	Bully/victim	Pure victim	Not involved
26.51	29.89_{b}	26.39_{ab}	25.61_{a}	26.88_{ab}
(4.26)	(3.98)	(3.81)	(4.89)	(4.51)
$n = 132$	$n = 9$	$n = 75$	$n = 31$	$n = 17$

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses. Marginal means without a shared subscript (a or b) differ from each other by Tukey HSD at $P < .05$.

$P < .01$. However, prisonization was not related to total bullying scores, $r(130) = .14$, $P = .12$ or total victimization scores, $r(130) = -.05$, $P = .60$. Therefore, prisonization cannot mediate the relationship between bullying and the perceived importance of social status. Furthermore, prisonization did not moderate the relationship as regression analyses revealed that there was no interaction between bullying behaviour and prisonization on the importance of social status (interaction $\beta = -.13$, $P = .16$). However, a univariate GLM was conducted on prisonization with bullying classification as the independent variable. There was a trend for prisonization to vary with bullying involvement, $F(3, 128) = 2.49$, $P = .06$, $\eta^2 = .06$, power = .61. A post hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD found that pure bullies had higher levels of prisonization than pure victims (see Table IV). The mean difference between pure bullies and pure victims was 4.28. Prisoners classified as not involved or bully/victims did not differ from any other categories. Prisonization also had a positive relationship with moral disengagement, $r(130) = .51$, $P < .001$.

Social Desirability

Further analyses also revealed that social desirability had a negative relationship with all the main variables; total bullying involvement, $r(103) = -.35$, $P < .001$, total victimization score, $r(130) = -.27$, $P < .01$, the perceived importance of social status, $r(130) = -.21$, $P < .05$, moral disengagement, $r(130) = -.35$, $P < .001$ and prisonization, $r(130) = -.21$, $P < .05$. This shows that prisoners who are involved in bullying, are highly prisonized, value status and morally disengage tend not to respond in a socially desirable way.

DISCUSSION

In the present study, prison bullying took many forms, but in line with previous research [Ireland and Ireland, 2000; Leddy and O'Connell, 2002] verbal/psychological bullying were the most prevalent. Physical aggression and theft-related bullying were of similar occurrence whilst sexual aggression was the least common, a pattern also akin with previous research [Connell and Farrington, 1996; Ireland, 2005]. However, comparisons with previous research must be considered with caution as this study has only looked at direct forms of bullying. It is possible that verbal/psychological types of bullying are the most frequently occurring because they carry the least chance of being detected and the least cost for the perpetrator [Bjorkqvist et al., 1994].

Consistent with previous research [Ireland, 1999c; Ireland and Archer, 2002], bully/victims in the current study were the largest group. Bully/victims have also been considered the most interesting category since they represent individuals who may be reacting to their own victimization by bullying others [Ireland, 2002a]. The relationship between prisoners' bullying, and their experience of being a victim further illustrates that prisoners who bully and prisoners who are bullied are not polar opposites but should be construed along a continuum of behaviour [Ireland, 2003]. It is likely that the paucity of pure bullies in the current study reflects the transient nature of the bully/victim group. Over a time frame of 6 months, it is likely that more bully/victims have been identified as they oscillate between being pure victims and pure bullies. This suggests that the few pure bullies who have been identified are quite stable pure bullies.

Bully/victims had a significantly younger age of first conviction than pure victims, and pure bullies were younger than both bully/victims and pure victims. Furthermore, bully/victims had spent more time in prison than pure victims or those not involved, and pure bullies had spent the longest time in prisons. These results complement past research, which has consistently found that bullies have more extensive criminal and institutional histories than their victims [O'Donnell and Edgar, 1998b; Power et al., 1997].

As predicted, bullying related positively to the perceived importance of social status in prison. Bully/victims valued social status more than pure victims or those not involved. Pure bullies may not have differed from other classifications because there were fewer of them. This suggests that the perceived importance of social status may be one factor upon which some bullying relationships are built. For example, O'Donnell and Edgar [1998a] identified four typologies of victimizers and found

that the largest group were preoccupied with status, and driven by a need for recognition. The current findings also strengthen previous research that bullies value dominance [Ireland, 2000] and believe that they will be respected for behaving aggressively [Ireland and Archer, 2002].

Interestingly, bully/victims valued social status most. This may explain why there was a positive relationship between the perceived importance of social status and both bullying and being a victim. It was also found that the more experience prisoners have of being victimized, the more dissatisfied they are with their perceived position in the social hierarchy of prison, desiring higher status than they believe they have. In contrast, involvement in bullying was not significantly correlated with any discrepancy between prisoners' perceived and desired status, although the relationship was negative. This suggests that, to some extent, the more bullying prisoners engage in, the more content they are with their perceived position in the hierarchy of prison, possibly because they have used bullying to achieve their status. It could be speculated that some prisoners who have been victims of bullying are dissatisfied with their perceived status become involved in bullying in an attempt to enhance their status. In turn they become bully/victims. Prisoners who are both bullies and victims appear to value social status more than any other group including pure bullies, which suggests that bullying may be more important in attaining perceived social status, than maintaining it.

Bullying involvement was also positively related to moral disengagement. Pure bullies and bully/victims had higher levels of moral disengagement than pure victims. Although there was no difference between pure bullies and bully/victims, pure bullies displayed the highest level of moral disengagement followed by bully/victims than pure victims. This suggests that the ease with which people morally disengage may play a central role in bullying. Such findings are congruent with research that has established the role of moral disengagement in harmful and delinquent behaviour [Bandura et al., 1996, 2001]. Moral disengagement also appears to relate to bullying amongst children [Menesini et al., 2003]. However, this is the first empirical evidence to suggest that proclivity to morally disengage is systematically related to bullying involvement in prisons. This implies that it may not be an abnormal development of people's moral reasoning that contributes to such anti-social behaviour. Rather, it seems to be the ease with which they can violate and disengage from their own moral standards that dictates behaviour.

Moral disengagement also related positively to the perceived importance of social status. Although the current results do not allow inferences of causation, individuals who aspire to a higher status appear to morally disengage, perhaps because of the behaviour they indulge in to achieve their aim of higher status. This is interesting because self-image, self-standards and a sense of self-worth are used in the normal self-regulation of behaviour [Anderson and Bushman, 2002]. The current results suggest that when a sense of social status becomes important, the normal self-regulatory mechanisms of behaviour do not operate.

Furthermore, moral disengagement partially mediated the relationship between bullying behaviour and social status. It could be that the perceived importance of social status affects bullying involvement both directly and by increasing moral disengagement. This seems plausible given that prisoners who bully value status and morally disengage more than those who do not. However, mediation does not imply causation, so it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions, but it warrants further investigation.

As expected, prisonization was positively related to social status. This suggests that inmates immersed into the social hierarchy of prison life and inmate subculture are most likely to value the importance of social status. The perceived importance of social status was also related to the number of times people have been in prison, age of first conviction and the total time spent in penal establishments. This suggests that much like the process of prisonization [Paterline and Petersen, 1999], the extent to which inmates value status in prison may be governed by both personal characteristics and environmental factors. Both of which may develop across time.

Although prisonization did not relate to bullying, the results did find that pure bullies were more prisonized than pure victims. This supports Ireland's [2000] proposal that bullies are more prisonized than victims. It is possible that if the scale was stronger in reliability, the difference between pure bullies and pure victims would be more pronounced and potentially prisonization would relate to bullying too. Nevertheless, given the number of pure bullies in the study, that they showed higher levels of prisonization than pure victims is promising. Another explanation for these findings could be that bully/victims are also prisonized and so prisonization related as much to victimization as it did to bullying except in the purest forms. Similarly, values such as status that may result from prisonization may be one determinant of bullying. Those who do not become prisonized may not adopt such values

and may become attractive targets of bullying since they are socially distant from the prison's subculture [O'Donnell and Edgar, 1998b]. Being a victim of bullying also related to the number of times people have moved to other prisons. This suggests that some prisoners may not actively resist prisonization, but fail to spend enough time in establishments to have the chance of successful integration. However, this is speculative as research is limited in this area [Ireland, 2000] and further work is needed.

Prisonization was positively related to moral disengagement. Socialization normally enables individuals to adopt moral standards that serve as guides and deterrents for behaviour [Bandura, 1991]. It could be that socialization such as prisonization, not only affects values such as social status, but can also have detrimental effects on moral standards and the ease with which people morally disengage. Similarly, it could be that only those who have already disengaged in a moral sense are likely to become involved in the prison's subculture.

Social desirability had a negative association with all the main variables. This implies that prisoners involved in bullying, are highly prisonized, value status and morally disengage tend not to offer socially desirable responses. Prisoners who are immersed into this network of behaviours may not need approval from external sources as the very nature of these behaviours satisfies their need for approval by inmate peers. Other prisoners may show a greater propensity to supply interviewers with favourable images of themselves because they are not immersed into the prison lifestyle, and do desire acceptance. Alternatively, the levels of bullying, prisonization, status value and moral disengagement may be higher than this study's findings imply. This could be because those who claim not to be involved in such behaviour were more interested in providing a socially desirable response to the interviewer than revealing factual accounts of their behaviour.

These findings have the potential to offer innovative ideas for dealing with prison bullying. If perceived social status is important for bullies and even more so for bully/victims, interventions need to recognize this and consider the need for perceived social status into intervention programmes. Furthermore, moral disengagement appears to play a significant role in bullying. If moral disengagement facilitates bullying, it needs to be made more difficult for people to remove humanity from their conduct [Bandura, 2002]. In support of this, previous research has successfully enhanced moral engagement against destructive means in children by peer modelling [McAlister et al., 1999].

The main limitation with this study is that it was restricted to direct forms of bullying and did not explore indirect bullying amongst prisoners. This makes it very difficult to get a complete picture of the types of bullying occurring, and problematical to make direct comparisons with previous research which has incorporated indirect bullying. Moreover, only adult male prisoners were used and the timeframe of 6 months may have been too long. Some prisoners may have forgotten incidents over such a lengthy period hence future work should use a shorter time span. This also makes it difficult to compare the results with research that used a shorter timeframe or may have used female or juvenile offenders.

Another limitation is in accurately measuring bullying in prisons, as it is unknown to what extent prisoners were reporting their behaviour and experiences honestly. One inevitable consequence of using an interview method rather than a questionnaire method is that inmates may be more reluctant to admit to bullying behaviour and the social desirability measures seem to indicate this. Interviewing also makes it difficult to accurately compare the findings with previous research that has used a questionnaire method.

This research has moved beyond a purely descriptive analysis of bullying to reveal that the desire to attain social status in prison may be one intrinsic characteristic that motivates bullying. This study also suggests that prisonization may instill values such as social status into prisoners, and influence the ease with which people morally disengage, which in turn, may serve to maintain involvement in bullying activity. Although many of the findings remain speculative, research is now needed to explore the ideas that have emerged from this study, and to consider whether the findings can be extended to indirect forms of bullying and also to female and juvenile prison populations.

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