

# **Masculinity, Social Capital and School Bullying in Chinese High School**

## **1. Overview**

School bullying based on gender and sexuality has drawn much attention of the public and the academia. Some research finds that homosexual and bisexual students are more likely to report high levels and frequency of bullying across the world, especially in the United States (Kosciw & Pizmony-Levy, 2016; Baruch-Dominguez, Infante-Xibille & Salomazuniga, 2016; Pascoe, 2007; Kosciw, Diaz & Greytak, 2008). For example, GLSEN (2009), a national school climate survey, reports that more than 84% of young gay, lesbian and bisexual students in the United States have ever suffered different kinds of bullying. However, these studies, as well as the discourses of sexual politics in social movements, often establish a prior but obscure connection between the abstract “sexual identity” and various social discriminations. Instead of directly using the concept of sexual identity, we should first think about the specific meaning of “sexual identity”. Does it refer to the identity that is known by others, a set of unchangeable and natural tendencies such as homosexual desire, a set of social performance and status that sexual minority students usually have, or the identity that simply means “I am who I am”? Besides, if it means a set of social performance and status that sexual minority students usually have but that sometimes straight students can also have, can we say sexual identity causes bullying?

Actually, many scholars have challenged this concept. They believe “post-identity” is a more appropriate concept in certain western countries, especially for young people, since an increasing number of young people refuse fixed identities and do not have a strong sense of marginalization (Dean, 2014; Mark McCormack, Liam Wignall & Eric Anderson, 2015;

Ward, 2015), and the social attitude toward various sexualities becomes more and more inclusive (McNair, 2013; Clements & Field, 2014; Keleher & Smith, 2012; Robinson & Espelage, 2011; Anderson, 2009). This kind of description is also true in Chinese well-educated youth community. For example, a very large proportion of my respondents in an interview accepted their homosexual or bisexual tendency without any long-term or substantial psychological struggle. Besides, they also told me that their current sexuality is more than fixed because they may be psychologically or even physically attracted by women under some specific circumstances. In their opinions, the identity, such as “Gay” and “bisexual”, are convenient labels for daily communication rather than fixed identities. In addition to the problem of the concept, we also have to deal with failed self-identification. Birkett and Espelage (2009) find students in the United States who question their own sexual orientation would self-report more verbal bullying than both LGB and heterosexual students. This finding suggests that the higher self-reported bullying probably at least partly result from failed self-identification rather than really existing bullying based on LGB identity. Therefore, the study of school bullying based on sexual identity becomes more difficult.

In this paper, I will decompose the concept of sexual identity as a set of social behavior or effects and bodily characteristics: self-identified orientation with social meaning, physical characteristics such as height and strength, gender performance, sexual role and whether the sexual orientation is known by other people. By using multiple correspondence analysis, I can then remerge them, with another set of social capital variables, as a social space, where one axis can represent a more flexible “masculine identity” rather than a fixed self-identified-orientation-based identity. Finally, three kinds of bullying conditions can be

used as supplementary variables. By looking at their locations in the space, we can explore the relationship between bullying, identity and social capital. Before multiple correspondence analysis, I also use descriptive statistics to investigate the overall bullying conditions between different gender and sexual groups and the conditional distribution of them in Chinese high school. Therefore, this paper has two objectives: exploring the overall bullying condition in Chinese high school and then its relationship with reconstructed sexual identity and social capital.

## **2. Data and its limits**

The data I use is a survey related to sexual environment in Chinese high school. The questionnaires of the survey were mainly answered by well-educated college students who reported the sexual environment at their high school. Since the sampling method related to sexual minority is snowball and census-like data is unavailable in this field, it is impossible to estimate a representative value through post-stratification method. For example, we don't know the ratio of male heterosexual and sexual minority in population and hence cannot estimate the overall condition of the whole male group. Therefore, I will simply compare the difference between different groups rather than estimate them as a whole.

However, even though I just compare different groups in terms of sex and sexual orientation, the representative problem cannot be thoroughly solved. Table 1 shows that the proportion of top in male sexual minority group is extremely low<sup>1</sup>. Even though the

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<sup>1</sup> Many questionnaires were distributed by over 40 student societies in Chinese universities and the members there are typically many bottom and versatile gay guys and female straight students, a few lesbian, top gay guys and bisexual students, and one or two male straight students. This kind of personnel structure obviously affects the survey result.

anecdotal evidence demonstrates that the proportion of top in China is supposed to be lower than those of bottom and versatile, the value in the survey is still abnormal. Therefore, the results must be adjusted when they are interpreted. In stereotype, top gay men are usually more masculine than bottom gay men, and thus suffer less bullying.

Table 1: The proportion of sexual role in sexual minority group<sup>2</sup>

| Sexual role    | Sex    | n   | Percent   |
|----------------|--------|-----|-----------|
| Bottom         | Male   | 411 | 0.4134809 |
| Top            | Male   | 66  | 0.0663984 |
| Versatile      | Male   | 468 | 0.4708249 |
| Not applicable | Male   | 49  | 0.0492958 |
| Bottom         | Female | 76  | 0.1117647 |
| Top            | Female | 326 | 0.4794118 |
| Versatile      | Female | 219 | 0.3220588 |
| Not applicable | Female | 59  | 0.0867647 |

Figure 1 and 2 demonstrate that this speculation, at least in my data, are likely to be true.

In Figure 1, The proportion of top gay men who are normatively masculine is several times larger than that of bottom. On the other hand, in the bottom gay men group, many people are not normatively masculine. Since top gay men in Figure 2 suffer obviously less verbal bullying than bottom men, it is reasonable to believe that sexual role and bullying condition

<sup>2</sup> Sexual role in different context for different people can have different meanings. They can be purely related to intercourse, especially in male groups: top is the insertive party, bottom is the receptive one and versatile can be both insertive and receptive. In female groups, top can be the active party and bottom the passive one in sexuality. However, in another context. It also refers to social role that is similar to social division in heterosexual world: top need to take care of bottom. However, no matter whether it contains social or sexual meanings, top is more masculine from the perspective of current gender norm.

are correlated with each other and the bullying condition in the gay group in my data can be underestimated.

Figure 1: Gender performance by sexual role

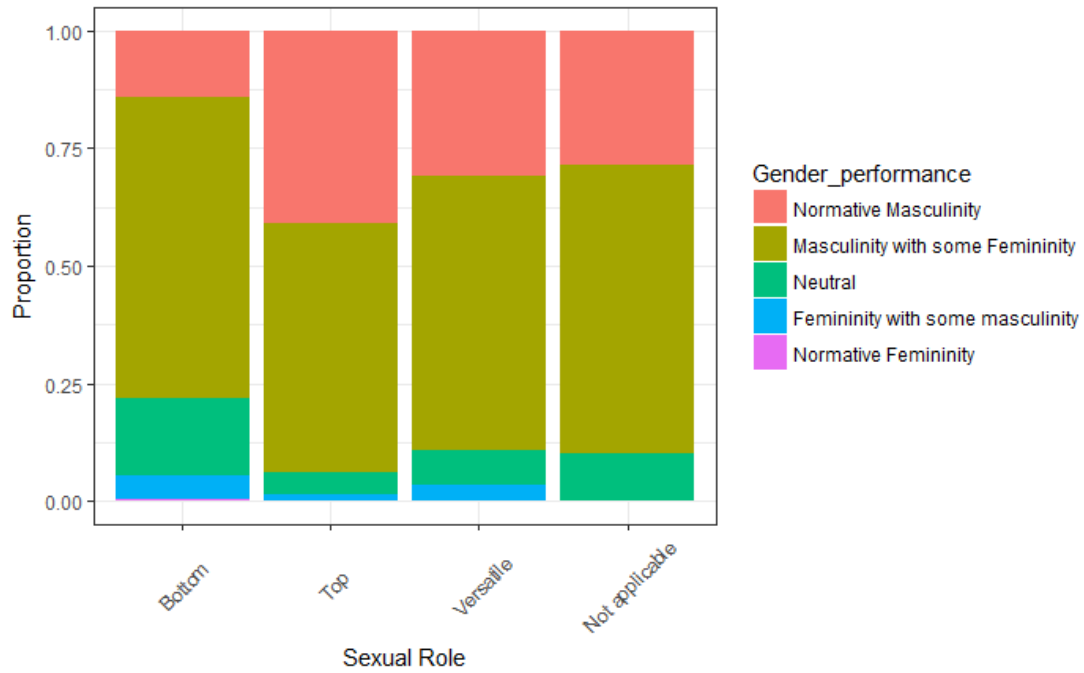
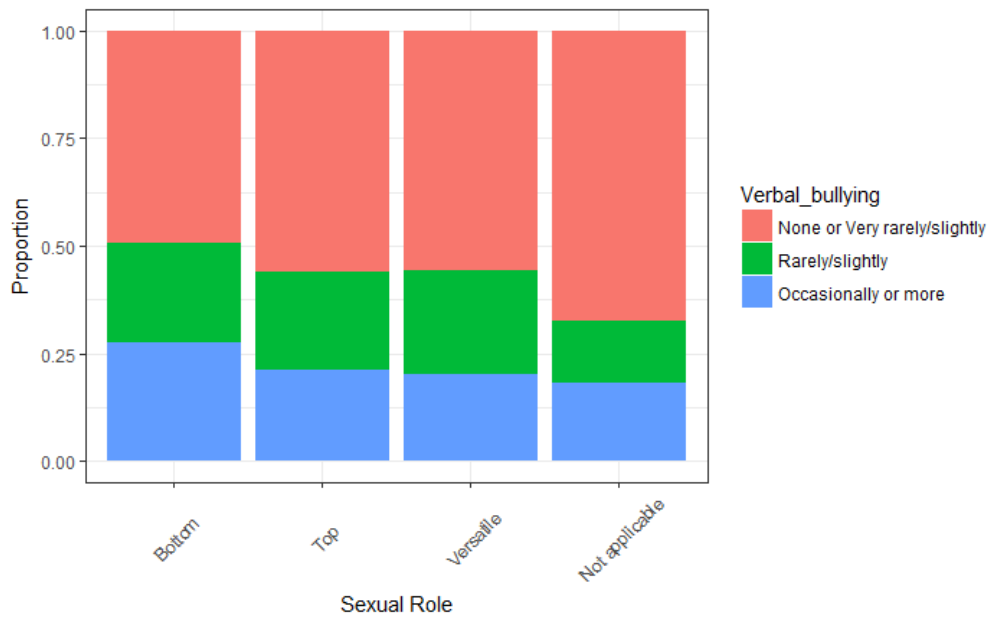


Figure 2: Verbal bullying by sexual role



However, the underestimation will not be large. As the figures show, although the top gay group is much more masculine than the bottom gay group, the difference of verbal bullying is relatively small. If we further compare top gay group with more masculinity and versatile gay group with less masculinity, we can find they almost don't have difference in terms of verbal bullying. These results demonstrate that even though the data contains more top, the change of bullying condition can be small. Therefore, we need not to worry too much about it.

Another limit of this data is that the questionnaire related to the heterosexual students does not contain the questions relative to sexual orientation. There are two problems in this case. First, I cannot filter out the sexual minorities who mistakenly finished this questionnaire. However, this is not a big problem since I only compare the difference between different groups. As long as the vast majority of respondents in this questionnaire are heterosexual students, it is still possible to identify the difference. The second problem is much knottier. It is obviously that a certain number of heterosexual students will be regarded as sexual minority by their classmates or teachers. The variable of "known by others" is so critical that I could not assume that all heterosexual students are completely straight in other people's eyes. Therefore, I only coded this situation as "not applicable", which can actually provide substantial information in multiple correspondence analysis.

Finally, in order to make the results of comparison more valid, I also remove a number of observation points from the data according to demographic variables. Put differently, the respondents in the data I select can represent the well-educated current college or graduate students in the Mainland China.

### 3. Variable selection

Since the objectives of this paper are exploring the general bullying condition in Chinese high school by gender and sexual orientation and looking at the relationship between bullying condition and some potential factors, I select three sets of variables from the data. The first set, of course, is three kinds of bullying conditions: verbal bullying, physical bullying and isolation. The selection of second and third set of variables is based on an assumption that bullying conditions can be influenced by both bodily and social factors. Therefore, the second set are related to students' bodily characteristics. They are gender performance (5-scale in descriptive statistics and 3-scale in multiple correspondence analysis)<sup>3</sup>, height, strength, sexual orientation, sexual role and whether people are regarded as sexual minority by their classmates. These physical/bodily characteristics can comprehensively inform whether a person has a masculine identity. It is worth noting that we already have a variable directly related to masculinity: gender performance. However, the solo variable cannot completely represent masculinity. Actually, when the vast majority of respondents answer the question of gender performance in this survey, their understanding of gender performance is whether a man is sissy or vice versa. For example, in my interview, nearly all people believe male students who are good looking, soft-voiced, petite, non-hairy, physically powerless, cute and adorable does not violate gender norm. In their words, "cute does not mean feminine or sissy". As a result, they know this kind of male students are different from some sorts of masculinity, but they still choose normative

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<sup>3</sup> The 5-scale variable is directly from the row data (from normative masculinity to normative femininity). When I do MCA, I transform it as 3-scale variable (normative, half-normative and not-normative gender performance).

masculinity for this question. Therefore, some characteristics such as height and strength are necessary when we talk about masculinity in this paper. As for sexual role and sexual orientation (both self-identified and others-regarded), they usually have a close tie to masculinity in social stereotype. The third set of variables are related to social capital. The variables I select are high school location (rural or urban), school quality, sexual education, family background and teachers' attitude.

#### **4. Descriptive statistics**

In this paper, descriptive statistics have two functions. First, it can tell us the general bullying condition and the numeric difference between groups. Second, I can also remove any variable when the descriptive statistics imply that it is problematic.

Table 2 shows the summary statistics of the variables I select. Since all variables are ordinal categorical, I treat them as numerous variables and calculate their means. Besides, I also use analysis of variance to see whether the difference of their means is different.

Except the variable of school location, all results in ANOVA are significant. It seemingly signifies a systematic difference based on gender and sexual orientation. However, if we consider that most differences within female group and within male groups are, respectively, insignificant, we should conclude that the difference in ANOVA results related to 4 groups are mainly caused by gender difference rather than sexual orientation difference. For example, if we compare male groups with female groups in terms of bullying conditions, we can find male groups suffer obviously more bullying of all three



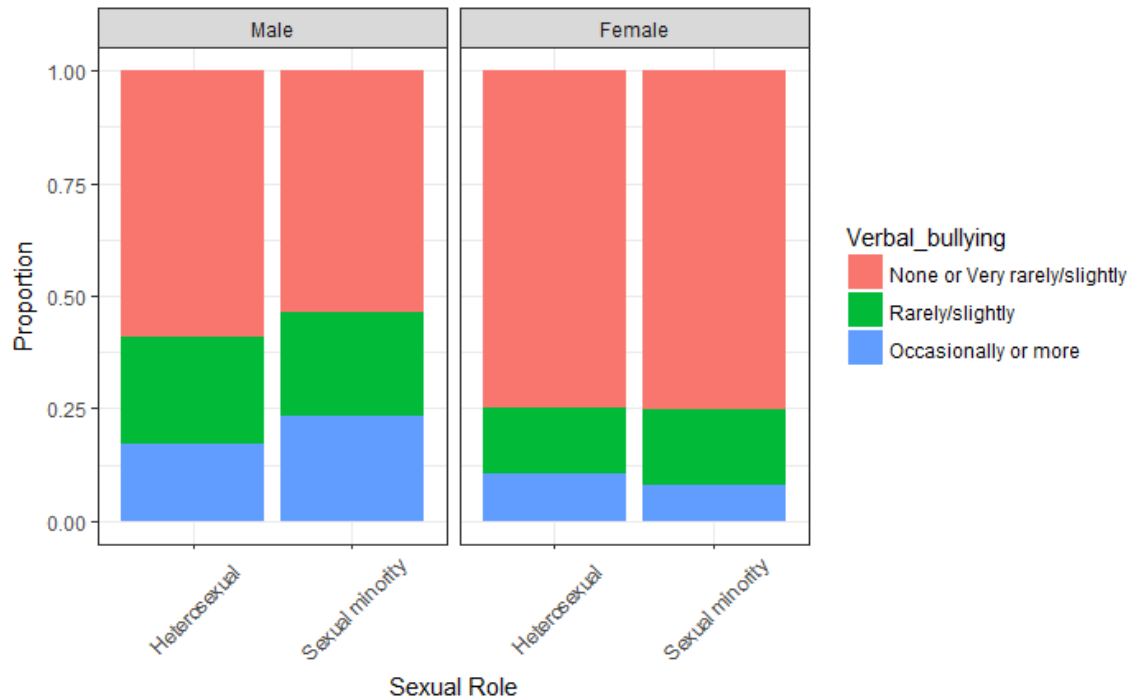
kinds, even though when we compare male straight students and lesbian students. As for the within-group difference, although lesbian and female straight students have several differences in terms of social capital and physical characteristics, their bullying conditions show no difference. On the other hand, in male groups, gay students suffer slightly more bullying than straight students.

Table 2: Summary statistics

|  | Male |       |          |      |        | Female  |      |          |      |        | Significant |
|--|------|-------|----------|------|--------|---------|------|----------|------|--------|-------------|
|  | Gay  |       | Straight |      | Diff.  | Lesbian |      | Straight |      | Diff.  | in          |
|  | Mean | S.D.  | Mean     | S.D. |        | Mean    | S.D. | Mean     | S.D. |        | ANOVA       |
| Verbal Bullying                            | 1.70 | 0.82  | 1.58     | 0.76 | 0.12*  | 1.33    | 0.62 | 1.36     | 0.66 | -0.03  | Yes         |
| Physical Bullying                          | 1.23 | .0.54 | 1.22     | 0.50 | 0.01   | 1.08    | 0.31 | 1.09     | 0.35 | -0.02  | Yes         |
| Isolation                                  | 1.32 | 0.61  | 1.29     | 0.58 | 0.03   | 1.24    | 0.54 | 1.24     | 0.53 | 0.00   | Yes         |
| Gender Performance                         | 1.95 | 0.73  | 1.39     | 0.69 | 0.56*  | 3.16    | 1.11 | 4.20     | 0.83 | -1.05* | Yes         |
| Known by others                            | 1.25 | 0.43  | N/A      | N/A  | N/A    | 1.38    | 0.49 | N/A      | N/A  | N/A    | N/A         |
| Rural (school location)                    | 0.22 | 0.42  | 0.21     | 0.41 | 0.02   | 0.17    | 0.38 | 0.22     | 0.42 | -0.05  | No          |
| School Quality                             | 2.42 | 0.79  | 2.48     | 0.76 | -0.06  | 2.32    | 0.83 | 2.48     | 0.76 | -0.16* | Yes         |
| Sexual Education                           | 1.25 | 0.59  | 1.42     | 0.73 | -0.17* | 1.32    | 0.64 | 1.46     | 0.74 | -0.13* | Yes         |
| Family Background                          | 1.90 | 0.61  | 1.88     | 0.59 | 0.02   | 1.82    | 0.57 | 1.81     | 0.57 | 0.00   | Yes         |
| Teachers’ attitudes                        | 2.93 | 0.85  | 2.97     | 0.83 | -0.03  | 2.74    | 0.82 | 2.86     | 0.81 | -0.11* | Yes         |
| Height                                     | 2.04 | 0.59  | 2.10     | 0.61 | -0.05  | 1.95    | 0.60 | 1.97     | 0.64 | -0.02  | Yes         |
| Strength                                   | 1.72 | 0.58  | 1.98     | 0.61 | -0.25* | 2.12    | 0.56 | 1.95     | 0.50 | 0.17*  | Yes         |
| * means difference at 5% significant level |      |       |          |      |        |         |      |          |      |        |             |

Beyond the means of bullying conditions, we can also take a close look at the distribution of categories. Since only the verbal bullying condition in the male group shows significant difference, I will focus on verbal bullying.

Figure 3: The distribution of verbal bullying

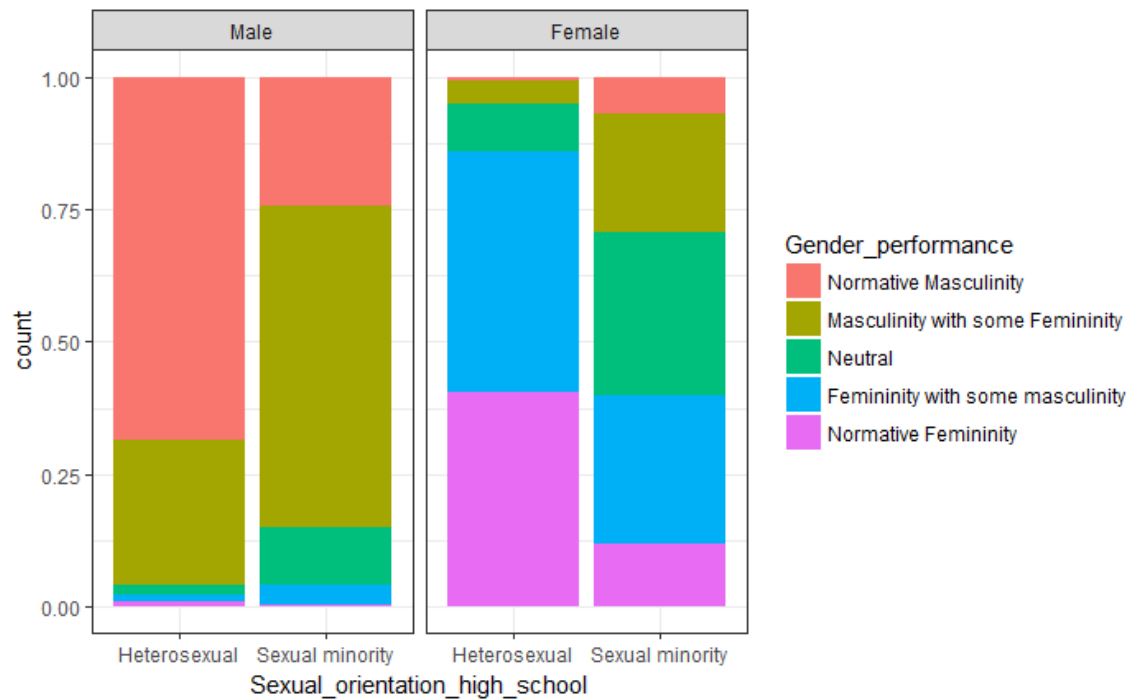


In Figure 3, the difference in female group is very slight. Lesbian students suffer slightly larger proportion of moderate to severe bullying than female straight students, and around 75% of students in both groups almost don't suffer verbal bullying. In male group, the difference is a bit larger. A smaller proportion of gay students suffer no verbal bullying and a larger proportion of them suffer moderate to severe verbal bullying.

Besides, we cannot make a conclusion that these differences are caused by sexual orientation. As the summary statistics and Figure 4 show, since gay and straight male students have a significant and large difference in terms of gender performance (gay students are much more feminine than straight male students), the gender performance are also likely the real causality. Besides, we can also speculate that gender performance in female groups is less likely to have an influence on bullying condition since we do not find a big difference in terms of verbal bullying given the big difference in gender performance.

In addition, another fact on the figure can also provide an additional explanation. When we compare the distribution of gender performance based on gender difference, it is obviously that gender performance on female groups are much more diverse. This fact probably signifies the gender norm in terms of gender performance has less restriction regarding women at least in China and thus women have more freedom to perform untraditional gender expression. Furthermore, because of the less restriction and more freedom, non-normative gender performance will also not be punished in the form of bullying.

Figure 4: The distribution of gender performance



Finally, I want to talk about the variable of sexual education in Table 2, which is abnormal and should be removed according to the summary statistics before I do MCA. In male groups, gay and straight students have very similar social capital. But why the sexual

education they receive is significantly different? I think the most effective explanation is not that they received different sexual education, but that gay students who were oppressed by current gender and sexual norms tended to overstate the shortage of sexual education. On the contrary, heterosexual students as the vested interest were more likely to overestimate the volume of educational information. This might also be the explanation of the result that gay and lesbian students have a similar mean of sexual education while straight male and female students share another similar mean. In this case, I remove this variable since it might twist the space in the following multiple correspondence analysis.

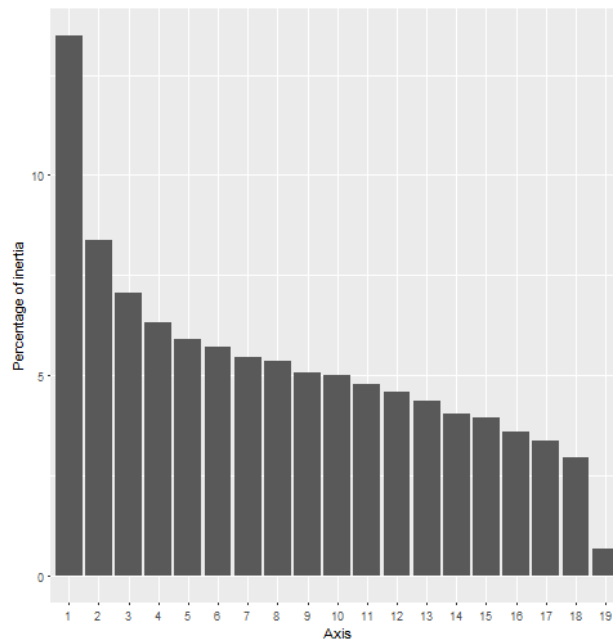
## **5. Multiple correspondence analysis**

I explore the difference of means of all variables and some conditional distributions of bullying in the session of descriptive statistics. However, descriptive statistics cannot provide us with a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between bullying, bodily characteristics and social capital. For example, although in male groups most variables show no significant difference, but it does not mean they really don't have influence on bullying conditions when they interact with each other. Therefore, in this part, I will create a space that can comprehensively represent both social and bodily parts of personal characteristics.

I use all variables shown in Table 2 in MCA, except the variable of sexual education due to the reason stated above. There are three sets of variables: bullying condition, bodily characteristics related to masculinity and social capital characteristics. Bodily and social capital characteristics will be used for space building and three types of bullying will be

the supplementary variables. While in summary statistics the gender performance is in 5-scale, I use 3-scale version in order to get a better space. My objective is to explore whether bullying conditions will be at different locations of the space. It can provide an implication of the comprehensive relationship between bullying and personal characteristics in two dimensions. Since we don't find significant difference in female groups in terms of all three types of bullying, and the perception of bodily characteristics obviously are very likely to have big gender differences and thus twist the space, I only create the space for the male groups.

Figure 5: Eigenvalues of MCA



Since the first two axes contain obviously more information than others, I choose them to build the space. Finally, the space explains 21.9% of the information contained in the raw data.

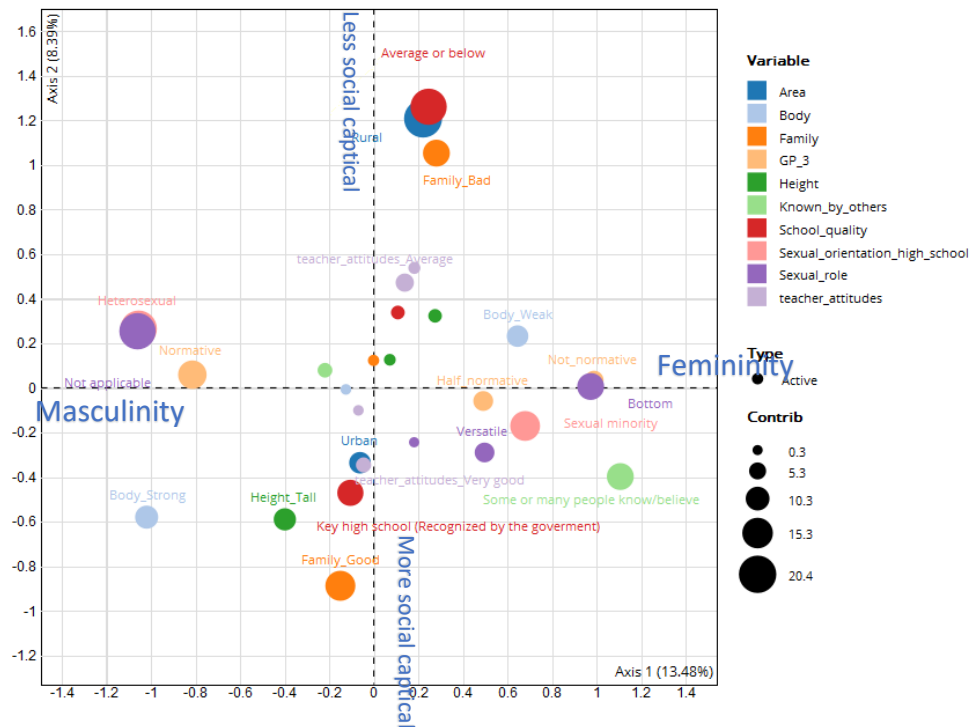
Table 3: Variable contribution of Axis 1

| Variable                       | Level                            | Coord  | Contrib | Cos2  | Count |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------|---------|-------|-------|
| Sexual_role                    | Not applicable                   | -1.060 | 17.01   | 0.712 | 634   |
| Sexual_orientation_high_school | Heterosexual                     | -1.055 | 17.01   | 0.716 | 640   |
| Sexual_orientation_high_school | Sexual minority                  | 0.679  | 10.95   | 0.716 | 994   |
| GP_3                           | Normative                        | -0.814 | 10.80   | 0.475 | 682   |
| Sexual_role                    | Bottom                           | 0.973  | 9.55    | 0.330 | 422   |
| Known_by_others                | Some or many people know/believe | 1.106  | 7.89    | 0.242 | 270   |
| Body                           | Body_Weak                        | 0.645  | 4.69    | 0.169 | 471   |
| GP_3                           | Half_normative                   | 0.491  | 4.46    | 0.217 | 775   |
| Body                           | Body_Strong                      | -1.019 | 4.39    | 0.126 | 177   |
| GP_3                           | Not_normative                    | 0.988  | 4.13    | 0.119 | 177   |
| Sexual_role                    | Versatile                        | 0.497  | 2.92    | 0.107 | 495   |

Table 4: Variable contribution of Axis 2

| Variable          | Level  | Coord  | Contrib | Cos2  | Count |
|-------------------|--|--------|---------|-------|-------|
| Area              | Rural  | 1.208  | 19.94   | 0.406 | 356   |
| School_quality    | Average or below                               | 1.261  | 18.01   | 0.350 | 295   |
| Family            | Family_Good                                    | -0.888 | 12.01   | 0.253 | 397   |
| Family            | Family_Bad                                     | 1.053  | 9.15    | 0.168 | 215   |
| School_quality    | Key high school (Recognized by the government) | -0.471 | 8.69    | 0.368 | 1019  |
| Area              | Urban  | -0.336 | 5.55    | 0.406 | 1278  |
| Height            | Height_Tall                                    | -0.590 | 4.74    | 0.097 | 355   |
| teacher_attitudes | teacher_attitudes_Average                      | 0.472  | 3.45    | 0.073 | 403   |
| Body              | Body_Strong                                    | -0.580 | 2.28    | 0.041 | 177   |
| teacher_attitudes | teacher_attitudes_Very good                    | -0.346 | 2.11    | 0.047 | 459   |

Figure 6 : The space with active variables

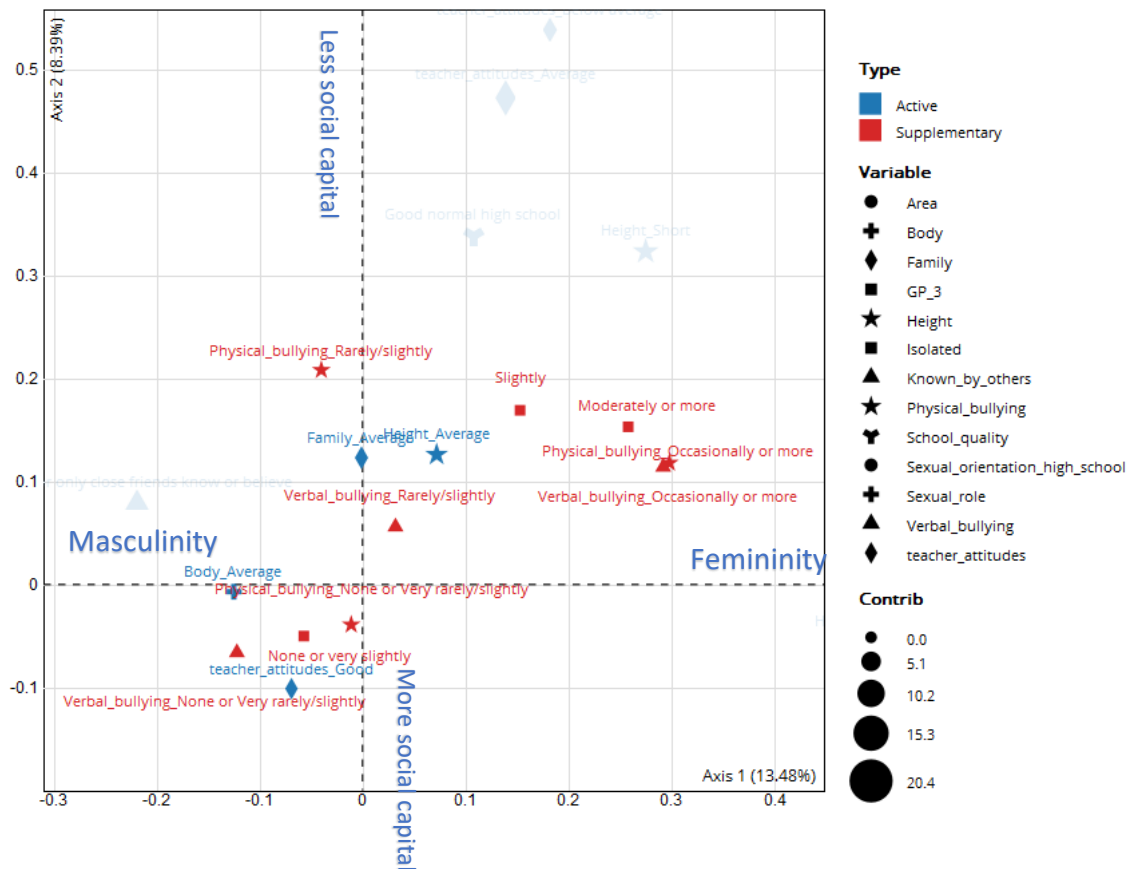


The variable contribution, which is bigger than 2, has been displayed in Table 3 and 4. For Axis 1, the variables with biggest contributions are related to sexual role, sexual orientation and gender performance, but the strength of body also have a considerable contribution. It is worth noting that the class of “not applicable” in the variable of sexual role contains two kinds of information. First, since all straight students are coded as “not applicable” and the number of gay students who choose not applicable is very small, it can represent the straight students. Second, we can also assume it contains the information of top if we regard the vast majority of male students will play an insertive or active role in their sexual and social relationship. Actually, no matter from which perspective we explain it, it has a close tie to the normative masculinity. Finally, we can find the variables on the left side of the Axis are “not applicable” of sexual role, heterosexuality, normative gender performance and strong body, all of which signifies masculinity in our society. On the other hand, sexual minority, bottom, identity that is known by many people (assuming that feminine are more likely to be regarded as gay), weak body, half-normative, not-normative and versatile are on the right side of Axis, which is related to femininity. Therefore, the first axis can be interpreted as the axis of masculinity.

As for Axis 2, school location, family background and school quality have the largest contribution. Teachers’ attitudes also play an important role in axis building. However, we have to explain why height and body strength have a considerable contribution. To some degrees, height and body strength can partially reflect social capital since they are related to the level of wealth at least in China. For example, the average height in city is taller than that in rural area since the difference of nutrition intake caused by wealth gap. Finally, the left side of Axis 2 that contains good family background, school quality, urban area, very

good teachers' attitudes, and strong and tall body represent more social capital and other variables on the right side refer to less social capital. Figure 6 shows the final space.

Figure 7: Bullying on the space



Now we can look at the locations of bullying on the space. Surprisingly, we can identify the difference based on comprehensive masculine identity and social capital, although in descriptive statistics most separate variables simply show insignificant results.

Generally, more social capital and masculinity do expect less bullying in most cases. However, the specific relationships are more complicated. First, probably because verbal bullying usually has the smallest negative effects, and people who bully other people even don't think it is a big problem, especially when it is related to joke-making and nickname-



calling, avoiding it requires much more masculinity and social capital. On the contrary, physical bullying usually has the largest negative effects and is regarded as extremely uncivil behaviors. Therefore, as long as people are not very feminine with very less social capital, the probability of suffering it is low.

Second, most severe types of bullying in terms of degree are more likely to happen on the people whose gender performance is not normative. Of course, they also have less social capital, but the influence of femininity seems more important than it. Finally, for slight degree of bullying, the locations of three types of bullying are very different. The location of slight bullying is still on the masculine side, but it signifies very little social capital. There might be two reasons for it. First, in the area with less social capital resources, specifically in poor rural areas and poor-quality school, physical conflicts might be seen as a more feasible way to solve problems than in urban areas. It is different from the severe physical bullying that requires the violation of gender or sexual norm. Slight physical bullying and conflicts in less social capital areas can be more daily, especially in masculine groups when physical methods are acceptable in these areas. Second, in my interview, most gay respondents said that their social circles were different from most straight students'. They had more female friends and seldom participated in many "straight activities" such as basketball and computer games that may be more likely to cause slight physical bullying. Therefore, the people who suffer slight bullying averagely are not feminine.

Finally, slight isolation signifies much more femininity than slight verbal and physical bullying. This means femininity is a very important factor for isolation, even though the degree is slight. Actually, the nature of isolation does differ from the other two, as long as the degree is not severe. In the interview, most respondents find slight bullying is usually

an indicator of close friendship, especially in cases of verbal bullying. However, slight isolation cannot result from close friendship, and it always means most people don't really dislike one person. Therefore, slight isolation is actually a severe problem as its location in the space.

## **6. Limitations**

In this paper, I first use descriptive statistics and multiple analysis to explore the general school bullying based on fixed gender and sexual identity in Chinese high school, and then use multiple correspondence analysis to analyze the relationship between bullying condition, masculine identity and social capital. Although I try to avoid some problems in the data, there are still two limitations.

First, the vast majority of respondents in the survey are well-educated young people. Therefore, the overall bullying conditions in this paper must be underestimated if we compare them with those in the whole population. Besides, although the bullying condition differences in this data are very small, the results might be totally different if we consider people from different social class and age cohort. In well-educated groups, most people have a very inclusive attitude towards sexual difference so that the differences of bullying are small in the results of this paper. However, in poor-educated groups, the bullying and discrimination based on sexual difference can be large.

Second, although I speculate more top gay students will not influence the result a lot, this speculation is completely based on the top gay students in the survey. However, since the survey has a representative problem that results in the extremely low proportion of top gay

students, we cannot ensure that the top gay students in this survey can represent the population of top gay students.

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