Bullying Types and Offense Planning Patterns in Juvenile Sexual Offenders

Master’s Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of Graduate School of Art and Sciences
Brandeis University
Department of Psychology
Raymond Knight, Advisor

In Partial Fulfillment
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by
Xiaoqi Tang

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ABSTRACT

Bullying Types and Offense Planning Patterns in Juvenile Sexual Offenders

A thesis presented to the Psychology Department

Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University
Waltham, Massachusetts

By Xiaochi Tang

Bullying is not only a prevalent problem in children and adolescent community samples, but it also plays a significant role in juvenile sexual offending. Yet, few studies have investigated the role that different types of bullying play in the patterns of offending among juveniles who have sexually offended (JSOs). We administered the Multidimensional Assessment of Sex, and Aggression (the MASA) to 306 incarcerated JSOs. Using their responses to bully and victimization items, we created either broad (inclusive) or narrow (exclusive) bully and victim categories and classified the juveniles into bully, victim, both bully and victim (bully-victims), and neither bully nor victim categories, using both the broad and narrow criteria. The dependent variables were factor-generated scales on offense planning and fantasy. Bully-victims scored significantly higher than victims, neither bully nor victims, and bullies in almost all four scales in offense planning including aggressive/violent planning. The data supported our hypothesis that
bully-victims, when compared with others, would be more likely to experience cognitive distortions such as aggressive planning, intimacy-seeking fantasies, and also detail-oriented offense planning.

*Keywords*: Assessment; Juvenile Sexual Offenders; MIDSA; MASA; Bullying; Offense Planning; Criminal Thinking.
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Note: the scores on Y-axis are t-scores computed by raw scores in aggressive/violent planning scale.
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Note: the scores on Y-axis are t-scores computed by raw scores in intimacy-seeking sexual fantasies scale.
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Note: the scores on Y-axis are t-scores computed by raw scores in intimacy-seeking sexual fantasies scale.
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Note: the scores on Y-axis are t-scores computed by raw scores in Explicit Planning scale.
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Note: the scores on Y-axis are t-scores computed by raw scores in Eluding Apprehension Planning scale.
Introduction

School bullying is a serious problem that can have detrimental outcomes for victims, including adverse psychological and behavioral outcomes (Nansel et al., 2001; Office & America, 2012). In addition, children who bully are more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviors, such as impulsivity and aggression (Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). Several federally sponsored nationally representative surveys conducted from 2001 to 2009 have supported these ill effects. According to such surveys between 20 to 28 percent of youth surveyed reported that they had been bullied during the survey periods, primarily at the middle school and high school levels (Nansel, Craig, Overpeck, Saluja, & Ruan, 2004; Nansel et al., 2001; Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ruan, & Scheidt, 2003; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009).

A prevalence estimate of either those who have exposed others to bullying behavior (i.e., bullies) or those who have been subjected to such behavior (victims) can be defined as the proportion of students who within a specified time period have perpetrated or experienced such behaviors. The relatively strict definition of prevalence is closely linked to the use of the term in epidemiology. Many of the prevalence estimates on school bullying reported in the literature, however, deviate from one to another, making it difficult to evaluate the variability in bully/victim estimates across different populations and cultural groups (Farrington, 1993; Schuster, 1996; Schwartz, Proctor, & Chien, 2001; Smith, 1999). For example, in a recent national representative study instead of using the recommended cutoff point of “2 or 3 times
a month” to code a student as involved or noninvolved in bullying (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Wang, Iannotti, and Nansel (2009) chose the cutoff point of “only once or twice” for all items. The participants then were coded accordingly as involved or not and categorized into four groups: bullies only, victims only, involved in both bullying and victim, or noninvolved (Wang et al., 2009).

The variability in prevalence rates observed is related not only to the wide range of self-reported frequencies used in definitions, but also to a number of other factors. For instance, some studies base their prevalence estimates on a single variable whereas others use composite scores or scales consisting of the mean or sum of several items. Additionally, studies also use different thresholds for differentiating victims from non-victims and bullies from non-bullies. For example, Agervold and his fellows reported that 1.0% of the sample (public-sector employees) said they had been bullied weekly during the previous six months, whereas 4.7% reported themselves as having been exposed to acts of bullying with the same frequency and for the same period of time. If they changed the criterion from "weekly" to "2-3 times a month" and included “social exclusion” as a subtype of bullying, the prevalence rose to 26.9% (Agervold, 2007). The above issues in choices of inclusion criteria and classifying types of bullies contribute to inaccurate estimations in the prevalence of bullying. Therefore, we explored the appropriateness and meaningfulness of cutoff point and classification method in detail in the present study.

Research on bullying has also demonstrated that children who bully are more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviors, such as impulsivity and aggression (Salmivalli & Nieminen,
Overall, bully-victims show significantly higher levels of aggression than pure bullies (Burton, Florell, & Wygant, 2013; Camodeca, Goossens, Terwogt, & Schuengel, 2002; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002). Several follow up studies of school bullying also demonstrated that bullying at early adolescence strongly predicted later criminality (Farrington, Ttofi, & Lösel, 2011; Olweus, 2011). For example, bullying at age 14 predicted violent convictions between age 15 and 20 and self-reported violence at age 15-18, after controlling for explanatory and behavior childhood risk factors (Farrington & Ttofi, 2011). In a study conducted among imprisoned adult offenders, bully/victims scored higher than participants who were not involved in bullying on the Hostility scale and total score of the Aggression Questionnaire. Such results suggest that the bullying behaviors of this category of prisoners may result from feelings of resentment that develop over time in response to being a victim of bullying (Ireland, 1999).

Although ample research has indicated that previous bullying experience is associated with the development of aggressive behaviors, little is known about the link between bullying types and offense planning patterns in sexual offenders. Because criminal thinking styles have been associated with antisocial behavior and with the offense planning patterns in sexual offenders (Simourd & Andrews, 1994; Walters, 2006), data about the link between prior types of aggressive, bullying behavior and a particular kind of criminal thinking (offense planning) could be informative. Furthermore, more serious offenders (e.g., violent, property) have been found to have higher criminal thinking scores compared with less serious offenders (e.g., drug, status) (McCoy et al., 2006). (Ragatz, Anderson, Fremouw, & Schwartz, 2011) found that bully-victims were most likely to exhibit many criminal thinking errors. Covariations between
bullying behavior and offense fantasies could be informative both about the motivations of bullies, but also about the antecedents to criminal thinking and offense planning. Such data could help to inform comprehensive intervention programs that use cognitive restructuring to address all of these thinking errors (Ragatz et al., 2011).

In the present study we used a sample of JSOs as our target population in studying early bullying experience and its impact on later criminal offending. The specific population was chosen for several reasons. First, JSOs are the focus of increasing attention, both in the media and criminology because they represent a group of antisocial and aggressive youth with potential issues of sexual proclivities but less physical aggressiveness than other types of criminals and offenders, such as those convicted of homicide or robbery. Secondly, JSOs capture the negative outcome on behaviors/traits. Thirdly, because of the detailed information available on this sample we can conduct an in-depth exploration of characteristics of pure bullies and pure victims and bully-victims. Finally, there are substantial data supporting the high correlational relation between early bullying experience and sexual aggression (Espelage, Basile, & Hamburger, 2012). The Structural Equation Models (SEMs) exploring etiological pathways of both sexual offenders and adult non-criminals have demonstrated that various measures of bullying predict latent exogenous variables such as offense planning, pervasive anger, anti-social behaviors and attitudes, offense planning and psychopathy-related traits, etc. (Knight, Prentky, & Cerce, 1994). The focus of the current study, however, is only on investigating how offense planning types (aggressive/violent planning, intimacy-seeking sexual fantasies planning, explicit planning and eluding apprehension planning) differ among bullying types (bullies, bully-victims, victims and
uninvolved individuals). We were also interested in whether a change in inclusion criteria of defining bullies, bully-victims and victims (narrow definition vs. broad definition) had an impact on investigation of the criminal offense planning patterns.

In light of the previous studies on bullies and bully-victims that have demonstrated that they have attitudes more accepting of aggression than victims or control and manifest more criminal thinking errors, it was hypothesized that both bullies and bully-victims would demonstrate the highest elevations in aggressive/violent planning compared to youth who were neither bullies nor victims. In addition, bullies were predicted to exceed bully-victims in their aggressive/violent planning. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that bully-victims would show the highest level of intimacy-seeking sexual fantasy planning when compared to the neither group, the pure bullies, and the victims. This latter hypothesis stemmed from previous research demonstrating that bully-victims and victims show characteristics of rumination to cope with peer-victimization (Erdur-Baker, 2009; Moreno-Jiménez, Rodríguez-Muñoz, Pastor, Sanz-Vergel, & Garrosa, 2009). Given the exploratory nature of defining groups by narrow/broad inclusion criteria of the study, we did not have specific hypothesis about which definition would be more meaningful in investigating the outcome variables.
METHOD

Participants

The 306 JSOs assessed in the present study were sampled from inpatient treatment centers in Maine, Massachusetts, and Minnesota. All participants had been adjudicated for at least one sexual crime (an assault that was sexually motivated and involved physical contact) against a victim of any age. All index offenses occurred before the JSO turned 18 years of age. The average period of institutionalization at the time of testing was 1 to 2 years. The mean age of the sample at the time of testing was 16.11 years (SD = 1.69). The sample was ethnically diverse (African American = 17.8%, Asian = 4.4%, Caucasian = 57.9%, Hispanic = 6.7%, Native American = 3.4%, Other = 9.8%).

Broad and Narrow Inclusion Criteria. Participants were divided using broad and narrow inclusion criteria to define their bullying type (pure bully, bully-victim, victim, or neither). The classification focused on three items, one asking the frequency of bullying others, one asking about the frequency of being the victim of bullying, and one asking about the frequency of picking fights. All items were asked about behavior between 1st and 6th grade, and all had temporal frequency response options that ranged from Never (0) to Very Frequent/Almost every day (5). An individual was classified into broad definition of pure bully if he reported that he had been a bully (reported bullying behavior more than twice), not a victim or that he had
picked fights with others equal to or more than twice from grade 1 to 6. The narrow inclusion criteria for a pure bully included self-reporting as a bully (reported bullying behavior more than twice), not a victim, and having picked fights with others equal or more than twice from grade 1 to 6. An individual was classified into broad definition of pure victim if he reported that he had been a victim (reported victimization more than twice), not a bully from grade 1 to 6. The narrow inclusion criteria of a pure bully included self-reporting as a bully (reported bullying behavior more than twice), not a victim, and having picked fights with others less or equal than once from grade 1 to 6. An individual was classified into broad definition of bully-victim if he reported that he had been a bully and a victim from grade 1 to 6 by the broad criteria. The narrow inclusion criteria of a bully-victim included self-reporting as a bully and a victim by the narrow criteria and having picked up fights less or equal than once from grade 1 to 6. An individual was classified into broad definition of a neither bully nor a victim if he reported by the broad definitions that he was neither a bully nor a victim from grade 1 to 6. A narrow inclusion criteria of a neither bully nor a victim included self-reporting as neither as a bully nor a victim by the narrow criteria and not having picked fights with others from grade 1 to 6.

Of the participants 15.3% (n = 47) were defined as narrow pure bullies from 1st to 6th grade, whereas 23.8% (n = 73) of the participants were classified into broad pure bullies; 15% (n = 46) were defined as narrow pure victims, whereas 21.8% (n=67) were classified into broad pure victims; 12.1% were defined as narrow bully-victims whereas 33.9% (n = 104) were classified into broad bully-victims; 57.3% (n=176) were classified into broad neither group, whereas 20.2% (n = 62) were classified into narrow neither group.
Institutional review boards (IRB) at Brandeis University and at each of the sites where juveniles were tested approved both the participant selection and administration protocols.

**Measurements**

**The MASA.** The Multidimensional Assessment of Sex, and Aggression (the MASA) is a contingency-based computer administered inventory that gathers detailed information on development, social environment, social competence, expressive aggression, juvenile and adult antisocial behavior and aggression, undifferentiated anger, offense planning, and various aspects of sexual behavior. The versions of the MASA used in this study incorporated language written for juveniles and included age-appropriate questions on social competence and sexual attitudes, behavior, cognitions, and fantasies. The scales developed for the MASA, including those used in the present study, have shown adequate to high test–retest reliabilities in samples of juveniles. Moreover, 87% of the 53 scales yielded Cronbach’s alphas equal to or greater than .70, 63% of the scales produced alphas equal to or greater than .80, and none of the scales yielded alphas below .60 (Knight & Cerce, 1999; Knight et al., 1994). Both juvenile and adult samples have shown considerable consistency in their factor structures among scales across MASA domains, and juvenile samples have shown test–retest reliability and internal consistencies comparable with adult samples (Knight et al., 1994; Knight & Sims-Knight, 2005). The present study focused on the portions of the MASA that explored offense planning scale.

**Dependent outcome scales.** The MASA offense planning scales contain items with five options. The five response-option items (absolute frequency option) range from 0 (never) to 4 (very often, >50 times). All offense planning scales were generated from exploratory factor
analyses on Adult Sexual Offenders and confirmatory analyses on Juvenile Sexual. The offense planning section is given to those who admit to (a) manipulating or forcing someone to have sex, (b) being charged or convicted of a sex crime, or (c) having sexual contact with a child or with a teen when they were over 19 years of age.

*Intimacy-Seeking Sexual Fantasies.* This scale consists of 17 items that assess fantasies in which the respondent ignores the agonistic nature of coercive sexual behavior and fantasizes that his sexual overtures will elicit a positive response. He fantasizes both about what he will say and do sexually to a woman and what she will say and feel and do sexually to him during the offense encounter (e.g., “My thoughts about how the person would act toward me included: How the person would act toward me while I was having sex”). The internal consistency for juveniles was .96.

*Aggressive/Violent Fantasies.* This scale contains seven items that tap the respondent's fantasies about physically harming, frightening, and even killing someone during nonconsensual sex (e.g., “My thoughts about what I would do to the person included: Scaring or frightening the person”). The internal consistency for juveniles was .84.

*Explicit Planning.* This factor consists of seven items that indicate that the respondent has thought specifically about committing an offense, including who the victim would be and where he would commit the offense (e.g., When I thought about manipulating somebody to have sex, I thought about where I would take the person or where I would commit the assault). The internal consistency for juveniles was .84.
**Eluding Apprehension.** This scale contains five items that assess the respondent's plans to elude apprehension after sexually coercive behavior (e.g., My thoughts about what I would do after I made somebody have sex included what to do with the person after the sex). High scores indicate high post-offense planning. The internal consistency for juveniles was .91.

**Procedures**

Participants were assigned random research identification numbers and neither their names nor their institutional identification numbers were included on any part of the testing protocol. An identification list linked participants’ research numbers to their names so that supplemental information abstracted from their criminal records could be coupled with their inventory responses. After the information abstraction, the list was destroyed. When the testing was introduced, the potential future benefits and risks of improved assessment for those who had sexually abused were demonstrated to participants. Each participant was then administered the most recent version available (Version 3, 4, 5, or 6) of the MASA.

**Analyses**

The 4 scales in offense planning served as dependent variable while the bullying status (bully, bully-victim, victim and neither) served as independent variable. After cleaning the data, residual analysis and Leven’s test of homogeneity of variance showed that the variance were equal across groups. General Linear Modeling was conducted between the outcome variables and groups (broad vs. narrow) defined by different inclusion criteria of bullying/victim/bully-victim/neither. Planned comparisons were justified in the present study because we had specific a priori, directional hypotheses about the differences that would be
found between different bullying groups. Scores of the four offense planning scales were calculated by the mean score of relevant items in the scales. To make the results more convenient to interpret in the results section, we transformed the raw scores into standard t-scores. Tables and plots in the results section were computed by using the t-scores.
Results

Aggressive/violent Fantasies

GLM analysis showed no significant difference between aggressive/violent planning in broad definition groups, $F(3, 294) = 1.89, p = .131$. In addition, similar results were found in the planned comparison procedures. There was, however, a significant main effect for the narrow groups in aggressive/violent planning scale, $F(3,294) = 2.69, p < .05$ (See Table 3). The narrow bully-victim group scored significantly higher than bully and victim group in the aggressive/violent planning scale with all $ps < .05$ (See Table 3). The narrow bully-victim group also scored significantly higher than neither group with $p < .05$ (See Table 3). A plot with estimated marginal means of aggressive/violent planning score for each group was provided in Graph 1. No significant differences were found between narrow bully and narrow victim groups, narrow victim and neither group, all three narrow groups (bully, bully-victim, victim) and neither group, narrow bully and neither group.

Intimacy-seeking Sexual Fantasies

Both broad groups and narrow groups yielded significant overall differences in Intimacy-Seeking Sexual Fantasies. Specifically, for broad group, bully-victim score significantly higher than bully with $F(1,294) = 10.177, p < .01$. It also significantly out performed neither group with $F(1,294) = 11.52, p < .01$. Other differences between broad groups
were not statistically significant. On the other hand, for narrow group, the victim group scored
significant higher than bully with $F(1,294) = 4.50, p < .05$, whereas bully-victim score
significantly higher than bully with $F(1,294) = 5.963, p < .05$ (See Table 4). Plots of narrow and
broad groups are provided in Graphs 2 and 3.

**Explicit Planning**

Similar to Intimacy-seeking Fantasies scale, both broad groups and narrow groups yielded
significant overall differences in Explicit Planning. Specifically, for broad definition, groups
involving bully or victims, when compared with neither group, showed significantly higher
scores in the scale, with $F(1,298) = 6.05, p < .05$. Bully-victims and victims also scored
significantly higher than neither group with all $p < .05$. For narrow group, victims scored
significantly higher than bullies with $p < .05$, Similar results were found in comparisons between
bully-victims, victims, and neither group (See Table 5). Plots of narrow and broad groups are
provided in Graphs 4 and 5.

**Eluding Apprehension**

Similar to the previous scales, both broad groups and narrow groups yielded significant
overall differences in Eluding Apprehension scale. In broad group, bully-victims scored
significantly higher than bullies, neither, and victims, with all $p < .05$. Compared to neither, 3
groups combined together scored significantly higher on this scale. For narrow group,
bully-victims only scored significantly higher than bully and neither, all $p < .01$(See Table 6).
Plots of narrow and broad groups are provided in Graphs 6 and 7.
Discussion

The present study explored how different definitions (narrow/broad) of bullying status could have an effect in the association with offense planning patterns in JSOs. We also investigated the question of whether previous bullying experience (either being a bully or a victim, or a bully-victim or neither) would influence the offense planning patterns. Inconsistent with our a priori hypothesis that bullies would score higher in aggressive/violent planning than all other groups and bully-victims would score higher in intimacy-seeking sexual fantasies than other groups, the data demonstrated that a bully-victims were more likely than pure bullies, victims, and neither to be involved in almost all four types of planning. Such results not only indicated that bully-victims, not pure bullies or victims experience more cognitive distortions not only in their ruminative fantasies but also in their aggressive fantasies. No significant differences were found between the narrow and broad definitions of bully, bully-victim, victim, and neither group in relation to the offense planning patterns, although narrow group did yield larger contrast estimates and larger statistical significance of the difference between groups.

The current study provides several unique contributions to the filed of bullying study and bullying prevention/intervention programs. First, to our knowledge, this study is the first study in examining the relation between previous bullying experience and offense planning patterns in sexual offenders. Second, the preliminary results yielded from the study are useful for both
bullying intervention programs and programs aimed at therapeutic interventions with JSOs, indicating the need of focusing on not only on eliminating aggressive attitudes and fantasies but also at addressing detail-oriented cognitive thinking patterns. This study also introduced new data about the ways that researchers have characterized bullying, illustrating the necessity for greater specificity in assessment tools in the future and the importance of revisiting assumptions based on either broad or narrow inclusion criteria of bullying status.

Yet, the present study is not without limitations. Several factors limit the generalizations that can be drawn from this study. These include-the retrospective, self-report nature of the recalled bullying experiences and the selectivity of the sample and the absence of any comparison non-offending groups. Frist, although self-report data are vulnerable to response biases and depend on the accuracy of respondents’ memories, in the present study participants were ensured confidentiality, and their low social desirability scales indicated that their response biases were minimal. Second, because the data for this study were collected exclusively from male JSOs residing in inpatient sexual-offender treatment facilities, a highly specialized sample, one cannot generalize these results to female Juvenile Sexual Offenders, all adolescents, or Adult Sexual Offenders.
References


