

# Kent Academic Repository

## Full text document (pdf)

### Citation for published version

Wood, Jane L. and Moir, Alice and James, Mark (2009) Prisoners' gang-related activity: the importance of bullying and moral disengagement. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 15 (6). pp. 569-581. ISSN 1068-316X.

### DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10683160802427786>

### Link to record in KAR

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/20143/>

### Document Version

UNSPECIFIED

#### Copyright & reuse

Content in the Kent Academic Repository is made available for research purposes. Unless otherwise stated all content is protected by copyright and in the absence of an open licence (eg Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher, author or other copyright holder.

#### Versions of research

The version in the Kent Academic Repository may differ from the final published version.

Users are advised to check <http://kar.kent.ac.uk> for the status of the paper. **Users should always cite the published version of record.**

#### Enquiries

For any further enquiries regarding the licence status of this document, please contact:

[researchsupport@kent.ac.uk](mailto:researchsupport@kent.ac.uk)

If you believe this document infringes copyright then please contact the KAR admin team with the take-down information provided at <http://kar.kent.ac.uk/contact.html>

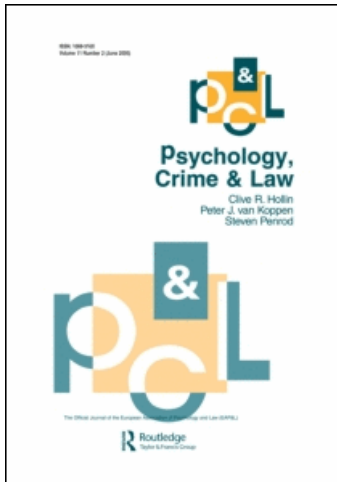
This article was downloaded by: [University of Kent]

On: 6 August 2009

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 907743053]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Psychology, Crime & Law

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title-content=t713647155>

### Prisoners' gang-related activity: the importance of bullying and moral disengagement

Jane Wood <sup>a</sup>; Alice Moir <sup>a</sup>; Mark James <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Psychology, Keynes College, University of Kent at Canterbury, Canterbury, UK

Online Publication Date: 01 July 2009

**To cite this Article** Wood, Jane, Moir, Alice and James, Mark(2009)'Prisoners' gang-related activity: the importance of bullying and moral disengagement',Psychology, Crime & Law,15:6,569 — 581

**To link to this Article:** DOI: 10.1080/10683160802427786

**URL:** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10683160802427786>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## **Prisoners' gang-related activity: the importance of bullying and moral disengagement**

Jane Wood\*, Alice Moir and Mark James

*Department of Psychology, Keynes College, University of Kent at Canterbury,  
Canterbury CT2 7NP UK*

*(Received 14 August 2008; final version received 22 August 2008)*

Gang-related activity can have a significant impact on the effective management of prisons in the UK, yet little is known about the characteristics of the prisoners involved. In this study, 141 adult male prisoners' gang-related activity was examined in relation to their bullying behaviour and use of moral disengagement. Results showed that prisoners most involved in gang-related activity were likely to have spent a longer total time in the prison system, be perpetrators of bullying and have high levels of moral disengagement. Findings also show that moral disengagement partially mediates the relationship between bullying and gang-related activity. Implications for treatment programmes and the prison estate are discussed.

**Keywords:** moral disengagement; prison gangs; bullying

### **Introduction**

Prison gangs and their activities have come to be associated with a perceived reduction in order and control in UK prisons (Wood & Adler, 2001; Wood, 2006), having long been seen as a formidable presence in the American penal system; however, our current understanding of them is relatively limited. No agreed definition of a prison gang currently exists; they have been described as cohesive groups of prisoners (with a leader) whose criminal activities negatively impact on the institutions that hold them (e.g. Fong & Buentello, 1991; Huff, 1996), while others contend that they are more flexibly constructed (e.g. Camp & Camp, 1985). There is a further lack of agreement concerning how many members are required for a group of prisoners to be considered a 'gang', and to date, we have only limited insight into the characteristics of prisoners involved in gang-related activity. The current study builds on existing knowledge by showing a link between gang-related activity, bullying and prisoners' ability to morally disengage. We use the definition outlined by Wood and Adler (2001) describing a prison gang as 'a group of three or more prisoners whose negative behaviour has an adverse impact on the prison that holds them' (p. 168).

The first and largest survey of American prison gangs reported their presence in 60% of Federal and State prisons (Camp & Camp, 1985), with gang membership estimated at 2% (12 634 prisoners) of the total prison population. Gang activities have a negative effect on the running of the prison in which they are housed (Rivera,

---

\*Corresponding author. Email: [j.l.wood@kent.ac.uk](mailto:j.l.wood@kent.ac.uk)

Cowles, & Dorman, 2003); they are reportedly responsible for more than 50% of prison management problems (Camp & Camp, 1985), leading in some cases to declarations of a state of emergency (Beaird, 1986; Fong, 1990). In some areas, gangs are thought to be responsible for as many as 80% of prison homicides (Gaes, Wallace, Gilman, Klein-Saffran, & Suppa, 2002). Prison gangs function on the acquisition of money and power (Camp & Camp, 1985; Fong, 1990), using threats and violence to dominate staff and other prisoners (Huff, 1996; Irwin, 1980; Stevens, 1997). The range of criminal activities gangs use to achieve this is wide (Camp & Camp, 1985; Battin, Hill, Hawkins, Catalano & Abbott, 1996), including drug trafficking (Camp & Camp, 1985; Buentello, Fong, & Vogel, 1991), 'gang banging' (including extortion, bullying and general harassment; Stevens, 1997) and violence (Fong & Buentello, 1991).

Given the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes a prison gang, distinguishing gang members from non-gang members is a difficult process; Forsythe (2006) makes the point that even if prison authorities were to have such a definition, gang members themselves will likely have a much different interpretation of gang membership, thus still limiting identification. Comparisons of gang and non-gang members reveal that gang members are more likely to have drug problems, will have been arrested more often, and will have used a weapon during their last offence (Sheldon, 1991). Consistent with their use of weapons, gang members are typically perceived as more aggressive than non-gang members (Thornberry, 1999). Gang members are less likely to engage in rehabilitation programmes, but more likely to attend education classes (Sheldon, 1991). Gang members are also likely to have served more time in prison and have longer current sentences than non-gang prisoners (Sheldon, 1991). They are also younger than non-gang prisoners (Ralph, Hunter, Marquart, Cuvelier, & Menanos, 1996) but do not differ in educational attainment or IQ levels (Sheldon, 1991).

As with all groups, prison gangs may be constructed as a result of a confluence of dispositional and situation factors (Fong & Buentello, 1991). Self-categorization theory (Turner, 1987) contends that classifying oneself as a member of a specific group forms the basis of determining one's social identity, which in turn promotes self-stereotyping and the adoption of normative, in-group behaviours. An increase in the numbers of mentally disordered offenders, drug and alcohol abusers, young violent offenders, and racial and ethnic groupings means that prison populations are becoming characterized by small, mutually exclusive groups (Paterline & Petersen, 1999). As a result of this fragmentation of the population, we might expect an increase in peer group activity as prisoners categorize themselves as being a member of, and consequently identify with, a specific group, taking on its rules, standards and beliefs concerning both attitudes and conduct. Indeed, American researchers propose that self-categorization is a key factor in prison gang development (Fong & Buentello, 1991).

While the presence of gangs in UK prisons has not been unequivocally established, a number of activities which may signify their presence have been recognized. One such activity is bullying (i.e. a subsection of aggression that is repetitive in nature; Olweus, 1996), evident to the extent that a mandatory anti-bullying strategy has been introduced in all UK prisons to tackle the problem (Home Office Prison Service, 1999). As the Home Office Prison Service (1993) states, prisons provide a climate in which 'the strong can exploit the weak to create their own hierarchies' (p. 6). A social

system in which paramount importance is given to the concept of survival of the fittest is encouraged (Connell & Farrington, 1996), with those individuals with greater access to power and resources (i.e. gang members) likely to be evaluated as fittest. Bullying may become the prime means of establishing and maintaining these hierarchies, since it is a function of an asymmetrical power relationship itself (Olweus, 1996). Bullying may act as a facilitator of gang recruitment, with prisoners bullying other prisoners *in order to* become a member of a high status group and aspiration to a higher social status has been identified as a motive for bullying other prisoners (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998; South & Wood, 2006). Those who bully to become a gang member may also do so as a means of avoiding becoming a victim themselves. Bullying is not only influential at the individual level (Blaauw, Winkel, & Kerkhof, 2001) but also at the institutional level (Home Office Prison Service, 1993). The disruptions generated by bullying incidents can serve to allow prisoners to subvert prison rules and acquire power (i.e. the function of the prison gang; Camp & Camp, 1985). A conceptual similarity between the activities of gang members and the activities of bullies is thus evident, implying that bullying can be ideally utilized to achieve the goals of the gang. It stands to reason therefore that in some cases, bullying may reflect the presence of prison gangs.

However, bullying in prisons has only recently become the focus of systematic empirical research (Ireland, 1999). Rather than assuming a simplistic dichotomous typology of 'bully' and 'victim', this research has tended to categorize prisoners into four groups: pure bullies, bully/victims, pure victims and those uninvolved in bullying (Ireland, 2002d). The importance of peer group influence on bullying in prison has been noted, with reports that more than a quarter of young offenders' bullying involved more than one perpetrator (Ireland, 2002d), although this line of investigation is severely limited. If prisoners become members of prison gangs via bullying other prisoners it is not unreasonable to expect that they may go on to adapt their bullying behaviours in order to achieve the gang's aims of acquiring and maintaining power and status. If they have become gang members through some other means (e.g. importation from a street gang; Jacobs, 1974), they may then adopt bullying behaviours for this same cause.

If some bullying in prisons occurs as a result of prison gang activity then treatment programmes must be developed that not only addresses bullying but also considers gang affiliation. In the USA, researchers have called for a more pro-active, research-led approach to the management of prison gangs which would result in their identification before they become organized and possibly disruptive, since they tend only to be recognized following a crisis that is costly to rectify (Fong & Buentello, 1991). However, before treatment programmes can be developed it is essential that more is understood about the psychological mechanisms that underlie prisoners' involvement in gang-related activity and bullying behaviour.

One such mechanism that can result in an individual engaging in bullying and/or gang-related activity is moral disengagement, the 'cognitive restructuring of inhumane conduct into a benign or worthy behaviour' (Bandura, 2002, p. 101). According to his social cognitive theory of the moral self, Bandura (1999) asserts that '...moral agency is manifested in both the power to refrain from behaving inhumanely and the proactive power to behave humanely' (p. 1). This is achieved through eight different practices, the most powerful of which redefine harmful behaviours as worthy (e.g. through using moral justifications, sanitizing language and exonerating social comparisons). Other practices minimize the perpetrator's

individual role by using diffusion and displacement of responsibility, distorting or disregarding the effects of one's actions and by blaming and dehumanizing the victim (Bandura, 2002). The theory of moral disengagement advocates that deviants do not differ from non-deviants in their abstract moral values, but they are better able to 'switch off' their moral standards (Bandura, 2002). Moral disengagement has been found to account for delinquent behaviour among school children who bully (Bandura, 1999, 2002; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Gini, 2006; Hymel, Rocke-Henderson, & Bonanno, 2005; Menesini et al., 2003), with a similar effect among prisoners who bully (South & Wood, 2006).

This study aimed to establish if prisoners' involvement in bullying would predict their involvement in gang-related activity. Since bullying can be used as a means of achieving higher status (O'Donnell & Edgar, 1998; South & Wood, 2006), bullying may be seen as an antecedent to gang-related activity. Given that the presence of gangs has not been clearly established in the UK, the identification of a bullying problem may act as a dynamic and observable risk factor of a gang problem. If so intervention techniques could be developed which would address bullying behaviour, and potentially nip the development of prison gangs in the bud. We also wanted to see if the relationship between gang-related activity and bullying is mediated by moral disengagement. Given that moral disengagement practices are utilized in the bullying process (i.e. Menesini et al., 2003; South & Wood, 2006) and our assertion that gang-related activity constitutes a step-up from bullying in terms of the variety of negative effects of such behaviour, it is not unreasonable to assume that prisoners will need a greater level of moral disengagement to take that step. Further, if the predicted relationship were to be found it may indicate that moral disengagement might be a good avenue to pursue for interventions addressing bullying and preventing gang uptake. Consequently we hypothesized that:

- Hypothesis 1: Given previous findings relating to characteristics of gang members (e.g. Sheldon, 1991) we expected that the total time prisoners had spent in the prison system, the length of their sentence, their age, their history of violent offending, their levels of moral disengagement and bullying involvement would predict involvement in gang-related activity.
- Hypothesis 2: Pure bullies and bully/victims would be more involved in gang-related activity and have higher levels of moral disengagement than would pure victims and prisoners not involved in bullying.
- Hypothesis 3: The relationship between involvement in bullying and involvement in gang-related activity will be mediated by moral disengagement.

## Method

### *Participants*

A total of 141 adult male prisoners from a category B (medium to high security) prison in the south-east of England were involved in this study. Participants were selected using O'Mahony's quasi-random method (1997); every fifth individual from a list of inmates supplied by the participating prison was selected. Prisoners who had spent less than 4 weeks in prison were eliminated from the sample since they were deemed unlikely to be sufficiently established within the system to be involved in either gang-

related activity or bullying. Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 73 years ( $M = 32.4$ ,  $SD = 9.77$ ). Forty-nine per cent of the sample were White, 37.6% were Black/Black British, 5.7% were Asian/Asian British, and 0.7% were Chinese, while 2.8% were of other ethnic origins and 3.5% of mixed ethnic origin (0.7% failed to disclose this information). Of the 141 participants, 44% ( $n = 62$ ) were on remand and 55% ( $n = 77$ ) had been sentenced (1% refused disclosure of this information). Sentenced participants' prison terms ranged from 8 weeks to 12 years ( $M = 3.04$  years,  $SD = 2.50$  years). The total time participants had spent in the prison system (including previous sentences) ranged from 4 weeks to 30 years ( $M = 4.45$  years,  $SD = 5.55$  years). Twenty one per cent ( $n = 30$ ) were either convicted of or accused of a violent offence, 20.6% ( $n = 29$ ) of burglary or theft, 14.9% ( $n = 21$ ) of robbery, 14.9% ( $n = 21$ ) for drug-related offences, 8.5% ( $n = 12$ ) for sexual offences, 2.1% ( $n = 3$ ) for murder and 14.9% ( $n = 21$ ) for other offences. Four participants (3.1%) refused to disclose this information.

### **Materials**

A number of demographic and institution-related measures were taken (e.g. length of sentence), since such factors have been identified as relating to involvement in gang-related activity (Sheldon, 1991).

Participants were asked to complete the Direct and Indirect Prisoner Behaviour Checklist (DIPC-R; Ireland, 2002a), which comprises 67 victimization items (e.g. 'I have been deliberately spat on by another prisoner') and 77 perpetrator items assessing direct and indirect bullying (e.g. 'I have forced another prisoner to do other jobs/chores that were mine'). Participants responded by either agreeing or disagreeing with each item statement; the greater the number of 'agree' responses indicated a greater involvement in either victimization or bullying. The victimization and perpetrator scales were reliable with high internal consistency,  $\alpha = 0.88$  and  $\alpha = 0.87$ , respectively.

Moral disengagement was assessed using the 32-item Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement Scale (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, & Regalia, 2001), adapted to make items more appropriate to a prison environment (e.g. 'Being verbally abusive to someone does not really hurt them', 'If men break rules in prison, it is the prison officers fault'). Responses were recorded using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A high score represented a greater use of moral disengagement strategies. The scale had high internal consistency,  $\alpha = 0.89$ .

To assess levels of gang membership and gang-related activity, the 35-item Prisoner Gang Activities Questionnaire (Wood, 2002) was used. This comprises 11 personal involvement items (e.g. 'Sometimes my friends and I trade in illegal materials and/or extra supplies'), 12 other involvement items (e.g. 'Some groups of prisoners are violent to other prisoners') and 12 open-ended questions. (e.g. 'How do you think other prisoners decide who they will be friendly with?'). Responses were recorded using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A high score on the personal involvement subscale represented a greater likelihood of gang membership. The scale had high internal consistency,  $\alpha = 0.86$ .

### **Procedure and ethical considerations**

All data was collected in accordance with the ethical principles of the British Psychological Society and HM Prison Service. Prisoners who agreed to participate

were brought to a classroom in groups of up to 10; as the questionnaires were of a sensitive nature, participants were seated so that they could not see each other's responses. The researcher remained in the room during data collection to answer any questions and provide help for participants who had reading and writing difficulties.

Participants were informed in writing and verbally about the purpose of the research, issues of confidentiality (e.g. that individuals' responses would remain anonymous, could not be traced back to them, and that they could not be used by the prison to identify individual prisoners' behaviour) and the option to withdraw from the research at any stage. They were then asked to sign a consent form, indicating that they understood the information provided and were happy to participate. On completion of the questionnaires, participants were debriefed verbally and given, in writing, the researchers' and support services contact details should they have further questions, wish to withdraw from the study or experience any distress from the issues raised by the study.

## Results

All analyses were conducted using an alpha level of 0.05 to determine significance.

### *Descriptive statistics*

Thirty-nine per cent ( $n = 56$ ) of participants admitted bullying and 60.3% ( $n = 85$ ) claimed to have been victims of bullying during the week before participating in this study. Ten (7%) prisoners were classified as pure bullies, 39 (27.7%) as pure victims, 46 (32.6%) as bully/victims and 46 (32.6%) as neither bullies nor victims. Ninety per cent ( $n = 127$ ) of participants stated that their responses represented a typical week for them.

To get a clearer idea of the extent of gang membership and activity in the prison, the percentage of prisoners who agreed or strongly agreed with the personal involvement items of the Prisoner Gang Activity Questionnaire (Wood, 2002) was calculated (see Table 1). The majority of prisoners knew other prisoners before coming in to the prison, mixed with the same prisoners most of the time and just under half reported being members of protective groups.

Table 1. Percentage of prisoners reporting personal involvement in gang-related activity.

Gang-related variable	Percentage	Number
Knowing other prisoners before entering prison	57%	80
Mixing with the same prisoners most of the time	52%	73
Protective group membership	44%	66
Abiding by individual group rules	32%	45
Feeling in danger from others on entry to prison	31%	43
Taking drugs	28%	39
Being recognized as a group by others	26%	36
Group involved in illegal activities outside prison	21%	30
Group trading in illegal/extra supplies	16%	23
Group has a leader	9%	13
Group wears clothes or tattoos to show membership	6%	8



### ***Predictors of gang-related activity***

To see if our expectation that the total time prisoners had spent in the prison system, the length of their sentence, their age, violent offending, and level of moral disengagement and bullying involvement predicted involvement in gang-related activity we used multiple regression. All assumptions of multiple regression were met; there were no obvious outliers based on the participants responses, which also showed no sign of skewness. Multicollinearity of variables was not detected. There were some missing values, most notably with regard to the self-reported nature of the offence for which participants had been incarcerated (3.1% of participants did not disclose this information and were not used in the analysis). Since bullying and victimization has some overlap (i.e. bully/victims) we also included victimization (measured using the victimization subscale of the DIPC-R; Ireland, 2002a) as an independent variable. The analysis produced a significant model that explained 33% of the variance (see Table 2).

As the model shows, the most important predictors of involvement in gang-related activity are moral disengagement, total amount of time spent in the prison system and being a perpetrator of bullying.

Table 2. Variables predicting gang-related activity.

Variable	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Moral disengagement	0.33	3.97	0.000
Sentence length	-0.07	-0.95	0.343
Total time spent in prison system	0.29	3.81	0.000
Age	-0.10	-1.27	0.206
Offence violent/non-violent	0.08	1.09	0.280
Being a victim of bullying	-0.06	-0.64	0.521
Being a perpetrator of bullying	0.30	3.28	0.001

Adj.  $R^2 = 0.33$ , d.f. = 7, 129;  $F = 9.99$ ,  $p < 0.001$ .

### ***Categories of bullying involvement***

An ANOVA was carried out to determine whether pure bully, bully/victim, pure victim or non-involved prisoners differed with regard to involvement in gang-related activities. Results showed there was a difference between categories,  $F_{(3,140)} = 7.142$ ,  $p < 0.001$  (see Table 3). Pure bullies and bully/victims had the highest level of gang-related activity while pure victims and those not involved in bullying had the lowest levels.

A similar ANOVA was carried out to determine whether each category differed with regard to their use of moral disengagement. Results showed there was a difference between categories,  $F_{(3,140)} = 7.32$ ,  $p < 0.001$  (see Table 3). Pure bullies, pure victims and bully/victims do not differ in the use of moral disengagement, but those with no involvement in bullying in any capacity were significantly less likely to use moral disengagement strategies than either pure bullies or bully/victims.

Table 3. Differences in use of moral disengagement and involvement in gang activity by bullying experience.

	Pure bullies ( <i>n</i> = 10)	Pure victims ( <i>n</i> = 39)	Bully/victims ( <i>n</i> = 46)	Not involved ( <i>n</i> = 46)
Gang-related activity	35.60 <sub>a</sub> (8.8)	28.23 <sub>b</sub> (5.16)	32.17 <sub>a</sub> (7.73)	27.09 <sub>b</sub> (6.95)
Moral disengagement	86.60 <sub>a</sub> (19.87)	69.44 <sub>ab</sub> (18.55)	84.07 <sub>a</sub> (22.45)	66.74 <sub>b</sub> (20.84)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Marginal means without a shared subscript (*a* or *b*) differ from each other by Tukey HSD at  $p < 0.05$ .

### ***Moral disengagement as a mediator between bullying and gang-related activity***

A mediation analysis was used to examine if moral disengagement mediates the relationship between bullying and gang-related activity. All four criteria of regression were met in the absence of multicollinearity; bullying behaviour had a significant bivariate relationship with moral disengagement and with gang-related activity, and moral disengagement predicted gang-related activity independent of bullying (see Figure 1). The Sobel *z*-test indicated that when controlling for moral disengagement a significant change was found in the relationship between bullying and gang-related activity ( $z = 3.51, p < 0.001$ ). This shows that moral disengagement partially mediates the relationship between bullying and gang-related activity.

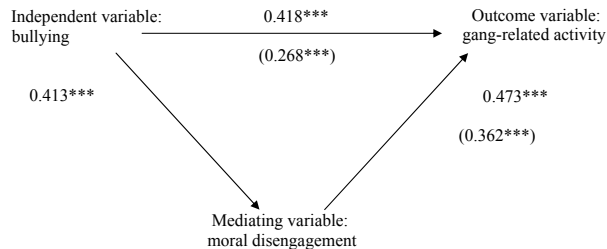


Figure 1. Partial mediation of the bullying – gang-related activity relationship by moral disengagement. \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ . Beta weights are shown; betas in parentheses are controlling for the other variable.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between the bullying and gang-related activity of prisoners. It was predicted that bullying behaviour may act as an antecedent to gang-related activity and then used as a means to achieve gang aims. It was further predicted that levels of moral disengagement and involvement in gang related activity may differ according to prisoners' experiences of bullying (i.e. as victims, perpetrators, or both). Finally, it was predicted that moral disengagement practices would be used to facilitate the move from bullying to more wide-ranging negative behaviours.

We found that the total amount of time that prisoners had spent in the prison system, their bullying involvement and their ability to morally disengage were the most important predictors of their involvement in gang-related activity. This

supports the idea that gang membership and aggressive behaviour (e.g. bullying) tend to go hand in hand (Thornberry, 1999) and shows that prisoners who do not bully are also unlikely to be involved in gang-related activity. Since those involved in gang-related activity reported high levels of moral disengagement it may be that they are better able to switch off moral self-sanctions (Bandura et al., 1996) and behave less humanely than those whose self-sanctions bind them to more acceptable behaviour.

As such, moral disengagement appears to facilitate involvement in gang-related activity. It is possible that prisoners involved in gang-related activity may reduce self-censure because they consider their behaviour results from the social pressures of other group members. If they do then they are unlikely to see themselves as personally responsible for their actions (Bandura et al., 1996) and since gang leaders play an important role in the day-to-day life of gang members (Jacobs, 1977) personal misconduct may be attributed to group leaders' directives. Equally collective misconduct may weaken moral standards due to encouragement from fellow gang members to behave inhumanely leading to fewer feelings of responsibility. As Bandura (1999) suggests 'when everyone is responsible, no one really feels responsible' (p. 198).

That total time spent in the prison system is an important predictor of gang-related activity suggests that those prisoners with experience of the system are most inclined to exploit those around them for personal gain. This implies that they probably know how best to work the system to their advantage. Earlier work found that recidivists' perceive higher levels of gang-related activity than do other prisoners (Wood, 2006); it may be that perceptions of gang-related activity are increased due to greater personal involvement in such activities. Involvement in gang-related activity suggests they are also likely to be more problematic in and out of prison (Sheldon, 1991), leading to additional convictions and incarcerations.

Violent offending was no more predictive of gang-related activity than non-violent behaviour; it may be that gang-related activity is not specific to prisoners convicted of violent offences. In line with the fact that gangs are more concerned with gaining power and status (Camp & Camp, 1985; Fong, 1990), aggression and violence could be seen more as a means to an end than as a goal in itself. This flies in the face of American findings that prison gang members are more violent than non-members because they are more likely to have used a weapon in their last offence (e.g. Sheldon, 1991). It could be that not all prisoners involved in gang-related activity are violent, or that prisoners become more violent following repeated incarceration even if they are not convicted of a violent offence. Equally, prisoners whose index offence was not violent may have convictions for violence further back in their criminal history: an issue the current study did not examine but which is worth future consideration.

With regard to the second hypothesis, the comparisons between pure bullies, pure victims, bully/victims and those not involved as either bullies or victims shows that prisoners who bully (including bully/victims) are more likely to be involved in gang-related activity than pure victims and those not involved. This reinforces the suggestion that bullying may facilitate involvement in gang-related activity. Since bullying creates disruptions that allow prisoners to acquire power and subvert prison rules (Home Office Prison Service, 1993) and that the function of prison gangs tends to disrupt the normal functioning of a prison (Beaird, 1986; Fong, 1990), it is not surprising that bullying seems to pave the way for gang-related activity. That pure

bullies, bully/victims and pure victims do not differ in levels of moral disengagement is also worthy of note. Previous work has shown that pure bullies and bully/victims have higher levels of moral disengagement than pure victims and those not involved (e.g. South & Wood, 2006).

However, since victims have similar levels of moral disengagement to bullies and bully/victims and if moral disengagement does facilitate bullying and gang involvement, it seems that pure victims have as much potential to become bullies and/or become involved in gang-related activity as any other prisoner. The fact that currently they are victims may be because at present, possibly due to existing hierarchies, pure victims do not have the *capability* to develop their bullying potential. Factors such as pure victims' lower social self-esteem (Ireland, 2002b) and lower assertiveness (Ireland, 2002c) may be of influence here rendering pure victims as less socially adequate than their bully counterparts and as such less able to become perpetrators. What we cannot know from the current data is if any of the pure bullies and bully/victims were once pure victims. This is worthy of future investigation since it could shed light on the trajectory of involvement in bullying and gang-related activity. On the other hand uninvolved prisoners have lower levels of moral disengagement than any other group. If moral disengagement facilitates bullying and gang-related activity then this group is the least likely to either bully and/or be involved in gang-related activity. The reasons why this is so are unclear, but further research could investigate if low levels of moral disengagement work as a protective factor against involvement in anti-social activity in prison and indeed explore the reasons why this group are also not victimized.

Our final hypothesis was partially supported; the relationship between bullying and involvement in gang-related activity was partially mediated by use of moral disengagement. While mediation does not necessarily imply causation, this finding does seem to suggest that moral disengagement is necessary for prisoners to make the leap from bullying to involvement in gang activities. Quite why this leap occurs is not clear as yet. Perhaps bullies recognize the potential that group membership has for increasing their existing power and perhaps, as speculated earlier, it is group responsibility that facilitates further moral disengagement. Whatever the reasons there seems to be a progression from bullying to gang involvement and moral disengagement seems to play some part in this 'progression'.

Although our findings provide some insight into prisoners' behaviour there are limitations to work of this kind. Our study was conducted in one prison using slightly over 10% of the population (a response rate of approximately 45%) and so we cannot be certain as to how generalizable the findings are. There will also be limitations as to the amount of information prisoners were prepared to share with us. Research of this kind is also inevitably constrained by the questions we ask participants. For example, due to the paucity of research conducted in the UK on prison gangs the questionnaire used in this study was based primarily on American findings (e.g. Fong & Buentello, 1991). As a result we need to consider that the American indicators of prison gang activity may not be as applicable to a UK population as it is to an American one. For instance, one item that refers to tattoos or clothing to signify group membership was relevant to 97% of Fong and Buentello's (1991) respondents whereas the majority of our participants strongly disagreed with this statement.

These findings add to the existing body of prison gang literature, to show that there is a link between bullying and gang-related activity. The earlier finding that bullies value social status in the prison (South & Wood, 2006) and that prison gangs function on the acquisition of material wealth (e.g. Camp & Camp, 1985) suggest that bullying and gang-related activity are both underpinned by a desire to attain power and status in the prison. The current finding that moral disengagement links to both bullying and gang-related activity gives us a clearer idea of the psychological processes that underpin prisoners' involvement in both forms of anti-social behaviour in prison. Our findings also have the potential to inform strategies for dealing with prisoners involved in bullying and/or gang-related activity. If moral disengagement is the cognitive facilitator that underpins bullying and gang-related activity then interventions could be adapted to make it more difficult for people to remove humanity from their conduct (Bandura, 2002). Previous research has already successfully enhanced moral engagement against destructive means in children by peer modelling (McAlister, Ama, Barroro, Peters, & Kelder, 1999). However, if moral disengagement and subsequently bullying and gang-related activity are to be addressed successfully we cannot afford to ignore the group context of prisoners' behaviour. In institutions where bullying and gang-related activity are prevalent prisoner groups are likely to escalate in number as prisoners form groups in response to existing groups (Knox, 1994). If they do then prisons may be vulnerable to a reduction in legitimate order and control (Wood & Adler, 2001; Wood, 2006) and prisoners will become increasingly vulnerable to bullying and gang-related activity.

## References

- Bandura, A. (1999). Moral disengagement in the perpetration of inhumanities. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 3, 193–209.
- Bandura, A. (2002). Selective moral disengagement in the exercise of moral agency. *Journal of Moral Education*, 31, 101–119.
- Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G.V., & Pastorelli, C. (1996). Mechanisms of moral disengagement in the exercise of moral agency. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71, 364–374.
- Bandura, A., Caprara, G.V., Barbaranelli, C., Pastorelli, C., & Regalia, C. (2001). Socio-cognitive self-regulatory mechanisms governing transgressive behaviour. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 80, 125–135.
- Battin, S., Hill, K.G., Hawkins, J.D., Catalano, R.F., & Abbott, R. (1996). *Testing gang membership and association with antisocial peers as independent predictors of anti-social behaviour: Gang members compared to non-gang members of law-violating youth groups*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology, Chicago.
- Beaird, L.H. (1986). Prison gangs: Texas. *Corrections Today*, July, 8, 22.
- Blaauw, E., Winkel, F.W., & Kerkhof, J.F.M. (2001). Bullying and suicidal behavior in jails. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 28, 279–299.
- Buentello, S., Fong, R.S., & Vogel, R.E. (1991). Prison gang development: A theoretical model. *The Prison Journal*, LXXI, 3–9.
- Camp, G.M., & Camp, C. (1985). *Prison gangs: Their extent, nature and impact on prisons*. US Dept of Justice, Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.
- Connell, A., & Farrington, D.P. (1996). Bullying among incarcerated young offenders: Developing and interview schedule and some preliminary results. *Journal of Adolescence*, 19, 75–93.
- Fong, R.S. (1990). The organizational structure of prison gangs: A Texas case study. *Federal Probation*, 54, 36–43.
- Fong, R.S., & Buentello, S. (1991). The detection of prison gang development. *Federal Probation*, 55, 66–69.

- Forsythe, D. (2006). Gangs in California's prison system: What can be done? Retrieved 19 June 2008, from: [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=977010](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=977010)
- Gaes, G.G., Wallace, S., Gilman, E., Klein-Saffran, J., & Suppa, S. (2002). The influence of prison gang affiliation on violence and other prison misconduct. *The Prison Journal*, 82, 359–385.
- Gini, G. (2006). Social cognition and moral cognition in bullying: What's wrong? *Aggressive Behavior*, 32, 528–539.
- Home Office Prison Service (1993). *Bullying in prison: A strategy to beat it*. London: HMSO.
- Home Office Prison Service (1999). *Anti-bullying strategy*. Prison Service Order 1702.
- Huff, C.R. (1996). *Gangs in America* (2nd edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hymel, S., Rocke-Henderson, N. & Bonanno, R.A. (2005). Moral disengagement: A framework for understanding bullying among adolescents. *Journal of Social Sciences, Special Issue No. 8*, 1–11.
- Ireland, J.L. (1999). Bullying amongst prisoners: A study of adults and young offenders. *Aggressive Behavior*, 25, 162–178.
- Ireland, J.L. (2002a). *Direct and Indirect Prisoner Behavioural Checklist – Revised*. Available by permission of the author only.
- Ireland, J.L. (2002b). Social self-esteem and self-reported bullying behaviour among adult prisoners. *Aggressive Behavior*, 28, 184–197.
- Ireland, J.L. (2002c). How does assertiveness relate to bullying behaviour among prisoners? *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 7, 87–100.
- Ireland, J.L. (2002d). *Bullying among prisoners: Evidence, research and intervention strategies*. Hove, UK: Brunner Routledge.
- Irwin, J. (1980). *Prisons in Turmoil*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co.
- Jacobs, J.B. (1974). Street gangs behind bars. *Social Problems*, 21, 395–409.
- Jacobs, J.B. (1977). *Stateville: The penitentiary in mass society*. London: University of Chicago Press.
- Knox, G. (1994). *An introduction to gangs* (3rd edn). Bristol, UK: Wyndham Hall Press.
- McAlister, A.L., Ama, E., Barroro, C., Peters, R.J., & Kelder, S. (1999). Promoting tolerance and moral engagement through peer counselling. Unpublished manuscript, University of Texas Health Science Centre, Houston, Texas.
- Menesini, E., Sanchez, V., Fonzi, A., Ortega, R., Costabile, A., & Lo-Feudo, G. (2003). Moral emotions and bullying: A cross-national comparison of differences between bullies, victims and outsiders. *Aggressive Behaviour*, 29, 515–530.
- O'Donnell, I., & Edgar, K. (1998). Routine victimisation in prisons. *The Howard Journal*, 37, 266–279.
- O'Mahony, P. (1997). *Mountjoy prisoners: A sociological and criminological profile*. Dublin: The Stationers Office.
- Olweus, D. (1996). Bully victim problems in schools. *Prospects*, 26, 331–359.
- Paterline, B., & Petersen, D.M. (1999). Structural and social psychological determinants of prisonization. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 27, 427–441.
- Ralph, P., Hunter, R.J., Marquart, J.W., Cuvelier, S.J., & Menanos, D. (1996). Exploring the differences between gang and non-gang prisoners. In R.C. Huff (Ed.), *Gangs in America* (2nd edn). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rivera, B.D., Cowles, E.L., & Dorman, L.G. (2003). An exploratory study of institutional change: Personal control and environmental satisfaction in a gang-free prison. *The Prison Journal*, 83, 149–170.
- Sheldon, R.G. (1991). A comparison of gang members and non-gang members in a prison setting. *Prison Journal*, 71, 50–60.
- South, C.R., & Wood, J.L. (2006). Bullying in prisons: The importance of perceived social status, prisonization and moral disengagement. *Aggressive Behavior*, 32, 1–12.
- Stevens, D.J. (1997). Origins of prison gangs in North Carolina. *Journal of Gang Research*, 4, 23–35.
- Thornberry, T.P. (1999). Membership in youth gangs and involvement in serious and violent offending. In R. Loeber, & D.P. Farrington (Eds.), *Serious and violent juvenile offenders: Risk factors and successful interventions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Turner, J.C. (1987). *Rediscovering the Social Group: A self-categorisation theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wood, J. (2002). Groups in Prisons: An examination of their origins, membership and gang related activities. Unpublished thesis, University of Kent, Canterbury, UK.
- Wood, J.L. (2006). Gang activity in English prisons: The prisoners' perspective. *Psychology. Crime & Law*, 12, 605–617.
- Wood, J., & Adler, J. (2001). Gang activity in English prisons: The staff perspective. *Psychology. Crime & Law*, 7, 167–192.