

THE STRAIN OF BULLYING

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ABSTRACT

Bullying is a complex issue to understand and address for many school districts. The nature of bullying itself is not simple, and bullying comes in many forms; such as cyber, physical, and verbal. A full and comprehensive understanding of bullying can therefore enhance the effectiveness of responses to bullying. Relying on the criminological context and especially general strain theory, this project provides an overview of bullying and the relevant criminological thought. The principal objective of this paper is to use the findings of empirical research to evaluate general strain theory. The paper also provides policy recommendations for combatting bullying.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying amongst adolescents proves to be a very tough subject to cover, in both its research and discussion. The adverse effects it has on individuals can be devastating and could possibly last for a lifetime. Nonetheless, it deserves more coverage due to the fact of its rise over the years and irreversible damage done as a result.

The factors that influence an individual to become a bully, particularly among adolescents, can vary from person to person. Parenting, the environment, social class and peers have all proven to be possible factors that create a bully within a person, but has been limited in actual scope of testing. Therefore, research can be done with the work of Robert Agnew's general strain theory as a guide to testing the root causes of bullying. Agnew's theory builds upon the strain theory originally put forward by Robert King Merton, but Merton's was limited in terms of fully conceptualizing the range of possible sources of strain in society, especially among youth. In Merton's theory, the idea is that "blocked opportunities to attain successful goals generate a pressure that leads to criminality." Except, "this pressure (or frustration) is structurally produced, but not at the individual level," causing it to be widely criticized (Froggio, 2007).

Agnew's theory believes differently when dealing with youth, claiming there are other factors that create delinquency. Instead, Agnew's theory proposes that negative experiences can lead to stress beyond those that are financially induced. Agnew's theory also describes four characteristics of strains that are most likely to lead to crime: strains are seen as unjust, strains are seen as high in magnitude, strains are associated with low social control, and strains create some pressure or incentive to engage in criminal coping

(Froggio, 2007). Furthermore, Agnew theory explains three categories of strains that lead to the frustration and sources of strain: The inability to achieve positively valued goals, the removal of, or threat to remove, positively valued stimuli, and to present a threat to one with noxious or negatively valued stimuli, such as physical abuse (Jacoby, Serverance, and Bruce, 2012: 254-255). Building upon the work of this theory, research on the effects that peers and parenting have on a bully can be more thoroughly explored.

A bully's behavior can be influenced through a number of ways. Sometimes it comes from trying to conform to their peers in order to avoid being different. Other times it comes from their parent's treatment towards them, causing instances of lashing out. What is common between them is the negative strain produced on the bully. With the limited amount of research done to analyze and understand the origin of bullying, the hope is to build upon the works already available, provide more knowledge on the subject, as well as spark discussion. Therefore, the goal of this paper is to define and understand general strain theory and bullying first as separate topics, then establish a link between them through empirical evidence, and finally, suggest policy recommendations based on the works conducted by previous researchers.

GENERAL STRAIN THEORY

Though general strain theory (GST) has been introduced briefly in the introduction, it was not originally based on Agnew's own creation. Theories are often built upon another's work in order to improve the basics of the idea and formulate their own theory in the process. Agnew is no different, and based his work on the person before him.

Agnew's interpretation first came upon Robert Merton's strain theory, which was devised in 1938. Originally used for sociology and crime, Merton's original theory built upon the work of the Father of Sociology Émile Durkheim, a French philosopher, and how he conceptualized the way society maintains its social integrity and coherence in modernity (Baker and Wilson, 2015: 13-14). Merton's theory states, "certain phases of the social structure generate the circumstances by which infringement of various social codes constitute a 'normal' or 'culturally oriented,' if not 'approved,' social response." Therefore, the primary focus of Merton's theory "is to discover how some social structures exert a pressure so great upon certain people in society that they eventually end up engaging in non-conformist/deviant, rather than conformist, conduct" (Baker and Wilson, 2015: 14)

A common example of Merton's theory would be an individual engaging in the selling of drugs, or in the act of prostitution in order to gain financial security for themselves or others. Furthermore, Merton's strain theory is dependent on the social and cultural structures the individual is surrounded in comparison to their capacity to achieve

their goals (Baker and Wilson, 2015: 14). In essence, Merton's work asserts that crime occurs when a "system of cultural values extols, above all else, certain common symbols of success for the entire population," while the reality of society blocks the opportunity to achieve success through approved conventional means, i.e. not as a result of criminal activity (Baker and Wilson, 2015: 18). Building upon specific areas of strain theory, namely "stress, justice/equity, and aggression research in psychology and sociology," Agnew devised general strain theory to explain delinquency and drug use (Agnew and White, 1992: 476).

In 1992, Robert Agnew constructed his own theory based off strain theory, and ultimately called it general strain theory (GST). Agnew called for a reexamination of strain theory, one that could be central in explaining crime and deviance, but that it needed to abandon social class and cultural variables, and needed to focus on norms. Agnew's theory is neither interpersonal nor structural like Merton's original theory, but focuses on emotional and individual aspects with an emphasis on their immediate social environment. Agnew instead argued "individuals who experience strains or stressors often become upset and sometimes cope with crime. Such individuals may engage in crime to end or escape from their strains" (Agnew, 2009: 169) Anger and frustration from within the individual foster negative relationships, and these individuals want to do anything they can to reject these negative stimuli. If those particular rejections are composed into emotions that the environment is unsupportive of, those strong negative emotions could sway the individual to engage in various types of crimes. Lastly, Agnew's theory outlined strains could come from any one of three sources, stating other

individuals may “(1) prevent one from achieving positively valued goals, (2) remove or threaten to remove positively valued stimuli that one possesses, or (3) present or threaten to present one with noxious or negatively valued stimuli” (Agnew, 1992: 50)

As explored before, Agnew’s core idea of GST is that emotion is the basis for which crime occurs. GST is primarily used to explain individual differences in crime, it can also be used to explain “offending over the life course, to explain group differences in crime, and to suggest strategies for controlling crime” (Agnew, 2009: 169). Agnew also introduces and establishes a significant difference between “objective and subjective strains.” Objective strains refer to the events and conditions that are generally disliked by people within a given group. Subjective strains refer to the events and conditions that are disliked by the particular individual or individuals being examined. The reason for the important distinction is due to the way individuals react to certain events in their life that could be encapsulated by different emotions (Agnew, 2009: 170).

For example, normally a divorce between two individuals would be devastating to the average couple, but in some cases could be seen as a joyous separation between two individuals who were not happy with each other. This in turn, affects the levels of positive and negative stimuli, changing the individual’s likelihood of engaging in crime. People who are distraught over their divorce may resort to crime to alleviate their strain while those who are happy to be free from an unsatisfactory relationship will not. Furthermore, the introduction of “experienced, vicarious and anticipated strains” can affect an individual. Experienced strains are strains that are personally related. (Agnew, 2009: 170) Vicarious strains are strains experienced by those who are close to the

individual, in which the individual feels responsible for protecting said others.

Anticipatory strains are when the individual expects strains to happen to them or others in the nearby future. The result of these strains often lead individuals to engage in crime in order to right the wrongs done either to themselves, others or in anticipation (Agnew, 2009: 170).

The amassment of strains not only affect the psyche of the individual, but also affects whether or not they engage in crime due to their toxicity in nature. Strains can cause a range of negative emotional states, including anger, frustration, depression, and fear. As a normal individual would, the next step for them would be take corrective action in order to alleviate the strains pressured on them. With the wide array of possible strains placed on one person, their judgment could be clouded to the point where immediate gratification is sought after, despite the means of achieving it. Engaging in crime provides a way of escaping from the strain, seeking revenge for a past wrongdoing, or directly easing their negative emotions (such as through the use of illegal drugs) immediately (Agnew, 2009: 170). The plethora of negative emotions or strains reduces the individual's ability to recognize and assess situations, lowers their sense of effectively communicating with others and ultimately hinders the perceived costs of crime. Depression within a person would give them the rationale of having nothing left to lose, or an angry person would retaliate when provoked by another person. Strains themselves could be conductive to crime, such as anger to violence, depression to drug use, and fear to escapists of crime, but still requires more research to be fully established as causal relationships (Agnew, 2009: 170-171).

As strains present the motivation to engage in crime, they also may cause a reduction in an individual's level of social control, including "direct control, stake in conformity, and the belief that crime is wrong." Depending on the level of strain, the reduction could be as short as temporary or be long term. Often, long-term strains involve negative treatment from conventional others, such as parents (disciplining/abusing their children), teachers (giving students bad grades or after-school detention), employees (giving negative feedback on work performance or even termination) and even police (Agnew, 2009: 171). These types of strains reduce the individual's stake in conformity, which in turn lowers their bond to the conventional others and investment to the conventional society. The individual's stake in conformity should not be mistaken as a core principle for GST. Other theories, such as social control theory, instead use this core idea to explain motivations for crime. Still, the individual's loss in both aspects negatively affects their own capacity to control their misbehaviors and actions that would go against society. Finally, as a culmination between their weakened ties to others and desperation, the individual may engage in criminal activities as their new value orientation "minimizes concern for others and prioritizes their own self-interest" (Agnew, 2009: 171).

While general strain theory is one of many criminal theories that could be applied to bullying, it relates closely compared to others due to its ties to explaining delinquency. Delinquency and bullying have shown to be different in certain aspects, as noted in the next section, but share some common elements. These common elements include the previously mentioned strains and sources of individual stress. As a result, general strain

theory is effective in understanding the motivations for bullying behavior, and serves as the basis for empirical studies outlined in the latter section.

BULLYING

The bullying phenomenon that plagues many schools around the world remains an intangible problem to address, dating back to its origin in 1530s (Donegan, 2012: 33). The majority of schools will claim that they have been clamping down on bullying and have a zero-tolerance approach when the situation arises. The fundamental issue is that bullying within schools never has a clear, unified definition, making it difficult for teachers and administrators to crack down on the subject (Donegan, 2012: 37-38). If two friends are calling each other derogatory names, is that considered bullying? If a couple of students are picking on another student, but the student is laughing along with them, is that bullying? This lack of an established definition makes situations like these difficult to assess, and also makes it complicated to create a policy that can rectify the problem. In order to get to a solution, or at least make way towards solving the problem of bullying, one must fully understand the topic of bullying and what it entails. Only by understanding bullying in both a general and a specific level, may we be able to make significant progress on the road towards solving the dilemma of bullying.

That being said, what is bullying? Or better yet, what behavior classifies as bullying? Bullying is typically defined as a “subset of peer aggression in which one or more individuals verbally, physically, and/or psychologically harasses a weaker victim” (Viljoen, O'Neill, and Sidhu, 2005: 521-522). In the community sense, the bullying “must be repetitive in nature,” but when it comes to prisons or correctional facilities, a single incident of victimization is enough to be considered bullying due to the population being

temporary (Viljoen, O'Neill, and Sidhu, 2005: 521-522). When the environment shifts towards outside the schools, then it becomes a means of harassment as opposed to being classified as bullying. The reason for this is because harassment can be charged for criminally, while bullying is not recognized as a form of crime in the public. This not to say one cannot be punished for the act of bullying, as it is punishable through juvenile detention and, depending on the degree of the bullying, jail time. The issue here is how to measure these two variants when confronted with applying the law as the majority of states have different views and rules on how their classified, but that is best saved for another paper.

Shifting our focus back to the schools, bullying can encompass many different forms that most teachers and administration never think to consider. Because of this, policy can be difficult to implement, as addressing once facet leaves open opportunity to do the other. As a result, four different aspects of bullying have been identified and serve as the basis for most anti-bullying programs and organizations. While the terms may interchange across the various programs, the general meaning remains. The four aspects are physical, verbal, social and cyber bullying, with physical .

Physical is, as it sounds, the act of physically hurting someone and can include “hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching and pushing or damaging property.” Physical bullying itself can cause both “short term and long term damage” towards the victim over the course of time. Verbal bullying is the act of using words to hurt an individual and includes “name calling, insults, teasing, intimidation, homophobic or racist remarks, or

verbal abuse” (National Centre Against Bullying). The nature of verbal bullying can “start off harmless,” but can soon “escalate to levels which start affecting the individual target” (National Centre Against Bullying).

Social and cyber bullying operate in a different way in comparison to the previous two, as direct contact with the victim is not necessary to bully them. This can be difficult for adults to identify due to the ambiguous nature these forms bullying contain. Even so, social bullying serves to “harm someone's social reputation and/or cause humiliation” and can include “lying and spreading rumors, negative facial or physical gestures, menacing or contemptuous looks, playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate, mimicking unkindly, encouraging others to socially exclude someone and damaging someone's social reputation or social acceptance” (National Centre Against Bullying). Cyber bullying has gained notoriety due to the emergence of the internet and social media over the past couple of years. The presence of social media has allowed users of all ages to project a persona of themselves online for the whole world to see. This in turn makes them targets for other individuals as there is not any sort of regulation to make the Internet a safe and easy place to browse, including hardware such as computers and smartphones, and software such as social media, instant messaging, texts, websites and other online platforms. What makes cyber bullying dangerous is that can occur at any moment. It can also be in “public or in private and sometimes only known to the target and the person bullying” (National Centre Against Bullying). While the nature of cyber bullying is still relatively new, known factors can include “abusive or hurtful texts emails, posts, images or videos, deliberately excluding others online, nasty gossip or

rumors, imitating others online or using their log-in” (National Centre Against Bullying).

While there exists variation in the types of bullying, there is also variation that lies between genders. While it’s true that both males and females can experience all forms of bullying, some studies have shown that specific aspects of bullying align with each gender. Males for example tend to exert the physical aspect of bullying, which comes as no surprise as boys tend to be more aggressive in nature with physical contact. Females on the other hand tend to follow along with the verbal aspect of bullying, attempting to use disparity socially to harass those they consider beneath them or jealous of. Although, keep in mind that both genders still exhibit all facets of bullying, but show more prominence in physical and social respectively.

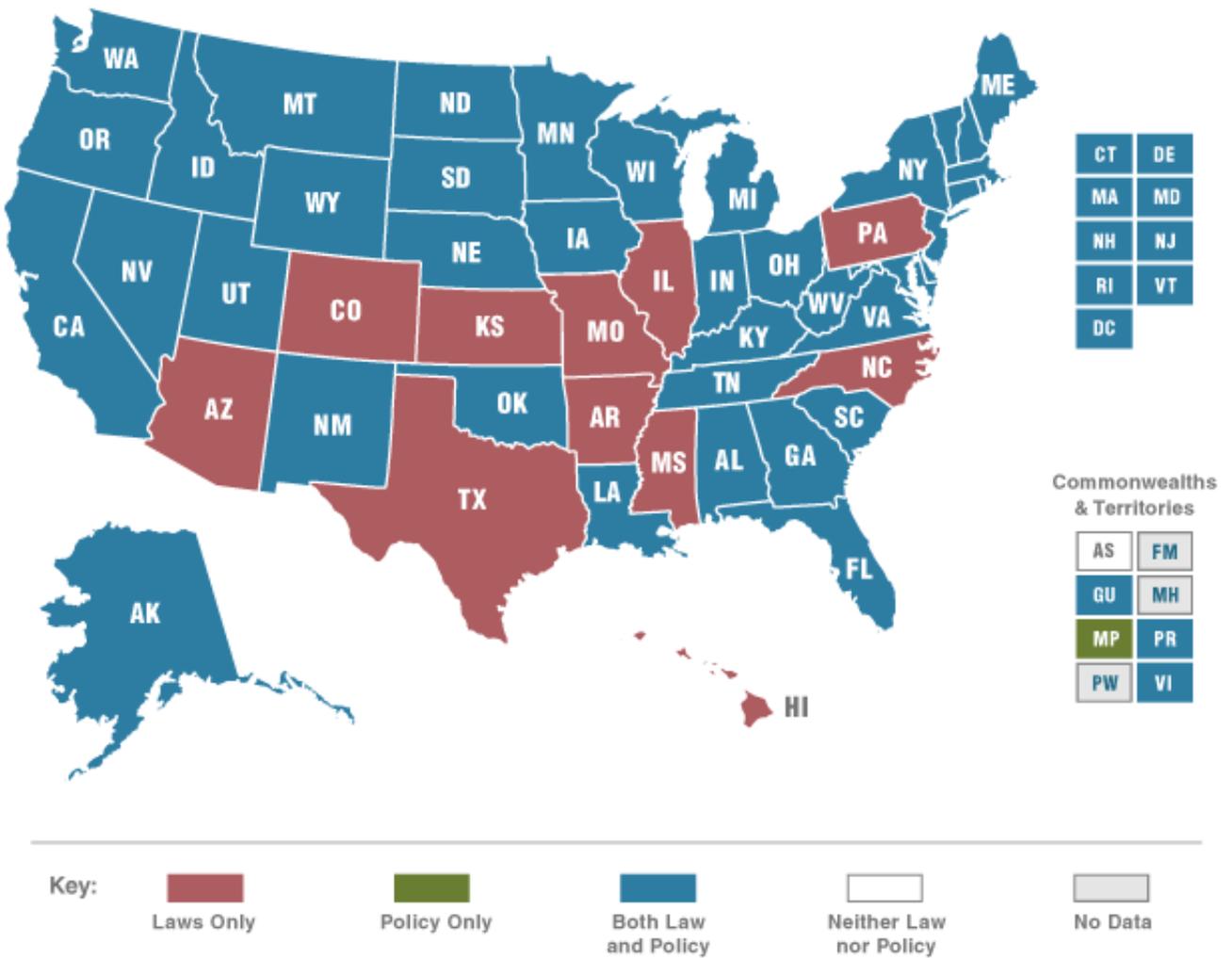
As stated earlier, the lack of a unified definition for bullying has caused confusion among boards of education when addressing the issue. What doesn’t help is the various kinds of acts people misinterpret to be bullying. For example, bullying and hazing tend to be mixed with one another. While typically done at the college level as a form of initiation for a certain group or organization, hazing occupies a different realm than bullying. For clarity, states have outlawed hazing and defined it as when a “perpetrator knowingly or recklessly organizes, promotes, facilitates or engages in any conduct that causes another person to be placed in danger of bodily injury” (Parks, Scotts, and Jones, 2015: 2-3). The difference lies in the definition, as bullying requires the offense to be “repetitive in nature.” While it is true that some forms of hazing are repetitive, the act is usually a result as an agreement by both participating parties (meaning consent), instead

of the offender preying on the weaker victim. These differences in mentality and the act itself are enough to separate bullying and hazing.

Harassment is another term often confused with bullying, and it is not difficult to see why. The act of hurting someone emotionally, physically or socially aligns with both harassment and bullying, but they are interpreted differently according to law. Currently, there is no federal law against bullying, but states are putting forth their own anti-bullying laws into effect, as shown in Table 1 (stopbullying.gov, 2015). As a result, this has caused a variation of policies and laws against bullying across all states, making it difficult to interpret collectively. Schools have taken it upon themselves to develop their own policies against bullying, in order to make up for the divided definition. What is agreed upon and understood, is when the act of bullying crosses over into harassment. While bullying usually involves a power imbalance, sometimes the reasons for preying upon the weaker victim are to discriminate them because of their race, ethnicity, religion, sex, nationality or disability. When it comes to these instances, the student's rights are violated, allowing for federal law to come in and intervene in defense of the child (NoBullying.com, 2015). This is the primary reason why most instances of bullying are never taken to court and are instead dealt with within the school's code of conduct. The responsibility of the school is to provide a safe environment for the children while the responsibility of the government is to protect their civil rights. This inherently outlines the differences between the acts of harassment and bullying.

Table 1

State Anti-Bullying Laws & Policies



Bullying is often associated with delinquency, due to them both being committed by adolescents. While this is partly true, a study presented later shows that bullying can

exist in colleges as well. Delinquency itself occupies a unique realm within the world of criminal justice, as it mainly pertains to minor crimes committed by those who are young of age. These young individuals are classified as juveniles and are associated with ages below 18, depending on the location. These crimes committed break the legal/moral standards created by society and could be seen as criminal if committed by an adult. Examples of these crimes can be theft, status offenses (such as underage drinking or smoking) or assault. Due to the age group, schools are often the medium from which delinquent behavior occurs or where multiple juveniles can gather in one venue. As a result, bullying can often be associated with only this age group and this location, when that isn't necessarily the case. As Moon et al. illustrates, "some bullying behaviors, which are related to emotional and psychological harms (i.e., isolating, intimidating, teasing, and spreading rumors), are not typically considered as delinquency" (2011: 855).

Part of the problem of bullying and attempting to differentiate it from other acts comes down to its lack of a true, unified definition among the community. Trying to solve a problem that cannot be identified is an issue in and of itself, but has not deterred researchers from trying to unravel the causes of bullying. The use of criminological theories has been helpful in understanding the nature of bullying, despite not being seen as a crime in federal law. Needless to say, significant advances have been made towards understanding this phenomenon, and the use of general strain theory has presented a unique way of revealing the causes of bullying.

GENERAL STRAIN THEORY & BULLYING

When presented with a unique social phenomenon such as bullying, it is not difficult to see the complications in determining its root causes. Plenty allude a bully's behavior to their nature or the parent's upbringing, but this would be a gross overlook of what goes into developing said nature. As a result, many researchers have conducted their own empirical studies to reveal the source and fostering of a bully's behavior. Through the use of criminological theories, such as general strain theory, researchers have been able to create studies to analyze the bully's actions pattern among their social and familial circle. It is with this information, that the understanding of a bully's behavior will broaden and become that much easier to discover the origin.

Our first study takes a look at schools in the country of South Korea, conducted Byongook Moon, Hye-Won Hwang, and John D. McCluskey. Their research analyzed 655 youths among three different schools from three different cities, using three different criminological theories, general strain theory, differential association theory, and general theory of crime, to evaluate their effectiveness in explaining school bullying. Moon et al.'s goals of this research were to illustrate its importance from three different perspectives. The first was to "serve to bridge criminology and its typical emphasis on serious misbehavior with the (arguably) more mundane but pervasive behavior of school bullying," the second to "explore the fit of general criminological theory in an international context, which is an area where criminology must expand its empirical inquiries" and lastly, to "open the door for further study of this topic" as the research will "necessarily will leave more questions, and directions for future research, than answers"

(Moon et al., 2011: 850).

One of the benefits of Moon et al.'s research is how it reflects bullying as an international concern, rather than one based on culture. Furthermore, it takes into account the different aspects of three criminological theories to ensure the audience that, like crime, bullying is interpreted in a multitude of ways. Moon et al. then goes on to explain the three theories, incorporating their relationship on the topic of bullying. Within the section of general strain theory, Moon et al. recognizes the empirical studies that support the alignment towards bullying, including several studies showing the application of certain elements of general strain theory to the bullying (2011: 855). While stating the limitations of comparing delinquency to bullying, Moon et al. pursues their study by using "two waves of an ongoing longitudinal study supported by the Korea Research Foundation Grant funded by the Korean Government," with the waves of longitudinal data being "collected at 1-year intervals from a panel of South Korean middle school students in 2005 and 2006" (2011: 855-856). Over the course of the study, the variables of "low self-control, the association with delinquent peers and the legitimacy of violence" as well as "strain and negative emotions (anger and depression)" were analyzed in their effect on bullying" (Moon et al., 2011: 858-859).

Moon et al.'s study revealed little support for differential association theory and general theory of crime, but showed modest support for general strain theory. In their findings, "two of eight GST-related variables (either in the baseline model or the final model) were significantly related to bullying," although significant strains displayed

differences (Moon et al., 2011: 868). Their results also yielded that “parental punishment and family conflicts were not significantly related to bullying,” but “teachers’ emotional and physical punishment and examination-related strain have significant effects” (Moon et al., 2011: 868). As a result, Moon et al. determined “those who experienced a high level of examination-related strain and experienced emotional and physical punishment by teachers are more likely to engage in bullying” (2011: 869). Therefore, their findings indicated, strains that originated from school had effects on bullying (Moon et al., 2011:869).

In 2012, Moon returned along with McCluskey, but brought Merry Morash to isolate a study general strain theory with bullying. This time around, Moon and company analyzed longitudinal data from 2,817 South Korean youth to see if general strain theory can be used to adequately explain bullying. Over the span of six years, Moon et al. used the data they collected to understand Korean youths’ “academic achievement, work experience, deviant behaviors, cyber-crime, fear of crime, and stressful life events,” while also giving a “nationally representative sample of Korean adolescents and their parents” (Moon et al., 2012: 834). Their findings partially supported general strain theory’s overall application to bullying in the Korean area and showed that youths who were prior victims (including bullying) and had conflicts with their parents were most likely to partake in bullying as well. The findings also show that “low self-control and association with delinquent peers” increase the prior effects as well, and even revealed that “some youths who are bullied by peers also act as bullies to protect themselves or alleviate the anger and frustration caused by being bullied” (Moon et al., 2012: 845). This in turn supports

the idea of the bully cycle, where the person being victimized ultimately becomes a bully themselves. While modest support exists for general strain theory and bullying, Moon et al. clarifies other theories “rival or complement the GST explanation.” Several factors such as “subgroup conflicts in the school setting, peer pressure to bully, students feeling disconnected from the school, and students feeling no shame at victimizing others” should be considered (Moon et al., 2012: 848).

Another study was conducted to analyze the relationship between general strain theory and bullying by Diab M. Al-Badayneh, Aref Al -Khattar, Rafe Al-Kresha, and Khawla Al-Hasan. The importance of their study was how they took a look at bullying at the collegiate level. The purpose of their study was to use general strain theory to analyze any possible gender differences in bullying and the overall bullying factor. Using Jordanian universities, a study was conducted using 25 classes, which were mandatory, from Mutah University. In this study, 1200 students were randomly drawn from the classes and about 1000 of them were given a questionnaire to complete. For clarity, in the sample “there were 424 males or 42.4%. 625 or 62.5% of the respondents were from humanitarian colleges, and around half of the sample 47% was first year level (freshman level)” (Al-Badayneh et al., 2012: 85).

Al-Badayneh et al.’s findings actually revealed a lot in common with bullying features present in different cultures. The data showed “males were more likely to be bullied and victims of face-to-face (F2F) bullying and cyber-bullying” and that “males and females tend to experience different types of strain with male strain leading to more

serious violent and property crimes” (Al-Badayneh et al., 2012: 100). The main cause of this strain on males is due to the differences in opportunities, their disposition to engage in crime and social support. Females, on the other hand, were more likely to be associated with anxiety, strain-based guilt and depression. Plus, female’s responses to strain were “more likely to reduce the likelihood of aggressive crimes and increase the likelihood of self-destructive and escapist attempts such as drug abuse” (Al-Badayneh et al., 2012: 100). Collectively, the findings showed how much strains had an effect on students’ perceptions of society. Al-Badayneh et al. asserts “at the individual level, college students have low levels of social control which increases the likelihood to respond to strains in a deviant way” (2012: 101). Consequently, these students are less prepared to deal with strains in a legal manner, due to the low levels of conventional social support. Ultimately, students’ experience, as a whole, more strain compared to other segments in their society. They feel that they are “squeezed between their aspirations and actual accomplishments, with a big gap between (Al-Badayneh et al., 2012: 101).

One final study was conducted by Justin W. Patchin and Sameer Hinduja, in order to research the effects of both traditional and non-traditional bullying on adolescents. Specifically, Patchin and Hinduja wanted to review the effects of cyberbullying on adolescents as well. The study comprised of data “from a survey distributed in the spring of 2007 to approximately 2,000 students in 30 middle schools (6th through 8th grades) in one of the largest school districts in the United States” (2011). Students were selected based on if they partook in a district-wide peer conflict class that the majority of students were required to enroll in during their middle school tenure. The general premise of this

class was to reduce the violence between youth as well as teach them “problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills,” usually through the practice of “supplemental activities such as fact sheets and educational games” (Patchin and Hinduja, 2011). The study itself was to analyze the effects this class had on student’s behavior towards one another.

The findings of Patchin and Hinduja’s research revealed that “both strain and anger/frustration were significantly related to traditional bullying” despite “controlling for the effects of gender, race, and age” (2011: 740). Going further, “youth who experienced strain or anger and frustration were more likely to bully others than those who had not experienced strain or anger/frustration” (Patchin and Hinduja, 2011: 740). The findings showed to be similar in the aspect of cyberbullying, as youth that reported strain or anger/frustration showed to be more likely to engage in cyberbullying. Interestingly enough, “age was positively related to bullying and cyberbullying,” specifically “older students were more likely to report participating in bullying and cyberbullying” (Patchin and Hinduja, 2011: 740). Considering the age group of students, the proper assertion would be bullying increases as the students progress through their middle school education. Evidently, Patchin and Hinduja claim that “there is a clear direct relationship between strain and both types of bullying (traditional and non-traditional),” and that “strain and anger/frustration have an influence on both types of bullying independent of each other” (2011: 741).

The support for general strain theory and bullying is present among multiple studies in the realm of empirical research. There may be other theories that fit better or

provide more clarity, but that's up to one's interpretation and study. While there may be some limitations in matching bullying and general strain theory component for component, the underlying premise is there. As long as researchers to call on one another to expand on their findings and studies, a solution could eventually come. Crime theories evolve just as crime does, and the effort to continue to build upon past research becomes that more important in formulating a strategy towards combatting bullying.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Developing a strategy to combat bullying can be a slippery-slope to approach. For one, despite it being a global concern, bullying still remains a case by case basis. Not all schools operate in the same way and each contain varying levels of bullying. Secondly, the lack of a unified definition for bullying makes it difficult to address the needs of a program when they cannot properly identify the problem. Lastly, attempting to create a one-fix-all solution for a phenomenon such as bullying is far from reach, as the established culture from society and school could make the strategy null in some places and successful in others. Regardless, this hasn't stopped researchers from presenting their ideas to address the issue and to call for more research in the field of study. These are just a few of their suggestions.

Moon et al.'s earlier research provided a look into the realm of bullying outside of the United States. Their study also gave key insight to the way people outside of the U.S. view education, and how much of a toll it takes on young students in a competitive nature. As such, the relationship between student and teacher, at least in Korea, remains vital in determining the level of strain on a student. In essence, teacher's relationship with students is represented as "an extension of parent-child relationship," as they spend most of the day in school together (Moon et al., 2011: 869). Obviously U.S. and Korean culture are vastly different, citing the acceptance of physical punishment or "discipline" being held to different standards. Although, Moon et al.'s study does bring forth important factors to consider, such as the "necessity of finding ways to reduce the stress students experience from competitive examinations and of nurturing a positive student-

teacher relationship” (2011: 870) Similarly, authorities within the school and teachers “need to recognize the negative consequences of excessive amount of examination-related strain and ineffective physical and emotional punishment” and should instead “find alternative disciplinary methods that do not include ineffective, and potentially damaging, emotional and physical abuse” (Moon et al., 2011: 870). This way, school authorities and teachers won’t inadvertently be the cause of strain when trying to address it.

In the subsequent years, Moon returned with others as core supporters of trying to alleviate the issue of bullying. In 2012, Moon et al. emphasized the importance parents had, as they “play a key role in deterring the bully’s behavior,” except “teachers and school authorities should recognize the victim-bully cycle” as well “in order to prevent it” (2012: 848). Providing an equal balance of support in both the school and at home will go a long way in deterring negative behaviors towards other students. If schools are lost on the way approach bullying, Moon and Jang suggest developing “programs that reduce students stress and promote positive student-teacher relationships” (2014: 2165).

Al-Badayneh et al.’s study, like the previous, shed light on the international concerns of bullying in other countries, and showed some similarity between cultures. At the same time, bullying was shown to be prevalent even at the collegiate level. Universities, like schools, provide a venue for multiple kinds of people to interact with each other, but also have the potential to foster ill will towards one another because of these differences. Highlights of gender differences also paved the way for potential isolation programs to be developed, as both males and females displayed different strains

from each other, leading to different methods of coping. Al-Badayneh et al. suggests that “preventive bullying programs are needed on university campuses, as well as in schools and in the local community” (2012: 103) In fact, “national plans are needed as well to overcome some macro level social problems such as poverty and unemployment” (Al-Badayneh et al., 2012: 103). In their mind, making changes towards society will go a long way towards alleviating their fears and placing less strain on them to achieve their aspirations in what feels like a bottleneck pathway.

Patchin and Hinduja’s work sought to understand the relationship between both traditional and non-traditional bullying in respect to general strain theory. Their analysis of the class created to help alleviate strains goes a long way in encouraging a system of evaluation for programs schools develop. With the establishment of a cycle where researchers critique different programs that were developed by empirical studies, a more unified approach can be taken towards eliminating the problem of bullying in schools. Patchin and Hinduja themselves push for schools to focus on three important implications. The first to “provide health education programming and emotional self-management skills to reduce the likelihood of significant strain resulting from interpersonal strife and conflict” (2011: 741). Taking it a step further, the culture of the school should be altered “through the use of classroom teaching modules or school wide assemblies,” in which the “educators might cover personal safety and defense; the defusement of potentially explosive interactions; stress management; the types of hostile behavior of which law enforcement should be made aware” (Patchin and Hinduja, 2011: 741). This way, “a clear reminder that absolutely no one deserves to be mistreated” can

be echoed throughout the school (2011: 741-742).

Secondly, students should be comfortable to openly approach and speak with either faculty or staff on their school campus, with the provision and of a nonthreatening and empathic environment. Within this environment, students should be able to properly vent, receive solace/emotional support, and understand why their instance of victimization occurred. This way, a psychological and mental effect occurs within the school. In Patchin and Hinduja's findings, "students who perceived their school climate to be more positive experienced less bullying and cyberbullying" (2011: 741) This, in turn, should "reduce the occurrence of, and negative outcomes stemming from, interpersonal conflicts that arise among adolescents" (Patchin and Hinduja, 2011: 741).

Lastly, strains placed on an individual make them desire to find a way to take "corrective action," and find a release. Seeing as how adolescents typically deal with strain in "maladaptive ways, such as resignation, avoidance, and hostility," it's up to the educators and other adults to "make available positive outlets at school and elsewhere to provide youth with a way to disengage from what weighs them down" (Patchin and Hinduja, 2011: 742). Either through the use of "physical or mental extracurricular activities," adolescents should be able to be free from the pressures placed on them in order to "find satisfaction and self-worth in exploring personal interests" (Patchin and Hinduja, 2011: 742).

Multiple approaches can be taken towards releasing strains from adolescents provided to them, just as there are many sources from which the strain comes from.

While it's uncertain whether or not these policy implications can make a difference for schools, the important thing to take away is that an effort is being made to understand and solve the issue. These recommendations are provided with the hope that schools and their administrators, as well as parents, will take the initiative towards eradicating bullying in these areas. Only through their contributions will they see the change they desire, if they are even aware.

CONCLUSION

General strain theory and bullying have shown to be correlated with one another due to strains and stressors placed on individuals, and have shown to expand among different cultures and age groups. The presence of such evidence encourages more studies to be conducted to further elaborate on the relationship between the two. As shown from the previously mentioned findings, future research should focus on developing effective strategies and programs to alleviate the strains placed on bullies. Furthermore, researchers should look at the multiple sources of strain in order to cease the burden placed on the individual. Lastly, considering the effects of the bully cycle (a bully is often the victim of bullying themselves), steps should be taken to trace the origin of the bully's behavior to understand them and stop the cycle from continuing.

The purpose of this thesis was not to shed light on a breakthrough discovery in the realm of bullying, nor was it to serve an obligation of completion. The purpose of this thesis was to educate others on a topic they might often glance at, but never stop to consider the causes and what solutions are available. Ideally, that is what every thesis should do to those who are willing to take a moment and read. The issues criminologists research and study will not go away just because they report their findings. It's certainly a big part of raising awareness, but it's up to the community to take action towards remedying the problem. For the researchers, their main focus is to educate the masses and put forth some suggestions to understand the phenomenon. In the end, the goal of this thesis was to present some of the available research about bullying and general strain

theory. If people can take away some sort of aspect they never thought of before or expand on the topic with their own research, then that's an added benefit towards educating.

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