ABSTRACT

FROM STANDING BY TO TAKING A STAND: THE MOTIVATION AND ABILITY TO DEFEND AGAINST BULLYING

by Holli E. Sink

An emphasis on using peer interventions to reduce bullying has led researchers to investigate effective ways of encouraging youths to take a stand against bullying. The present study investigated the roles of moral disengagement and social self-efficacy in relation to youths’ reports of victim defending behaviors in the context of physical, verbal, and relational bullying. Results indicate that both moral engagement and social self-efficacy are related to victim defending, with the combination of high moral engagement and high social self-efficacy predicting the highest levels of victim defending. Whereas youths high in moral engagement report relatively high levels of defending behaviors regardless of level of social self-efficacy, implications for youths low in social self-efficacy who attempt to intervene should be considered. Results support the importance of promoting both moral engagement and social competence to foster victim defending in schools.
FROM STANDING BY TO TAKING A STAND: THE MOTIVATION AND ABILITY TO DEFEND AGAINST BULLYING

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From Standing by to Taking a Stand: The Motivation and Ability to Defend Against Bullying

Bullying is considered to be a common and severe form of school violence, one which is associated with a myriad of negative outcomes for youths (Elinoff, Chafouleas, & Sassu, 2004). As researchers have increasingly recognized that bullying is a social process involving more participants than merely the bully and victim, they have begun focusing on the use of peer interventions to help reduce the problem (e.g., Salmivalli, 1999). Whereas studies have recently begun to uncover what causes some youths to intervene in bullying situations (e.g., Rigby & Johnson, 2006), further research is needed in order to understand better how to effectively shift youths’ behavior from providing an audience for the bullying to stopping the bullying.

First, this study will summarize literature on the consequences and the process of bullying in order to demonstrate the importance of research on victim defending. Next, previous research on victim defending and helping behaviors will be reviewed. Finally, given that motivation and ability have been shown to be related to effective actions (Bandura, 1992; Heider, 1958), this study discusses the roles that moral disengagement and social self-efficacy (as measures of motivation and ability, respectively) play in victim defending.

Bullying Types and Consequences

Bullying has been defined as “repeatedly . . . harming others . . . by physical attack or by hurting others’ feelings through words, actions, or social exclusion” (Hazler, 1996, p. 6). Research on bullying and aggression has traditionally focused on the display of direct or physical aggression toward peers (see Bjorkqvist, 1994, for a review). Whereas the perception of relational bullying may be that it is more normative and acceptable than overt bullying (Glick, Segura, & Page, 2007), research has shown that relational aggression and relational bullying (e.g., social exclusion from a group, spreading rumors, and manipulation) have been associated with deleterious effects for youths (Crick & Grottpeter, 1995; Sharp, 1995; Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield, & Karstadt, 2000). Thus, an investigation of ways to promote peer interventions across both direct and indirect forms of bullying is necessary. However, peer responses to bullying may vary depending on the type of bullying encountered. For example, a recent study found that youths were most willing to intervene in physical situations, followed
by verbal situations and then social situations and were more willing to intervene if they perceived the bullying to be serious (Haffner, McDougall, & Vaillancourt, 2007). In contrast, other findings suggest that youths are more likely to intervene in verbal bullying scenarios than in physical (Rigby & Johnson, 2006). Further investigation of youths’ responses to various types of bullying and of characteristics that promote intervening in both direct and indirect types of bullying is warranted.

Both bullying and victimization generally have been shown to be related to serious short- and long-term negative outcomes for youth (Carney & Merrell, 2001). Common among bullies are loneliness, lack of close peer relationships, social and emotional maladjustment, high risk of alcohol or drug use, and poor academic achievement (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). Children who bully are also likely to engage in later antisocial and violent behavior (Rigby, 2003). Children who are victimized are more likely to report physical and mental health problems and to have suicidal thoughts than non-victims (Rigby, 2001). Victimization has also been correlated with low self-esteem, depression, and increased anxiety (Wolke et al., 2000). Experiencing bullying during the transition into middle school in particular is associated with poor school adjustment (Nansel, Haynie, & Simons-Morton, 2003); thus, middle school youths may be especially vulnerable to these negative outcomes.

**Bullying as a Group Process**

Bullying is a social process that involves more than merely the bullies and the victims. Recently, researchers have become interested in how bystanders act as instrumental components of the bullying circle (Hazler & Denham, 2002; O’Connell, Pepler, & Craig, 1999; Salmivalli, 1999; Sutton & Smith, 1999; Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2004). Not only are bystanders negatively affected by bullying (Carney, 2000; Hazler & Denham, 2002), they are beginning to be seen as “active and involved participant[s] in the social architecture of school violence, rather than passive witness[es]” (Twemlow et al., 2004, p. 215). Bystanders may help sustain bullying by joining in, actively reinforcing, or passively accepting bullying behaviors, or, alternatively, they may help reduce bullying through intervening or defending the victims (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). Even youths who seem to be passively standing by and refraining from direct involvement in the process may, in fact, contribute to the negative effects of bullying, by increasing the sense of
humiliation and social isolation experienced by victims (Hazler & Denham, 2002). Therefore, all youths, whether they are directly involved or not, may contribute to and reinforce bullying.

Observational research also supports the idea that bullying is a group process, as studies have shown that peers are present in up to 88% of bullying episodes on school playgrounds (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). In a study of primary school children on a playground, O’Connell and colleagues (1999) found that during bullying episodes, students, on average, spent 75% of their time reinforcing bullying either by passively watching or actively modeling bullying behaviors. On the other hand, students spent only 25% of their time stepping in to help the victims. Craig, Pepler, and Atlas (2000) offer additional support for peer reinforcement of bullying, as they observed peers being present during most (85% and 79% respectively) bullying episodes both in the classroom and on the playground. This seems to indicate that bullying is a community phenomenon. Given the power of peer influence, one of the most effective interventions may be to encourage students to dissuade their peers from bullying. In fact, Sutton and Smith (1999) assert that “the strongest influence on attitudes toward bullying and bullying behavior may be children who are popular and already anti-bullying—the defenders” (p. 109). Therefore, research targeting what entices students to step in and defend victims, rather than acting in ways that are conducive to bullying, is warranted.

**Characteristics Associated with Victim Defending**

In an attempt to begin developing strategies to promote anti-bullying behavior among students, researchers have begun studying characteristics that are common among youths identified as defenders of victims. Factors such as popularity among peers (Salmivalli et al., 1996), being female (Camodeca & Goosens, 2005; Rigby & Johnson, 2006; Salmivalli, et al., 1996), holding anti-bullying attitudes (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004), and being young (e.g., in primary school compared to secondary school; Menesini, Eslea, Smith, Genta, Giannetti, et al., 1997; Rigby & Johnson, 2006) have been associated with victim defending behavior. Empathic awareness has also been related to children identified as prosocial as compared to bullies or victims (Warden & Mackinnon, 2003). In a study of the association between personality factors and bullying roles among Italian primary schoolchildren, Tani and colleagues (2003) found that defenders of bullying exhibited the highest levels of friendliness (or agreeableness) compared to all other children and exhibited lower levels of emotional instability than pro-bullies and victims. In addition, Rigby and Johnson (2006) recently
found that Australian primary and secondary school students were likely to report intentions to help victims of verbal and physical bullying if they had positive attitudes toward victims, if they believed their parents and friends expected them to intervene, and if they never or rarely bullied others in the past. Thus, preliminary research on victim defending has begun to reveal several general characteristics that are common among victim defenders.

Despite the progress that has been made toward identifying characteristics common of victim defenders, studies suggest that the majority of students fail to intervene in bullying situations, even when they report that they would like to. For instance, students’ reports of intervening have been shown to overestimate their actual observed victim defending behavior (O’Connell et al., 1999). In O’Connell and colleagues’ (1999) study, 41% of students claimed that they try to assist victims, whereas peer interventions were only observed in 25% of bullying situations. Similarly, in a recent survey of youths in southwest Ohio, 85% of students said they feel sorry for the victim or want to help when they witness bullying, however, only 40% reported actually attempting to help the victim (Elfstrom & Sink, 2006). A deeper understanding of why “most students act in ways which are prone to maintain and encourage bullying rather than diminish it, despite the fact that the attitudes of most children have been found to be against bullying” (Salmivalli, 1999, p.454) is necessary. In other words, research should assess why most youths fail to intervene, even if they disapprove of the bullying.

It has been suggested that students may be hesitant to intervene in bullying situations because of their uncertainty about how to effectively help (Craig et al., 2000; Hazler, 1996). Hazler (1996) more specifically attributes the lack of peer interventions to three general reasons: lack of awareness of what to do; the fear of themselves becoming the target of the bullies’ attacks; or the possibility of exacerbating the situation by doing the wrong thing. However, Hawkins and colleagues’ (2001) found that the majority (57%) of peer interventions were successful in stopping the bullying. Still, students only intervened in 58 out of the 306 bullying episodes, indicating that students remain reluctant to intervene, even if they may, in fact, be successful at intervening. Therefore, peer interventions may indeed be successful at reducing bullying, but finding ways to encourage them to begin attempting to intervene is essential.
The Effective Personal Force Model

In order to encourage more students to act against bullying, it is necessary to understand more specifically the motivations and psychological processes that underlie these prosocial behaviors. One framework that may shed light on the processes that underlie helping behaviors in bullying situations is Heider’s (1958) model of effective personal force, which postulates that two factors contribute to a person’s effectiveness in actions—motivation and power/ability. Heider (1958) describes motivation as comprising one’s intentions and power as consisting of both mental and physical abilities in addition to attitudes of self-confidence, asserting that “when a person’s self-confidence is destroyed, his [sic] abilities may also be” (p. 94). A combination of these two factors is necessary in order to achieve a goal. Namely, if an individual possesses the ability but lacks the motivation, progress toward an end goal will not be made. Heider emphasizes the distinction between a person’s power factor (the concept of “can” or ability) and the motivational factor, describing them as “significantly different in the affairs of everyday life” (p.83).

Social psychological studies on helping behaviors have supported the notion that intentions to help and ability to help are distinct concepts (Shotland & Heinold, 1985) and that effective help-giving depends on the combination of both motivation and ability (Clary & Orenstein, 1991). In applying Heider’s model to a study of adults’ helping behaviors in a crisis-counseling volunteer situation, Clary and Orenstein (1991) found that motivation and abilities were related to the amount and effectiveness of help (respectively). Accordingly, helping behaviors in bullying situations would likely stem from the combination of the motivation and the ability to stop the bullying.

Application of the Effective Personal Force Model to Victim Defending

Moral disengagement. In bullying situations, the motivation to intervene may be associated with the extent to which one perceives the wrongfulness of the bullying act to be, which is termed moral engagement (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli, 1996a). That is, the more morally engaged a youth is, the more motivation he/she may have to defend against bullying. Bandura and colleagues (1996a) discuss the link between moral standards and actions, asserting that moral “standards serve as guides and deterrents for action” (p. 364). In other words, individuals act in ways that are in line with their moral standards and avoid acting in ways that violate their standards, in order to maintain a sense of self-respect.
(Bandura et al., 1996a). Under this assumption, people perform potentially harmful acts only if they have justified them in some way to themselves. Through the process of moral justification or moral disengagement, people are able to engage in detrimental acts without feeling the need for self-condemnation. That is to say, “people have little reason to be troubled by guilt or to feel any need to make amends for inhumane conduct if they reconstrue it as serving worthy purposes or if they disown personal agency for it” (Bandura et al., 1996a, p. 366).

Bandura (1996a) describes various mechanisms through which individuals are able to disengage from their moral principles. These mechanisms involve reconstructing one’s view of harmful conduct into acceptable conduct, minimizing one’s responsibility in the harmful consequences of his/her actions, distorting the consequences of harmful actions, or through dehumanizing or attributing blame to victims. For example, using euphemistic language (e.g., labeling shoving someone as “joking” rather than as an “aggressive” act) can make aggressive behavior seem more acceptable, leading to a lack of inhibition for such acts. Displacement of responsibility, through which people attribute their actions to social pressures or to the authority of others (e.g., “Kids shouldn’t get in trouble for misbehaving if their friends pressured them to do it”), serves as another method of moral disengagement by relieving perpetrators of personal responsibility of the harmful effects of their actions.

Bandura and colleagues’ (1996a) study supported this theory, showing that children who were higher in moral disengagement were more likely to aggress interpersonally, to feel less guilt for harmful conduct, and to engage in more delinquent behavior than children who were morally engaged. Other studies have shown that moral disengagement is related to aggressive behavior (e.g., Diener, Dineen, Endresen, Beaman, & Fraser, 1975; Yadava, Sharma, & Gandhi, 2001) and to bullying in particular (Ando, Asakura, & Simons-Morton, 2005; Gini, 2006; Menesini, Sanchez, Fonzi, Ortega, et al., 2003) in children. Studies have also indicated that moral engagement varies depending on the roles that children take in the bullying circle (Menesini, Sanchez et al., 2003). When asked to imagine themselves in the role of bully in a bullying situation, children who were identified as bullies attributed more moral disengagement emotions (indifference and pride) and motives (egocentrism) to the bullying act than children who were identified as victims or outsiders (Menesini, Sanchez et al., 2003).
Whereas moral *disengagement* has been consistently linked to aggressive behavior, moral *engagement* has been linked to prosocial behavior (Bandura et al., 1996a; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli, 1996b). When individuals acknowledge that hurtful behavior is indeed harmful and refrain from viewing hurtful behavior in a euphemistic light, they are less likely to engage in the hurtful behavior. Maintaining a standard of self-regulation against harmful acts is likely to lead to prosocial behavior. Thus, moral engagement may be a key factor in motivating youths to defend victims against bullying. Upholding the notion that bullying is wrong and not discounting the severity of this behavior seems like a necessary constituent of the motivation to intervene in bullying situations. A recent study supports this idea, showing that children identified as victim defenders exhibited the least amount of moral disengagement compared to all other roles in the bullying circle (Gini, 2006). In fact, Gini (2006) points out that moral engagement “may be one of the basic motivations for prosocial behavior, frequently shown by these children towards their victimized mates” (p. 537). Other researchers have also acknowledged the importance of this factor, suggesting that the teaching of moral values to children in schools should be a priority in attempting to reduce aggression (Rigby, 1996; Sutton & Smith, 1999). However, Gini (2006) calls attention to the need to consider youths’ *abilities* to help other peers in addition to this motivational factor, suggesting that “interpersonal competencies that young children do not necessarily possess” be addressed (p. 537). Therefore, while moral disengagement may relate to one’s motivation to defend victims, one’s ability in doing so should also be addressed.

**Social self-efficacy.** Whereas moral engagement may explain the motivation to intervene, it does not explain one’s power or ability to intervene in bullying situations. Youths’ perceptions of their *power* to intervene in bullying situations may be associated with how able they are to navigate social conflicts and their confidence in doing so (i.e., perceived social self-efficacy). Bandura’s self-efficacy theory asserts that self-efficacy plays a central role in one’s “exercise of personal agency” and revolves around the idea that “unless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act” (Bandura et al., 1996b, p. 1206).

The relation between one’s beliefs in one’s abilities to act and one’s accomplishment of those actions has been well documented across various types of performance, indicating
that high self-efficacy (whether produced by successes in prior experiences or vicariously) is related to successful performance (see Bandura, 1992, for a review). Studies have shown that individuals’ perceived self-efficacy better predict their performance on tasks than their actual abilities (Bandura, 1992). For example, children who had the same mathematical ability varied in their performance on math problems as a function of their levels of self-efficacy regarding math (Collins, 1982 in Bandura, 1992). That is, those who regarded themselves as efficacious performed better than others of similar ability levels who had low self-efficacy when given difficult math problems to solve. In addition, receiving even fabricated positive feedback on their abilities mediates the relationship between people’s motivation and performance on tasks (Bandura, 1992). For example, perceived self-efficacy mediated individuals’ performance on a physical endurance task (Weinburg, Gould, & Jackson, 1979). When high self-efficacy was induced, as compared to low self-efficacy, participants showed more physical endurance on a competitive task and more persistence, clearly demonstrating the influence of self-efficacy beliefs on performance. Therefore, self-efficacy is highly related to one’s ability to perform successfully and serves as an indication of whether or not one will achieve particular tasks.

Perceived self-efficacy has been shown to influence individuals’ actions in helping situations as well. In regards to help-giving, Schwarzer, Dunkel-Schetter, Weiner, & Woo (1992) found evidence to support the idea that “the motivation to help is affected by the belief that one can be effective as a helper (self-efficacy expectancy)” (p. 65). In this study, self-efficacy expectancy (measured by self-report items such as “it is easy for me to comfort someone in distress”) significantly contributed to college students’ intentions to support a rape victim. The perceived competence of potential helpers has been highlighted in the social psychology literature, and results from multiple studies have confirmed that perceived competence (either based on real abilities or induced by false-feedback) leads to more help-giving or quicker helping responses (Midlarksy, 1971; Shotland & Heinold, 1985). Given that self-efficacy is related to help-giving, it is also likely related, more specifically, to helping victims in bullying situations.

Researchers in the field of bullying have acknowledged the importance of confidence and courage for youth to intervene in bullying situations (Salmivalli, 1999). In studies of bullying, youths’ reports of their own social self-efficacy have been shown to be negatively
correlated with physical, verbal, and indirect bullying (Ando et al., 2005). Other types of self-efficacy (e.g., for assertion, for aggression, and for intervening) have also been found to be related to bullying and victimization (Andreou, Vlachou, & Didaskalou, 2005). For example, high self-efficacy for assertion and for intervening in bullying situations was related negatively to victimization for boys and girls respectively (Andreou et al., 2005). Conversely, it has been predicted that perceived self-efficacy would predict children’s intention to intervene in bullying situations (Andreou & Metallidou, 2004; Ribgy & Johnson, 2006). Andreou and Metallidou (2004) found that self-efficacy for asserting one’s self was related to defending behaviors in girls, but not for boys. In Rigby and Johnson’s (2006) study, perceived self-efficacy failed to significantly contribute to children’s reported intentions to intervene; however, the authors suggest that perhaps the global measure they used was too broad and that a more specific measure (e.g., perceived empathic self-efficacy) may better predict defending behavior. Given the social process that bullying entails, it seems likely that perceived self-efficacy in navigating social situations in particular would influence children’s likelihood to intervene.

The Current Study

A review of the literature suggests that moral engagement may serve as a key motivating factor for prosocial behavior (Bandura et al., 1996a; Gini, 2006), whereas disengagement from moral standards is related to aggression and bullying behaviors (Ando, et al., 2005; Gini, 2006; Menesini, Sanchez et al., 2003). Research has also highlighted the role that perceived self-efficacy plays in relation to help-giving behaviors (Schwarzer et al., 1992), and has recently expanded this concept to intervening behaviors in bullying situations (Rigby & Johnson, 2006). However, the current literature has not attended to the relations among moral disengagement, perceived self-efficacy related to interpersonal situations (e.g., social self-efficacy), and victim defending behaviors.

Hypotheses

Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which moral engagement and social self-efficacy are associated with victim defending behaviors. Based on the theory of effective personal force and previous research on helping and bullying behaviors, it is hypothesized that moral engagement and social self-efficacy will predict high levels of reported defending behaviors among middle school youths. More specifically, social self-
efficacy is expected to moderate the relationship between moral engagement and defending behavior. That is, moral engagement may inspire the motivation to intervene, whereas being confident in one’s social skills may influence the likelihood of choosing to intervene. In other words, having a high level of moral engagement may not be enough for youths to act. Rather the level of moral engagement in combination with the degree of social self-efficacy will better predict youths’ defending behaviors. Findings may lead to a better understanding of why some youths decide to intervene in bullying situations, which may eventually lead to improved strategies for promoting anti-bullying behaviors in schools.

Method

**Sample 1**

*Participants.* Participants included 268 fifth through eighth grade students from two elementary and one middle school in southwestern Ohio. Data from fourteen subjects were removed from the analyses because reports of moral disengagement and social self-efficacy were missing. Thus, data from 254 participants was analyzed. Approximately 52% were girls, and 48% were boys. District data indicated that of the students in that district 78.5% were white, 14.6% were African American, 4.3% were multi-racial, and 1.5% were Hispanic. Approximately 50% of students in were economically disadvantaged with approximately $25,000 being the median household income of the district.

*Procedure.* Data from three schools implementing the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP; Olweus, 1993) were collected as part of their engagement in this program, which they began approximately two years prior to data collection. Use of the archival data for this project was exempt from approval by the Miami University IRB. In accordance with the district policies for the three schools involved in the OBPP, passive consent was employed. Students were asked to complete the questionnaire during the school day in a classroom. Following the typical Olweus (1996) Bully/Victim Questionnaire (BVQ), students were asked to answer questions regarding victim defending, moral disengagement, and social self-efficacy. Questionnaires were administered in classrooms of approximately 10-20 students. Teachers briefly explained the purpose of the survey—“to gather information from the students about bullying and some other conditions at the school in order to make the school environment as good and as safe as possible.” Before beginning the questionnaire, teachers advised students to refrain from putting identifying information on
the surveys (e.g., names), and informed students that their answers would be anonymous. Teachers were instructed to allow students to skip answers and to respect students’ privacy by not walking around the room or looking at students’ answers. In order to assure students understood questions about “bullying,” students were read the following definition prior to answering questions:

We say a student is being bullied when another student, or several other students, say mean and hurtful things or make fun of him or her or call him or her mean and hurtful names, completely ignore or exclude him or her from their group of friends or leave him or her out of things on purpose, hit, kick, push, shove around, or lock him or her inside a room, tell lies or spread false rumors about him or her, or send mean notes and try to make other students dislike him or her, and other hurtful things like that. When we talk about bullying, these things happen repeatedly, and it is difficult for the student being bullied to defend himself or herself. We also call it bullying, when a student is teased repeatedly in a mean and hurtful way. But we don't call it bullying when the teasing is done in a friendly and playful way. Also, it is not bullying when two students of about equal strength or power argue or fight.

The entire survey took approximately 45 minutes to complete. Upon completion, teachers collected the surveys and placed them in a sealed envelope.

**Sample 2**

*Participants.* Participants included 50 seventh and eighth grade students from a middle school in southwestern Ohio. Data from 4 subjects were removed for the analyses because reports of moral disengagement and social self-efficacy were missing. Thus, data from 46 participants was analyzed. Approximately 61% were girls, and 39% were boys. Of the participants, 95.7% were white and 4.3% were African American. Approximately 50% of students were economically disadvantaged with approximately $25,000 being the median household income of the district.

*Procedure.* Data from one middle school not involved in the Olweus program were collected via individual interviews as part of a research study. Data from this school was collected via individual interviews, which were approved by the Miami University IRB. Once permission to conduct the study was obtained from school administrators, informed consent forms were sent home with all students in classrooms whose teachers consented to
participate. Parents or guardians (hereinafter referred to as parents) were asked to return the forms to the school, indicating whether or not they permitted their child to participate in the study. The purpose and procedure of the study along with assurance of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study (i.e., no negative consequences for not participating) were made explicit in the consent forms. Parents were informed that their child would receive a gift card for a free video rental as a reward for participating.

Once parental consent was obtained, trained research assistants (RAs) asked for children’s assent. At the beginning of the individual interviews, RAs explained the assent process, including confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study to the participants.

For children who assented to participate, trained RAs administered a battery of questionnaires, including those on victim defending, moral disengagement, and social self-efficacy. A definition of bullying (see above) was read to students before they were asked to respond to the questionnaire. Individual interviews were conducted in a private space in the school building during non-academic class periods. Participants completed the questionnaires over two separate interview sessions (approximately 1 week apart). Each session took approximately 25 minutes. In order to respect privacy and decrease the likelihood of socially desirable answers, participants were asked to record their responses on their own questionnaires, as RAs read each question aloud.

**Measures**

*Defending behavior.* The dependent variable was derived from questions assessing victim defending behaviors modified from the Olweus BVQ (1996) and were influenced by those used in the Rigby and Johnson (2006) study. The BVQ includes the question, “How do you usually react if you see or understand that a student your age is being bullied by other students?” Students are asked to choose from among 6 response options: 1) not noticing the bullying; 2) taking part in the bullying; 3) not doing anything, but thinking the bullying is OK; 4) watching the bullying; 5) not doing anything, but thinking they should help the victim; or 6) trying to help the victim in some way. In the current study, this defending question was expanded into three separate questions pertaining to physical bullying (“What do you usually do if a student your age is being kicked, pushed and shoved around?”), verbal bullying (“What do you usually do if a student your age is being called mean names, made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way?”), and relational bullying (What do you usually do if a
student your age is being ignored, left out of things, or people are spreading rumors about them so that no one will like them?”).

*Moral Disengagement.* A subset of items from the Moral Disengagement Scale (Bandura et al., 1996a), as adapted by Ando and colleagues (2005), was used to assess youths’ moral disengagement. Three items that were used in Ando and colleagues’s (2005) study were excluded from this study due to inappropriateness or irrelevance to this sample (e.g., “Damaging some property is no big deal when you consider that others are bullying”). Thus, 10 items were used to assess children’s readiness to disengage morally in different situations by displacing responsibility and engaging in euphemistic thinking (see Appendix A). Sample items include “Slapping and shoving someone is just a way of joking” and “Kids shouldn’t get in trouble for misbehaving if their friends pressured them to do it.” Children were asked to rate how much they agreed with each statement on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 *(disagree)* to 5 *(agree)*. This measure has been used with youths aged 10-15 years and internal consistencies have shown to be acceptable (Ando et al., 2005; Bandura et al., 1996a, 1996b). For this sample, the internal consistency of this scale was acceptable (Cronbach’s Alpha = .78).

*Social Self Efficacy.* Perceived social self-efficacy was measured via a self-report measure that assesses children’s beliefs in their abilities to maintain relationships and navigate interpersonal conflicts successfully (Bandura et al., 1996b). A subset of 8 items from Bandura et al.’s (1996b) study was utilized (see Appendix B). Sample items include: “If my friend and I have a problem, I can talk with him/her to solve it” and “I can work with other kids even if they are difficult to get along with.” Children were asked to rate how sure they felt about each statement on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 *(definitely not)* to 5 *(definitely yes)*. This measure has been used with youths aged 11-15 years, and internal reliabilities have shown to be acceptable (Ando et al., 2005; Bandura, 1996b). The internal consistency for this sample was acceptable (Cronbach’s Alpha = .82).

**Results**

*Missing Data Procedures*

*Sample 1.* The moral disengagement and social self-efficacy variables were computed by summing each item from each respective scale. Eight participants left one item missing on the moral disengagement scale, and seven participants left one item missing on
the social self-efficacy scale. To account for missing values in summing each variable across participants, the average of the remaining items for each scale was used to replace each respective missing value before summing each variable.

**Sample 2.** Participants in Study 2 left no blank items on either the moral disengagement scale or the social self-efficacy scale. Thus, no data were replaced for these participants.

**Combined Data Set**

A series of independent sample t-tests indicated that there were no significant mean differences between data from Study 1 and Study 2 across each type of victim defending, moral disengagement, and social self-efficacy, all $p > .10$. Therefore, data from the two studies were combined for the remainder of the analyses.

First, data from participants who indicated that they had never noticed a student being bullied were removed from the analyses involving victim defending. Thus, analyses that include victim defending questions (i.e., participants’ reported responses to seeing physical, verbal, and relational bullying) include only responses from those participants who acknowledged experiencing bullying situations. Means, standard deviations, ranges, skewness, and kurtosis for each dependent and independent measure are provided in Table 1. Analysis of the skewness and kurtosis indicated that no transformation of the data was necessary.

**Frequency of Responses to Bullying**

Table 2 provides participants’ reports of how they respond when encountering physical, verbal, and relational bullying situations. Between approximately 14 and 20% of participants reported not noticing that bullying had occurred, with physical bullying being the least noticed and verbal bullying being the most noticed. Only approximately 2-3% reported taking part in the bullying, whereas approximately 10% said they would watch the bullying. Between 18 and 28% expressed that they think they ought to help the victim but fail to take any action. Thus, across each type of bullying, at least approximately one-third of participants reported some type of behavior that may contribute to the bullying by taking part in or providing an audience for the bullying. On the other hand, approximately half of the participants reported that they would try to help the victim in some way in relational bullying situations, while almost half would attempt to help in physical or verbal bullying situations.
Correlations among Study Variables

To examine the relationships among the independent and dependent variables and the moderator, ten bivariate correlations were conducted, all of which were found to be significant at the p < .01 level (see Table 3). In particular, all three types of victim defending were positively correlated. As predicted, social self-efficacy was positively correlated with all three types of defending behavior, and moral disengagement was negatively associated with each type of victim defending behavior. Moral disengagement and social self-efficacy were negatively correlated with each other.

Mean Differences

To examine mean differences across sex, grade, and school for each variable, independent sample t-tests and one-way between subjects ANOVAs were conducted. Mean differences between males and females among the five dependent and independent variables are presented in Table 4. Across all three types of bullying, females on average reported higher rates of defending behavior than did males. In addition, males reported higher rates of moral disengagement when compared to females.

To assess whether varied data collection procedures and school settings affected students’ responses, mean differences across the four schools were assessed for each variable. Results of a one-way between subjects ANOVA revealed significant differences among schools on moral disengagement, $F(3, 294) = 3.75$, $p < .05$. Post-hoc analyses (Tukey’s honestly significant difference (HSD) test) indicated that participants from one junior high school reported higher rates of moral disengagement ($M = 24.50$) than participants from an elementary school in the same district ($M = 20.96$), $p < .05$. Both of these schools participated in the classroom data collection procedure. Mean scores from the school that participated in the individual interviews did not differ significantly from those of any other participating schools on any of the study measures. No other significant mean differences between schools were found, all $ps > .10$.

Results of a one-way between subjects ANOVA indicated significant differences among grade levels for moral disengagement, $F(3, 294) = 3.48$, $p < .05$. Post-hoc analyses (Tukey’s HSD test) indicated that sixth graders reported lower rates of moral disengagement ($M = 21.04$) than eighth graders ($M = 24.77$), $p < .05$. That is, sixth graders reported being more morally engaged when compared to eighth graders. However, fifth graders’ ($M =
21.71) and seventh graders’ \( M = 22.80 \) reports of moral disengagement did not differ significantly from any of other grade levels, \( ps > .05 \). No other significant mean differences between grade levels were found, all \( ps > .10 \).

To assess for differences in participants’ reports of defending across different types of bullying, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. Results revealed no significant differences in participants’ responses to the three different types of bullying, \( F (1, 225) = .27, p > .10 \).

**Regression Analyses**

To test the hypothesis that social self-efficacy moderates the relationship between moral disengagement and victim defending, a series of hierarchical regression analyses were conducted for each type of defending behavior (physical, verbal, and relational) following Aiken and West’s (1991) recommendations. Both moral disengagement and social self-efficacy scores were centered prior to regression analyses.

Three individual hierarchical regressions were conducted, one for each type of bullying, with school, grade, and sex entered as covariates on the first step and each independent variable (moral disengagement and social self-efficacy) entered on the second step. The term representing the two-way interaction of the independent variables was entered on the third step. Results indicated that the best-fitting model included both independent variables and their interaction term for the prediction of defending in physical, verbal, and relational bullying situations, \( F (1, 228) = 18.56, p < .01 \); \( F (1, 245) = 21.75, p < .01 \); \( F (1, 240) = 19.05, p < .01 \), respectively. As shown in Table 5, steps two and three of each regression model accounted for significantly more variance than the respective prior model.

After controlling for covariates, the effect of moral disengagement, social-self-efficacy, and their interaction significantly contributed to the regression equation (see Table 5). Results indicated that sex was the only covariate that significantly predicted defending in physical, verbal, and relational bullying (\( \beta = -.27; \beta = -.31; \beta = -.52 \), respectively; all \( ps < .05 \)), indicating that girls are more likely to report defending than boys. For physical and verbal defending, sex was no longer significant after adding moral disengagement and social self-efficacy in the second step of the model, \( ps > .10 \). As shown in Table 6, the main effect of sex remained significant in the final model for relational bullying; however, a three-way interaction (moral disengagement, social self-efficacy, and sex) entered on the fourth step
yielded no significant change in variance accounted for, $F$-change $= 2.71$, $p > .10$, indicating that the moderational effect was not further moderated by gender. Thus, whereas there was a main effect of sex such that girls were more likely to report defending against relational bullying than were boys, the two-way interaction of moral disengagement and social self-efficacy remained significant when controlling for sex. As shown in Table 6, no other covariates were significant in the final regression models.

Examination of the beta weights for each regression revealed that, as expected, moral disengagement was significantly negatively associated with higher reports of defending behavior across all three types of bullying. Also, as predicted, social self-efficacy was positively related to defending behavior across each type of bullying (see Table 6). As the graphs in Figures 1, 2, and 3 show, social self-efficacy moderated the relationship between moral disengagement and defending behavior for each type of bullying. More specifically, as moral disengagement increased, the relationship between defending and the level of social self-efficacy became more varied. At high levels of moral disengagement, higher levels of social self-efficacy predicted higher levels of reported defending, compared to lower levels of social self-efficacy. On the other hand, at low levels of moral disengagement, all levels of social self-efficacy predicted relatively high levels of defending behaviors. That is, when participants reported being extremely morally engaged, they reported high defending behaviors regardless of their levels of social self-efficacy. This seems to be saying the opposite of the hypothesis that high social self-efficacy (in addition to moral engagement) is necessary for youths to intervene; in fact, youths who are highly morally engaged may be enticed to intervene, even if they lack confidence in navigating social situations.

Discussion

It was hypothesized that social self-efficacy and moral disengagement would predict victim defending in various types of bullying situations (physical, verbal, and relational). More specifically, it was predicted that social self-efficacy would moderate the relationship between moral disengagement and defending in that the combination of low moral disengagement and high social self-efficacy would predict the highest level of defending. Results supported these hypotheses and indicated that both social self-efficacy and moral disengagement were significantly related to victim defending behaviors for each type of bullying. As expected, the combination of high social self-efficacy and low moral
disengagement predicted the highest levels of victim defending. However, the nature of the moderation was different than expected. Extremely high moral engagers reported relatively high defending behaviors, regardless of level of social self-efficacy. In contrast, at high levels of moral disengagement, levels of social self-efficacy played a greater role in predicting victim defending than at lower levels of moral disengagement. This suggests that high social self-efficacy may entice some youths to intervene, even if they are highly morally disengaged. Possible reasons for and implications of these results are discussed below.

**Differences Associated with Bullying Type**

The positive correlations among all types of victim defending indicate that students who report victim defending behavior when confronted with one type of bullying (e.g., physical) are likely to also report defending behavior in other types of bullying situations (e.g., verbal or relational). These findings are in line with Rigby and Johnson’s (2006) study that found that youths’ intentions to intervene in verbal and physical bullying situations were significantly positively related.

In addition, in the present study, no significant differences in intervening across different types of bullying emerged, which counters several recent studies that indicate that youths may intervene more frequently in certain types of bullying situations than others (Haffner et al., 2007; Rigby & Johnson, 2006). However, previous studies have revealed mixed results regarding the types of bullying in which youths more frequently intervene (Haffner et al., 2007; Rigby & Johnson, 2006). A limitation of the present study is the positive response tendency associated with youths’ self-reporting their reactions to each type of bullying. Thus, future studies may be enhanced by employing measures that use other informants (e.g., peers, teachers) or observational data to clarify if variations exist in the frequency of victim defending behavior across types of bullying. Given that the perceived seriousness of various types of bullying (Haffner et al., 2007) and potential repercussions associated with intervening in different scenarios may influence youths’ likelihood of intervening, defending behaviors across different types of bullying should continue to be addressed in future research.

**Moral Disengagement**

The expected negative correlation between moral disengagement and each type of victim defending behavior suggests that as students’ moral disengagement increases their
likelihood of defending decreases. In other words, the more morally engaged students are, the more likely they are to defend victims in bullying situations. These findings are in line with previous research linking moral engagement and prosocial behavior (Bandura et al., 1996a; 1996b). In addition, children identified as victim defenders have been shown to exhibit the least amount of moral disengagement compared to other roles in the bullying circle (Gini, 2006). When students maintain the idea that bullying is wrong and do not minimize or distort the serious harm that can result from these aggressive acts, they are more likely to try to help victims, rather than joining in, ignoring, or standing by.

Therefore, it is important for schools to encourage moral engagement, especially around bullying issues, among students. One method that may be effective is to educate youths and raise their awareness of bullying, its consequences, and the group process of bullying (O’Connell et al., 1999; Orpinas & Horne, 2006; Salmivalli, 1999). If students realize that they may be contributing to bullying, even if not directly, they will be less likely to displace or minimize their responsibility in stopping the bullying. In addition, explicitly identifying what bullying behaviors are and their consequences may prevent students from distorting the consequences of or thinking euphemistically about bullying (e.g., slapping is a way of joking).

However, it is unlikely that implementing interventions for students will be successful, unless a positive school climate is being promoted in tandem (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). School climate takes into account not only the physical environment of the school, but also the subjective aspects (e.g., interactions of the members in the school community), and a positive school climate is related to positive youth development (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). Creating a sense of community and caring among students, by establishing clear expectations of behaviors, holding regular group discussions, and promoting school wide team-building activities, may prevent students from dehumanizing or attributing blame to the victims. Once students feel a sense of connectedness to other students, they will be less likely to accept or justify transgressions towards their fellow students, and in turn, be more likely to stand up for them in bullying situations.

A limitation in the present study is the potential for social desirable responses to both the moral disengagement and defending questions. In addition there is a positive response tendency across the two self-report measures, thus youths who report victim defending
behaviors are also likely to report that transgressions towards others are unjustifiable. To confirm the current results, future studies should employ other methods of assessing youths’ responses to bullying (e.g., observation, teacher or peer report).

Social Self-efficacy

As predicted, social self-efficacy was positively correlated with all three types of defending behavior, suggesting that students high in social self-efficacy are likely to try to help victims in bullying situations. This finding is consistent with social psychological studies indicating that self-efficacy or perceived competence is related to supporting or helping victims (Midlarksy, 1971; Schwarzer et al., 1992; Shotland & Heinold, 1985). In addition, previous research on bullying has revealed similar findings. Ando and colleagues (2005) found that social self-efficacy was negatively associated with physical, verbal, and indirect bullying. Conversely, the present study suggests that social self-efficacy is positively related to defending in each type of bullying situation.

As previously mentioned, Rigby and Johnson (2006) used a global measure of self-efficacy and failed to predict defending behavior; thus, they suggested using a more specific measure. The findings from the present study suggest that social self-efficacy may indeed be more specifically related to intervening in bullying situations than a global measure of self-efficacy. If youths are confident in their abilities to navigate social situations, they are more likely to believe that they can successfully intervene in situations like bullying. On the other hand, uncertainty about being able to produce desired outcomes result in “little incentive to act” (Bandura et al., 1996b, p.1206). That is, unless youths have the confidence that they are able to help victims, they are not likely to attempt to intervene.

Therefore, it is important for schools to promote students’ skills in navigating interpersonal relationships. Orpinas and Horne (2006) suggest that cultivating social skills, problem-solving skills, and emotion identification and regulation skills are all likely to enhance youths’ skills in interacting with others. In addition, having students engage in activities that promote teamwork toward a shared goal would allow students to practice their interpersonal skills while working cooperatively with one another. Group discussions around problem-solving in social situations foster students’ learning of the process of positive decision-making in social situations (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). Moreover, employing role-
plays of how to effectively intervene in bullying situations would increase students’ confidence in doing so when they are encounter bullying (Salmivalli, 1999).

Again, enhancing students’ social skills should be done within the context of developing a positive school climate (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). Fostering a caring and cooperative school environment is conducive to developing positive relationships and forming friendships. As youths become successful at forming friendships, they likely are concurrently becoming more confident in their interpersonal skills. Thus, enhancing interpersonal skills and promoting a positive school environment seem to go hand-in-hand. In fact, Ando and colleagues (2005) have suggested that skills training in social interactions increases youths’ positive attitudes toward school and promotes school bonding.

*Moral Disengagement and Social Self-efficacy*

The negative correlation between moral disengagement and social self-efficacy indicates that as youths decrease in moral disengagement, their social self-efficacy increases. In other words, youths who are morally engaged also tend to exhibit high levels of social self-efficacy, which is consistent with previous research findings (Ando et al., 2005). Bandura and colleagues (1996a) argued that moral disengagement is related to prosocial behavior, in that those who are morally disengaged are less prosocially oriented and are likely to be rejected by peers. The negative peer interactions that likely result for those who are morally disengaged and rejected peers are likely related to one’s confidence in navigating social situations. Thus, there may be a cyclical nature between moral disengagement and social self-efficacy in that as youths disengage morally, they commit more injurious acts which lead to poor peer interactions and, in turn, decreased confidence in social situations. However, the direction of this relationship is unclear, as a low social self-efficacy may also lead to poor peer interactions, which consequently may foster an attitude that is conducive to moral disengagement.

*Contextual Factors: Sex, School, and Grade*

*Sex.* The finding that females report higher rates of defending behavior across each type of bullying situation is consistent with some previous research, as girls have been identified as victim defenders more often than boys both by their peers (Camodeca & Goosens, 2005; Goosens, Olthof, & Dekker, 2006; Menesini, Codecasa, Benelli, & Cowie, 2003; Salmivalli et al., 1996; 1998) and by teacher report (Arnzen Moedell, Vanderzee, Sink,
Volz, & Kerig, 2007). However, inconsistent results have emerged from other studies. For example, Menesini and colleagues (1997) found no difference in self-reported intervening between boys and girls. On the other hand, Hawkins and colleagues’s (2001) observational study suggested that boys intervened more frequently overall than girls; however, boys were also more often involved in bullying situations, both as perpetrators and victims. The investigators also discovered that girls and boys were more likely to intervene when the bullying episodes involved youths of their respective sex. Thus, there were no sex differences in the likelihood of intervening when the bullying involved same-sex peers. Interestingly, several other studies have suggested that sex differences in defending are moderated by age. In O’Connell and colleagues’s (1999) observational study, younger (grades 1-3) and older (grades 4-6) girls were more likely to intervene than older boys. Additionally, one self-report study has suggested that young girls (primary school students) are more likely to intervene than young boys (Rigby & Johnson, 2006). The context in which the bullying takes place also may contribute to sex differences. An observational study of bullying on the playground and in the classroom found that males appropriately intervened more frequently on the playground than in the classroom, whereas for girls, the opposite effect was found (Craig et al., 2000).

However, as noted, the previous research on sex differences has been inconsistent. One explanation for this may be the fact that measures used have been widely discrepant (e.g., self-report vs. observation) as has been the attention given to the context in which intervening takes place (e.g., gender of the victim or location of the bullying). Therefore, future research will be enhanced by employing multiple measurements of defending behaviors and by addressing various contextual variables associated with the bullying scenarios.

Recent research on sex differences in empathy may offer insights into these sex differences in defending behaviors, given that empathy has been found to be related both to negative attitudes toward bullying (Endresen & Olweus, 2001), and prosocial behavior (Warden & Mackinnon, 2003). Endresen and Olweus (2001) found that, compared to boys, girls reported more empathic responsiveness to a person in distress; however, different patterns for boys and girls emerged based on age and the sex of the distressed person. Both boys and girls reported more empathy toward female than male victims, and girls’ reports of
empathic responsiveness overall increased with age. On the other hand, whereas with age boys’ empathy increased for female victims, as boys got older their empathy decreased for male victims. Endresen and Olweus (2001) attribute the decrease in boys’ empathic concern for other males to their macho values associated with the masculine role, whereas their increase in empathic concern for girls may reflect their growing interest and attraction to females. Conversely, identification with the female role, which cultivates caring for and supporting others, may be partly responsible for the increase in empathy found in girls (Endresen & Olweus, 2001; Eagly, 1987).

In the present study, girls reported defending victims more often than did boys, a finding consistent with other studies showing that girls are more prosocial (e.g., Warden & Mackinnon, 2003) and hold more pro-victim attitudes than boys (Rigby & Johnson, 2006). These findings also are in accordance with the notion that aggression is more acceptable for boys than girls (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Similarly, girls more often serve as peer supporters against bullying than do boys (Cowie, 2000). Cowie (2000) attributed the difference to the masculine values that are instilled in boys, suggesting that “many boys do not choose to use their caring abilities unless they are sure that such action will not threaten their perception of what it is to be masculine” (p. 94; ). This is in line with the theory of social roles, which suggests that females are communally oriented and expected to offer help through caring for others (Eagly, 1987). In contrast, the masculine role has more agentic connotations, expecting men to help in more risky situations or to be the “rescuers” of those who are subordinate (Eagly, 1987). Given the different ways in which males and females offer help, girls and boys may intervene differently in bullying situations, as well. For example, boys may intervene physically, whereas girls may console the victim or ask for help. Having youths specify in which ways they help victims in bullying situations may yield important finding for how boys and girls respond specifically in bullying situations. Therefore, future studies may help clarify sex differences in victim defending by considering the sex of the victim and methods youths use to intervene (not merely if they attempt to help or not.)

Related to the finding that males defend victims less than females, males in this study reported higher rates of moral disengagement compared to females, which is consistent with previous research (Bandura et al., 1996a; Yadava, Sharma, & Gandhi, 2001). Whereas girls are more likely than boys to be identified as defenders, boys are more likely than girls to be
identified as bullies (e.g., Camodeca & Goosens, 1995; Goosens et al., 2006; Salmivalli et al., 1996). Given that boys are more often involved in bullying, they may become accepting of it, and in turn may view it as normative and harmless. Indeed, research has shown that bullies exhibit higher levels of moral disengagement than victims and youths who engage in other roles in the bullying circle (Gini, 2006; Menesini, Sanchez et al., 2003), and bullying has been shown to be positively related to moral disengagement (Ando et al., 2005). According to Bandura and colleagues (1996), those who morally disengage are also likely to think in ways that are conducive to aggression and, in turn, are more likely to behave in harmful ways. Thus, there is a cyclical relation between bullying behavior and moral disengagement. That is, in order to justify their own aggressive behavior, bullies adopt strategies of moral disengagement. In turn, their thoughts, which justify aggressive behaviors, are conducive to bullying acts and consequently reinforce their bullying behaviors.

School setting. Students from one participating junior high school reported higher rates of moral disengagement than students from one of the elementary schools. Both schools were in the same district and participated as part of their engagement in the OBPP. Engagement in the OBPP may have an impact on students’ moral engagement, given that the program raises awareness of bullying through components such as the establishment of school rules against bullying and classroom meetings revolving around bullying issues (Olweus, 1993). Although the two schools began implementing the OBPP at the same time, implementation and effectiveness of the program often varies by school. Therefore, the relative low levels of moral engagement in the junior high school may be related to a low level of engagement in the OBPP.

The differences between schools are not likely accounted for by age or by school district, given that there was no difference between the junior high school and the other elementary school in the same district, nor was there a difference between the middle school (which houses the same grade levels as the junior high) and either of the elementary schools. It seems then that the difference may be attributed to the individual school context. School climate has been shown to be related to bullying (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). More specifically a positive school climate is associated with reducing aggression and promoting positive youth development (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). The difference in levels of moral disengagement
between these two schools may be attributed to a more positive school climate (e.g., that fosters caring and respect among students and teachers and establishes clear expectations of appropriate behavior; Orpinas & Horne, 2006) at the elementary school in comparison to the junior high school. Indeed, empirical evidence suggests that moral engagement is related to a positive school climate (as measured by pride at school, support by school teachers, and support by close friends; Ando et al., 2005).

*Grade.* In this study, sixth graders reported lower rates of moral disengagement than eighth graders. That is, sixth graders tended to be more morally engaged when compared to eighth graders. Although, there was no significant difference between any other grades, this finding, suggests that moral disengagement may increase with age, which is in accordance with Bandura and colleagues’ (1996a) finding that older youths were more likely to adopt strategies of moral disengagement than younger youths. One explanation for this may be the increasing impact of peer influences on youths as they get older. Siu, Cheng, and Leung (2006) suggest that the increasing influence that peers have during adolescence combined with the decrease in influence that parents and teachers have in promoting prosocial behaviors affords the development of delinquent behavior during this time period. Therefore, addressing how to maintain moral reasoning skills when confronted with peer pressure is an important issue for schools to address (Siu et al., 2006). Moreover, promoting positive peer pressure through the development of a positive school climate would also lessen the likelihood that older youths would be influenced in a negative way.

*Moderational Effects*

As expected, social self-efficacy moderated the relationship between moral disengagement and defending behavior for each type of bullying. Consistent with Heider’s (1958) model of effective personal force, results suggest that the combination of low moral disengagement and high social self-efficacy predict the highest levels of victim defending, whereas high moral disengagement and low social self-efficacy predict the lowest levels of victim defending. Results indicate that at low levels of moral disengagement, all levels of social self-efficacy predict relatively high levels of defending behaviors. That is, youths who are highly morally engaged report relatively high defending behaviors, regardless of their levels of social self-efficacy. In contrast, at high levels of moral disengagement, social self-efficacy becomes more important in predicting victim defending. In other words, as moral
disengagement increases, higher levels of social self-efficacy are needed to predict defending, compared to lower levels of social self-efficacy.

Therefore, youths who are morally disengaged require a great amount of social self-efficacy in order to intervene in bullying situations. For youths who lack the moral motivation to step in, being confident in their social skills may still lead some to intervene. According to Heider’s (1958) model, if one possesses the ability to act but lacks the motivation, no effective action will take place. Thus, given that these youths are not motivated by moral standards, other motivations may be persuading these youths to intervene. For example, those who are confident that they can intervene successfully may be driven by more personal incentives, such as popularity or being the “hero.”

The data suggest that high moral engagement alone may be enough to encourage youths to intervene. That is, youths who are highly morally engaged are likely to step in regardless of their confidence in navigating social situations. While promoting moral engagement may be a promising way to encourage defending, the methods by which children attempt to intervene should also be addressed. In line with Bandura’s (1996b) self-efficacy theory, youths who lack confidence about navigating social situations, but are driven by their moral engagement to attempt to step in, may not have the skills to intervene successfully. In turn, these youths may become the brunt of the bullying themselves or cause the bullying to become worse. In order for youths to be able to intervene successfully, it will be important for them to learn effective non-hostile strategies (O’Connell et al, 1999). Therefore, in addition to cultivating moral engagement, it is important to promote social competence as well, to ensure that when youths are motivated enough to take a stand they have the ability to do so effectively.

As mentioned previously, promoting both individual skills and positive attitudes along with creating a positive school environment are important to encouraging moral engagement and social self-efficacy. Raising students’ awareness of the consequences of bullying and the group process that underlies bullying may enhance moral engagement among youths. The development of social skills, problem-solving skills, and emotional regulation is likely to increase youths’ interpersonal relationship skills. However, important to promoting both moral engagement and social self-efficacy is a positive school climate (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). A positive school climate fosters positive relationships and
friendships, which in turn, advances youths’ confidence in navigating social skills. In addition, a sense of community and caring among students discourages students’ from minimizing the harmful effects of bullying or blaming the victim, increasing the likelihood of peer interventions. As suggested by positive youth development approaches, by promoting both moral engagement and social competence, schools will foster a range of positive youth behavior, such as victim defending, while also preventing negative behaviors, such as aggression (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004).

Limitations

Several limitations of the present study should be considered. The use of self-report methods for all measures may have resulted in social desirable responses and positive response tendencies across different variables. Various methods of data collection from multiple informants would help to confirm the current findings.

The present study was also limited by the general nature of the questions regarding youths’ responses to bullying. Whereas questions regarding youths’ responses to bullying situations included various types of bullying scenarios (physical, verbal, and relational), the specific context of the bullying situation (e.g., setting in which the bullying takes place, sex of victim) likely influences the way in which youths respond. Studies that address specific contextual variables of bullying scenarios may reveal important differences in youths’ responses, especially between sexes. The present study also failed to ask children about methods used to help victims and effectiveness of intervening. Studies inquiring about how youths intervene in each situation would be important, as types of intervention may vary greatly across different types of bullying situations and between sexes. For example, intervening in physical scenarios may involve a physical act, whereas, consoling the victim may be a common intervention in response to relational bullying. An additional aspect that would be worthwhile to investigate is how successful youths are in their interventions. While investigating whether students attempt to intervene in bullying situations provides valuable information, it does not reveal how efficacious these intervention attempts are.

Finally, the current study treated the dependent variable, victim defending, as a continuous variable, whereas the response prompts for the defending question on the OBPP survey could be considered categorical. Future analyses may be enhanced by placing youths’ responses into specific categories (e.g., active bystander vs. defender) and analyzing the data
by methods such as logistic regression and chi-square analyses. Alternatively, the methodology of measuring victim defending may be improved by constructing items that are more consistent with a continuum of behavior. For example, a continuous variable of victim defending could be created by asking youths how much of the time they defend victims (e.g., never, seldom, sometimes, often, or almost always).

Conclusions

Several important implications can be drawn from these findings. Results suggest that interventions that employ methods to increase moral engagement and social self-efficacy concurrently will likely increase victim defending behaviors in schools. Therefore, bullying prevention programs should promote both moral engagement (e.g., through education and awareness-raising) and interpersonal relationship skills (e.g., through social and emotional skills training). To do this most effectively, interventions for students should take place within the context of a positive school climate, which fosters a sense of belonging and caring among students (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). This sense of connectedness is conducive to building interpersonal skills, as students are likely to form friendships and positive relationships within a friendly environment. In addition, when students feel connected to their fellow classmates, they are more likely to be motivated to protect one another.

Similarly, social competence and moral engagement are likely to contribute to the cultivation of a positive school climate. Therefore, as a positive school climate is enhanced, positive peer pressure is likely to become the social norm, encouraging students to act in prosocial ways, while negative peer pressure dissipates. While targeting moral engagement and social self-efficacy likely promotes victim defending and reduces bullying, targeting multiple areas of skills in tandem are also likely to promote youths’ positive development across a range of domains (Catalano et al., 2004).
References


Table 1

*Means, Standard Deviations, Ranges, Skewness, and Kurtosis for Study Measures*

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<th>Measure</th>
<th>N</th>
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<td>Defending, Physical Bullying</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>5.36</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-1.67</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defending, Verbal Bullying</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-1.59</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defending, Relational Bullying</td>
<td>251</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-1.63</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Disengagement</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>22.83</td>
<td>7.83</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>.60</td>
<td>.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>27.63</td>
<td>6.67</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-.41</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Percentages of Responses to Physical, Verbal, and Relational Bullying Scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Physical (N = 300)</th>
<th>Verbal (N = 299)</th>
<th>Relational (N = 299)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Bullying Noticed</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Join In on the Bullying</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approve of the Bullying</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch the Bullying</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should Help</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>28.8</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to Help</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>50.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. No Bullying Noticed indicates that the participant has never noticed the respective type of bullying; Join In on the Bullying indicates that the participant takes part in the respective type of bullying; Approve of the Bullying indicates that the participant does nothing but thinks the respective type of bullying is OK; Watch the Bullying indicates that the participant just watches the respective type of bullying; Should Help indicates that the participant thinks he/she should help, but does nothing; Attempt to Help indicates that the participant tries to help the victim in some way.
Table 3

*Correlations among Study Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Defending, Physical Bullying</td>
<td>.70**</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.42**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Defending, Verbal Bullying</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.65**</td>
<td>-.49**</td>
<td>.45**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Defending, Relational Bullying</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.50**</td>
<td>.39**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Moral Disengagement</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.29**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Social Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>—</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .01**
### Mean Differences between Females and Males

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defending, Physical Bullying</td>
<td>5.48 (130, .73)</td>
<td>5.20 (107, 1.09)</td>
<td>2.37*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defending, Verbal Bullying</td>
<td>5.41 (139, .81)</td>
<td>5.10 (115, 1.07)</td>
<td>2.67**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defending, Relational Bullying</td>
<td>5.58 (140, .74)</td>
<td>5.05 (109, 1.16)</td>
<td>4.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral Disengagement</td>
<td>21.06 (160, 6.68)</td>
<td>24.98 (136, 8.57)</td>
<td>-4.43**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>28.21 (160, 6.11)</td>
<td>26.90 (138, 7.25)</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05; ** p < .01
Table 5

*Results of Hierarchical Regression Models*

| Variable | DV: Physical Def. | | | | | DV: Verbal Def. | | | | | DV: Relational Def. | | |
| | $R^2$ change | $F$-change | | | $R^2$ change | $F$-change | | | $R^2$ change | $F$-change | |
| Step 1 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sex | .03 | .03 | 2.26 | | .03 | .03 | 2.73 | | .08 | .08 | 7.43** |
| Grade | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| School | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Step 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| MD | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| SSE | .30 | .27 | 43.25** | | .32 | .29 | 51.76** | | .31 | .22 | 38.67** |
| Step 3 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| MD x SSE | .33 | .03 | 11.28** | | .35 | .03 | 10.9** | | .32 | .02 | 5.68* |

*Note.* SSE = Social Self-Efficacy. MD = Moral Disengagement. DV = Dependent Variable. Def. = Defending.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$
Table 6

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Defending Behavior*

| Variable | DV: Physical Def. | | | DV: Verbal Def. | | | DV: Relational Def. | | |
|----------|-------------------|---|---|-----------------|---|---|-------------------|---|
|          | β     | t   | | β    | t   | | β    | t   | |
| School   | -.015 | -.87 | | .008 | .42 | | .016 | .82 |
| Grade    | .048  | 1.05 | | .022 | .50 | | -.009 | -.20 |
| Sex      | -.082 | -.78 | | -.059 | -.56 | | -.265 | -2.37* |
| MD       | -.034 | -4.47** | | -.044 | -5.87** | | -.046 | -5.72** |
| SSE      | .052  | 5.87** | | .042 | 4.92** | | .034 | 3.62** |
| MD x SSE | .003  | 3.36** | | .003 | 3.29** | | .002 | 2.38* |

*Note. Values reported are from third step of regressions. SSE = Social Self-Efficacy. MD = Moral Disengagement. DV = Dependent Variable. Def. = Defending.*

* p < .05; ** p < .01
Figure 1.

*Social Self-efficacy as a Moderator of the Relationship between Moral Disengagement and Defending in Physical Bullying Situations*

Note. SSE = Social Self-Efficacy.
Social Self-efficacy as a Moderator of the Relationship between Moral Disengagement and Defending in Verbal Bullying Situations

Note. SSE = Social Self-Efficacy.
Figure 3.

Social Self-efficacy as a Moderator of the Relationship between Moral Disengagement and Defending in Relational Bullying Situations

Note. SSE = Social Self-Efficacy.
Appendix A

Moral Disengagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Disagree a lot</th>
<th>Disagree a little</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Agree a little</th>
<th>Agree a lot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Slapping and shoving someone is just a way of joking.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A kid who only talks about breaking rules should not be blamed if other kids go ahead and do it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. It is okay to make fun of a classmate because hitting him/her would be worse.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. If a group decides together to do something bad, it is unfair to blame any one kid in the group for it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Kids shouldn’t be blamed for using bad words when all their friends do it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Teasing someone does not really hurt them.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Kids who get bullied usually deserve it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. It is alright to lie to keep your friends out of trouble.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Kids shouldn’t get in trouble for misbehaving if their friends pressured them to do it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Insults don’t really hurt anyone.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix B

### Social Self-efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Definitely not</th>
<th>Probably not</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Probably yes</th>
<th>Definitely yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I can do something to stop it when I see other kids being bullied.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I can work with other kids even if they are difficult to get along with.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I can be friendly even to someone I don’t really like very much.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I can tell a friend my feelings calmly even when he/she has upset me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. When other students have a disagreement, I can help them talk about it and come up with a solution.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I can control my temper when I get mad at another student.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I can keep myself from saying something that could make an argument worse.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. If my friend and I have a problem, I can talk with him/her to solve it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>