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# UNIQUE AND INTERACTIVE EFFECTS OF MORAL EMOTIONS AND MORAL DISENGAGEMENT ON BULLYING AND DEFENDING AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

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## ABSTRACT

The first aim of the present study was to examine in a single model how moral disengagement and moral emotions were related to bullying and defending behavior among schoolchildren. The second aim was to test whether the two moral dimensions interacted with each other to explain behavior in bullying situations. Data were collected from 561 Swedish students. Moral disengagement was positively associated with bullying and negatively associated with defending, whereas moral emotions score was negatively associated with bullying and positively associated with defending. Moreover, students who scored high in moral emotions did not tend to bully other students, irrespective of their levels of moral disengagement, whereas when the moral emotions score was low bullying behavior increased with increasing levels of moral disengagement. In contrast, moral disengagement was negatively related to defending behavior at low levels of moral emotions, but not when moral emotions were high.

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**B**ULLYING is an immoral action due to its repeated harmful intentions and negative effects on a person in a weaker position (Bauman, 2008; Hymel, Schonert-Reichl, Bonanno, Vaillancourt, & Rocke Henderson, 2010). Smith and Sharp (1994) define bullying as “systematic abuse of power” (p. 2). In contrast, defending a victim in bullying situations can be considered a moral action because it aims at protecting the welfare and rights of the victim. It is an example of

humane, caring, and prosocial behavior. Hence, bullying and defending have opposite intrinsic effects on the well-being of the victim. Whereas refraining from bullying others is an inhibitive form of morality, defending a victim is a proactive form of morality (see Tisak, Tisak, & Goldstein, 2006).

Research on morality has devoted considerable attention to processes that explain the association between moral cognitions and actual moral or immoral actions. Classic cognitive-developmental theories of moral development (Kohlberg, 1976, 1984; Piaget, 1932) maintain that moral reasoning develops with age across a set of invariant stages, and that actual actions are the logical consequence of moral reasoning and knowing the correct behavior in a given situation. However, these cognitive constructivist theories also agree in assuming that moral development is not an obligatory process, and a moral delay can happen, thus increasing the risk of antisociality (Emler & Tarry, 2007; Gibbs, 2010). Yet studies on peer bullying have found that bullying behavior is not necessarily related to lack of cognitive skills in moral reasoning (e.g., Caravita, Miragoli, & Di Blasio, 2009; Gasser & Keller, 2009; Gini, Pozzoli, & Hauser, 2011). More relevant areas of inquiry deal with moral emotions and specific distortions in moral cognition, such as moral disengagement mechanisms (Gini, Pozzoli, & Hymel, 2014; Malti & Krettenauer, 2013).

### Moral Emotions

In general, children consider bullying to be highly immoral (Menesini et al., 1997; Thornberg, 2010; Thornberg, Birberg Thornberg, Alamaa, & Daud, in press), wrong independently of rules, more wrong than conventional transgressions, and justify their bullying judgments by referring to the harm bullying causes (Thornberg, 2010; Thornberg et al., in press). However, Bandura (1999) suggested that moral knowledge or reasoning is not enough but has to be translated into moral conduct through self-regulatory mechanisms rooted in moral standards and self-sanctions. Moral emotions have been suggested as a significant source of motivation for moral conduct (e.g., Eisenberg, 2000; Haidt, 2003; Hoffman, 2000). With reference to Haidt (2003), *moral emotions* are the emotions that respond to moral violations and motivate moral behavior. They are associated with the help/harm dimension of behavior and the dyadic positions in the help/harm situation—an agent position, that is, the one who assaults or rescues, and a patient position, that is, the one to be assaulted or rescued (Gray & Wegner, 2011).

In the literature, three often-discussed moral emotions are empathy, sympathy, and guilt (Bierhoff, 2002; Eisenberg, 2000; Hoffman, 2000). The positive association between empathy and prosocial behavior has been found in several studies (for reviews, see Eisenberg, Eggum, & Di Giunta, 2010; Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Sadovsky, 2006; Hoffman, 2000). In the context of bullying, students with a high level of empathy are more likely to take the defender role (Barchia & Bussey, 2011b; Caravita, Di Blasio, & Salmivalli, 2009, 2010; Correia & Dalbert, 2008; Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoè, 2007), whereas students with a low level of empathy are more likely to take the bully role (Correia & Dalbert, 2008; Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006; Stavrinides, Georgiou, & Theofanous, 2010) or display pro-bullying behavior (Gini et al., 2007). Like empathy, sympathy also has been found to be positively associated with prosocial behavior (for reviews, see Eisenberg et al., 2006, 2010; Hoffman, 2000) and negatively associated with aggression (Carlo et al., 2010; MacEvoy & Leff, 2012). Furthermore,

previous research with children and adolescents has shown that guilt is negatively related to aggression (Roos, Salmivalli, & Hodges, 2011), bullying (Menesini et al., 2003; Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012; Perren, Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, Malti, & Hymel, 2012), and antisocial behavior (Lotze, Ravindran, & Myers, 2010) and positively associated with empathy (Hoffman, 2000; Silfver & Helkama, 2007) and prosocial behavior (Olthof, 2012). Hence, it is reasonable to assume that moral emotions as an index of empathy, sympathy, and guilt have an impact on students' behavior in bullying situations.

### Moral Disengagement

Empathic distress and other moral emotions may be reduced or even neutralized as a result of attributions and other processes (Hoffman, 2000). As outlined in the social-cognitive theory of moral agency (Bandura, 1999), there are many social and psychological maneuvers by which self-regulated mechanisms can be deactivated and moral self-sanctions can be disengaged from immoral conduct. *Moral disengagement* refers to such sociocognitive processes through which people can disengage from moral control and thus commit inhumane acts toward other people without suffering negative self-sanctions. Specifically, Bandura (1999) described eight mechanisms, clustered into four broad categories through which moral control can be disengaged: (1) cognitive restructuring (e.g., "Stealing is not really harmful when compared with murder"); (2) minimizing one's agentive role (e.g., "I was not the only one to have such behavior"); (3) minimizing, disregarding, or distorting the consequences (e.g., "I didn't really hurt him. He's OK"); (4) dehumanizing or blaming the victim (e.g., "He is an animal and deserves what I did").

Almost 2 decades of research have shown that moral disengagement is positively associated with aggressive behavior (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Pastorelli, 2001; Barchia & Bussey, 2011a; Paciello et al., 2008; Pelton et al., 2004; Pornari & Wood, 2010; for a meta-analysis, see Gini et al., 2014) and negatively associated with prosocial behavior (Bandura et al., 1996, 2001). In the context of bullying, students with higher levels of moral disengagement are more likely to take the bullying role (Caravita, Gini, & Pozzoli, 2012; Gini, 2006; Gini et al., 2011; Hymel, Rocke-Henderson, & Bonanno, 2005; Obermann, 2011a; Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012; Perren et al., 2012; Thornberg & Jungert, 2014) or pro-bullying roles (Gini, 2006; Pozzoli, Gini, & Vieno, 2012; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013) and less likely to take the defender role (Caravita et al., 2012; Gini, 2006; Obermann, 2011b; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013).

### Present Study

One possible limitation of the current literature on this issue is that studies so far have usually assessed independently the role of moral disengagement or moral emotions in bullying behavior and, to a lesser extent, defending the victim. What is currently unknown is whether their role is confirmed when they are *concurrently* considered as potential predictors of bullying and defending behavior. Moreover, instead of assessing emotion attribution in hypothetical scenarios, which are common in previous studies on moral emotions (Malti & Krettenauer, 2013), it would be important to ask students how they feel when they participate in or witness bullying.

The first aim of the present study was to examine in a single model how moral disengagement and moral emotions were related to bullying and defending behavior among schoolchildren. That is, we were interested in studying the role of each moral dimension (i.e., their main effect) while taking into account the role of the other one on both behaviors. We hypothesized that both moral dimensions would contribute significantly to explaining the variance of both bullying others and defending the victim. If true, this would indicate that, although correlated, moral emotions and moral disengagement are uniquely associated with bullying and defending behavior and are worth studying together.

The second aim was to test whether the two moral dimensions interacted with each other to explain behavior in bullying situations (i.e., moderation effects). According to Bandura (1999), moral disengagement is produced by the reciprocal interplay of cognitive, affective, and social factors. It is therefore reasonable to assume an interaction effect between affective and cognitive dimensions of morality in relation to bullying and defending behavior. Previous studies have found the link between moral disengagement and different moral emotions. For example, moral disengagement has been negatively associated with empathy (Almeida, Correia, & Marinho, 2010; Barriga, Sullivan-Cosetti, & Gibbs, 2009; Hyde et al., 2010) and feelings of guilt regarding moral transgressions (Bandura et al., 1996; Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012). In Obermann's (2011b) study, so-called "unconcerned passive bystanders" displayed a higher level of moral disengagement compared with defenders and "guilty passive bystanders." By integrating the concept of moral emotions (i.e., empathy, sympathy, and moral guilt) with Bandura's social-cognitive theory of moral agency and moral disengagement, we claim that adolescents who are more prone to feel moral emotions in bystander or transgressor encounters (see Hoffman, 2000) are more resistant to moral disengagement. Moral emotions are associated with the construction of moral-action schemas and have been integrated within the overall conceptual framework guiding the child's morality (Hoffman, 2000; Nucci, 2001). Thus, because aroused moral emotions should make internalized moral standards or moral-actions schemes more easily accessible and persistent in exerting a pervasive interpretative influence over social information processing in bystander and transgressor encounters, aroused moral emotions should make it harder for moral disengagement mechanisms to influence actions. Therefore, we hypothesized moderation effects of moral emotions on the relation between moral disengagement and both bullying and defending: High levels of moral emotions should weaken the positive link between moral disengagement and bullying as well as weakening the negative link between moral disengagement and defending.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Participants were recruited from 28 elementary school classes (fifth and sixth grades) from 11 public schools located in two cities and two villages in Sweden. The Swedish school system consists of a kindergarten year (the year children become 6 years old) and then 9 years of compulsory schooling including elementary school (grades 1–6) and secondary school (grades 7–9). In elementary school, students have

a home classroom in which they have most of their classes, and they have the same class teacher for most school subjects. Their class teacher follows them through grades 1–3, and then a new class teacher follows them through grades 4–6. In secondary school, students meet a variety of subject teachers and they change classrooms for each class.

The original sample consisted of 615 (56.5% boys) students. School principals and teachers were asked first for consent. Parental consent letters were then distributed to all the families. Finally, all the participants were asked for their consent. The final sample consisted of 561 students (50.6% boys;  $M_{\text{age}} = 11$  years, 8 months,  $SD = 6$  months), resulting in a participation rate of 91.2%. Socioeconomic and ethnic background data were not gathered on an individual level. Nevertheless, the sample was recruited from schools located in neighborhoods of different socioeconomic statuses, representing both the lower and middle classes. Based on information from the schools, the large majority of the participants have a Swedish ethnic background.

The participants filled out a questionnaire in their ordinary classroom setting. Three student teachers, at the end of their teacher training, were present in the classrooms during the data gathering (one student teacher in each classroom). They explained the study procedure, assured confidentiality, and assisted the participants who needed help. The participants responded anonymously to the questionnaire.

## Measures

**Bullying behavior.** A six-item Swedish bullying scale (Thornberg & Jungert, 2014) was used to measure participants' bullying behavior. The participants were asked, "How often have you alone or together with others done the following things at school toward the same person in the past three months?" Two items measured physical bullying: "Beat or kicked the person in order to give him/her pain" and "Shoved or held the person against his/her will." Two items measured verbal bullying: "Teased and called the person mean names" and "Made fun of or joked about the person in a way he/she didn't like." Two items measured relational bullying: "Excluded the person from our group" and "Spread mean rumors or lies about the person." The participants indicated how often they behaved as described in each item on a five-point scale (0 = "I haven't done that," 1 = "a couple of times," 2 = "2 or 3 times a month," 3 = "about once a week," 4 = "several times a week"). The scores of the scales measuring the three types of bullying were strongly correlated ( $.66 < r < .71$ ); thus answers to the six items were averaged to form a single bullying score (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Defending behavior.** A shortened version of Thornberg and Jungert's (2014) defending scale was used to measure participants' defending behavior in aggression situations. This 10-item scale consisted of two sections. In the first section (witnessing physical aggression), the participants were asked, "When one or more students are beating, kicking, harshly shoving, or holding another student in order to make the person upset, what do you usually do?" In the second section (witnessing verbal aggression), the participants were asked, "When one or more students are teasing, threatening, or calling another student mean names in order to make the person upset, what do you usually do?" The same five items followed the question in each of the two sections: "I go and tell a teacher," "I try to make them stop," "I try to comfort the exposed student," "I try to defend the exposed student," and "I tell them to stop

fighting with the student.” The participants indicated how often they respond in accordance with the behavior described in each item (0 = “never,” 1 = “seldom,” 2 = “sometimes,” 3 = “usually,” 4 = “always”). Given the high correlation between the scores of defending during verbal and physical aggression ( $r = .85$ ), answers to the 10 items were averaged to form a single score of defending (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .94$ ).

**Moral emotions.** A 12-item Moral Emotions Scale was designed to measure the degree of moral emotions with relevance for bullying situations. Four items tapped *empathy with the victim* (“I feel sad if I see a bullied person being sad,” “It hurts me if I see a person being bullied,” “I feel sad if I see someone being sad because others are teasing him or her,” “If someone who is teased starts crying, it would feel like I would become upset too”). Two items tapped *sympathy for the victim* (“If I see someone being bullied, I would really feel sorry for that person,” “If someone is sad because others are teasing him/her, I would really feel sorry for that person”). Three items tapped *guilt for inaction*, that is, guilt for not helping or defending the victim (“I feel like a bad person if I just stand and watch and do nothing when a person is bullied,” “If I see someone being bullied and if I don’t try to help that person, I would feel guilty,” “If I don’t try to stop bullying I’m seeing, I would feel guilty”). Three items tapped *transgressive guilt*, that is, guilt for bullying or harassing another person (“I would feel guilty if I tease a person,” “I feel guilty if I bully another person,” “I would feel like a bad person if I bully another person”). Participants rated each item on a seven-point scale, where 1 means “disagree” and 7 means “agree.” Even though the items were designed to measure different moral emotions, the four categories of moral emotions were highly intercorrelated (correlations ranged from .72 to .85), and a factor analysis (principal components, Varimax rotation) yielded a single factor that did not distinguish the different moral emotions. Therefore, answers on all items were averaged to form a single score of moral emotions ( $\alpha = .97$ ).

**Moral disengagement.** An 18-item Swedish Moral Disengagement in Bullying Scale (MDBS; Thornberg & Jungert, 2014) was used to measure participants’ proneness to morally disengage in bullying situations. Examples of items are: “It’s okay to hurt another person a couple of times a week if you do that to protect your friends,” “There’s nothing wrong with name-calling a person a bit every day as long as you just do it as a joke,” “If my friends begin to bully a classmate, I can’t be blamed for being with them and bullying that person too,” and “If people are weird, it is their own fault if they get bullied.” Participants rated each item on a seven-point scale, where 1 means “disagree” and 7 means “agree” (Cronbach’s  $\alpha = .90$ ).

## Results

### Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Study Variables

Descriptive statistics of the study variables are reported in Table 1. Gender differences in mean scores were tested through a series of *t*-tests, and effect sizes are expressed as Cohen’s *d*. Boys scored higher than girls on bullying and moral disengagement, while girls reported greater defending behavior and moral emotions, which refers to an index of empathy, sympathy, and moral guilt, as compared with boys.

Correlations among variables were analyzed separately for boys and girls (see Table 1). In both groups, moral disengagement negatively correlated with moral



Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among the Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	Full Sample		Boys		Girls		<i>t</i>	<i>d</i>
					<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
1. Bullying	—	-.29***	.28***	-.22***	.20	.44	.30	.58	.10	.20	5.74***	.46
2. Defending	-.53***	—	-.14*	.41***	2.77	.95	2.58	1.04	2.96	.82	-4.71***	-.41
3. Moral disengagement	.55***	-.47***	—	-.16**	1.83	.81	2.01	.96	1.65	.57	5.48***	.46
4. Moral emotions	-.40***	.69***	-.34***	—	5.32	1.64	4.86	1.74	5.79	1.38	-7.06***	-.59

Note.—Correlations for boys ( $n = 284$ ) are presented below the diagonal, and correlations for girls ( $n = 277$ ) are presented above the diagonal.

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

emotions. Moreover, it was positively related to bullying and negatively associated with defending behavior. The opposite pattern of results was observed concerning moral emotions. Finally, a negative association between bullying and defending behavior emerged. Overall, the magnitude of the correlation coefficients was greater for boys than for girls.

### Path Analysis

Because the results of both the  $t$ -tests and correlation analysis showed some gender differences in the study variables, to control for gender effects the path model was tested on the partial correlation matrix, in which the effect of gender was partialled out, using the LISREL 8.7 Program (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993). Bullying and defending scores were entered in the model as the observed dependent variables, whereas participants' scores for moral disengagement and moral emotions were entered as observed independent variables. Furthermore, to test for moderation, the procedure proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986; see also Frazier et al., 2004) was followed, so that independent variables were centered around their mean to create the interaction term. The interaction resulting from the product of the two mean-centered variables was entered in the model.

The final model is depicted in Figure 1 (all paths reached statistical significance). Given that the path model reproduced exactly the observed data, the indexes commonly used to evaluate the fit of the model cannot be calculated. The only available index is the amount of variance explained by the model ( $R^2$ ), which is .31 for bullying and .39 for defending behavior. The main effects of both moral disengagement and moral emotions on bullying and defending behavior (in opposite directions) were significant. Moreover, as hypothesized, the interaction term moral disengagement  $\times$  moral emotions was significant.

As far as bullying behavior is concerned, results of follow-up analysis (Fig. 2) revealed that at high levels ( $+1$   $SD$ ) of moral emotions, the relation between moral disengagement and bullying was very small ( $\beta = .06$ ,  $t = 1.80$ ,  $p = .07$ ), so that students who scored high in moral emotions did not tend to bully other students, irrespective of their levels of moral disengagement. Conversely, when the moral

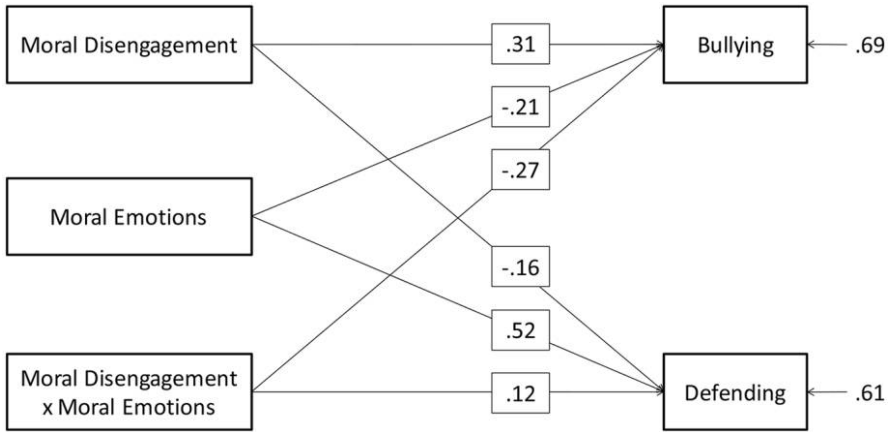


Figure 1. Final path graph.

emotions score was low ( $-1 SD$ ), bullying behavior increased with increasing levels of moral disengagement ( $\beta = .28, t = 13.67, p < .001$ ). With regard to defending behavior, as one can see in Figure 2, moral disengagement was negatively and significantly related to defending at low levels of moral emotions ( $\beta = -.29, t = -7.14, p < .001$ ), but not when moral emotions were high ( $\beta = -.08, t = -1.17, p = .24$ ). In the latter case, participants' level of defending behavior was high notwithstanding their proneness to morally disengage.

## Discussion

Within the field of moral psychology and development, several scholars have recently stressed the importance of theoretically integrating moral cognition and moral emotions and empirically investigating both moral dimensions in order to explain individual differences in moral as well as immoral behavior (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004; Hoffman, 2000; Malti & Latzko, 2010; Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012). In line with this integrative perspective, this study was the first to examine in a single model how moral disengagement and moral emotions were related to bullying and defending behavior among schoolchildren. Specifically, we tested whether moral disengagement and moral emotions uniquely contributed to explain both behaviors and whether the two moral dimensions interacted with each other in explaining these behaviors in bullying situations.

Consistent with previous studies (e.g., Caravita et al., 2012; Gini, 2006; Gini et al., 2011; Perren et al., 2012; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013), moral disengagement was positively associated with bullying behavior and negatively associated with defending behavior. As hypothesized, these associations remained when moral emotions were included in the same model. This finding adds to previous studies that have shown that the link between moral disengagement and aggressive behavior is significant even after the role of other variables, such as aggression efficacy, rule perception, or parenting, is accounted for (e.g., Barchia & Bussey, 2011a; Caravita et al., 2012; Pelton et al., 2004). Furthermore, because empathy and guilt have been found to be negatively associated with bullying behavior and positively associated with defending behavior (e.g., Barchia & Bussey, 2011b; Correia & Dalbert, 2008; Menesini et al., 2003), we expected a similar pattern between the construct moral emotions, which



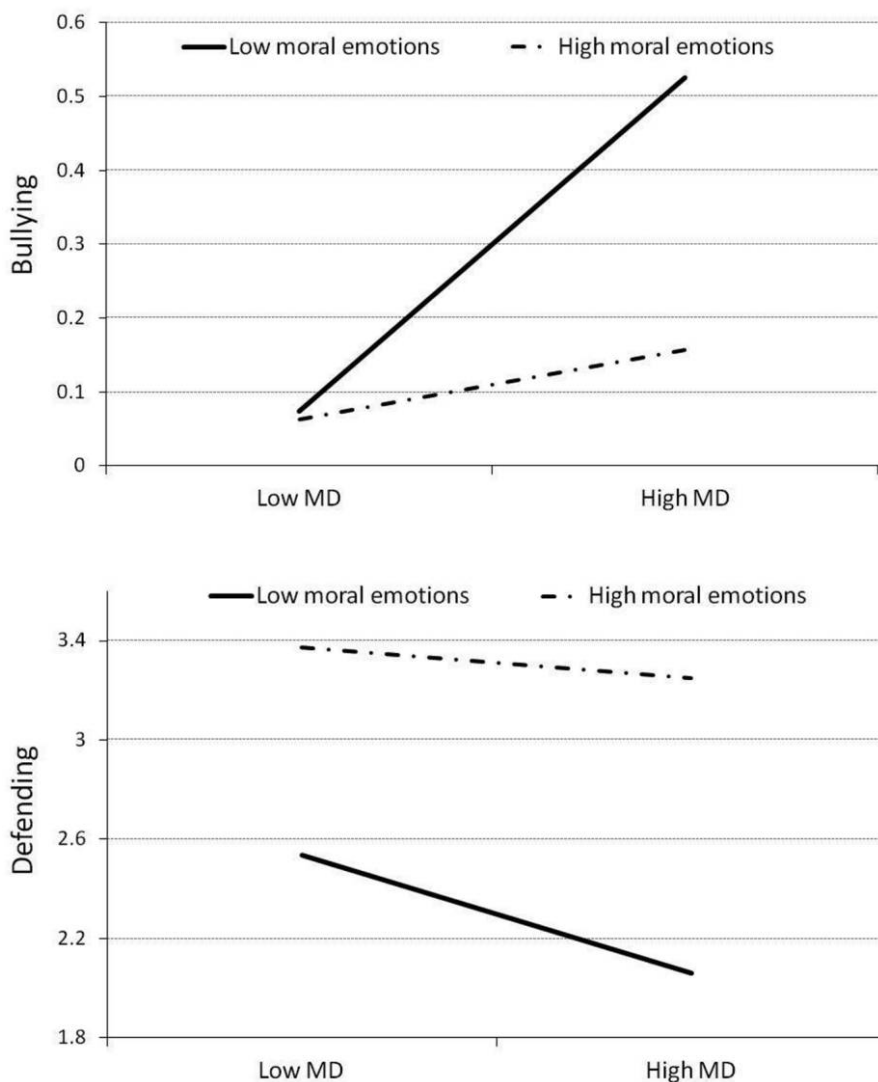


Figure 2. The moral disengagement  $\times$  moral emotions effect on bullying and defending behavior.

here refers to a total index of empathy, sympathy, and moral guilt, and the two behaviors in bullying situations. The current findings confirmed that these relationships hold even when controlling for moral disengagement. Hence our study revealed that both moral emotions and moral disengagement are uniquely associated with both bullying and defending behavior.

Although these main effects confirm the relevant role of both moral dimensions in bullying, little is known about how moral disengagement interacts with other individual risk factors (Gini et al., 2014). The model tested in the present study showed that moral emotions moderated the effect of moral disengagement on both bullying and defending behavior. This is a new and interesting result because it suggests that bullying behavior is more likely with higher levels of moral disengagement among students who display low levels of moral emotions. Conversely, students who displayed high levels of moral emotions did not tend to bully others irrespective of their levels of moral disengagement. Moreover, defending behavior decreased with in-

creasing levels of moral disengagement among students with a low level of moral emotions, but students who scored high in moral emotions also reported a high level of defending behavior irrespective of their levels of moral disengagement. Hence, our findings suggest that strong moral emotions tend to overrule moral disengagement associations with behavior in bullying situations, at least in this age group. In accordance with Hoffman (2000), moral emotions such as empathy, sympathy for the victim, and moral guilt do all display an individual's awareness of the harmful consequences for the victim. In the online processing of social information (see Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004; Hoffman, 2000), "hot" cognitions evoked by moral emotions draw attention to the victim's distress and the moral issues in the situation in a way that seems to be more persuasive and forceful than any parallel presence of moral disengagement.

Overall, these results suggest that the construct moral emotions—not only in terms of moral sanctions that could be associated with guilt when violating moral standards (Bandura, 1999, 2004) but as a construct that covers empathy, sympathy for victims, transgressive guilt, and guilt for inaction (Hoffman, 2000)—may be crucial to incorporate with the social-cognitive theory of moral agency (Bandura, 1999, 2004) to better understand and explain bullying and defending behavior. This is actually congruent with the social-cognitive theory because it proposes that actions are the outcome of the reciprocal interplay of cognitive, affective, and social factors (Bandura, 1986, 1999, 2004). This is also consistent with other models that seek to explain the moral "inability" that lies under antisocial conduct, such as the "violence inhibition mechanism" (e.g., Blair, 2001). Briefly, this mechanism is activated by distress cues (e.g., the sad and frightened expressions of others), and moral socialization occurs through the pairing of the activation of the mechanism with representations of the acts that caused the distress cues (i.e., the moral transgressions). If the activation of this mechanism is partially inhibited, moral transgressions are enacted more easily. Furthermore, our results support Barhight, Hubbart, and Hyde (2013), who recently found that children who reacted with high negative emotions and heart rate acceleration when watching bullying videos in a laboratory setting were more prone to intervene in real-life bullying than children who reacted with low negative emotions and heart rate deceleration when watching these videos.

### Limitations and Implications for Interventions

Limitations of this study include the self-report procedure, which is vulnerable to social desirability and shared method variance effects (Cornell & Bandypadhyay, 2010). Furthermore, we used a cross-sectional design, and we therefore are not able to pinpoint the direction of effects between moral disengagement and emotions and bullying-related behaviors. Further studies would need to take a longitudinal approach to investigate the directions of the effects. Thus, identified associations as well as drawing causal conclusions based on the associations should be considered with great caution. In addition, the defending behavior scale assumes that the participants have witnessed physical and verbal aggression among their peers. In some cases, it might be possible that the response option "never" could have been misinterpreted as never having witnessing such aggression rather than never having intervened in the way described. However, the participants were in fact asked to rate what they usually did *when* one or more students acted in accordance with at least one of the

described aggressive behaviors. According to a recent report from the Swedish National Agency for Education (2013), 12% of the students in grades 4–6 reported that they are peer victimized at school on a weekly basis. To assume that students more than once have witnessed at least one example of physical aggression (beating, kicking, harshly shoving, or holding another student to make the person upset) and at least one example of verbal aggression (teasing, threatening, or calling another student mean names) mentioned in the scale is therefore reasonable. Finally, a note of caution needs to be sounded regarding the generalization of the findings. This sample of early adolescents from Sweden may or may not be similar to the population of adolescents with whom the readers primarily work or are interested in. Future studies should try to replicate the current findings with other samples of students of different age levels and from different cultural backgrounds.

Despite these limitations, the present findings suggest that anti-bullying programs can discourage bullying behavior and encourage defending behavior among students by counteracting and deconstructing moral disengagement and fostering and strengthening moral emotions. Developing a sense of personal responsibility is crucial (e.g., Pozzoli & Gini, 2012). To reduce moral disengagement among students, teachers and other school staff need to make students aware of and challenge moral disengagement mechanisms when they emerge among them as well as enhancing the moral atmosphere of the school and classroom, because school climate or moral atmosphere has been found to be negatively associated with the prevalence of bullying (e.g., Bonnet, Goossens, Willemen, & Schuengel, 2009) and students' tendency to blame the victim of bullying (Gini, 2008). Among children in classrooms with more teacher emotional support (see Hamre et al., 2013), behavior problems are less common (McCormick, Capella, O'Connor, & McClowry, 2013). According to a recently published qualitative study, a major theme in students' perceptions of teacher care was fostering emotional well-being, including providing comfort, connecting with students, and helping students feel valued (Jeffrey, Auger, & Pepperell, 2013). In addition, prevention and interventions targeting the whole school class to decrease moral disengagement and bullying are important because bullies tend to have popular sociometric status (e.g., Farmer et al., 2010), which might indicate a widespread collective moral disengagement that normalizes, rationalizes, and justifies bullying (see Thornberg, 2015). Hence, moral disengagement at both individual and class levels has to be counteracted (see Pozzoli et al., 2012).

In particular, working with and enhancing students' moral emotions (empathy, sympathy for victims, guilt for bystander inaction, and guilt for harming others) appear to be crucial to minimize the moral disengagement effects on bullying and defending in bullying situations. From a moral philosophical point of view, emphasizing the need to foster moral emotions should not be confused with ethical subjectivism or "emotivism," arguing that no matter what moral judgments people make, they are expressing only their subjective feelings and nothing more (Rachels, 1999). On the contrary, moral emotions emerge from the experiences and conceptions of human welfare, justice, and rights, cognitively structured around considerations of the intrinsic effects that an individual's actions have on the well-being of other people, identified by Turiel (1983) and Nucci (2001) as the moral domain of human functioning and cognition. Thus, moral emotions are based on moral reasons. In accordance with that, induction has been suggested as a powerful method for parents and teachers to use in order to promote the development of moral emotions and

cognitions (e.g., Hoffman, 2000; Turiel, 1983). Induction is about reasoning with children and making them aware of the effects of their actions on others. Hoffman (2000) argues that induction has two important functions: (a) calling attention to the victim's distress and making it salient to the child, thus "tapping into the child's empathic proclivity (using it as an ally) by activating any or all of his or her empathy-arousing mechanisms and producing empathic distress" (p. 151), and (b) highlighting the role of the child's action in causing that distress, which creates conditions for feeling guilt.

Induction should be used when having serious conversations with bullies. Examples of induction would be to explain for the bullies how the victim is feeling because of their hurtful comments or ask questions such as, "How do you think she feels when you keep on excluding her from the group?" or "How would you feel if someone talks to you like that?" and then have a conversation to help the bully or the bullies notice and recognize the victim's feelings, especially his or her distress, by pointing out the effects of their behavior. Induction should also be used in conversations with witnessing children, who responded with negative bystander behaviors, such as assisting or reinforcing the bullies. Moreover, teachers could make efforts to prevent or tackle bullying through the curriculum (Cowie & Sharp, 1994) by using films, drama, role-play, or literature about bullying and then initiating classroom or small group discussions powered by inductive questions and reasons.

Hence, in addition to addressing moral disengagement, bullying prevention needs to include strategies to promote students' moral emotions, and bullying interventions need to involve induction when addressing the bullies. Based on our findings, strengthening students' moral emotions should weaken the association between moral disengagement and bullying behavior as well as the negative association between moral disengagement and defending behavior.

## Note

Robert Thornberg is professor and Tomas Jungert is associate professor in the Department of Behavioural Sciences and Learning, Linköping University. Tiziana Pozzoli is a research assistant and Gianluca Gini is an associate professor in the Department of Developmental and Social Psychology at the University of Padova. Address all correspondence to Robert Thornberg, Department of Behavioural Sciences and Learning, Linköping University, SE-58183 Linköping, Sweden; e-mail: robert.thornberg@liu.se.

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