A Longitudinal Study of Defender Identity, Defending Behavior, and Peer Victimization in Childhood

By

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Auburn University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science,
Marriage and Family Therapy

Auburn, Alabama
August 5th, 2023

Keywords: Defender Identity, defending behaviors, peer victimization, defender role, school children

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Abstract

Research has shown the importance and benefit of children being willing to defend peers who are the target of peer victimization. Currently, little is known about the influence of having a defender identity on defending behaviors. This study addressed this gap in the literature by testing whether having a stronger defender identity predicts heightened defending behaviors. Furthermore, as being seen as a defender may decrease the likelihood that a child will be peer-victimized, this research examined whether a defender identity may be protective against peer victimization by increasing the likelihood of defending others. This study utilized an existing longitudinal data set collected during the Fall, Winter, and Spring of children's fourth or fifth-grade year (760 girls and 804 boys; M_{age} = 10.05 years). Self-reports of defending behaviors, empathy, and self-efficacy for defending and peer-reports of defending behaviors and peer victimization were collected. A full structural equation model (SEM) was estimated to examine the direct effects of a defender identity on defending behaviors and the indirect effects on peer victimization. There are known differences in defending behaviors between boys and girls; therefore, gender was also tested using a multigroup analysis to determine if a defender identity predicted heightened defending behaviors more strongly for boys than for girls. Results showed that having a stronger defender identity predicted heightened levels of defending behaviors. Further, heightened defending behaviors mediated the relationship between defender identity and lower levels of peer victimization. No gender differences in these associations were found. This research underscores the importance of cultivating children's identity as a defender in bullying situations and points to new directions for anti-bullying interventions.

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Introduction

There is an extensive body of research documenting the harmful repercussions of peer victimization during childhood and adolescence (e.g., Meter & Card, 2016; Pöyhönen et al., 2010; Salmivalli, 2010). Peer victimization is defined as being the target of any form of repeated bullying or harassment from peers (Hong & Espelage, 2012; Salmivalli et al., 2011; Salmivalli et al., 1996). It includes being subjected to either physical or verbal attacks, or both (Graham & Juvonen, 1998) and typically occurs in front of peers (Hawkins et al., 2001; Meter & Card, 2016). Peer victimization occurs nationwide regardless of geographical and socioeconomic location, and in 2001, the National Institute of Health estimated that about 5.7 million children have been victims or witnessed peer victimization (Hong & Espelage, 2012).

When witnessing peer victimization, bystanders can engage in either passive behaviors, which include watching the victimization as it happens, or active behaviors, such as defending the victim (Salmivalli, 2010; Salmivalli et al., 2011). Defending behaviors are those intended to stop peer victimization or otherwise aid the victim (Meter & Card, 2016; Salmivalli et al., 1996). Examples include telling an authority figure, comforting the victim, or standing up for the victim in front of the bully (Pöyhönen et al., 2010). Being defended by a peer has the potential to prevent bullying and protect victims against the negative outcomes that often result from being bullied (Salmivalli, 2010), such as academic problems (Espelage et al., 2013), loneliness, social anxiety (Graham & Juvonen, 1998), and externalizing behaviors (Attar-Schwartz et al., 2017). As evidence has accumulated regarding the benefits of defending behaviors in response to peer victimization, researchers have increasingly sought to identify what predicts whether a child defends when witnessing peer victimization or engages in more passive or pro-bullying behaviors. These studies have primarily focused on a small subset of individual characteristics

typical of defenders, leaving a gap in our understanding of the complex intrapsychic processes that contribute to defending. This study aimed to help close this gap by examining whether having a defender identity is predictive of defending behavior and whether one's defender identity is indirectly predictive of being less peer victimized through heightened defending.

Defending Behaviors and the Prevention of Bullying

The participant role approach to understanding bullying views peer victimization as occurring within an interpersonal system in which aggression often takes place in the presence of peers. According to this perspective, during an incident of bullying, children and youth assume a range of roles, including, bully, victim, assistant, reinforcer, or defender. Which roles children take can result in different outcomes for the victim and can impact the course of the bullying situation (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Since defending behaviors are intended to stop peer victimization (Meter & Card, 2016; Salmivalli et al., 1996), it is presumed that having more children assume the defender role leads to less peer victimization and better outcomes for the victim. However, defenders often are in the minority in their classrooms. A review of 37 studies revealed that only 39% of children act as defenders (Ma et al., 2019).

There is growing evidence of the benefits of children engaging in defending behaviors. In classrooms with more reinforcing behaviors, an environment is created where aggressive students are encouraged to bully others (Nocentini et al., 2013). In contrast, in classrooms with more defenders, children who are often most at risk for being victims (e.g., those high in social anxiety or peer rejection) experience fewer instances of actual peer victimization (Kärnä et al., 2010; Nocentini et al., 2013; Salmivalli, 2014). Not surprisingly, in classroom settings, defending behaviors are negatively associated with peer victimization, while reinforcing

behaviors (e.g., coming to view the situation, telling the victimizer to continue) are associated with more frequent peer victimization (Salmivalli et al., 2011).

Higher frequency of defending is also associated with reduced severity of the negative outcomes for the victim (Salmivalli, 2014; Sanino et al., 2011). Typically, victims of bullying report low self-esteem and loneliness (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). However, victims who have peers willing to defend them report having higher self-esteem and less anxiety and depression than those who were not defended (Sanino et al., 2011; Schuster, 2001). Defended victims are also more liked and more popular among classmates than victims without defenders (Sanino et al., 2011; Schuster, 2001). Thus, for victims, having someone defend them against bullying may improve their self-esteem, mental health, and peer relationships and reduce their chances of being bullied in the future.

Given the benefits of defending, it is important to identify the factors that contribute to children defending others. Age and gender are two such factors. Girls and younger children are more likely to defend than peers who are male and/or older (Espelage et al., 2011; Lambe et al., 2017, 2019). Gender differences in defending have thought to be due to girls receiving more socialization focused on being nurturing and helpful, and these gender roles often become more apparent as children age (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Researchers have also identified psychosocial correlates and predictors of defending behaviors. At the individual level, students who are more empathetic (Ma et al., 2019; Nickerson et al., 2015; Zych et al., 2016), have a higher sense of defender self-efficacy (Ma et al., 2019; Tharnberg & Jungert, 2013; van der Ploeg., et al 2017), and are popular/have a higher social status (Lambe et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2019; Pöyhönen et al., 2010; Salmivalli et al., 1996) are more likely to be defenders than other children. Further, children are more likely to defend others if they have a low level of moral disengagement

(Mazzone et al., 2016) and if they are prosocial and have stronger moral identity (Pozzoli et al., 2016).

Thus, researchers have identified a set of discrete traits characteristic of defenders, including self-perceptions consistent with acting as a defender (e.g., seeing oneself as empathetic and good at defending). From a theoretical perspective, it may be a unified sense of self as a defender (i.e., a defender self-concept), inclusive of the traits of defenders, that contributes to engaging in defending in bullying contexts. Thus, based on theoretical arguments (e.g., Participant Role Approach to Bullying (Salmivalli et al., 1996; Salmivalli, 2010) and Dynamics Systems of Role Identity (Kaplan & Garner, 2017)) and empirical evidence from studies of social behavior (e.g., Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Hardy & Carlo, 2005; Lamont-Mills & Christensen, 2006; Prince & Nurius, 2014; Uddin et al., 2019;), youths' self-concept as a defender may have a powerful influence over their decision to defend the victim of bullying. Research is needed, therefore, to understand how incorporating the role of defender in one's self-concept can lead to defending behaviors, which, in turn, may reduce their likelihood of being peer victimized.

Defender Self-Identity and the Development of Defending Behaviors

Self-concept can be broadly defined as a people's perception of themselves developed through a culmination of experiences and reinforcement from significant others (e.g., parents, teachers, peers; Shavelson et al., 1976). However, rather than simply being the byproduct of past experiences, one's self-concept is also a driving determinant of behavior (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Shavelson et al., 1976). The first goal of this research was to explore how a conception of oneself as a defender is associated with a child's defending behaviors across a school year. The second goal of this research was to examine whether holding a self-concept as a defender is indirectly associated with lower levels of peer victimization through heightened defending

behavior, suggesting that a defender self-concept may have positive long-term consequences for youths' socioemotional development.

Both theory and research point to one's self-concept as a driver of behavior (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). For example, according to Blasi's Model of Moral Identity, individuals vary as to the extent to which their sense of self includes valuing moral choices and prosociality and having goals of being altruistic to others (Blasi, 1980; Blasi, 1983; Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Hardy & Carlo, 2005). Blasi further proposes that individuals strive to maintain consistency between their actions and identity. For example, as youth integrate the contents of moral identity into their sense of core self, they increasingly strive to act in a manner consistent with their developing moral self-concept (Blasi & Glodis, 1995; Hardy & Carlo, 2005). Similarly Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (Kaplan & Garner, 2017) posits that as individuals begin to see themselves as having characteristics and attributes associated with a given role (e.g., enjoys cooking, buys cookbooks, able to distinguish flavors in foods), these self-perceptions become organized into a unifying role identity (e.g., chef, family cook), that then propels further engagement in the relevant behaviors (e.g., cooking for others). This leads to a reciprocal association in which engagement in role-consistent behavior strengthens one's role identity (Kaplan & Garner, 2017).

A growing literature has documented the effects of self-concept on behavior. For example, associations have been found between people's sense of self as a good student (Prince & Nurius, 2014), creative person (Uddin et al., 2019), athlete (Wayment et al., 2019), and a moral person (Hertz & Krettenauer, 2016) and their engagement in role-consistent behaviors. In one study illustrative of how one's self-concept can foster role-consistent behaviors, Lamont-Mills and Christensen (2006) examined the relationship between perceived identity as an athlete

and level of sports participation (elite, recreational, or non-participation) among Australian University students. The researchers found that having a stronger athletic identity was associated with competing in higher levels of sports (Lamont-Mills & Christensen, 2006).

Having a sense of self as a defender in bullying situations may similarly fosters children's defending behaviors. Consistent with the Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (Kaplan & Garnder, 2017), children may have a defender identity if they see themselves as (a) engaging in defending behaviors and (b) having traits that are consistent with defending. Thus, children's defender identity is foremost seeing oneself as having typically engaged in defending others when witnessing bullying. Moreover, a defender self-concept should be inclusive of seeing oneself as holding two traits integral to defending others: (a) having high levels of empathy, and (b) possession of a strong sense of self-efficacy for defending (Barchia & Bussey, 2011; Gini et al., 2007; Ma et al., 2019; Meter & Card, 2015; Pöyhönen et al., 2010).

Empathy is broadly defined as a person's ability to recognize, understand, and share in others' emotions (Bryant, 1982; Hoffman, 1987; Hoffman, 2000; Miller & Eisenberg, 1988). Empathy has long been considered a necessary trait for prosocial or helping behaviors, such as defending (e.g., Caravita et al., 2009; Coke et al., 1978; Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Lockwood et al., 2014; Paciello et al., 2013; Penner et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2014). Specifically, when witnessing bullying, students higher in empathy likely recognize and consider how the victim is feeling in that situation and utilize these feelings to enact defending behaviors (Hoffman, 2000). Not surprising then, empathy has been found to be associated specifically with defending victims of peer victimization (Gini et al., 2007; Gini et al., 2008; Nickerson et al., 2015). Van Noorden et al. (2015) reviewed 40 studies on empathy's associations with different roles in bullying situations and found that empathy was consistently positively associated with defending

behaviors. Moreover, Van der Ploeg et al. (2017) measured empathy and defending behaviors over time and found that empathy was predictive of defending behaviors six months later. Interestingly, empathy is almost always measured using self-reports (Van Noorden et al., 2015). These self-reports in essence reflect the person's view of themselves as empathetic and, thus, could be considered part of one sense of identity. Thus, perceiving oneself as empathic is likely integral to having a defender identity, as it allows individuals to see themselves as able to consider how the victim is feeling in bullying situations and recognize that the victim needs help.

In situations of peer victimization, defending can be risky, as youth often worry about their own reputation and safety if they take the side of the victim (Pozzoli & Gini, 2010; Pozzoli et al., 2012; Strindberg et al., 2020). Consequently, defenders need to feel as though they know how to intervene (Gini et al., 2008; Nickerson et al., 2014) and feel confident in their ability to do so (Pozzoli & Gini, 2013). Self-efficacy, broadly defined as the belief or confidence people have in their ability to successfully execute acts that produce desired outcomes (Bandura, 1997), is a driving force behind prosocial behaviors (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2017) and the defense of others (Clark & Bussey, 2020; Jenkins et al.,2016; Pöyhönen et al., 2010; Pöyhönen & Salmivalli, 2008; Thornberg et al., 2020). Researchers have also begun examining children's perceived confidence specifically in their ability to successfully defend victims (i.e., defender self-efficacy; Thornberg et al., 2017). When a person's defending self-efficacy is high, they typically engage in more instances of defending (Barchia & Bussey, 2011; Peets et al., 2015; Pöyhönen et al., 2012; Pronk et al., 2013; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013; Thornberg et al., 2017). Indeed, defending self-efficacy has been found to significantly differentiate defenders from witnesses who take on passive bystander roles (Thornberg et al., 2017). Therefore, feeling

confident in one's ability to enact defending behaviors may be a critical component of a defender identity.

This study aimed to measure defender identity and test whether or not having a stronger defender identity predicts heighted defending behavior over the course of a school year. To accomplish this goal, structural equation modeling was used, and a latent variable of defender identity was created, utilizing three self-reported indicators: (a) defending behavior, (b) empathy, and (c) self-efficacy. The model was tested using longitudinal data from three time points over one school year to see if a latent variable reflecting a defender identity positively predicts peer-reported defending behavior. Thus, defending behavior was assessed using two sources. Children's self-reports of defending were included as indicators of how they believe they behave when witnessing aggression and bullying. These self-reports reflect part of children's self-schema. In contrast, peer-reports of defending are presumed to reflect how often children are witnessed defending by peers. While peer-reports are not without bias, they are generally believed to be a more objective measure of defending behaviors. In other words, self-reported defending was included a measure of part of a child's identity; peer-reported defending was included to provide a relatively more accurate measure of their defending behavior. The study focused on 4th and 5th graders, as increases in bullying are often found in late childhood (Fujikawa et al., 2021; Salmivalli et al., 1998) while at the same time defending decreases. Thus, it is critical to determine whether a defender identity is key to maintaining or developing defending behaviors during late childhood, as this period may serve as a basis for behaviors during the more difficult early adolescent years.

Defender Identity as a Protective Factor for Peer Victimization

While a defender identity may have clear implications for engaging in defending

behaviors, it is less clear whether such an identity serves as a protective factor or a risk factor for the child. Of particular importance is whether a defender identity reduces the likelihood of becoming a victim of bullying. By promoting engagement in defending, a defender identity may foster a child's reputation as someone who is assertive and prosocial, two traits antithetical to being victimized by peers (Salmivalli et al., 1996; Salmivalli, 2010). Thus, by acting on their defender identity in service of protecting others, children may be inadvertently reducing their likelihood of being in the role of victim, further solidifying their role as a defender. It should be noted that youth often worry that the opposite will happen if they defend their victimized peers and that their defense of bullied peers may elicit aggression, not respect, from others (Strindberg et al., 2020).

Current empirical evidence regarding whether defending reduces or increases the risk of peer victimization is mixed. Cross-sectional studies suggest a slight positive association between defending and peer victimization (Lambe et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2015). However, these concurrent associations may be attributable to victims defending each other against a common bully or set of bullies. Examining longitudinal research can provide a better assessment of how defending may be protective against peer victimization. Huitsing et al. (2014) found that over time children who defend victims may become victimized by the bullies to whom they were standing up. However, this does not necessitate that children who defend experience an overall increase in peer victimization over time. Only two longitudinal studies to date have examined whether defending leads to an overall increase or decrease in being peer-victimized. Meter and Card (2015) collected data from students in 6^{th}-7^{th} grade in the Spring of two academic years and found that defending behaviors served a protective role for the youth against further victimization. Additionally, defenders had a decreased reputation as a victim among peers and

instead were seen as assertive and willing to stand up for themselves (Meter & Card, 2015). Malamut et al. (2022) collected data from students in 7th-9th grade from the spring of one academic year through the following spring and, in contrast, found that defending behaviors were not significantly associated with future victimization. Notably, these two studies both collected data on adolescents and examined the association between defending behaviors and victimization across two school years. Therefore, neither can speak to whether defending is protective against peer victimization for younger children or protective during the course of one school year. The latter point is particularly important, as defending behaviors may allow the child to develop a reputation as being assertive among one peer group that is not sustained in subsequent school years with different sets of classmates. Thus, this study examined defending behaviors and experiences of peer victimization in younger children across an entire school year to try and better understand how a defender identity may indirectly protect against being peer victimized by fostering defending behaviors.

The Proposed Study

The current study tested a full structural equation model of how defender identity may predict heightened defending behaviors and lower levels of peer victimization. Longitudinal data were collected from 4th and 5th graders during the Fall, Winter, and Spring of one school year. Latent variables were estimated for defender identity, defending behaviors and peer victimization as shown in Figure 1. Utilizing the three time points, the model tested if defender identity, measured during the Fall, predicted heightened defending in the Winter. The model also tested if defending in the Winter predicted lower levels of peer victimization in the Spring. Additionally, this model tested if children's Fall defending identity indirectly predicted Spring peer victimization through peer-reported defending behaviors in the Winter.

Multigroup analysis was preformed to examine gender as a potential moderator of the association between defending identity and defending behaviors. Specifically, it was hypothesized that a defender identity may foster more defending behaviors in boys versus girls. Boys have been found to value social dominance and develop more defined dominance hierarchies (Jarvinen & Nicholls 1996; Omark et al., 1975), while girls have been found to value closeness and harmony in their relationships (Blatt et al., 1993; Henrich et al., 2001) and tend to respond in more prosocial ways to conflict (Chung & Asher, 1996; Hopmeyer & Asher, 1997; Rose & Asher, 1999). Furthermore, boys are exposed to more instances of overt acts of physical and verbal aggression than girls (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick et al., 1996; Crick et al., 1999; Rudolph, 2002), which may affect the ways they defend others, in particular more assertive and direct behaviors. Given this information, there are two reasons why a defender identity may be more critical for developing defending behaviors among boys than girls. First, there may be heightened expectations that girls engage in defending in order to maintain harmonious relationships in their peer group. Thus, group norms may supplant one's defender identity in determining girls' willingness to defend. Second, defending for boys may require countering peers' physical and verbal aggression, and boys may be expected to defend assertively rather than indirectly (Rose & Rudolph, 2006). Consequently, boys may need to have a strong sense of themselves as defenders to risk intervening when witnessing bullying situations.

Therefore, this study tested following four hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Having a stronger defender identity in the Fall would predict higher levels defending behaviors in the Winter.

Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of defending behaviors in the Winter would predict lower levels of victimization in the Spring.

Hypothesis 3: Defending behaviors in the Winter would mediate the association between defender identity in the Fall and peer victimization in the Spring.

Hypothesis 4: Defending identity in the Fall would predict higher levels of defending behaviors in the Winter more strongly for boys than for girls.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study included 1,564 children (M_{age} = 10.05 years; *SD* = .67; 760 girls and 804 boys) in 4th and 5th grade classrooms in 13 public elementary schools at the time of data collection. The children were racially diverse, 36.1% Black, 4.1% Latina/o, 55% White, .7% Asian, .1% Native American, .2% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 3.5% Multiethnic, and .2% other race/ethnic background. Of the children in the participating schools, 53.1% to 93.6% (*M* = 71.31%) received free or reduced lunch. These schools were located in small, rural, primarily low SES communities in the Southeastern United States. The 13 schools included 91 fourth-grade and fifth-grade classrooms. All children from these classrooms were invited to participate in the study at the start of the school year, and 76.1% of the children received parental consent and provided written assent.

Procedure

Data were collected during two consecutive school years. The first cohort (5 schools) participated during the 2017-2018 school year, and the second cohort (8 schools) participated during the 2018-2019 school year. Schools included both 4th and 5th grade classrooms, with the exception of one school that went up to only the 4th grade. All children participated in a randomized controlled trial of a theory-based antibullying program which aimed to increase

defending behaviors when witnessing bullying and, as a result, improve students' emotional well-being, school adjustment, and academic progress. Schools were randomly assigned to one of two groups: 1) an intervention group that participated in a group activity based on Deviance Regulation Theory (Blanton & Berkley, 2008), or 2) a control group. All study measures and protocols were identical across the two intervention conditions except for the intervention activities. Of the 13 schools, eight were assigned to the DRT intervention (55 classrooms), and five were assigned to the control condition (37 classrooms). In each school, children participated in a fall data collection and a 45-minute intervention activity two weeks later. Follow-up data were collected approximately three months after the intervention activity in the winter and again in the Spring, three months following the Winter collection.

In each classroom, children completed group-administered paper and pencil questionnaires. Data collection at each time point took approximately 50-55 minutes. A research assistant (undergraduate or graduate level) read the instructions and questions out loud, and two or more assistants were present during this process to provide help. At each time point, teachers completed a questionnaire packet for each student participating in the study, and teachers received a $10 USD honorarium for each packet they completed. This study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Auburn University, Protocol #17–092 MR 1703; Project Title, "Using Deviance Regulation to Combat Bullying".

Measures

Empathy

Empathy was measured using Bryant's (1982) 22-item empathy index (EI), which has been found to have strong reliability and validity in previous research (Cronbach's $\alpha = .81$; Barchia & Bussey, 2011). Children responded to items asking about their perceived empathy in

different scenarios (e.g., “I get upset when I see a girl/boy being hurt”, “Seeing a girl/boy who is crying makes me feel like crying”, and “It’s hard for me to understand why someone else gets upset”). Children scored themselves on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*Not at all true of me*) to 5 (*Very true of me*). Items were averaged to create a final composite empathy score (α=.66).

Defender Self Efficacy

Defender self-efficacy was measured using five items, three of which were taken from Salmivalli and colleagues (Kärnä et al., 2011; Pöyhönen et al., 2010), who based items on the Participant Response Questionnaire (Salmivalli et al., 1996). Children responded to questions asking them how easy it would be to engage in different peer-defending behaviors (e.g., “Try to make others stop bullying” or “Comforting the victim”) and scored themselves on a four-point Likert scale from 1 (*Very Difficult for Me*) to 4 (*Very Easy for Me*). Adequate internal reliability was found for these items with children in this age group (Cronbach’s α = .65; Pöyhönen et al., 2010). However, two items were included to increase the measure of internal reliability (e.g., “Intervene in a bullying situation and help the victim”; Thornberg and Jungert, 2013). Item scores were averaged to create a final composite defender self-efficacy score (α=.69).

Defending Behavior

The Participant Response Questionnaire (PRQ-SR; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004) was used to measure self- and peer-reported defending behavior. For the self-reported measure, children responded to five items asking how often they engaged in defending behaviors. These five items were used from the 15-item version of the PRQ (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). Two of the items were worded as the original (“tell them to stop bullying”, “try to make other stop bullying”). A third item was split into two separate items (“comfort the victim”, “encourage the victim to tell the teacher about the bullying”) which increased the measures

internal reliability while another item was adapted to capture active efforts to seek adult intervention ("tell the teacher or other adult about the bullying"). Children responded to each item on a Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*a lot*). A composite defending scoring was computed for each time point by averaging the item scores (α= .75).

For the peer-report measure, children rated each of their participating classmates on three PRQ items ("tells the others to stop bullying," "tries to make the others stop bullying," and "comforts the victim or encourages him or her to tell the teacher about the bullying") on a Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*a lot*). These items have been shown to have good internal reliability (α = .89) and criterion validity in previous research (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). Items were used as observed indicators of latent defending scores in the Fall, Winter, and Spring.

Peer Victimization

Peer victimization was measured using three peer-report items assessing verbal, physical, and relational victimization. For each item, children rated their participating classmates on a four-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*a lot*). The average rating children received from each of their participating classmates on the three items was calculated. Items were used as observed indicators of latent peer victimization scores in the Fall, Winter, and Spring.

Data Analytic Plan

Missing Data and Descriptive Statistic

For all study variables, means and standard deviations were calculated, bivariate correlations were estimated, and independent sample *t*-tests were used to test for gender differences and differences as a function of intervention conditions. Chi-square tests were used to test whether those with and without missing data differ by gender or intervention condition. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to determine any differences in those with and

without missing data on self-reports of defending, empathy, self-efficacy, peer-reports of defending, and peer victimization.

Primary Analysis

Using Mplus version 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2017), a full structural equation model (SEM) was estimated to test the theoretical model presented in Figure 1. Full information maximum likelihood (FIML) was utilized to account for missing data. FIML estimates a likelihood function for each participant using all of the available data to estimate model parameters (Enders & Bandalos, 2001). Maximum likelihood robust error estimation (MLR) was used to correct for any non-normality that may influence the estimates of standard errors and model fit (Finney & DiStefano, 2006).

A latent Fall defending variable was created using the three self-report measures (i.e., self-reported defending behavior, empathy, and defender self-efficacy). For the Fall, Winter, and Spring, latent variables of defending behaviors were created using the three peer-report items of confronting, stopping, and making others stop. Fall, Winter, and Spring latent peer victimization variables were created using the three peer-reported items of relational, verbal, and physical victimization. I allowed error covariances from indicator variables at adjoining timepoints to be estimated, as well as within-wave covariances between latent constructs. Model fit was assessed using a chi-square test of model fit and other frequently used fit statistics (i.e., RMSEA < .08; CFI ≥ .95; SRMR < .08; Henseler et al., 2016; Schreiber et al., 2006). To test for gender differences, a constrained model was estimated, where coefficients and variable means were equal for boys and girls, and this model was then compared to an unconstrained model, where coefficients and latent variable means were freely estimated. A $\Delta\chi^2$ test was used to compare the model fit of the constrained and unconstrained model, with a significant difference indicating at

least one significant gender difference in the parameter estimates. After a significant $\Delta\chi^2$ was found, models that constrained each parameter separately for boy and girls was estimated. These models were compared to a completely constrained model to identify any gender differences, which was indicated by a significant $\Delta\chi^2$. A final model was estimated that constrains all path coefficients and means to be equal for boys and girls but excluded gender constraints for the parameters where a significant gender difference was found.

Path coefficients were then assessed to identify if they confirmed direct and mediated pathways. Bootstrapping was used to estimate the indirect effect of defender identity on peer victimization through defending behaviors (Preacher & Hayes, 2004).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Descriptive statistics and results of independent samples *t*-tests comparing children by gender and intervention condition are presented in Table 1. Girls had higher self-reports of defending behaviors, empathy, and self-efficacy. Across the three waves girls also had higher peer-reports of defending behaviors than boys. However, across all time points, boys received higher peer-reports of peer victimization (relational, verbal, and physical) with the exception of Spring relational victimization where the difference was not significant. For intervention condition, there were no differences in self-reports of defending behaviors, empathy, and self-efficacy. Across the three time points, participants in the control condition had higher reports of defending behaviors (comforting, telling others to stop, and making others stop) than those in the DRT condition. In the Fall and Winter, participants in the DRT condition had higher peer-reported verbal victimization and physical victimization, and in the Spring, participants in the DRT condition had higher peer-reported relational, verbal, and physical victimization. Therefore,

a supplemental analysis was conducted in which the final model was tested in which intervention condition was controlled for in all predictive pathways.

Bivariate Correlations

Bivariate correlations are presented in Tables 2-7. Moderate correlations were found among the defending identity items (i.e., self-reported defending, empathy, and efficacy) for both girls and boys (all *r*s $\geq$ .21). Self-reported defending and empathy showed small associations with peer-reported defending behaviors over time (*r*s ranging from .12 to .28) while self-efficacy showed very weak, mostly nonsignificant, associations with the defending behaviors for both girls and boys (*r*s ranging from .00 to .10). The correlations between the defending identity items and peer-reported victimization items ranged from nonsignificant to small and negative *(r*s ranging from -.24 to .05). Moderate-to-strong correlations were found among peer-reported defending behaviors (*r*s ranging from .45 to .88), and the stability coefficients for each of the indicators were strong across the three waves. Moderate-to-strong correlations were also found among the peer-reported victimization items (*r*s ranging from .34 to .79), and the stability coefficients for each of the indicators was strong across the three waves. The correlations between peer-reported defending behaviors and the peer victimization items were negative and small-to-moderate in magnitude (*r*s ranging from -.59 to -.18).

Missing Data Analysis

The percentage of missing data was small, ranging from 1.41% to 6.39% across all study variables. Of the children in the sample, 12.53% were missing data on at least one variable. Independent samples *t*-tests indicated that participants with missing data did not differ significantly from those with complete data self-reports on defending behaviors, $t(1504) = 1.23$, $p = .22$, empathy, $t(1495) = 1.37$, $p = .17$, and self-efficacy, $t(1482) = .45$, $p = .65$. However,

those with missing data received significantly lower reports of defending behaviors and higher reports of peer victimization at all time points except for physical victimization in the Spring (means and *t*-tests are presented in Table 8). Thus, FIML was employed allowing data from all participants to be included in analyses and to reduce bias in parameter estimation.

Tests of Defender Identity as a Predictor of Defending Behavior and Peer Victimization

The hypothesized model was estimated constraining all of the paths to be equal across boys and girls. The model fit was weaker than desired, $\chi^2(377) = 2028.21$, $p < .001$, CFI = .94, RMSEA = .075, SRMR = .072. Based on the modification indices, error covariances were estimated between Fall and Spring peer-reported relational, verbal, and physical victimization; between Winter peer-reported physical and relational victimization; between Winter peer-reported making others stop and telling others to stop; and between Fall self-reported defending and self-reported defending self-efficacy. This revised model fit the data well, $\chi^2(371) = 1426.87$, $p < .001$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .060, SRMR = .065. Freeing all of the equality constraints led to improved model fit, $\Delta\chi^2(41) = 82.80$, $p < .001$. Therefore, paths were sequentially freed to identify those for which there was a significant gender difference. The factor loading for Fall peer-reported comforting was stronger for girls than for boys, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 5.86$, $p = .02$. There was a gender difference in the path between Fall defender identity and Winter peer-reported victimization such that the path was stronger for boys than for girls, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 5.27$, $p = .02$. In addition, the covariance between the latent Winter defending and peer victimization variables was stronger for boys than girls, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 11.23$, $p < .001$. Finally, the error covariance between the Winter defending behaviors of telling others to stop and making them stop was stronger for girls than for boys, $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 6.39$, $p = .01$.

A final model in which all parameters were constrained to be equal except those for which there was a significant gender difference fit the model well, $\chi^2(367) = 1399.34$, $p < .001$, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .06, SRMR = .067. Final unstandardized and standardized factor loadings, structural paths, and error covariances are presented in Tables 9-11. Figure 1 also presents the final path coefficients. Consistent with the bivariate correlations, all stability paths were strong and statistically significant. Defender identity in the Fall was predictive of lower Winter peer victimization but only for boys. Importantly, for both boys and girls, Fall defender identity was predictive of higher levels of Winter peer-reported defending behaviors, and Winter peer-reported defending behaviors was predictive of lower levels of Spring peer victimization. This resulted in a significant negative indirect effect for Fall defender identity on Spring peer victimization through higher levels of Winter peer-reported defending behaviors (girls and boys unstandardized indirect effect = -.005, 95% CI: -.012, -.001; girls standardized indirect effect = -.016, 95% CI: -.037. -.004; boys standardized indirect effect = -.015, 95% CI: -.034, -.004).

The final model was re-estimated controlling for intervention condition on all predictive pathways. This model showed no change in the pattern of findings. Specifically, unstandardized path coefficients showed no difference greater than |.01|. Statistical significance did not change for any paths, with the exception of the path between Fall defender identity to Winter peer-victimization for boys which was $p = .057$. Most importantly, there was still a significant indirect effect for Fall defender identity on Spring peer victimization through higher levels of Winter peer-reported defending behaviors (girls and boys unstandardized indirect effect = -.007, 95% CI: -.020, .000; girls standardized indirect effect = -.012, 95% CI: -.032, -.001; boys standardized indirect effect = -.011, 95% CI: -.029, -.001).

Discussion

The current study was the first to document an association between having a stronger defending identity and heightened levels of defending behaviors during the school year. Previous literature has identified the harmful repercussions of peer victimization (Meter & Card, 2016; Pöyhönen et al., 2010; Salmivalli, 2010) and the benefits of having children present who are willing to defend the victim (Salmivalli, 2014; Sanino et al., 2011). Thus, understanding how children see their role in bullying situations may provide important insights into how to increase defending and reduce pro-bullying bystander behaviors. The findings also pointed to an indirect effect of defending identity on peer victimization through defending behavior. Thus, having a defender identity may not only benefit others through greater defending behaviors but may also serve a protective function for the child.

Defender Identity Predicting Defender Behavior

Consistent with hypotheses, results of this study showed that a defending identity in the Fall was predictive of higher levels of defending behaviors in the Winter. One's role identity has been found to be a driving force for a person's behaviors (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003; Shavelson et al., 1976). Further, as outlined in Blasi's Model of Moral Identity, individuals work towards alignment and consistency between their identity and their behaviors (Blasi, 1980; Blasi, 1983; Blasi & Glodis, 1995). Drawing from this theory, I proposed that having a sense of self as a defender may motivate children to act on a victim's behalf to maintain a consistent sense of self. This is the first study to test this proposition and, therefore, meaningfully builds upon previous research that has examined the individual correlates of defender behavior. Interestingly, many of the known correlates of defending (e.g., empathy, self-efficacy for defending, Barchia & Bussey, 2011; Gini et al., 2008; Ma et al., 2019; Meter & Card, 2015; Pöyhönen et al., 2010) have been

assessed through self-reports. This work diverges from these past studies by more explicitly acknowledging that what is being measured is a child's sense of self (e.g., sense of self as empathetic). Not surprising then self-reports of defending, empathy, and self-efficacy are often significantly correlated (Ma et al., 2019). I argue, and demonstrate, here that these self-reports can be viewed as part of an integrated sense of one's role as a defender. By viewing these self-perceptions as part of a unified sense of self, this research helps understand how a defender identity as a whole may facilitate aiding others who are being targeted for aggression.

As this is the first known study to measure defender identity, an examination of the adequacy of the measurement of a defender identity is also important. Drawing from Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (Kaplan & Garner, 2017), I proposed that when children see themselves as having characteristic of a defender, these self-perceptions form into a unified sense of self as a defender. The measurement of defender identity in this study reflected this theoretical perspective. It was presumed that a sense of self as a defender would need to include believing defending is a behavior in which one regularly engages, viewing oneself as empathetic to others, and seeing oneself as capable of effectively standing up for or aiding victims. Results supported this model of defender identity as indicated by the model fit for the final SEM model and the significant factor loadings for both boys and girls. It is important to note that self-efficacy had the lowest factor loading of the three indicator variables (See Table 9). This difference in loadings could be due to a child engaging in defending behavior, but not being confident that their actions are highly effective. For example, a child may empathize with victims and attempt to defend targeted peers but may not be confident that their efforts were successful. Over time, self-efficacy could increase through self-perceived successful attempts at defending. Having identity measurements during the Fall timepoint only did not allow for testing possible factorial

invariance over time (Little & Slegers, 2014). According to Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (Kaplan & Garner, 2017), one's identity is constantly changing, drawing from experiences and continuous self-evaluations. Therefore, it will be important to examine whether self-efficacy, as well as the other indicators, become more or less integral to the measurement of defender identity over time. Furthermore, additional important characteristics of defenders may not have been included. For example, previous research has tied viewing oneself as prosocial and moral (Patrick et al., 2019) with defending peers. Thus, future research should examine these as additional components of a strong defender identity.

Indirect Effect of Defending Identity on Peer Victimization Through Defending Behavior

Results of this study showed an indirect effect of Fall defender identity on lower levels of Spring peer victimization through heightened levels of Winter defending behaviors. By demonstrating a direct effect of defending behaviors on lower levels of peer victimization, this research addresses the question of whether or not defending is a protective factor against being victimized in the future or whether it increases the risk of being peer-victimized. Although defending is commonly viewed by children and adolescents as increasing the likelihood of becoming a target of peers' aggression (Pozzoli & Gini, 2010; Pozzoli et al., 2012; Strindberg et al., 2020), the few studies examining this have yielded mixed results (Malamut et al. 2022; Meter & Card, 2015). One potential reason defending may have served a protective function in this study was that associations were tested across a single school year and, thus, within a relatively stable peer group. Children who defend others may be creating the reputation for themselves as being a someone who is assertive and prosocial, two known traits of children who are infrequently victimized (Salmivalli, 2010; Salmivalli et al., 1996). Children also often defend

their friends when their friends experience peer victimization (Oldenburg et al., 2018), potentially creating a web of alliances that lead to greater protection against peer victimization.

Defender identity was found to be predictive of decreased levels of Spring peer victimization, underscoring that there are potential benefits of a defender identity beyond how it serves peer-victimized classmates. Moreover, if holding a defender identity leads to behaviors that protect against becoming peer-victimized, it may have additional, downstream benefits for the child such as reducing risk for academic problems (Espelage et al., 2013), loneliness, and social anxiety (Graham & Juvonen, 1998). Prosocial children have been found to be more liked and accepted by their peers (Newcomb et al., 1993; Rubin et al., 2006) and have higher friendship quality (Poorthuis et al., 2012). Thus, by engaging in defending, children may be enhancing their social status and relationships with classmates. Furthermore, a defender identity may be self-reinforcing by reducing the extent to which children take on the role of victim in bullying situations, allowing them to be in the position to defend their bullied peers and, in turn, leading to increased feeling of defender self-efficacy.

Gender Differences

Results of this study showed no gender differences in the mediated pathway between Fall defender identity and Spring peer victimization. This finding was surprising given the hypothesis that defender identity would more strongly predict higher levels of defending behaviors for boys than for girls. Knowing that boys are exposed to more instances of physical and verbal violence (Crick & Bigbee, 1998; Crick et al., 1996; Crick et al., 1999; Rudolph, 2002) and may have to intervene and defend in more intense situations, it was thought that boys would need a stronger defender identity to be motivated to defend others. However, in this study there was no difference in the predictive association between defender identity and defending behaviors. Girls

have been found to respond to conflict in prosocial ways (Chung & Asher, 1996; Hopmeyer & Asher, 1997; Rose & Asher, 1999), so their defending identity may be as tied to their defending behaviors as boys.

However, two interesting gender differences did emerge. The first regarded the measurement of defending behavior; specifically, comforting was a stronger indicator of defending behavior for girls than it was for boys. Girls value closeness and harmony in their relationships (Blatt et al., 1993; Henrich et al., 2001) and report receiving more emotional support within friendships than boys do (Slavin & Rainer, 1990). Taken together, this may explain the difference as comforting the victim would bring a greater sense of emotional closeness between the defender and victim, which girls likely value more than boys. Second, the path between Fall defender Identity and Winter peer-victimization was nonsignificant for girls and was significant and negative for boys. This may be due to the greater use of physical aggression among boys (Björkqvist, 2018), which likely is highly observable. Boys who see themselves as defenders may have more opportunities to be seen by peers engaging in defender role-consistent ways, resulting in more immediate reductions in peer victimization. Girls, in contrast, may defend in more situations of relational aggression, which may require a more extensive period of time in order to lead to reduced peer victimization.

Strengths, Limitations and Future Directions

This study is the first, to date, to study a child's sense of a defender identity, as well as the first to examine whether a defender identity is associated with higher levels of defending behaviors. Thus, this study moves the field forward by examining how self-reported traits often characteristic of defenders are integrated into a unified sense of self, promoting increased defending of bullied peers. In addition to bringing a new theoretical perspective to the literature,

this study had a number of strengths. First, whereas defender identity was necessarily assessed through self-reports, defending behaviors were measured using peer-reports, eliminating the possibility that any observed associations between children's defender identity and their behavior could be an artifact of shared method variance. This is particularly important when studying defending, as prosocial behaviors are culturally valued (Hu et al., 2021), and children, therefore, may overestimate how likely they are to defend. A second strength of this study was the inclusion of data collected at three timepoints from the same school year. Longitudinal studies of defending often examine associations across consecutive school years (e.g., Malamut et al. 2022; Meter & Card, 2015). However, given the friendships and reputations are often formed over the course of a school year, it is important to see how a defender identity may impact behaviors and outcomes within a specified peer group (e.g., a classroom).

One weakness of this study is that the indicators of defender identity were collected only during the Fall. Consequently, this study is unable to speak to the stability of children's defender identity over time and whether a more stable defender identity is more predictive of defending behaviors than a less stable defender identity. Furthermore, theory describes identity as being reinforced and strengthened through enacting behaviors consistent with that identity (Kaplan & Garner, 2017). In the future, it will be important to collect defender identity over time to examine whether engagement in defending leads to an increased defender identity. It will also be important to examine other predictors of developing a strong defender identity (e.g., exposure to different types of peer victimization, having strong friendships, being praised by adults for sticking up for peers). Such studies should also examine the consistency of defending identity and behaviors across school years and classrooms. As children progress through school, they often change classrooms and classmates. Research is needed to know if there are contextual

factors within the classroom or peer groups that may increase or decrease the extent to which children hold a defender identity.

Additional limitations in the measurement of defender identity should be noted. Because defender identity was measured at only one timepoint, factorial invariance across waves could not be tested (i.e., whether the association between the observed indicators and the latent variable did not change during the school year or across development; Little & Slegers, 2014). It is possible, for example, that over time, efficacy becomes more central to one's defender identity as children evaluate their attempts at helping bullied peers. Studies are needed that examine additional constructs that may be important to one's defender identity but were not tested in this study. For example, popular children and those with a higher social status are more likely to be a defender (Lambe et al., 2019; Ma et al., 2019; Pöyhönen et al., 2010; Salmivalli et al., 1996). Thus, seeing oneself as having a role of prominence or leadership in the peer group may play an important role in one's defender identity. Further, seeing oneself as being moral (e.g., having a sense of behaviors that are right and wrong) and generally prosocial (e.g., acting in ways that benefit others) may also be integral to one's sense of defender identity (Pozzoli et al., 2016).

Additional studies should examine the effects of a defender identity with older and younger groups of students. As children age, they spend more time at school, and the school context has shown to be important in the formation of identity (Lannegrand-Willems & Bosma, 2006). Moreover, the frequency of bullying has been found to increase around the transition into middle or junior high schools (Cross et al., 2018; Pepler et al., 2006). During this time, children may have greater opportunities to witness bullying and engage in defending behaviors. This increased exposure to bullying may provide more opportunities for adolescents to reflect on their own behaviors when witnessing aggression. On the other hand, studies have shown that younger

children are more likely to be defenders than older children (Espelage et al., 2011; Lambe et al., 2017, 2019; Ma et al., 2019). Younger children may need fewer experiences of defending or less reinforcement from others (e.g., parents, teachers, peers), two factors critical to identity development (Shavelson et al., 1976), to form their defender identity. Thus, the development of a defender identity and its consequences need to be understood within specific developmental contexts.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this study provides novel information about a child's defender identity, as well as how having a defender identity is associated with heightened levels of defending behaviors and lower levels of peer-victimization over time. Although much attention has been paid to the role of defenders in bullying situations and their impact on aggression within the peer group (Meter & Card, 2016; Salmivalli et al., 1996), children's sense of being a defender as part of their identity has yet been explored. This study underscores that a defender identity can be meaningfully assessed with elementary school children and points to the importance of having a defender identity for fostering defending behaviors. The findings also address the unresolved issue of whether defending has negative repercussions for the child, in particular, heightened risk for their own future peer victimization. Not only did the results show that defending was predictive of lower levels of peer victimization, they also provided evidence that a defender identity can promote a child's own socioemotional well-being by indirectly lowering risk for peer victimization.

Although much remains to be understood about the development and consequences of a defender identity, the findings also suggest some important implications for anti-bullying interventions. Potential interventions could help children understand the benefits of defending by

emphasizing the protective effects for the victim and the defender against future victimization. An emphasis can also be placed on helping children promote their defender identity. Education and information on the different types of defending behaviors can be provided to children followed by roleplays where they are allowed to practice these behaviors in different bully scenarios. Facilitators can provide feedback to children after the role plays (e.g., “Wow, it looks like you noticed they were feeling scared and chose to step in by getting a teacher, great job!”). Such feedback may help children see themselves as empathetic and foster their self-efficacy for defending. Further, facilitators can ask children to share about their experiences noticing when someone needed help or when they stepped in to defend a peer. They then can highlight how the children have traits of a defender and/or already successfully defended in the past which can promote children seeing themselves as being in the defender role. Thus, this research provides not only important avenues for basic research, it can also inform intervention development and evaluation.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Comparisons across Gender and Intervention Condition

	Total sample		Girls	Boys		Control condition	DRT condition	
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*M*	*t*-test	*M*	*M*	*t*-test
Wave 1 SR defending	3.26	.69	3.79	3.14	-6.95***	3.03	3.22	2.36
Wave 1 SR Empathy	3.47	.53	3.61	3.33	-10.75***	3.54	3.42	4.44
Wave 1 SR Self Efficacy	2.92	.73	2.92	2.91	-.37***	2.96	2.88	2.14
Wave 1 Comforting	2.53	.50	2.69	2.39	-12.29***	2.64	2.45	7.65***
Wave 1 Tell others stop	2.46	.54	2.58	2.35	-8.77***	2.60	2.36	8.99***
Wave 1 Make others stop	2.48	.51	2.61	2.36	-9.64***	2.60	2.39	8.00***
Wave 2 Comforting	2.55	.54	2.73	2.37	-13.59***	2.65	2.47	6.70***
Wave 2 Tells others stop	2.50	.53	2.64	2.38	-9.67***	2.64	2.40	9.03***
Wave 2 Make others stop	2.51	.52	2.63	2.40	-9.06***	2.65	2.41	9.17***
Wave 3 Comforting	2.54	.57	2.72	2.38	-12.26***	2.67	2.45	7.61***
Wave 3 Tell others stop	2.50	.55	2.62	2.38	-8.47***	2.64	2.39	8.54***
Wave 3 Make others stop	2.53	.53	2.64	2.44	-7.36***	2.68	2.43	9.20***
Wave 1 Relational vic	1.55	.36	1.51	1.60	4.75***	1.54	1.57	-1.52
Wave 1 Verbal vic	1.68	.49	1.59	1.77	7.30***	1.64	1.72	-3.13**
Wave 1 Physical vic	1.45	.34	1.37	1.52	8.82***	1.39	1.50	-5.97***
Wave 2 Relational vic	1.56	.36	1.52	1.59	3.67***	1.54	1.57	-1.73
Wave 2 Verbal vic	1.74	.50	1.65	1.83	6.92***	1.70	1.77	-2.84**
Wave 2 Physical vic	1.43	.33	1.36	1.51	8.97***	1.39	1.46	-4.02***
Wave 3 Relational vic	1.54	.35	1.52	1.56	2.21	1.51	1.57	-3.34***
Wave 3 Verbal vic	1.76	.49	1.70	1.82	4.87***	1.72	1.80	-3.42***
Wave 3 Physical vic	1.46	.33	1.39	1.53	7.87***	1.41	1.50	-5.59***

Table 2

Bivariate Correlations among the Peer-reported Defending Items

Variable	1.	2.	3.
1. Wave 1 SR defending	---	.36	.41
2. Wave 1 SR Empathy	.36	---	.23
3. Wave 1 SR Self Efficacy	.38	.21	---

Note. Correlations below the diagonal are for girls and above the diagonal are for boys. SR = self-reported. All values are significant at $p < .001$.

Table 3

Bivariate Correlations among the Peer-reported Defender Items

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Wave 1 Comforting	---	.67	.54	.76	.59	.50	.76	.53	.45
2. Wave 2 Comforting	.64	---	.79	.65	.82	.73	.66	.77	.72
3. Wave 3 Comforting	.57	.82	---	.56	.77	.82	.58	.72	.81
4. Wave 1 Tell others to stop	.76	.68	.63	---	.65	.56	.83	.62	.57
5. Wave 2 Tell others stop	.58	.81	.78	.66	---	.81	.65	.87	.78
6. Wave 3 Tell others stop	.50	.74	.84	.59	.78	---	.58	.78	.87
7. Wave 1 Make others stop	.77	.71	.63	.83	.66	.58	---	.63	.58
8. Wave 2 Make others stop	.54	.76	.74	.63	.87	.78	.63	---	.74
9. Wave 3 Make others stop	.50	.73	.83	.59	.75	.88	.60	.74	---

Note. Correlations below the diagonal are for girls and above the diagonal are for boys. All values are significant at $p < .001$.

Table 4

Bivariate Correlations among the Peer-reported Victimization Items

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
1. Wave 1 Relational vic.	---	.61	.55	.58	.48	.48	.59	.44	.43
2. Wave 2 Relational vic.	.63	---	.66	.46	.59	.51	.46	.63	.47
3. Wave 3 Relational vic.	.58	.67	---	.34	.42	.51	.38	.50	.53
4. Wave 1 Verbal vic.	.61	.49	.43	---	.76	.71	.64	.48	.50
5. Wave 2 Verbal vic.	.50	.58	.48	.77	---	.79	.54	.61	.55
6. Wave 3 Verbal vic.	.48	.53	.55	.69	.78	---	.51	.56	.64
7. Wave 1 Physical vic.	.60	.49	.47	.61	.55	.54	---	.56	.51
8. Wave 2 Physical vic.	.47	.62	.49	.51	.57	.51	.63	---	.61
9. Wave 3 Physical vic.	.44	.48	.55	.48	.48	.56	.57	.63	---

Note. Correlations below the diagonal are for girls and above the diagonal are for boys. vic. = victimization. All values are significant at $p < .001$.

Table 5

Bivariate Correlations between the Fall Defender Identity Items and Peer-reported Defending Items

	Girls			Boys		
Variable	SR defending	SR empathy	SR efficacy	SR defending	SR empathy	SR efficacy
Wave 1 comfort others	.12**	.21***	.04	.19***	.23***	.06
Wave 2 comfort others	.15***	.23***	.06	.23***	.28***	.08*
Wave 3 comfort others	.18***	.22***	.05	.18***	.24***	.10*
Wave 1 tell others to stop	.14***	.17***	.04	.18***	.26***	-.00
Wave 2 tell others stop	.14***	.19***	.06	.20***	.25***	.07
Wave 3 tell others stop	.18***	.23***	.08*	.15***	.22***	.05
Wave 1 make others stop	.16***	.19***	.05	.20***	.25***	.04
Wave 2 make others stop	.12***	.18***	.06	.20***	.20***	.05
Wave 3 make others stop	.16***	.18***	.10**	.14***	.20***	.01

Note. SR = self-reported.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 6

Bivariate Correlations between the Fall Defender Identity Items and Peer-reported Victimization Items

	Girls			Boys		
Variable	SR defending	SR empathy	SR efficacy	SR defending	SR empathy	SR efficacy
Wave 1 relational victimization	-.00	-.05	-.01	.01	-.07	-.03
Wave 2 relational victimization	-.01	.01	-.00	.01	-.01**	-.06
Wave 3 relational victimization	.03	-.00	-.00	.02	-.04	-.04
Wave 1 verbal victimization	-.07*	-.18***	.02	-.09*	-.21***	.20
Wave 2 verbal victimization	-.07	-.14***	.02	-.12**	-.24***	-.01
Wave 3 verbal victimization	-.05	-.15***	.01	-.07	-.20***	.02
Wave 1 physical victimization	-.05	-.16***	-.02	-.02	-.14***	-.01
Wave 2 physical victimization	-.05	-.09*	.03	-.03	-.17***	-.03
Wave 3 physical victimization	-.05	-.11**	.04	.03	-.10**	.05

Note. SR = self-reported.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 7

Bivariate Correlations between the Peer-reported Defending and Victimization Items

	Comfort Others			Tell others to stop			Make others stop		
Variable	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
					Girls				
Wave 1 relational victimization	-.22	-.30	-.30	-.30	-.36	-.33	-.26	-.36	-.33
Wave 2 relational victimization	-.16	-.27	-.25	-.23	-.30	-.28	-.23	-.31	-.34
Wave 3 relational victimization	-.24	-.29	-.34	-.28	-.31	-.32	-.27	-.34	-.36
Wave 1 verbal victimization	-.39	-.51	-.48	-.50	-.53	-.50	-.48	-.51	-.51
Wave 2 verbal victimization	-.39	-.51	-.48	-.46	-.54	-.51	-.46	-.51	-.53
Wave 3 verbal victimization	-.39	-.51	-.54	-.44	-.52	-.58	-.43	-.50	-.59
Wave 1 physical victimization	-.24	-.30	-.32	-.32	-.37	-.36	-.24	-.35	-.37
Wave 2 physical victimization	-.16	-.26	-.31	-.28	-.30	-.34	-.23	-.29	-.37
Wave 3 physical victimization	-.30	-.32	-.35	-.35	-.39	-.39	-.29	-.38	-.38
					Boys				
Wave 1 relational victimization	-.28	-.32	-.32	-.31	-.38	-.34	-.33	-.35	-.31
Wave 2 relational victimization	-.20	-.32	-.32	-.25	-.38	-.34	-.25	-.33	-.32
Wave 3 relational victimization	-.18	-.29	-.34	-.23	-.33	-.36	-.23	-.30	-.35
Wave 1 verbal victimization	-.52	-.57	-.55	-.57	-.61	-.55	-.58	-.56	-.54
Wave 2 verbal victimization	-.43	-.61	-.58	-.47	-.65	-.60	-.50	-.60	-.56
Wave 3 verbal victimization	-.40	-.58	-.62	-.45	-.60	-.64	-.47	-.55	-.62
Wave 1 physical victimization	-.29	-.35	-.33	-.34	-.41	-.36	-.35	-.37	-.38
Wave 2 physical victimization	-.20	-.32	-.36	-.27	-.39	-.37	-.29	-.37	-.37
Wave 3 physical victimization	-.27	-.34	-.38	-.28	-.41	-.39	-.31	-.36	-.40

Note. All values are significant at $p < .001$.

Table 8

Means and Independent Samples T-tests as a Function of Missing Data

	No missing data	Missing data	
Variable	*M*	*M*	*t*-test
Wave 1 SR defending	3.26	3.19	1.23
Wave 1 SR Empathy	3.48	3.41	1.37
Wave 1 SR Self Efficacy	2.92	2.89	.45
Wave 1 Comforting	2.56	2.34	5.35***
Wave 1 Tell others stop	2.49	2.26	5.28***
Wave 1 Make others stop	2.51	2.28	5.52***
Wave 2 Comforting	2.57	2.32	5.31***
Wave 2 Tells others stop	2.53	2.25	6.10***
Wave 2 Make others stop	2.54	2.24	6.51***
Wave 3 Comforting	2.56	2.32	4.46***
Wave 3 Tell others stop	2.51	2.30	3.39***
Wave 3 Make others stop	2.55	2.34	3.75***
Wave 1 Relational vic	1.55	1.63	-2.98**
Wave 1 Verbal vic	1.66	1.83	-4.16***
Wave 1 Physical vic	1.44	1.52	-2.94**
Wave 2 Relational vic	1.55	1.62	-2.14*
Wave 2 Verbal vic	1.73	1.87	-3.15**
Wave 2 Physical vic	1.43	1.51	-2.74**
Wave 3 Relational vic	1.54	1.63	-2.50*
Wave 3 Verbal vic	1.76	1.85	-1.99*
Wave 3 Physical vic	1.46	1.51	-1.50

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 9

Unstandardized and Standardized Factor Loadings from Final SEM Model

Factor loadings	Girls unstandardized	Boys unstandardized	Girls standardized	Boys standardized
Fall self-reported defending	1.00	1.00	.50***	.48***
Fall empathy	1.14***	1.14***	.70***	.77***
Fall defending self-efficacy	.51***	.51***	.22***	.25***
Fall comforting	.90***	.82***	.85***	.83***
Fall tell others stop	1.00	1.00	.92***	.91***
Fall make others stop	.95***	.95***	.90***	.91***
Winter comforting	.98***	.98***	.89***	.89***
Winter tell others stop	1.00	1.00	.90***	.93***
Winter make others stop	.93***	.93***	.87***	.89***
Spring comforting	.98***	.98***	.90***	.89***
Spring tell others stop	1.00	1.00	.94***	.94***
Spring make others stop	.94***	.94***	.92***	.92***
Fall relational vic	1.00	1.00	.70***	.72***
Fall verbal vic	1.61***	1.61***	.82***	.87***
Fall physical vic	1.01***	1.01***	.79***	.75***
Winter relational vic	1.00	1.00	.63***	.71***
Winter verbal vic	1.71***	1.71***	.82***	.85***
Winter physical vic	.97***	.97***	.70***	.72***
Spring relational vic	1.00	1.00	.61***	.65***
Spring verbal vic	1.84***	1.84***	.81***	.87***
Spring physical vic	1.09***	1.09***	.70***	.75***

*** $p < .001$.

Table 10

Unstandardized and Standardized Coefficients for Structural Path and Covariances

Coefficient	Girls unstandardized	Boys unstandardized	Girls standardized	Boys standardized
	Autoregressive and cross-lagged paths			
Fall defender identity → Winter defending	.15***	.15***	.10***	.11***
Fall defender identity → Winter victimization	.02	-.05*	.03	-.06*
Fall defending → Winter defending	.75***	.75***	.77***	.75***
Fall defending → Winter victimization	-.04**	-.04**	-.09**	-.07**
Fall victimization → Winter victimization	.73***	.73***	.80***	.76***
Winter defending → Spring defending	.98***	.98***	.91***	.92***
Winter defending → Spring victimization	-.03**	-.03**	-.08**	.85***
Winter victimization → Spring victimization	.78***	.78***	.83***	-.07**
	Covariances			
Fall defender identity with Fall defending	.04***	.06***	.30***	.37***
Fall defender identity with Fall victimization	-.02***	-.02***	-.25***	-.25***
Fall defending with Fall victimization	-.06***	-.08***	-.53***	-.64***
Winter defending with Winter victimization	-.01***	-.01***	-.32***	-.46***
Spring defending with Spring victimization	-.01***	-.01***	-.45***	-.52***

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 11

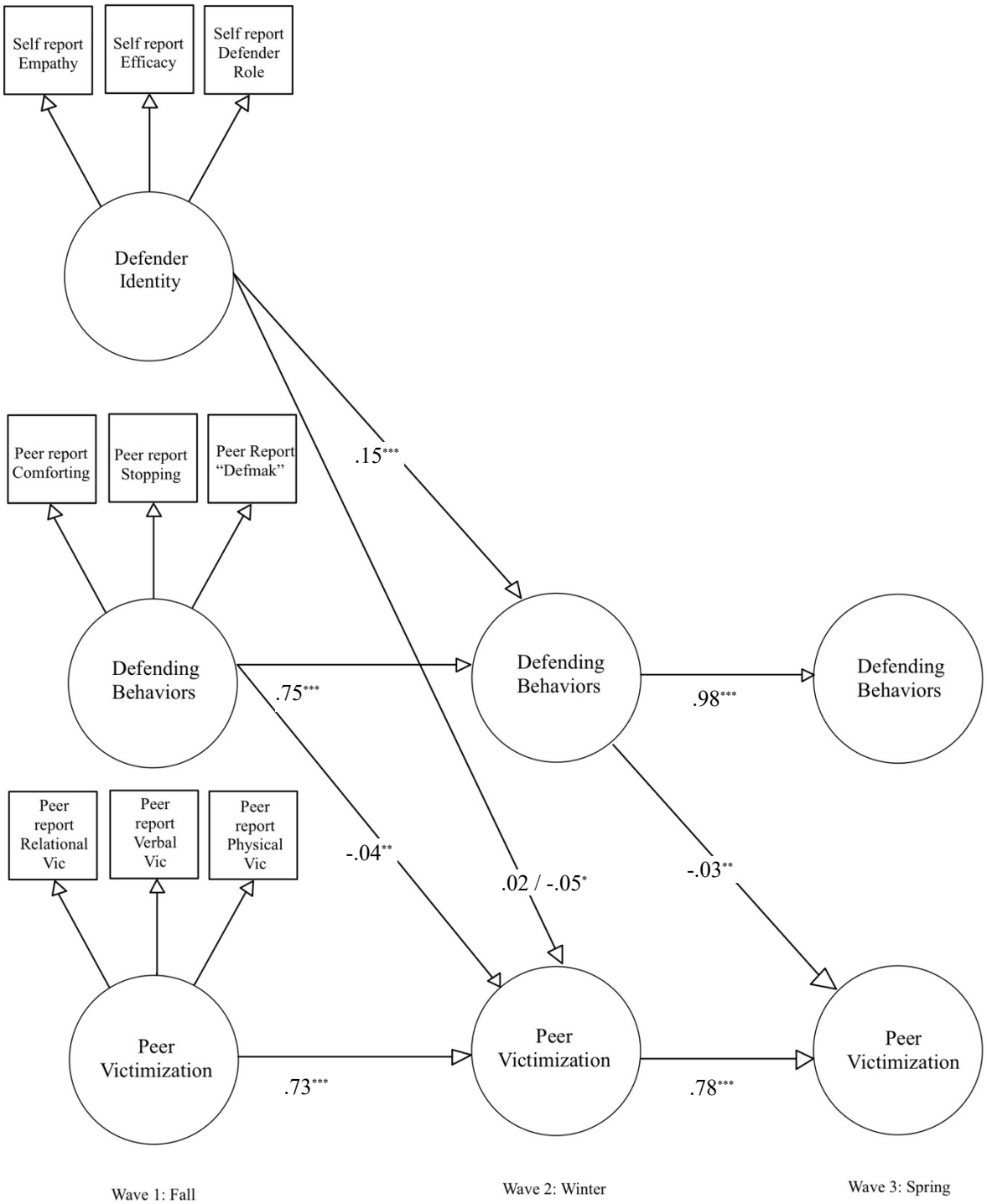
Unstandardized and Standardized Error Covariances between Observed Indicator Variables

Coefficient	Girls unstandardized	Boys unstandardized	Girls standardized	Boys standardized
Fall self-report defending with Fall defending efficacy	.13***	.13***	.34***	.28***
Fall comforting with Winter comforting	.01***	.01***	.20***	.19***
Winter comforting with Spring comforting	.03***	.03***	.44***	.39***
Fall tell others to stop with Winter tell others to stop	-.002	-.002	-.04	-.05
Winter tell others to stop with Spring tell others to stop	-.001	-.001	-.02	-.05
Fall make others stop with Winter make others stop	.001	.001	.03	.03
Winter make others stop with Spring make others stop	.00	.00	.004	.004
Winter make others stop with Winter tell others to stop	.02***	.01***	.38***	.24***
Fall relational victimization with Winter relational victimization	.03***	.03***	.44***	.41***
Fall relational victimization with Spring relational victimization	.03***	.03***	.43***	.37***
Winter relational victimization with Spring relational victimization	.03***	.03***	.48***	.46***
Winter relational victimization with Winter physical victimization	.01***	.01***	.21***	.19***
Fall physical victimization with Winter physical victimization	.01***	.01***	.30***	.20***
Fall physical victimization with Spring physical victimization	-.001	-.001	-.02	-.01
Winter physical victimization with Spring physical victimization	.01***	.01***	.30***	.24***
Fall verbal victimization with Winter verbal victimization	.04***	.04***	.60***	.57***
Fall verbal victimization with Spring verbal victimization	.03***	.03***	.50***	.52***
Winter verbal victimization with Spring verbal victimization	.04***	.04***	.50***	.54***

*** $p < .001$.

Figure 1

Full Structural Equation Model Estimating Direct Effects of Defender Identity on Defending Behavior and Indirect Effects on Peer Victimization



* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.