Moral Disengagement from Bullying: The Effects of Gender and Classroom

Abstract

We examined the effects of gender and classroom membership on moral disengagement–cognitive justifications of detrimental conduct. Sixth-graders aged 11 to 13 years (N = 273) participated in the study. Bullying was registered using the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire and moral disengagement was measured on a 14-item scale designed for this study. The study showed that moral disengagement related to bullying and varied as a function of gender, which supports the relevance of considering gender in moral education anti-bullying programs. Next, the study revealed significant differences in moral disengagement between classrooms. This finding points to the need to elucidate associations between moral disengagement and classroom characteristics.

Keywords: adolescence, aggressive behavior, bullying, moral cognition, moral disengagement

Introduction

School bullying—an aggressive behavior characterized by repetitiveness, imbalance of power, and intentionality—is a harmful and common problem of early adolescence (Olweus, 2011). Approximately 11% of early adolescents report having been bullied at school two or three times a month (e.g., Janošová, Kollerová & Zábrodská, n.d.; Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Examination of pro-bullying behaviors and attitudes in this age period presents a crucial research task, because as children