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Defending victimized peers

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successfully with conflictual social interactions (Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoè, 2008; Pöyhönen & Salmivalli, 2008). In addition to scoring high on likeability, most defenders also have a high standing in the peer group as indexed by perceived popularity (i.e., being perceived as popular, “cool,” and influential; Pöyhönen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2010; Sainio, Veenstra, Huising, & Salmivalli, 2010). However, some studies did not find a link between defending and perceived popularity, or found a link only under specific conditions (e.g., Caravita, Gini, & Pozzoli, 2012; Caravita et al., 2009).

With regard to expectations from significant others, Pozzoli and Gini (2012) observed that defenders perceive higher levels of parental pressure to defend their victimized peers. In a similar vein, defending has been linked to higher perceived peer (but not teacher) pressure for intervention (Pozzoli, Gini, et al., 2012). In a recent study, findings indicated that defenders tend to befriend peers who are similar in defending behavior (Ruggieri, Friemel, Sticca, Perren, & Alsaker, 2013), and it has also been observed that over time young adolescents become more similar to their friends in terms of defending behavior (Sijtsema, Rambaran, Caravita, & Gini, 2014).

Several researchers (e.g., Caravita et al., 2012; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013) have found that defending is inversely related to moral disengagement (i.e., the tendency to use self-justification mechanisms that solve the dissonance between individual moral values and behaving in ways contrary to them). In a recent study (Gini, Pozzoli, & Bussey, 2015), it was found that defending is more likely when children more strongly believe that such disengaged justifications are common in their classroom (i.e., collective moral disengagement).

In most previous studies on defending, the construct has been assessed using (adaptations of) the defender scale developed by Salmivalli and colleagues (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). This instrument operationalizes defending as a broad homogeneous construct, that encompasses both active interventions (attacking the bully), as well as comforting and consoling the victim afterwards.

Most researchers tend to consider defenders and those who are defended as relatively uniform groups, with defending serving one main function, and defenders showing little variation in their motivations to stand up for their harassed peers. That is, defending is usually seen as the prosocial, altruistic interventions of well-liked, empathic children who are motivated to alleviate the trouble and pain of weak victimized children (Sainio et al., 2011).

Whereas most researchers in the field lump together attacking the bully and consoling the victim (i.e., bully- and

victim-oriented defending), there are good theoretical and empirical grounds to more strictly distinguish between these two forms of defending and conceptualize them as separate constructs. Theoretically, relative to consoling the victim, defending a victim by actively intervening is in general a more risky behavior. That is, by confronting a powerful bully and often a supporting group of assistants and reinforcers, a defender increases the risk to become the next victim himself. Indeed, Lodge and Fryenberg (2005) posited that the fear of becoming the next target of bullying may be an important reason for not taking supportive action. For instance, one participant stated “I didn’t say anything because I thought that the teaser would start picking on me” (p. 333). In a similar vein, Gini et al. (2008) argued that defending can be risky, because bullies may retaliate and direct their aggression toward defenders. Moreover, by opposing the person in power and displaying behavior that runs counter to classroom norms that often favor bullying (Juvonen & Galván, 2008), defenders may risk their social standing.

However, when a high standing child with a secure position in the group takes sides with the victim, such negative consequences are less likely to occur, relative to children with a low standing. In fact, it has been suggested (e.g., Pöyhönen et al., 2010) that a high reputation-based status in the peer group (with reputation-based status construed as being dominant, visible, influential and popular) may be a precondition for engaging in active, bully oriented defending. As noted, several studies have shown that defenders are typically high in (reputation-based) status, which provides indirect support for this view (e.g., Sainio et al., 2011). More indirect support is provided by Pöyhönen et al. (2010) who found that among children experiencing high empathic affect for the victim only those high in perceived popularity actually intervened. However, because this study was cross-sectional, no inferences can be made regarding the direction of effects. At this point, it should be noted that Belacchi (2008) advanced a modified version of Salmivalli’s defender scale (Salmivalli et al., 1996), by adding two specific roles that were previously subsumed under the defender role; that is, *mediator* and *consoler*. A mediator actively tries to reconcile the bully and the victim, thereby indirectly supporting the victim. A consoler attempts to alleviate the detrimental effects of bullying by comforting the victim, but does not intervene directly. Although some evidence was found to support the validity of this alternative model (Belacchi, 2008), in subsequent studies (e.g., Belacchi & Farina, 2010) the three roles (defender, mediator, and consoler) were again combined into an overarching prosocial “macrorole.” Hence, differences between children taking on the three different roles were not investigated and remain unknown.

The heterogeneity of defenders and those who are defended may also have been underestimated, as well as the extent to which the function and motivation of defending may vary across defenders. For instance, in recent studies using a social network perspective (Huitsing, Snijders, van Duijn, & Veenstra, 2014; Huitsing & Veenstra, 2012), it was found that not only victims are defended, but bullies as well. Moreover, some bullies were frequently nominated for the seemingly contradictory roles of bully and defender. These remarkable findings appear to be due to the existence of multiple subgroups, with members of different groups bullying each other. Specifically, while bullies harass outgroup members, they are at the same time defended by other bullies from their ingroup, as well as by assistants and reinforcers. It was also observed that, similar to victims harassed by the same bullies, bullies targeting the same victims tended to defend each other. In fact, defending among bullies was even stronger than defending among victims.

Taken together, these findings suggest that apart from helping the victim and make her feel better, defending may also occur for self-centered reasons or to protect the position of bullies. The results of another recent study (Pöyhönen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2012) also suggest that defenders may be motivated by instrumental reasons, by showing that some children think that their standing/status may improve as a result of defending, and that those more strongly holding this belief are more likely to engage in defending behavior.

Given the potential differences between the two forms of defending, variations in the function and motivational underpinnings of defending behavior, and the observation that both bullies and victims are defended, it seems plausible that multiple subgroups of defenders exist. We assert that these subgroups differ in the extent to which they enact both forms of defending, and exhibit distinct profiles in terms of reputation-based status (as indexed by perceived popularity and social dominance) in the peer network, preference-based likeability (social preference), and bullying behavior.

Specifically, besides a large subgroup of “non-defenders” scoring low on both forms of defending, we expect a subgroup of “overall” defenders with a behavioral repertoire in which both bully oriented and victim-oriented defending are common. Similar to what has been found in previous research examining the characteristics of this “classical” group, these defenders are predicted to be high in reputation-based status, well liked by their peers, and low in bullying. In addition, we expect a subgroup of prosocial, victim-oriented defenders who primarily support and console the victim afterwards in the background, and largely refrain from actively opposing the bully. We expect these children to

resemble the “overall” defenders in terms of high preference-based likeability and low bullying scores. In contrast, based on several studies suggesting that children who are not socially prominent are reluctant to actively intervene when the bullying occurs (e.g., Pöyhönen et al., 2010; Sainio et al., 2011), we expect that they will score relatively low on reputation-based status.

We predict that there will be a subgroup of bully oriented defenders, who primarily engage in actively confronting the bully (bully oriented interventions), but who are not strongly inclined to also console victims. Based on the work of Huitsing and Veenstra (2012), we expect that relative to overall and victim-oriented defenders, children in this group will score higher on bullying. Given that bullies are at greater risk of being rejected, we expect that bully oriented defenders will be more disliked by their peers. Moreover, because elevated bullying is often accompanied by high levels of power and social dominance (e.g., Reijntjes et al., 2013; Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003), we expect these children to be high in reputation-based status.

The present study was designed to investigate the presence of different subgroups of defending children and to determine to what extent these subgroups differ from each other in terms of reputation-based status, preference-based likeability, and involvement in bullying. Toward this aim, we followed children from late childhood into early adolescence. In three consecutive years, we assessed the extent to which participants engaged in the two different forms of defending, as well as their scores on salient characteristics in multiple domains. This developmental period was examined based on previous work showing that the incidence of bullying peaks around age 11 (e.g., Eslea & Rees, 2001).

To measure reputation-based status, we assessed both resource control and perceived popularity. Resource control refers to having access to desirable, but scarce material and social resources (Hawley, 1999). Higher levels of resource control indicate higher social dominance in the peer group. In resource control theory (RCT, Hawley, 1999) social dominance is construed as competitive superiority, which is an aspect of relationship asymmetry. To comprehensively assess preference-based likeability, we measured social preference ratings, as well as perceived friendship and enmity nominations. Self-reported perceived social competence was included to also assess children’s own view on their social functioning.

Although much previous work on defending has been cross-sectional in nature, the comparison of different age groups suggests that defending behavior may decrease over time (e.g., Pöyhönen et al., 2010), possibly due to group norms becoming more approving of bullying

as children grow older (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). Although identifying changes over time is not the main purpose of the present research, and our hypotheses are not longitudinal in nature, the prospective design enables us to determine the magnitude of the potential decline in defending and potential differences between the two forms of defending in this regard. Moreover, using multiple measurement waves yields a more reliable assessment of defending subgroup membership (see below), and scores for the examined correlates.

Our analytic approach relied on a combination of person- and variable-centered techniques. Specifically, parallel-process latent class growth analysis (LCGA; Muthén, 2001) was used to determine the number of defending subgroups that best capture the heterogeneity of the data. This person-centered approach yields latent classes (i.e., subgroups of participants) following distinct developmental trajectories for both types of defending behavior simultaneously. After determining these latent classes, variable-oriented analyses were employed to examine whether and how their characteristics differed. We expected that multiple subgroups of defenders would emerge, each showing a distinct configuration of salient characteristics.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 394 children (53% girls) from 12 elementary schools throughout the Netherlands. The sample was the youngest cohort of the study of Olthof, Goossens, Vermande, Aleva, and Van der Meulen (2011), who were investigated in the spring semesters during their last three years at elementary school. At the start of the study in 2006 (Time 1), all participants were in fourth grade, at Times 2 and 3 they were in fifth and sixth grade, respectively. Participants' mean age at Time 1 was 10.3 years ($SD = 0.5$ years). There was no school transition during this period, and almost all children stayed in the same classroom with the same peers. Participation rates within classrooms were almost equal across years, and in all classes more than 80% of the classmates rated their peers at all measurement waves. Although socio-economic status was not formally assessed, the sample included pupils from a wide range of social backgrounds (low and working classes through upper middle class).

Parents received a letter in which the purpose of the study and the procedures were explained. Only 4% did not want their child to participate. Children's own assent rate was 100%. Most (83%) participants were native Dutch (Caucasian).

At Times 2 and 3, data were available for 372 (94.4%) and 342 participants (86.8%). Attrition was mainly due

to participants moving to other, non-participating schools (16 at Time 2, and an additional 17 at Time 3). Children not participating at Time 2 and/or Time 3 did not significantly differ from children with complete data in terms of their scores on relevant variables at Time 1 ($P_s > .10$).

Procedure

Children, peers, and the teachers of the participants provided data. Children's self-perceived social competence ratings were obtained during a classroom session run by trained research assistants. Teachers rated the resource control of the participating children of their class at their own convenience. The peer reports (nominations and ratings) were collected during two separate interview sessions. Children were individually interviewed by a research assistant in a quiet classroom. To minimize interviewer effects, research assistants were extensively trained, written research protocols were employed, and a laptop was used to administer standardized interviews. When making peer nominations, children were provided a list of their classmates to use. The number of nominations was unlimited.

Measures

Defending and bullying. To assess defending and bullying, the bullying role nomination procedure (BRNP; Olthof et al., 2011) was used. The BRNP is a comprehensive 27 item measure that indexes five different forms of bullying; that is, physical (e.g., pushing, hitting), property attacks (e.g., damaging or taking away other's belongings), verbal (e.g., calling names), direct relational (e.g., turning one's back on someone who wants to play), and indirect relational (e.g., gossiping). To avoid potential interpretation differences of the term bullying, participants first received an elaborate description of the concept, in which its three core features were explained; that is, intent to harm, repetition over time, and a power difference between perpetrator and victim (Salmivalli & Peets, 2009).

Subsequently, a particular type of bullying was described and the participant was handed a list with several examples of that type. Given the strong increase in cyber-bullying during the past decade, we also included several examples of that type of bullying.

For each type of bullying, nominations were obtained by asking two questions; that is, "*Do you know which classmates carry out that particular form of bullying?*" and "*If so, could you give us their names?*" For all types of bullying, continuous scores for each child were computed within classrooms by dividing the total number of received nominations for that participant by the number of nominators -1 (the participant himself;

Kärnä et al., 2011; possible range 0–1). Given the adequate value for Cronbach's α across both time and gender ($>.75$ at all three assessment points), total bullying scores were calculated by averaging the scores for the five forms of bullying.

Following other researchers using peer nomination data (e.g., Caravita, Pöyhönen, Rajala, & Salmivalli, 2011), these scores were standardized within classes. Subsequent to the bullying items, participants answered questions about other bullying roles, including two on defending (in the Olthof et al., 2011 study only the first item was used). The first was intended to elicit prosocial, victim-oriented defending nominations; that is, "*Some children try to support and help children who are bullied. These children tell the victim not to care about what happened, or they console him/her afterwards, or during break time they treat him/her friendly, or they go to an adult to talk about the bullying.*" The second question was intended to elicit active, bully oriented defending nominations: "*There are also children who get annoyed when another child is bullied. These children intervene when a classmate is bullied, go over there and try to help the victim by chasing the bully away.*" For both forms of defending nominations were obtained via two questions: "*Do you know which classmates carry out this form of defending?*" and "*If so, could you give us their names?*" For both forms of defending, standardized scores for each child were computed as was done for bullying.

Perceived popularity. This construct refers to social standing and visibility and is positively related to peer perceptions of power (Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003). Children nominated both popular and unpopular classmates. As in previous research (e.g., LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002), these terms were not defined. Instead, we explained that "*In every class some children are very popular; whereas other children are not popular at all.*" Then we asked "*Which children in your class are popular?*" and "*Which children in your class are not popular at all?*" Perceived popularity scores were calculated within classrooms as the standardized difference between the standardized number of popular votes and the standardized number of unpopular votes (see LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002; Olthof et al., 2011).

Resource control. Resource control is an index of social dominance (Hawley, 1999; Pellegrini & Long, 2002) and refers to having access to desirable material and social resources. Teachers rated participants on six items, on a scale from 0 (*never or almost never*) to 4 (*very often*). Examples include: "*To what extent is this child usually at the center of attention in a group of children?*"; "*To what extent does this child usually get what it wants?*"; and "*To what extent does this child usually get the best roles in games?*" The ratings were

averaged to yield a measure of teacher-reported resource control. The scale showed high internal consistency, as evidenced by coefficient alpha exceeding .90 at all assessment points. To take differences between teachers with respect to their characteristics as raters of their pupils' level of resource control into account, scores were standardized within each class. Noteworthy, we also collected data on resource control using peers as informants (see also Olthof et al., 2011). The same pattern of differences between defender subgroups was found for peer- and teacher-reported resource control. Scores as reported by teachers were substantially correlated with those reported by peers (r 's ranging from .55 to .59; P 's $<.001$). We choose to examine teacher-reported resource control to avoid shared reporter-bias.

Peer-reported social acceptance. To assess participants' peer acceptance (or likeability), the sociometric status rating (SSRat) procedure was used (Maassen, Akkermans, & Van der Linden, 1996). Specifically, participants rated their classmates on a 7-point scale ranging from -3 ("*extremely dislikeable*") to 3 ("*extremely likeable*"), with 0 as the neutral midpoint. Overall acceptance (likeability) was calculated by averaging all received ratings.

Self-perceived social competence. We also assessed participants' own perception of their functioning in the social domain, using the 6-item social subscale of the Dutch version of the Perceived Competence Scale for Children (PCSC; Harter, 1982). Harter construes social competence as competence vis-à-vis one's peers (not adults), as indexed by attributes such as having a lot of friends, being easy to like, and being a central member of one's class (Harter, 1982). For each item, the child was presented two statements (e.g., "*Some children have a lot of friends*" versus "*Other children don't have many friends*") and asked to choose the one that describes him best. That choice is then rated on a scale ranging from 1 to 4 , with higher scores indicating higher self-perceived social competence. In the present study, mean scores were used. Internal consistency was adequate at all assessment points (range .73–.84).

Perceived friendship scores. Children were told that "*Some children are friends of each other. They like each other a lot, do things together, and have fun when hanging out. They also help each other and they can cooperate well. Which children in this class are your friends?*" Continuous proportion scores were computed by dividing the number of received nominations by the number of participating classmates -1 . Scores were then standardized within classrooms.

Enmity scores. Children were told that "*Some children do not get along with each other at all. They often quarrel. They can't cooperate and they will never*

help each other. You could say these children are enemies. They do not like each other; they rather detest each other. Which children in this class do you detest yourself?" Enmity scores were computed as described above for friendship scores.

Analytic Strategy

The two most often used statistical techniques to model longitudinal data are conventional growth curve models (LGM) and group-based trajectory models such as latent class growth analysis (LCGA; Kreuter & Muthén, 2008). The LGM approach models the associations among a repeatedly measured variable using a single population-level trajectory that varies quantitatively across individuals. The variations in level and slope are expressed as random effects. The LCGA approach accounts for the same associations by specifying a limited number of different groups, each with its own growth trajectory. Although groups show between-class mean differences in level and slope of their trajectories, there is no further systematic variation *within* these groups (i.e., zero within-class variance and covariance in the growth factors). This signifies that persons within a certain class k are assumed to follow the same trajectory. Both models discussed above are special cases of growth mixture models (GMM's). This latter modelling approach yields a mixture of different latent classes, with each class being heterogeneous in terms of growth parameters.

In the present study, given our assumption that different subgroups of defenders exist, we preferred using the LCGA approach over the LGM approach, which assumes no classes. We performed both a LCGA and a GMM, but the latter method did not yield a trustworthy solution.

The primary analyses proceeded in two steps. First, we used parallel-process LCGA (Muthén, 2001) to determine the number of defending subgroups. In this approach, the trajectories of bully and victim-oriented defending are construed as one developmental process with two indicators. The model determines subgroups of participants following distinct developmental trajectories for both defending behaviors simultaneously. Participants are assigned to the subgroup that best conforms to their observed scores according to the maximum posterior probability of group membership. The analyses were performed using MPlus version 6.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 2010). The estimator that was used (robust maximum likelihood; MLR) is robust against non-normality of scores. Missing data were handled through full information maximum likelihood (FIML). In the case of three assessment points, these trajectories are identified on the basis of intercepts (starting values) and linear slopes.

A series of models was fitted, starting with a one-group model and moving to a five-group model. To decide on the number of groups, several statistical indicators were used, including the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), the Lo-Mendell-Rubin Likelihood Ratio Test (LMR-LRT), and entropy (Nagin, 2005). We also examined the average posterior probability ($AvePP_j$), the odds of correct classification (OCC_j), and the model estimated proportion of the population following a particular trajectory (π_j) was compared with the corresponding proportion of the sample assigned to that trajectory (P_j), with less discrepancy indicating better model fit (Nagin, 2005).

In the second step, we examined differences between the distinct defender subgroups. For all variables examined, separate ANOVA analyses were performed. Significant effects were followed up by post hoc tests, using Tukey's HSD to identify significantly different groups. Given that the LCGA approach uses the data of all assessment points, and preliminary analyses indicating little change in correlates over time, we performed the analyses on the average scores of these variables.

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Table I displays the means and standard deviations for all variables at the three assessment points, for the total sample and for boys and girls separately. Scores for most variables were stable over time, but self-perceived social competence increased between Times 1 and 2, while peer-reported social acceptance increased between Times 2 and 3 ($P_s < .05$). Girls consistently received more nominations than boys for victim-oriented defending ($P_s < .01$), along with fewer nominations for bully oriented defending ($P_s < .05$). Across the three waves boys consistently engaged in higher levels of bullying ($P_s < .001$), and they received more enmity nominations at Times 1 and 2 ($P_s < .05$). At all three time points, both defending types were only weakly correlated (range .15–.20; $P_s < .05$; see Table II). Moreover, for both types of defending the shared variance with all other variables was less than 20%. Bully oriented defending was consistently most strongly positively correlated with resource control and perceived popularity, and to a lesser extent with bullying. In turn, victim-oriented defending was consistently most strongly positively associated with social acceptance and friendship nominations; and consistently negatively associated with bullying.

Defending Subgroups Using the LCGA Approach

The statistical indicators provided clear support for a four-group model. When moving from a one-group to a

TABLE I. Means and Standard Deviations for All Variables at the Three Assessment Points by Gender

Measure	Boys		Girls		Total	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Bully oriented defending						
Wave1	.25 _a	.81	-.17 _b	.77	.04	.82
Wave2	.19 _a	.85	-.10 _b	.76	.04	.81
Wave3	.14 _a	.86	-.07 _b	.77	.03	.82
Victim-oriented defending						
Wave 1	-.35 _a	.84	.38 _b	.82	.02	.90
Wave 2	-.25 _a	.75	.29 _b	.93	.03	.89
Wave 3	-.39 _a	.75	.40 _b	.88	.03	.91
Resource control						
Wave 1	.09	.96	-.07	.92	.00	.94
Wave 2	-.02	1.02	.03	.88	.01	.95
Wave 3	.02	.98	-.05	.89	-.01	.93
Bullying						
Wave1	.37 _a	.95	-.32 _b	.77	.01	.93
Wave2	.34 _a	.94	-.22 _b	.79	.05	.91
Wave3	.33 _a	.99	-.24 _b	.72	.03	.91
Perceived popularity						
Wave1	.05	1.03	-.09	.89	-.01	.97
Wave2	.08	1.02	-.03	.92	.03	.97
Wave3	.03	1.03	-.06	.88	-.02	.95
Self-perceived social competence						
Wave1	2.74 ₁	.50	2.70 ₁	.51	2.73 ₁	.50
Wave2	3.07 ₂	.57	2.90 ₂	.71	2.97 ₂	.66
Wave3	3.06 ₂	.65	2.95 ₂	.68	3.00 ₂	.67
Peer-reported social acceptance						
Wave1	3.49 ₁	.72	3.81 ₁	.61	3.65 ₁	.68
Wave2	3.46 ₂	1.07	3.73 ₂	1.01	3.60 ₂	1.05
Wave3	3.70 ₂	.66	3.91 ₂	.62	3.81 ₂	.65
Friendship						
Wave 1	-.04	.96	.04	1.04	.01	1.01
Wave 2	-.001	1.04	.001	.97	0.002	1.00
Wave 3	-.05	.99	.05	1.01	0.003	.99
Enmity						
Wave 1	.12 _a	1.06	-.11 _b	.93	.01	1.01
Wave 2	.14 _a	1.10	-.13 _b	.88	.02	.99
Wave 3	.05	.96	-.04	1.04	.01	1.01

Note. Rows with different subscripts indicate significant differences between boys and girls ($P < .05$). Columns with different subscripts indicate significant differences over time ($P < .05$).

four-group model, the BIC value decreased, and the LMR-LRT was in all instances significant. When adding a fifth group, the BIC value increased, entropy decreased and the LMR-LRT value was not significant. Importantly, the fit indices for the four-group model were good ($AvePP_s > .080$; $OCC_s > 7$; entropy = .74; differences between P_s and $\pi_s < 2\%$).

The largest group consisted of “non-defenders” ($n = 204$; 51.8% of the sample; 40.4% girls). Children in this group displayed stable low scores for both victim-oriented defending (intercept [I] = -0.42 , $P < .001$; slope [S] = -0.03 , $P > .20$) and bully oriented defending ($I = -0.18$, $P < .01$; $S = -0.04$, $P > .20$; see Table III). The non-significant values for the slopes indicate no linear change over time. Participants in the second largest group, victim-oriented defenders ($n = 99$; 25.1%; 82.8% girls), displayed stable medium-high scores for victim-oriented defending ($I = 0.56$, $P < .001$; $S = 0.10$, $P > .20$), along with low scores for bully oriented defending ($I = -0.29$, $P < .05$; $S = 0.09$, $P > .20$). The third largest group consisted of bully oriented defenders ($n = 51$; 12.9%; 13.7% girls), who consistently engaged in low levels of victim-oriented defending ($I = -0.22$, $P > .05$; $S = -0.10$, $P > .20$), along with stable high levels of bully oriented defending ($I = 0.74$, $P < .01$; $S = 0.08$, $P > .20$). The smallest fourth group consisted of “overall defenders” ($n = 40$; 10.2%; 72.5% girls). These children displayed stable high scores for both victim-oriented ($I = 1.25$, $P > .001$; $S = -0.02$, $P > .20$) and bully oriented defending, $I = 0.99$, $P < .001$; $S = -0.13$, $P > .10$).

Post hoc analyses using the Wald test, with alpha set to .001 to account for multiple testing, showed that for victim-oriented defending the intercepts of the four groups differed significantly. Specifically, the overall defenders scored higher ($I = 1.25$) than did the victim-oriented defenders ($I = 0.56$). In turn, the victim-oriented defenders scored higher than both the bully oriented defenders and the non-defenders, who did not

TABLE II. Correlations Between Study Measures at Time 1

	Bully Orient Defending	Vict.-Orient Defending	Bullying	RCT	Perc Pop.	Perc Friendship	Enmity	Peer Rated Soc. Accept.	Self Perceived Social Compet.
Bully oriented defending		.15*	.18*	.23*	.26*	.08	.11*	.02	.09
Victim-oriented defending			-.28*	.04	.09	.17*	-.14*	.36*	.03
Bullying				.47*	.45*	.06	.32*	-.39*	.12*
Resource control					.58*	.22*	.14*	-.04	.20*
Perceived popularity						.33*	.03	.19*	.30*
Perceived friendship							-.11*	.32*	.23*
Enmity								-.42*	.04
Peer rated soc. acceptance									.22*

Note. Correlations at Times 2 and 3 were very similar. These figures can be obtained from the first author.

* $P < .05$.

TABLE III. Multiple-Group Latent Growth Model Parameter Estimates

Measure	Intercept	Linear Slope
Bully oriented defending		
Overall defenders ($n = 40$; 72.5% girls)	0.99 _a	-0.13
Victim-oriented defenders ($n = 99$; 82.8% girls)	-0.29 _b	0.09
Bully oriented defenders ($n = 51$; 13.7% girls)	0.74 _a	0.08
Non-defenders ($n = 204$; 40.4% girls)	-0.18 _b	-0.04
Victim-oriented defending		
Overall defenders ($n = 40$)	1.25 _a	-0.02
Victim-oriented defenders ($n = 99$)	0.56 _b	0.10
Bully oriented defenders ($n = 51$)	-0.22 _c	-0.10
Non-defenders ($n = 204$)	-0.42 _c	-0.03
Resource control		
Overall defenders ($n = 40$)	0.45 _a	0.71
Victim-oriented defenders ($n = 99$)	-0.08 _b	0.79
Bully oriented defenders ($n = 51$)	0.57 _a	0.78
Non-defenders ($n = 204$)	-0.19 _b	0.83
Perceived popularity		
Overall defenders ($n = 40$)	0.50 _a	0.84
Victim-oriented defenders ($n = 99$)	-0.10 _b	0.75
Bully oriented defenders ($n = 51$)	0.49 _a	0.92
Non-defenders ($n = 204$)	-0.20 _b	0.87
Bullying		
Overall defenders ($n = 40$)	-0.20 _b	0.85
Victim-oriented defenders ($n = 99$)	-0.31 _b	0.65
Bully oriented defenders ($n = 51$)	0.83 _a	0.72
Non-defenders ($n = 204$)	0.04 _c	0.85
Peer-reported social acceptance		
Overall defenders ($n = 40$)	1.11 _a	0.64
Victim-oriented defenders ($n = 99$)	0.92 _b	0.51
Bully oriented defenders ($n = 51$)	0.51 _c	0.78
Non-defenders ($n = 204$)	0.50 _c	0.67
Self-reported social competence		
Overall defenders ($n = 40$)	3.07 _a	0.45
Victim-oriented defenders ($n = 99$)	2.81 _b	0.49
Bully oriented defenders ($n = 51$)	3.09 _a	0.45
Non-defenders ($n = 204$)	2.79 _b	0.55
Friendship scores		
Overall defenders ($n = 40$)	0.63 _a	1.05
Victim-oriented defenders ($n = 99$)	0.11 _b	0.79
Bully oriented defenders ($n = 51$)	0.25 _{a,b}	0.71
Non-defenders ($n = 204$)	-0.24 _c	0.80
Enmity scores		
Overall defenders ($n = 40$)	-0.22 _b	0.54
Victim-oriented defenders ($n = 99$)	-0.30 _b	0.51
Bully oriented defenders ($n = 51$)	0.47 _a	1.22
Non-defenders ($n = 204$)	0.10 _{a,b}	0.94

Note. Groups with different subscripts differ from each other at the $P < .05$ level.

differ from each other ($I = -0.42$, and $I = -0.22$, respectively).

For bully oriented defending, the intercepts of the overall and the bully oriented defenders ($I = 0.99$ and 0.74 , respectively) were equal. Both significantly exceeded the values for the two other groups ($I = -0.18$ and -0.29 for the non-defenders and the victim-oriented defenders, respectively), who did not differ.

Only for the overall defenders, the intercepts of the two types of defending behavior did not differ. In contrast, the victim-oriented defenders showed significantly higher scores for victim-oriented than bully oriented defending (see Table III). The bully oriented defenders and the non-defenders engaged in significantly less victim-oriented than bully oriented defending (see Table III).

Characteristics of Defenders: Differences Between Subgroups

Perceived popularity. Analyses revealed a significant main effect, $F(3, 389) = 14.32$; $P < .001$; $\eta^2 = .10$. Follow-up analyses showed that overall defenders and bully oriented defenders had received equally high mean perceived popularity scores, which significantly exceeded those observed for the victim-oriented defenders and non-defenders ($P_s < .001$; Cohen's d for significantly different groups ranging from .73 to .81). The scores of these two latter groups did not differ ($P > .20$; see Table III).

Resource control. Analyses showed significantly different mean resource control scores across the defender subgroups, $F(3, 386) = 10.95$; $P < .001$; $\eta^2 = .12$. Post hoc follow-up analyses revealed that the two groups that scored highest on bully oriented defending (overall defenders and bully oriented defenders) obtained significantly higher and equal levels of resource control, compared to the victim-oriented defenders and non-defenders, who scored low on bully oriented defending (all $P_s < .003$; Cohen's d for significantly different groups ranging from .70 to .93). The scores of these two latter groups did not differ ($P > .20$; see Table III).

Bullying. A significant overall effect was observed, $F(3, 389) = 26.13$; $P < .001$; $\eta^2 = .17$. Follow-up analyses showed that children scoring high on victim-oriented defending (overall and victim-oriented defenders) had the lowest and equal scores for bullying, significantly exceeded by those of the non-defenders ($P_s < .001$; Cohen's d ranging from 0.31 to 0.46). In turn, the bully oriented defenders scored significantly and substantially higher than the non-defenders ($d = 0.94$).

Peer-reported social acceptance. The difference between the four groups was significant, $F(3, 389) = 26.13$; $P < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. The highest scores were observed for the overall and victim-oriented defenders, who did not differ from each other ($P > .30$; see Table III). Scores for these two groups significantly exceeded those observed for the other two groups; that is, the bully oriented defenders and non-defenders ($P_s < .001$; Cohen's d for significantly different groups ranging from .68 to .92). The scores for

these two latter groups did not differ from each other ($P > .30$).

Self-perceived social competence. Significant differences in mean scores were found between groups, $F(3, 389) = 6.90$; $P < .001$; $\eta^2 = .05$, with the highest values for the overall and bully oriented defenders, who did not differ ($P > .20$). Relative to these two former groups, the victim-oriented and the non-defenders both reported substantially lower scores (P s ranging from .002 to .042; Cohen's d ranging from 0.54 to 0.55; see Table III). The scores for these latter two groups did not differ from each other ($P > .30$).

Perceived friendship scores. A significant overall effect was observed, $F(3, 325) = 13.07$; $P < .001$; $\eta^2 = .11$. The non-defenders received the lowest scores. Significantly higher scores were observed for the three other groups (P s ranging from .001 to .006; d ranged from 0.45 to 1.03). The overall defenders scored higher than the victim-oriented defenders ($P < .015$), but overall defender scores did not differ from those of the bully oriented defenders. Scores for bully oriented and victim-oriented defenders did not differ ($P > .30$).

Enmity scores. Significant differences across groups were observed, $F(3, 321) = 9.17$; $P < .001$; $\eta^2 = .08$. Follow-up analyses showed that scores were highest for bully oriented defenders, followed by non-defenders (although the difference was not significant; $P < .06$). Relative to the bully oriented defenders, scores were significantly lower for both overall and victim-oriented defenders (P 's $< .005$; d ranged from 0.78 to 1.04; see Table III). These two latter groups did not differ from each other ($P > .30$).

DISCUSSION

An important conclusion of the present work, and consistent with hypotheses, is that defenders do not constitute one homogenous group, neither in terms of their enactment of the two forms of defending, nor with respect to their characteristics. The distinction that was made between the two forms of defending proved useful, given that children differed in the extent to which high (low) scores on one type of defending were accompanied by high (low) scores on the other type of defending.

Consistent with expectations, in addition to the largest group (52% of the sample) scoring low on both types of defending, three different subgroups were identified. A relatively small subgroup of overall defenders (10%; predominantly girls), scored high on both types of defending. A larger subgroup (25%) displayed substantial levels of victim-oriented defending, but largely refrained from bully oriented defending. The vast majority in this subgroup was also female. In contrast,

most children in the third subgroup (13%), bully oriented defenders, were boys. Their scores were in line with our expectation that some children would primarily engage in bully oriented defending, and largely abstain from consoling the victim. The present findings did not reveal changes in defending over time. For the correlates examined, scores were also quite stable during the study period.

Before discussing our findings in more detail, it should be noted that most prior work in which children are classified in terms of their role in the bullying process (Salmivalli et al., 1996) found that the percentage of children classified as defender does not exceed 20%. A likely explanation for the higher total percentage of children classified in one of the three defender subgroups in the present work is that we focused on defending behavior only, whereas other researchers typically also took scores for other bullying roles into account when classifying children (e.g., as a bully, assistant, outsider, or defender). Noteworthy, post hoc analyses revealed that many children (50%) classified as a bully oriented defender in the present study would have been classified as a bully or assistant when using the classification system described in Olthof et al. (2011), which is an adaptation of the procedure developed by Salmivalli et al. More generally, when applying the participant role procedure only the defending behavior of children classified as defenders, that is those receiving the highest score for this role (compared to their scores for the other roles), are considered, and all defending behavior displayed by children not classified as a defender are neglected.

The subgroup of overall defenders in the present study is most akin to defenders as identified in previous research using a global measure, in terms of both size and salient characteristics. Specifically, these children were high in perceived popularity, resource control, self-perceived social competence, peer acceptance, perceived friendship scores, and few peers considered them as their enemy.

In addition to the overall defenders, a larger subgroup of primarily victim-oriented defenders was identified. Consistent with gender-role norms and girls' stronger inclination to nurture and provide psychological assistance (Eagly, 1987; Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989), more than 80% of this group was female. Results showed that these children were almost as well liked as the overall defenders. In contrast, in line with the view that only children high in reputation-based status dare to actively oppose the bully, victim-oriented defenders were lower in perceived popularity and resource control than the overall defenders.

Supporting and consoling appear to have important beneficial effects on the victim's wellbeing (Sainio et al.,

2011). However, actively opposing the bully can be considered a more effective way to reduce bullying. Theoretically, challenging the bully by publicly intervening means providing him negative feedback, thereby decreasing the benefits (e.g., power, prestige) that often result from this behavior, and eventually the motivation to bully. Empirically, in an observational study on school playgrounds, it was found that in the majority of cases active interventions (e.g., telling the bully to stop) were effective in stopping bullying (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). It is, therefore, unfortunate that the relatively sizeable group of victim-oriented defenders is typically reluctant to actively oppose the bully, in addition to consoling the victim.

Although the third subgroup of bully oriented defenders did preferentially enact this kind of defending, as noted, about 50% of the children in this group consisted of bullies and their supporters, presumably defending each other for primarily self-centered and instrumental reasons (see also Huising & Veenstra, 2012).

According to several theoretical approaches, including Alexander's (1987) evolutionary approach of human behavior and Hawley's (1999) resource control theory (RCT), people may be motivated to engage in other-benefiting, seemingly moral behavior (e.g., defending), to instrumentally achieve their own goals. Consistent with this view, Hawley and Geldhof (2012) demonstrated that selectively promoting group norms ("selective moral engagement") among preschoolers was positively associated with higher social dominance and the use of (coercive and prosocial) strategies to attain it. Those who scored high on selective moral engagement and social dominance, in particular "bis-strategics" who used both strategies at high levels, were rated lowest on moral internalization by their teachers.

Apart from protecting bullies, it may also be that some of the bully oriented defenders stand up for weak victims, in an attempt to increase their status in the peer group by defying the powerful bully. To clarify this issue, future research focusing on dyadic relationships ("who defends whom and in what way") is needed, as well as measures directly indexing motivations to engage in bully oriented defending.

Although not well accepted by the peer group at large, bully oriented defenders did not appear to experience social problems themselves, as indexed by their self-perceived social competence scores. This finding replicates research showing that aggressive youth may overestimate their own social competence, relative to peer-rated social acceptance (e.g., David & Kistner, 2000). Conversely, only overall defenders received more friendship nominations than did the bully oriented defenders (although the difference was not significant),

which is consistent with findings showing that bullies are often central members of their "clique" and are befriended with other aggressive peers (Salmivalli & Peets, 2009). Taken together, these findings may suggest that bully oriented defenders are disliked by many peers in their outgroup, but quite well accepted by ingroup members.

Some previous work has provided evidence to suggest that older children are less inclined to defend than younger children (e.g., Pöyhönen et al., 2012; Pozzoli, Gini et al., 2012). However, in several studies in which decreases over time were identified, changes were quite small (e.g., Pöyhönen et al., 2012; Sijtsema et al., 2014). For instance, in the study of Sijtsema et al. (2014) for boys peer-reported defending scores in late childhood decreased over a 1-year period from 1.92 ($SD = 1.12$) to 1.88 ($SD = 1.28$). For girls, these figures were 2.15 ($SD = 1.24$) and 2.07 ($SD = 1.22$). Consistent with the only other longitudinal study using peer nominations (Menesini, Codecasa, Benelli, & Cowie, 2003), in the current research for both defending forms no link with age was observed. One possible explanation is that our participants were part of stable, well-established groups, attending the same school during the study period. Possibly, with the transition to secondary school, when existing peer groups are reshuffled and a new social hierarchy has to be established, the well documented increases in bullying (Pellegrini & Long, 2002) are accompanied by a decline in defending.

The present research has possible implications for intervention. Our findings strongly suggest that although the active defending of victimized peers by opposing the bully is necessary and should in general be encouraged, "spontaneous" bully oriented defending that is enacted in favor of bullies and/or motivated to obtain instrumental goals may sometimes have undesirable consequences. That is, defending that occurs to protect the position of bullies or to help them reach certain instrumental goals is likely to prolong or amplify the bullying, and is therefore undesirable. Results also indicate that relatively few boys tend to comfort victims. Hence, it should be explained to boys in particular that in addition to active bully oriented defending, providing support may also be very valuable for victims (see Sainio et al., 2011). Moreover, non-aggressive children with a secure position in the peer group should be encouraged to more often actively intervene when bullying occurs. Interventions should also aim to foster affective empathy and anti-bullying attitudes among boys, given that higher scores on these constructs are positively linked to both forms of defending (e.g., Pöyhönen et al., 2010).

Like all studies, the present work has limitations. First, our findings are based on primarily Caucasian pre-adolescents. Future studies should include children from

a broader age range and different ethnic groups. Second, the LCGA approach that was used assumes a finite number of distinct, developmentally homogeneous trajectory groups, but it cannot be determined with certainty whether these different groups actually exist. That is, while latent classes may reflect qualitatively different meaningful real-world population subgroups, it is also possible that the distribution of true scores is continuous, and that subgroups are merely quantitatively different. Third, the present study did not focus on antecedents or consequences of defending behavior. For instance, we did not examine whether high (reputation-based) status is a prerequisite or a consequence of active, bully oriented defending. At this point, it should be noted that during the study period children were part of well-established groups, with classmates having been together for several years prior to being investigated during their last 3 years at elementary school. In this period, positions in the peer hierarchy were already well ingrained and stable, resulting in small changes over time. Future research on bidirectional effects between defending and status in the peer group will benefit from examining how these relations develop in newly formed groups (e.g., children in the first grade of secondary school). In a new social environment, status and popularity have to be acquired, and defending (as well as bullying) may be strategically used to achieve this goal. Fourth, we did not examine what kind of individual children were defended by the three defender groups. Although it seems likely that the overall and victim-oriented defenders mainly stand up for “genuine,” weak victims, it is less clear who benefit from the behavior of the bully oriented defenders. Future dyadic oriented research investigating this issue is needed. Fifth, both forms of defending were assessed with only one peer nomination item. However, whereas single-item questionnaire measures are often unreliable, a peer nomination item differs from a single questionnaire item measure. Specifically, from a measurement perspective, such an item is actually a series of binary (true–false or yes–no) test items. A participant’s score for a peer nomination item is, therefore, the result of n items, where n is the number of peer nominators. Nevertheless, it has been found that reliability may increase when multiple peer nomination items are used to assess a specific construct (e.g., Babcock, Marks, Crick, & Cillessen, 2014). Moreover, the item assessing victim-oriented defending included going to an adult to talk about the bullying. We acknowledge that this behavior does not directly serve to comfort the victim, but could be considered intermediate between actively confronting the bully and more passively comforting of the victim. As a consequence, the victim-oriented item is somewhat heterogeneous. However, the victim-oriented question

does not include behavior involving a direct confrontation with the bully. Importantly, the use of this item yielded theoretically meaningful and significant differences between the four defender subgroups (Fig. 1).

Notwithstanding these limitations, the present research extends our knowledge of defending in youth in several important ways. First, contrary to almost all previous research conceptualizing defending as a single, general construct, our approach in which two types of defending were distinguished resulted in the identification of multiple, theoretically meaningful subgroups of defenders. Second, defending appears to be quite stable during the last years of elementary school. Third, in addition to a relatively small subgroup of traditional “overall” defenders, there appears to be a substantial subgroup of youth who also provide support to the victim, but refrain from actively intervening. Fourth, another defending subgroup was identified, primarily consisting of high status boys who predominantly engaged in bully oriented defending. These children were quite disliked, and high in bullying. It was found that a substantial part of these defenders score high on pro-bullying roles (i.e., bullies or assistants). Although more research is needed, it seems likely that quite a few of them defend other bullies for instrumental reasons. Taken together, previous research may have underestimated both the heterogeneity and the number of

Fig. 1. Bully oriented and victim-oriented defending behavior over time for the four defender subgroups.

children who in one way or another engage in defending behavior. However, contrary to the prevailing view, it may well be that bully oriented defending may sometimes be motivated by instrumental reasons and in these instances have undesirable consequences.

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