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**Do Classroom Relationships Moderate the Association Between Peer Defending in
School Bullying and Social-Emotional Adjustment?**

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Abstract

Peer defending has been shown to protect bullied peers from further victimization and social-emotional problems. However, research on the effects of defending students demonstrated positive and negative social-emotional adjustment. To explain these mixed findings, researchers have suggested that associations between defending and social-emotional adjustment may be buffered by protective factors (i.e., defender protection hypothesis) or exacerbated by vulnerability factors (i.e., defender vulnerability hypothesis). In line with these hypotheses, the current study aimed to investigate whether relationships with teachers and peers moderate the association between defending and social-emotional adjustment, i.e., depressive symptoms and self-esteem. This three-wave longitudinal study examined the association between peer-nominated defending, and later self-reported depressive symptoms and self-esteem in 848 fourth-to-sixth graders (53% girls; $M_{\text{age}} = 10.61$ years, $SD = 0.90$ at Wave 1). Peer-nominated positive and negative teacher-student relationships (closeness, conflict) and peer relationships (acceptance, rejection) were used. Clustered multiple linear regression analyses demonstrated that defending behavior did not predict later depressive symptoms or self-esteem. Contrary to our expectations, teacher-student closeness, peer acceptance and their combination did not play a protective role in the association between defending and social-emotional adjustment. In addition, teacher-student conflict, peer rejection and their combination did not put defending students at risk for social-emotional maladjustment. Thus, relationships with teachers and peers did not moderate the association between defending and later depressive symptoms and self-esteem.

Keywords: school bullying, defending behavior, social-emotional adjustment, risk factors, protective factors, teacher-student relationships, peer relationships

Do Classroom Relationships Moderate the Association Between Peer Defending in School Bullying and Social-Emotional Adjustment?

Bullying and Defending

Bullying in school is a widespread and persistent problem. A study in 144 countries around the world revealed that one third of 9- to 15-year-olds had been bullied in the last month [1]. Scholars have defined bullying as repeated goal-directed behavior causing harm to someone with less power than the bully, making it difficult for victims to defend themselves [2,3]. Bullying comes with a high cost for victims. It is associated with negative outcomes in several developmental domains, e.g., academic problems, such as truancy and lower achievement, and psychosocial and psychosomatic difficulties, e.g., low self-esteem, depressive symptoms, feelings of loneliness, suicidal ideation, self-harm, and lower levels of life satisfaction [1,4,5]. In addition, bullied students are at increased risk to experience long-term difficulties, such as psychosocial, health, and economic difficulties [1,6].

Bullying does not just happen between two people (i.e., the bully and the victim), but can be considered as a socially meaningful process that occurs in the presence of peers. One of the first theories that has emphasized bullying as a group process is the participant role approach, which distinguishes six roles involved in bullying [7]. Besides the role of bully and victim, there are four so-called bystander roles, namely the assistant, reinforcer, outsider and defender. Whereas the first three bystander roles reinforce the bullying by allowing it to continue, defenders try to stop the bullying and stand up for the victim [7].

Defending and Social-Emotional Adjustment

Previous research has shown that peer defending predicts lower victimization levels and higher social-emotional adjustment of victims [8,9]. Hence, encouraging and training students to defend their victimized peers is included in several of the more recent anti-

bullying interventions [10,11,12]. Although previous research has focused on the effects of being defended on victimized peers, research on the effects of defending on students displaying this behavior is scarce and of recent date. However, as defending may be associated with poor social-emotional adjustment, it is important to gain more insight into the effects on defending students themselves before encouraging this potentially risky behavior [13]. Previous research on the effect of defending students themselves provided an inconsistent picture. On the one hand, defending behavior was shown to be associated with various positive developmental characteristics, such as lower levels of depressive symptoms [14], higher self-esteem [15,16], social and general self-efficacy [15,17], high social status [7,17], popularity [17,18] and lower levels of peer victimization [19]. Conversely, other studies indicated that students' defending behavior was associated with negative developmental characteristics, including higher levels of depressive symptoms [20,21,22], lower self-esteem [20], internalizing difficulties [15,23,24], school distress [15] as well as higher levels of peer victimization [14,15]. Hence, to date, the association between defending behavior and defending students' social-emotional adjustment is not yet clear. In addition, these studies are characterized by cross-sectional designs, limiting the possibilities to take conclusions on the direction of the associations. To our knowledge, only two studies have examined the longitudinal association between defending behavior and defending students' social-emotional adjustment, in terms of depressive symptoms, social anxiety [15] and peer victimization [15], controlling for Wave 1 social-emotional adjustment. The results of these studies indicated that defending did not put secondary school students at risk for later social-emotional maladjustment. Previous research thus yielded inconsistent results and, as a consequence, it is unclear whether defending behavior predicts better or worse social-emotional adjustment for those displaying defending behavior.

Hence, before merely encouraging students to defend their victimized peers, it is important to get more insight into the factors that might explain these inconsistent findings [13]. One possible explanation is that defending behavior might lead to different outcomes depending on the presence of risk or protective factors [14]. The current study will investigate the association between defending behavior and later social-emotional adjustment, i.e., self-esteem and depressive symptoms, in elementary school children using a longitudinal design. In addition, this study will investigate whether classroom relationships, i.e., relationships with teachers and peers, play a moderating role in the association between defending behavior and social-emotional adjustment.

Potential Moderating Effects of Relationships with Teachers and Peers

Only recently, the role of moderating factors in the association between defending behavior and defending students' social-emotional adjustment has received scholars' attention. The social-ecological diathesis-stress model has emphasized that being involved in bullying, including as a defender, can be seen as a negative life event which, combined with other individual or contextual risk factors, can lead to internalizing problems and can negatively impact one's social status [25]. In line with this model, Malamut and colleagues [14] distinguished the defender protection and defender vulnerability hypotheses. The defender protection hypothesis assumes that having a protective factor, such as being popular, weakens the association between defending behavior and negative outcomes, and may even link defending behavior with positive outcomes such as higher self-esteem. The defender vulnerability hypothesis assumes that defending behavior is associated with negative outcomes only for individuals who have a vulnerability, such as being victimized themselves. Malamut et al. [14,19] found initial evidence for both hypotheses: Defending behavior was associated with higher concurrent social anxiety for students with higher levels of victimization [14]. Moreover, defending behavior predicted higher levels of later depressive

symptoms for those who were unpopular and victimized, while it predicted lower levels of later depressive symptoms for those who were popular and not victimized [14]. In addition, in classrooms with high bullying popularity norms defending behavior was associated with more concurrent victimization, whereas in classrooms with high defending popularity norms, defending behavior was associated with less concurrent victimization [19].

To obtain a better picture of the risk and protective factors that potentially moderate the association between defending behavior and social-emotional adjustment, it is important to investigate other potential moderators in this association. More specifically, the current study focuses on classroom relationships, i.e. relationships with teachers and peers. As elementary school children spend a lot of time at school, relationships with their teachers and peers are highly important [26]. As such, according to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological paradigm, interactions between child characteristics and one's environment, including broader environments such as the school context, can influence children's social-emotional adjustment [26,27]. Besides, self-determination theory and the interpersonal risk model are two theoretical frameworks explaining the importance of relationships at school on children's social-emotional adjustment. According to the self-determination theory, the fulfillment of the need to belonging as one of the basic human needs is a requirement for one's well-being [28]. It is anticipated that positive relationships with significant others, such as teachers and peers, fulfill the need for belonging and promote one's social-emotional adjustment [29]. Negative relationships with significant others, on the other hand, may threaten this need and may result in social-emotional maladjustment [29]. In addition, according to the interpersonal risk model [30,31], the relationships that children form, including the relationships with teachers and peers, play a role in their social-emotional adjustment. Moreover, the risk and protective factor paradigm has emphasized the importance of risk and protective factors which can buffer or exacerbate the association between having a risk factor and social-emotional

maladjustment [32]. Whereas negative relationships with teachers and peers can be considered as risk factors for the development of social-emotional maladjustment, positive relationships with teachers and peers can operate as protective factors promoting children's social-emotional adjustment. As a result, positive and negative characteristics of relationships with teachers and peers might play a risk or protective role in the association between defending behavior and later social-emotional adjustment.

Peer Relationships

Relationships with peers are often studied using a positive and a negative indicator, peer acceptance and peer rejection, respectively [27,33,34]. Peer acceptance refers to the level of being liked by peers, whereas peer rejection expresses the extent to which a student is disliked by peers [35]. Peer acceptance and peer rejection have been found to predict children's social-emotional adjustment. For instance, research has shown that peer acceptance predicts positive outcomes for children and adolescents, such as higher self-esteem [36,37] and was found to be protective against internalizing symptoms, such as depressive symptoms [30,38]. On the other hand, peer rejection predicted low self-esteem [39] and more internalizing symptoms such as depressive symptoms [30,40,41].

Besides direct effects, previous research has found that relationships with peers play a moderating role in the association between having a risk factor and social-emotional adjustment. That is, peer acceptance buffered the association between parental rejection and later internalizing problems [42]. Additionally, peer acceptance buffered, while peer rejection exacerbated the link between aggressive behavior, and social-emotional and academic outcomes [34]. Whereas the potential moderating role of peer acceptance and rejection in the association between defending and defending students' social-emotional adjustment has not yet been investigated, a combination of peer victimization and popularity was found to moderate the association between defending behavior and depressive symptoms [14].

Teacher-Student Relationships

Besides peers, teachers can be considered as significant individuals with whom students form relationships during their school career. Like peer relationships, teacher-student relationships are often conceptualized along a positive dimension, referring to supportive, close and warm relationships, and a negative dimension, reflecting high-conflict, disharmonious relationships [27,43]. Teacher-student relationships have been found to predict children's social-emotional adjustment. That is, supportive teacher-student relationships were found to be predictive of lower depressive symptoms [44,45,46] and higher self-esteem [45,47], while negative relationships with teachers predicted higher levels of depressive symptoms [44,48] and lower self-esteem [49].

Research has shown that positive teacher-student relationship can protect students at risk for developing negative outcomes [50]. For instance, positive teacher-student relationship dimensions, such as closeness and support were protective factors in the relationship between low effortful control and depressive symptoms [51], between peer victimization and depressive symptoms [52,53], and between peer victimization and self-esteem [47]. On the other hand, teacher-student conflict was found to be a reinforcer of negative developmental outcomes for at-risk children. For instance, teacher-student conflict exacerbated the relationship between negative affectivity and internalizing problems [54], between low teacher-student warmth and depressive symptoms, and between victimization and depressive symptoms [55]. The potential moderating role of the teacher-student relationship in the association between defending behavior and social-emotional adjustment has not yet been investigated.

Cumulative Effect of Relationships with Teachers and Peers

According to the cumulative interpersonal risk model, the higher the number of interpersonal risk factors present, the larger the prevalence and manifestation of psychopathology [30]. In addition, this model assumes that the presence and interaction of interpersonal risk factors may be involved in children and adolescent's social-emotional maladjustment [30]. Accordingly, a longitudinal study of Wang et al. [29] investigated the role of both teacher-student relationships and peer relationships on social-emotional adjustment. Results demonstrated that a teacher-student relationship characterized by low closeness and high conflict in combination with high problems with peers was associated with the least positive social-emotional adjustment. On the other hand, a teacher-student relationship characterized by high closeness and low conflict in combination with low problems with peers was associated with the most positive social-emotional adjustment. In addition, as mentioned previously, the findings of Malamut et al. [14] were in line with the cumulative interpersonal risk model as they found that defending behavior predicted higher levels of depressive symptoms for students who were both unpopular and victimized. In the current study, the moderating role of a combination of interpersonal risk (i.e., peer rejection, teacher conflict) and a combination of interpersonal protective factors (i.e., peer acceptance, teacher closeness) in the association between defending behavior and later social-emotional adjustment will be investigated.

Current Study

Given the inconsistent results regarding the association between defending behavior and social-emotional adjustment, and the lack of longitudinal research, the first aim of this study is to investigate this association through a longitudinal design. In order to investigate the association between defending behavior and later social-emotional adjustment, a negative (i.e., depressive symptoms) and a positive (i.e., self-esteem) social-emotional developmental outcome will be included in the current study. The second aim of the current study is to

investigate whether students' relationships with teachers (i.e., closeness and conflict) and peers (i.e., acceptance and rejection) moderate this association. Both research questions will be examined in a sample of upper elementary school children. Research in this target group is important because bullying peaks at the end of elementary school and the beginning of secondary school [1].

Due to the lack of longitudinal research and the contradicting findings in cross-sectional literature for depressive symptoms [14,22] and self-esteem [15,20], it is not possible to propose a specific hypothesis regarding the first research question. As mentioned before, previous research found both negative and positive social-emotional outcomes for defending students. These contradicting findings may possibly be explained through the defender protection and defender vulnerability hypotheses [14]. According to the defender protection hypothesis, protective factors may weaken the association between defending behavior and negative outcomes or may even link defending behavior with positive outcomes. In contrast, the defender vulnerability hypothesis posits that, only for those who have a vulnerability, defending behavior is associated with negative outcomes. As mentioned previously, Malamut et al. [14,19] found initial evidence for both hypotheses.

With regard to the second aim of this study, the potential moderating role of relationships with teachers and peers in the association between defending behavior and social-emotional adjustment, the following hypotheses were proposed. In line with the defender protection hypothesis and findings of previous research [14,30,47], we expect that defending will predict less depressive symptoms and higher self-esteem when teacher-student closeness or peer acceptance are higher. In line with the defender vulnerability hypothesis, the interpersonal risk model and findings of previous research [14,30,54], we expect that defending is associated with more depressive symptoms and lower self-esteem in case of higher teacher-student conflict or peer rejection. In addition, based on the cumulative

interpersonal risk model [30] and the results of Malamut et al. [14] and Wang et al. [29], we expect that a combination of higher teacher student closeness and higher peer acceptance will show the most positive social-emotional adjustment associated with defending behavior, whereas a combination of higher teacher-student conflict and higher peer rejection will show the least positive social-emotional adjustment.

Methods

Design and Participants

This study used data from the longitudinal Teachers4Victims project [56], for which the data were collected in the school year 2018-2019, i.e., November (Wave 1), February (Wave 2) and April (Wave 3). Data from Wave 1 were used for predictor variables (i.e., defending behavior), moderator variables (i.e., teacher-student closeness and conflict, and peer acceptance and rejection) and control variables (i.e., depressive symptoms, self-esteem, gender and grade), while data from Wave 3 were used for outcome variables (i.e., depressive symptoms and self-esteem). Wave 2 data were used to impute missing data (cf. *infra*), but were not otherwise included in the analyses. The study was approved by the Social and Societal Ethics Committee (SMEC) of KU Leuven. Participants in this study were elementary school children (Grades 4 to 6) from Flanders (Dutch-speaking community of Belgium) who completed questionnaires and peer nominations. The 13 elementary schools that participated were recruited through convenience sampling. After the school's permission was obtained, parents of the students in all classes of Grade 4, 5 and 6 ($n = 62$ classes) received informed consent forms and information about the study. Active parental consent was obtained for 1051 students (53.2% girls; $M_{\text{age}} = 10.57$ year, $SD = 0.91$ at Wave 1), with a response rate of 81.5%. Of the 1051 students with parental permission, data of 203 students were excluded from the analyses because of various reasons. First, 91 students did not participate in the second and

third wave of the study, because one school dropped out of the study after the first wave. Second, one class of another school (18 students) dropped out after the first wave due to a bullying problem. Third, data of 7 participants who did not complete the questionnaires on the outcome variables at any wave were excluded from the analyses. Fourth, data of 86 participants out of eight classes had to be excluded because either there was a class level response rate lower than 60% or less than 10 students in the class participated in the study. Excluding these classes was needed to obtain reliable sociometric scores of peer nominations [57]. Finally, the data of one student were excluded because this student did not sufficiently master Dutch. Differences between the excluded and included participants on the background variables and main variables of interest were examined. Results showed no differences between the excluded students and the students in the analytical sample in terms of gender, teacher-student conflict, peer acceptance, peer rejection, defending behavior, depressive symptoms at Wave 1 and Wave 3, and self-esteem at Wave 1 and Wave 3. However, the excluded students were younger ($F(1, 1049) = 8.65, p = .003, M_{\text{age}} = 10.40$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 0.90$ at Wave 1) and scored higher on teacher-student closeness ($F(1, 1049) = 21.39, p < .001, M_{\text{closeness}} = .16, SD_{\text{closeness}} = 0.21$) compared to the students in the analytical sample ($M_{\text{age}} = 10.61$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 0.90$ at Wave 1, $M_{\text{closeness}} = .11, SD_{\text{closeness}} = 0.14$). The analytical sample consisted of 848 students of 47 classes in 12 schools. Students were 8 to 13 years old (53% girls; $M_{\text{age}} = 10.61$ years, $SD_{\text{age}} = 0.90$ at Wave 1) of whom 27.9%, 35.6% and 36.4% were in Grade 4, 5 and 6, respectively. A total of 92.3% of the students was born in Belgium and 62.5% only spoke Dutch at home. Furthermore, 13.6% only spoke another language at home, whereas 23.9% spoke both Dutch and another language at home.

Procedure

During classical data collection sessions, paper and pencil questionnaires and peer nominations were completed individually under the supervision of at least one master or

doctoral student of KU Leuven. Before filling in questionnaires, researchers provided standardized instructions on questionnaire completion and confidentiality, and offered a definition of bullying based on Olweus [2]. Students could consult this definition at any time during the administration. By doing so, we tried to reduce the impact of participants' subjective interpretations of bullying.

Peer nominations were used to measure defending behavior, teacher-student closeness and conflict, and peer acceptance and rejection. Participants had to nominate the peers of their class for which the statements hold. They were allowed to nominate as many peers as they wanted, including none. Afterwards, proportion scores of defending behavior, teacher-student closeness and conflict, and peer acceptance and rejection at Wave 1 for each student were calculated by dividing the total number of nominations by the number of nominators within each class minus one, as self-nominations were not allowed, resulting in a continuous score between 0 and 1. A higher proportion score indicated a higher proportion of peer nominated defending behavior, teacher-student relationship dimensions or peer relationship dimensions.

Moreover, to reduce participants' burden, a three-form planned missing data design was applied [58] with a total of four item sets (X, A, B, C). Item set X contained the most informative items and was the largest. Three questionnaire forms were made, each containing item set X and missing one of item sets A, B or C (i.e., XAB, XAC, XBC). During Wave 1, participants were randomly assigned at student level (within classes) to complete one of three questionnaire forms and were unaware of their own form. Approximately one-third of the students filled in each of the three questionnaire forms at each wave. Participants switched questionnaire forms after each wave through a systematically rotating manner [59]. As such, after participation in all three waves, participants completed all questionnaires of set A, B and C at least twice and completed set X at all three waves. Item set X contained the independent and moderator variables that were used in this study and, as a consequence, students filled in

these items at all waves. Because of this planned missingness, both dependent variables (depressive symptoms and self-esteem) were not filled in at Wave 3 by 33.3% of the students in the analytical sample. Planned missingness was handled through multiple imputation (cf. *infra*).

Measurements

Defending Behavior (Wave 1)

Defending behavior was assessed by the use of one peer nominated item, i.e., “Which classmates stand up for students (from your class or from your school) who are being victimized at school? These are classmates who either comfort the bullied student, encourage the bullied student to tell the teacher about the bullying, tell others to stop bullying, try to stop the bullies, or do several of these behaviors”, which was adapted from the Participant Role Questionnaire (*PRQ*) [7]. Proportion scores of defending behavior were calculated as described in the procedure section.

Relationships with Teachers and Peers (Wave 1)

Teacher-Student Relationships. The affective quality of the teacher-student relationship (i.e., closeness and conflict) was measured using two peer nominations [60,61]. Closeness was assessed by “Which classmates does your teacher like the most?”, while conflict was assessed by “Which classmates does your teacher often get angry with?” A moderate correlation [62] of $r = -.30$ and $r = -.31$ between peer nominated teacher-student closeness and conflict was found in a previous study [60] and the current study (Table 2), respectively, which supported the discriminant validity of both constructs. In addition, previous research found that peer nominated teacher-student closeness and conflict were highly and moderately positively correlated with teacher-reports of the same dimensions,

respectively [60]. Proportion scores of teacher-student closeness and conflict were calculated as described in the procedure section.

Peer Relationships. Two dimensions of peer relationships, i.e., acceptance and rejection, were measured using the following peer nominated social status scales of Coie et al. [35]: “Which classmates do you like most?” and “Which classmates do you like least?”, respectively. Reliability and validity of these items for both constructs were shown by Cillessen and Bukowski [57]. In the current study, a moderate correlation of $r = -.45$ between peer nominated peer acceptance and rejection was found (Table 2) which supported the discriminant validity of both constructs. Proportion scores of peer acceptance and peer rejection were calculated as described in the procedure section.

Social-Emotional Adjustment (Wave 1 and Wave 3)

Depressive Symptoms. Self-reported depressive symptoms were measured using the Dutch version of the Major Depressive Disorder Scale (*MDDS*) [63] as previously used by Kaufman et al. [64] and van der Ploeg et al. [65]. Participants had to indicate how often they experienced certain depressive symptoms using nine items (e.g., “I feel that nothing is much fun anymore.”). Answers were provided using a four-point scale with answers from 1 = *Never* to 4 = *Always*. Previous research has shown good internal consistency of the Dutch version of the MDDS (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .81$) [64,65]. In the current study, the items of the MDDS at Wave 1 and Wave 3 showed acceptable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .80$) and good (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$) internal consistency, respectively. The individual mean score of depressive symptoms was calculated for each participant with a possible range of 1 to 4. Higher mean scores indicated higher depressive symptoms.

Self-Esteem. Self-reported self-esteem was measured using a Dutch translated adaptation of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (*RSE*) [66] by Kaufman et al. [64].

Participants had to indicate how much they agreed with five statements (e.g., “On a whole, I am satisfied with myself.”) using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *Never* to 5 = *Always*. Previous research has shown good internal consistency of the Dutch version of the RSE (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$) [64]. In the current study, the items of this scale at Wave 1 and Wave 3 showed acceptable (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$) and good (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .89$) internal consistency, respectively. The individual mean score of self-esteem was calculated for each participant with a possible range of 1 to 5. Higher mean scores indicated higher self-esteem.

Preliminary Analyses

In this section, the conducted preliminary analyses of this preregistered study (<https://osf.io/n4zpv>) will be discussed, i.e., multiple imputation, assumption checks, and calculation of Intraclass Correlation Coefficients and design effects. The main analyses will be explained in the results section. Analyses of missingness, Cronbach’s α , assumption checks, and descriptive and correlational analyses were performed prior to multiple imputation in SPSS IBM 28.0.1.1. [67]. R [68] was used to perform the computation of multiple imputation, Intraclass Correlation Coefficients (*samplesize4surveys* package) [69], design effects and clustered multiple linear regression analyses (*miceadds* package) [70].

First, multiple imputation was performed to handle planned and unplanned missingness of the control variables depressive symptoms and self-esteem at Wave 1 and the outcome variables depressive symptoms and self-esteem at Wave 3 [71]. Due to the planned missingness design, there was a planned missingness of 32.9% and 32.5% for each of these variables in the analytical sample at Wave 1 and Wave 3, respectively. In addition to the planned missingness, there was an unplanned missingness at the item level that ranged between 1.8% and 3.1% for depressive symptoms at Wave 1 and Wave 3, and that ranged between 1.6% and 3.2% for self-esteem at Wave 1 and Wave 3 in the analytical sample. Unplanned missingness was assumed to be random and hence, was also handled through

multiple imputation. Twenty imputed datasets were created using R [68]. Imputation of the missing values on the control and outcome variables (i.e., depressive symptoms and self-esteem) was based on participants' scores on the same variable on the other two (non-missing) waves. Afterwards, analyses were performed on all 20 imputed datasets and statistical values were averaged over all imputed datasets. The mean score and range of statistical values in these imputed datasets will be reported.

Second, because participants were nested within classrooms, scores of participants in the same classroom were more similar to each other than scores of participants in different classrooms and the assumption of independence was violated [72]. To investigate the degree of dependence within classes, Intraclass Correlation Coefficients and design effects were calculated for each study variable (Table 1) [69]. A design effect of 2.00 was used as the threshold value to perform clustered multiple linear regression analyses and robust standard errors instead of regular multiple linear regression analyses [73]. As design effects of defending behavior, teacher-student conflict and peer acceptance were larger than 2.00 (Table 1), clustered linear regression analyses with robust standard errors were performed [70]. This method accounts for differences between classrooms by using robust standard errors. In addition, all clustered linear regression models made use of listwise deletion in the case of missingness for variables other than the imputed variables (i.e., depressive symptoms and self-esteem).

Third, assumptions of linearity, homoscedasticity, normality of errors and multicollinearity were checked for all regression models regarding both research questions. The assumption of normality of errors was violated for all regression models. However, this was taken into account by using clustered multiple linear regression analyses with robust standard errors. Results of the assumption check showed that the other assumptions were not

violated for any of the regression models. Furthermore, inspection of outliers through Q-Q plots showed that there were no univariate or multivariate outliers in the regression models.

Results

Descriptive and Correlational Analyses

Descriptive statistics of the main study variables, i.e., means, standard deviations and ranges are presented in Table 1. Regarding defending behavior, 18.16% of students were nominated by none of their classmates, while 81.84% of students were nominated by at least one classmate.

Bivariate Pearson correlations between the main study variables and control variables are presented in Table 2. Correlational analyses indicated that there were moderate positive correlations between defending behavior at Wave 1 and teacher-student closeness and peer acceptance at Wave 1, and gender (with 0 being a boy and 1 being a girl) according to Cohen's guidelines [62]. There was a negligible positive correlation between defending behavior and self-esteem at Wave 1. In addition, there were moderate negative correlations between defending behavior at Wave 1 and teacher-student conflict and peer rejection at Wave 1. There were negligible negative correlations between defending behavior at Wave 1, and depressive symptoms at Wave 1 and Wave 3, and self-esteem at Wave 3.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	<i>N</i>	Mean (<i>SD</i>)	Range	<i>ICC</i> [Range]	<i>DEFF</i> [Range]
Defending Behavior W1	848	.13 (.11)	.00-.60	.10	2.75
Teacher-Student Closeness W1	848	.11 (.14)	.00-.75	.06	2.02
Teacher-Student Conflict W1	848	.10 (.21)	.00-1.00	-.02	0.68
Peer Acceptance W1	848	.24 (.14)	.00-.74	.11	2.93
Peer Rejection W1	848	.14 (.14)	.00-.76	.04	1.74
Depressive Symptoms W1	848	1.70 (.50)	1.00-3.67	.02 [.004;.04]	1.31 [1.06;1.62]
Self-Esteem W1	848	3.77 (.79)	1.00-5.00	.03 [.02;.04]	1.45 [1.30;1.63]
Depressive Symptoms W3	848	1.56 (0.51)	1.00-4.00	.04 [.03;.05]	1.68 [1.51;1.83]
Self-Esteem W3	848	3.79 (0.94)	1.00-5.00	.03 [.02;.04]	1.55 [1.40;1.76]

Note. ICC = Intraclass Correlation Coefficient, DEFF = Design effect. W1 = Wave 1. W3 = Wave 3. The descriptive statistics of the imputed data are represented for depressive symptoms and self-esteem. ICC and DEFF are calculated for the imputed data. The range of ICC and DEFF across the imputed datasets is reported for Depressive Symptoms and Self-Esteem at Wave 1 and Wave 3.

Table 2*Bivariate Pearson Correlations Between the Main Study Variables and Control Variables*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Defending Behavior W1	1										
2. Teacher-Student Closeness W1	.40***	1									
3. Teacher-Student Conflict W1	-.20***	-.31***	1								
4. Peer Acceptance W1	.49***	.31***	-.15***	1							
5. Peer Rejection W1	-.30***	-.23***	.52***	-.45***	1						
6. Depressive Symptoms W1	-.02*	-.08***	.02*	-.12***	.06***	1					
7. Self-Esteem W1	.02*	.03***	.07***	.12***	-.07***	-.44***	1				
8. Depressive Symptoms W3	-.003	-.10***	-.02*	-.11***	.10***	.71***	-.42***	1			
9. Self-Esteem W3	-.02**	.01	.08***	.08***	-.04***	-.44***	.77***	-.53***	1		
10. Gender	.35***	.34***	-.37***	.06	-.16***	.09***	-.18***	.10***	-.18***	1	
11. Age W1	-.01	-.04	.08*	.15***	.14***	-.13***	.04***	-.09***	.03***	.01	1

Note. Gender: boys = 0 and girls = 1. W1 = Wave 1. W3 = Wave 3.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Direct Association Between Defending and Later Social-Emotional Adjustment

To investigate the direct association between defending behavior and later social-emotional adjustment, two clustered multiple linear regression models with defending at Wave 1 as independent variable, and depressive symptoms or self-esteem at Wave 3 as dependent variables were conducted (Table 3). All analyses controlled for gender, age, and depressive symptoms or self-esteem at Wave 1, and controlled for clustering of students in classrooms.

Results indicated that the model testing the direct association between defending and later depressive symptoms was significant ($F(4, 1098.043) = 110.01, p < .001, R^2 = 0.34$). There was a significant effect of depressive symptoms at Wave 1 on later depressive symptoms ($\beta = 0.73, p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of Wave 1 depressive symptoms predicted more depressive symptoms at Wave 3. However, the effect of defending on later depressive symptoms was not significant ($\beta = -0.04, p = .80$), i.e., higher levels of Wave 1 defending were not significantly associated with less depressive symptoms at Wave 3 after controlling for Wave 1 depressive symptoms, age and gender.

In addition, the model testing the direct association between defending and later self-esteem was also significant ($F(4, 897.278) = 205.78, p < .001, R^2 = 0.39$). There was a significant effect of self-esteem at Wave 1 on later self-esteem ($\beta = 0.91, p < .001$). Higher levels of Wave 1 self-esteem were significantly associated with higher self-esteem at Wave 3. However, the effect of defending on later self-esteem was not significant ($\beta = -0.19, p = .42$), indicating that higher levels of Wave 1 defending were not significantly associated with lower self-esteem at Wave 3 after controlling for Wave 1 self-esteem, age and gender.

Table 3*Clustered Multiple Linear Regression Models for Depressive Symptoms and Self-Esteem*

	Depressive Symptoms W3				Self-Esteem W3			
	β (SE)	$t(826)$	p	Range β	β (SE)	$t(826)$	p	Range β
(Intercept)	0.42 (0.19)	2.25	.03*	[0.05;0.79]	0.46 (0.33)	1.37	.17	[-0.20;1.11]
Gender	0.05 (0.03)	1.69	.09	[-0.01;0.10]	-0.07 (0.05)	-1.49	.14	[-0.16;0.02]
Age W1	-0.001 (0.02)	-0.09	.93	[-0.03;0.03]	-0.003 (0.03)	-0.14	.89	[-0.06;0.05]
Depressive Symptoms W1	0.73 (0.04)	18.83	<.001***	[0.66;0.81]				
Self-Esteem W1					0.91 (0.04)	25.64	<.001***	[0.84;0.98]
Defending Behavior W1	-0.04 (0.15)	-0.25	.80	[-0.32;0.25]	-0.19 (0.23)	-0.80	.42	[-0.64;0.27]

Note. Gender: boys = 0 and girls = 1. W1 = Wave 1. W3 = Wave 3.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Moderator Effects of Relationships with Teachers and Peers

Moderator Effects Testing the Defender Protection Hypothesis

To investigate the defender protection hypothesis, two clustered multiple linear regression models testing the main effects of defending, teacher-student closeness and peer acceptance at Wave 1, and the two-way and three-way interactions between these variables on depressive symptoms or self-esteem at Wave 3 were conducted (Table 4). The analyses controlled for gender, age, and depressive symptoms or self-esteem at Wave 1, and controlled for clustering of students in classrooms.

Results showed the model testing the defender protection hypothesis for later depressive symptoms was significant ($F(9, 2318.22) = 51.17, p < .001, R^2 = 0.36$; Table 4). In this model, there was a significant effect of gender on later depressive symptoms ($\beta = 0.06, p = .049$), with girls reporting more depressive symptoms than boys. Again, the effect of depressive symptoms at Wave 1 on later depressive symptoms was significant ($\beta = 0.72, p < .001$). However, there was no significant interaction effect between defending and teacher-student closeness ($\beta = -0.45, p = .79$), nor between defending and peer acceptance ($\beta = 1.17, p = .24$) on later depressive symptoms. The three-way interaction between defending, teacher-student closeness and peer acceptance did not show a significant effect on later depressive symptoms either ($\beta = 0.14, p = .96$).

The model testing the defender protection hypothesis for later self-esteem was significant as well ($F(9, 2192.87) = 102.16, p < .001, R^2 = 0.38$; Table 4). In this model, there was a significant effect of self-esteem at Wave 1 on later self-esteem ($\beta = 0.91, p < .001$). However, no significant interaction effect between defending and teacher-student closeness ($\beta = 0.68, p = .74$), nor between defending and peer acceptance ($\beta = -1.48, p = .42$) on later self-esteem was found. In addition, there was no significant effect of the three-way interaction

between defending, teacher-student closeness and peer acceptance on later self-esteem ($\beta = 1.46, p = .73$).

Moderator Effects Testing the Defender Vulnerability Hypothesis

To investigate the defender vulnerability hypothesis, likewise, two clustered multiple linear regression models testing the main effects of defending, teacher-student conflict and peer rejection at Wave 1, and the two-way and three-way interactions between these variables on depressive symptoms or self-esteem at Wave 3 were conducted (Table 4). The analyses controlled for gender, age, and depressive symptoms or self-esteem at Wave 1, and controlled for clustering of students in classrooms.

Results showed the model testing the defender vulnerability hypothesis for later depressive symptoms was significant ($F(9, 2502.19) = 54.25, p < .001, R^2 = 0.35$; Table 5). In this model, again, the effect of depressive symptoms at Wave 1 on later depressive symptoms was significant ($\beta = 0.73, p < .001$). In addition, a significant effect of peer rejection on later depressive symptoms was found ($\beta = 0.40, p = .03$), indicating that higher levels of Wave 1 peer rejection predicted more depressive symptoms at Wave 3. There was no significant interaction effect between defending and teacher-student conflict ($\beta = -0.81, p = .54$), nor between defending and peer rejection ($\beta = -0.57, p = .69$) on later depressive symptoms. In addition, no significant effect of the three-way interaction between defending, teacher-student conflict and peer rejection on later depressive symptoms was found ($\beta = 1.57, p = .75$).

The model testing the defender vulnerability hypothesis for later self-esteem was significant as well ($F(9, 2377.89) = 95.87, p < .001, R^2 = 0.36$; Table 5). In this model, there was a significant effect of self-esteem at Wave 1 on later self-esteem ($\beta = 0.91, p < .001$). However, no significant interaction effect between defending and teacher-student conflict ($\beta = 0.09, p = .97$), nor between defending and peer rejection ($\beta = -1.37, p = .59$) on later self-

esteem was found. In addition, there was no significant effect of the three-way interaction between defending, teacher-student conflict and peer rejection on later self-esteem ($\beta = -1.96$, $p = .79$).

Table 4

Clustered Multiple Linear Regression Models for Depressive Symptoms and Self-Esteem Testing the Defender Protection Hypothesis

	Depressive Symptoms W3				Self-Esteem W3			
	β (SE)	$t(826)$	p	Range β	β (SE)	$t(826)$	p	Range β
(Intercept)	0.50 (0.19)	2.61	.009**	[1.59;2.54]	0.42 (0.33)	1.25	.21	[-0.24;1.07]
Gender	0.06 (0.03)	1.98	.049*	[0.06;0.20]	-0.07 (0.05)	-1.33	.18	[-0.17;0.32]
Age W1	-0.004 (0.02)	-0.25	.80	[-0.09;-0.01]	-0.002 (0.03)	-0.07	.94	[-0.06;0.05]
Depressive Symptoms W1	0.72 (0.04)	18.80	<.001***	[0.01;0.03]				
Self-Esteem W1					0.91 (0.04)	25.50	<.001***	[0.84;0.98]
Defending Behavior W1	-0.19 (0.39)	-0.48	.63	[-1.02;0.76]	0.02 (0.61)	0.04	.97	[-1.18;1.23]
Teacher-Student Closeness W1	-0.16 (0.19)	-0.84	.40	[-0.52;0.21]	-0.17 (0.30)	-0.56	.57	[-0.77;0.42]
Peer Acceptance W1	-0.21 (0.16)	-1.32	.19	[-0.53;0.11]	0.20 (0.31)	0.62	.53	[-0.42;0.81]
DB x TSCI	-0.45 (1.71)	-0.26	.79	[-3.81;2.90]	0.68 (2.02)	0.33	.74	[-3.30;4.65]
DB x PA	1.17 (0.99)	1.18	.24	[-0.78;3.12]	-1.48 (1.84)	-0.81	.42	[-5.10;2.14]
DB x TSCI x PA	0.14 (3.11)	0.04	.96	[-5.99;6.26]	1.46 (4.14)	0.35	.73	[-6.69;9.61]

Note. Gender: boys = 0 and girls = 1. W1 = Wave 1. W3 = Wave 3. DB = Defending Behavior. TSCI = Teacher-Student Closeness. PA = Peer Acceptance.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Table 5

Clustered Multiple Linear Regression Models for Depressive Symptoms and Self-Esteem Testing the Defender Vulnerability Hypothesis

	Depressive Symptoms W3				Self-Esteem W3			
	β (SE)	$t(826)$	p	Range β	β (SE)	$t(826)$	p	Range β
(Intercept)	0.43 (0.18)	2.32	.02*	[0.07;0.79]	0.42 (0.34)	1.24	.22	[-0.25;1.09]
Gender	0.03 (0.03)	0.97	.33	[-0.03;0.09]	-0.05 (0.05)	-1.06	.29	[-0.15;-0.05]
Age W1	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.39	.69	[-0.04;0.02]	-0.005 (0.03)	-0.16	.87	[-0.06;0.05]
Depressive Symptoms W1	0.73 (0.04)	18.97	<.001***	[0.65;0.81]				
Self-Esteem W1					0.91 (0.04)	25.48	<.001***	[0.84;0.98]
Defending Behavior W1	0.15 (0.20)	0.75	.45	[-0.25;0.56]	-0.01 (0.33)	-0.24	.98	[-0.67;0.65]
Teacher-Student Conflict W1	-0.14 (0.11)	-1.29	.20	[-0.35;0.07]	0.13 (0.22)	0.59	.55	[-0.30;0.56]
Peer Rejection W1	0.40 (0.18)	2.16	.03*	[0.03;0.76]	0.12 (0.32)	0.39	.70	[-0.51;0.75]
DB x TSCo	-0.81 (1.33)	-0.61	.54	[-3.43;1.80]	0.09 (2.11)	0.04	.97	[-4.06;4.24]
DB x PR	-0.57 (1.44)	-0.39	.69	[-3.41;2.27]	-1.37 (2.56)	-0.53	.59	[-6.40;3.67]
DB x TSCo x PR	1.57 (4.88)	0.32	.75	[-8.00;11.14]	-1.96 (7.20)	-0.27	.79	[-16.10;12.17]

Note. Gender: boys = 0 and girls = 1. W1 = Wave 1. W3 = Wave 3. DB = Defending Behavior. TSCo = Teacher-Student Conflict. PR = Peer Rejection.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

Discussion

Previous studies has shown inconsistent patterns in the direct association between defending and later social-emotional adjustment [15]. As defending behavior may put defending students at risk for social-emotional problems, it is important to gain more insight into the effects of defending on defending students themselves [13]. As such, this longitudinal study aimed to investigate the association between defending behavior in school bullying and later social-emotional adjustment, namely depressive symptoms and self-esteem. A longitudinal design was adopted because most previous studies were cross-sectional, limiting the ability to draw conclusions about the direction of associations. Furthermore, the inconsistency in previous research may be explained by the defender protection and defender vulnerability hypotheses [14]. Therefore, this study examined whether the quality of relationships with teachers (i.e., teacher-student closeness and conflict) and peers (peer acceptance and rejection) moderated the association between defending and later social-emotional adjustment. These relationships are important as children spend a lot of time at school. Additionally, theory and research have emphasized that positive relationships with peers and teachers may play a protective role in stressful situations, whereas negative relationships may reinforce the negative effects of risk situations [14,26,30,54,55].

Results indicate that defending does not predict later depressive symptoms, nor later self-esteem in elementary school students. In other words, defending is not a risk factor for later depressive symptoms or lower self-esteem. This is in line with the only available longitudinal studies, which did not find significant associations between defending behavior, and later depressive symptoms and social anxiety [14], nor between defending behavior and later victimization [19] in secondary school students, although there was a negative concurrent association between defending and depressive symptoms [14]. The present

longitudinal study thereby is able to replicate the longitudinal findings of Malamut et al. [14,19] in elementary school students through a longitudinal design.

As argued by Malamut and colleagues [14], the lack of a direct association between defending and later social-emotional adjustment could be explained by the defender protection and vulnerability hypotheses, for which they found first evidence. However, in the present study, teacher-student closeness, teacher-student conflict, peer acceptance, and peer rejection did not moderate the association between defending, and later depressive symptoms and self-esteem. In other words, teacher-student closeness and peer acceptance did not play a protective role in defending students' social-emotional adjustment, and teacher-student conflict and peer rejection did not put defending students at risk for developing social-emotional maladjustment. Hence, this study did not find evidence for the defender protection, nor the defender vulnerability hypothesis for relationships with teachers and peers. This is surprising, given previous evidence showing that the teacher-student relationship moderated the association between having a risk factor and positive or negative developmental outcomes [47,51,54,55]. In addition, students' social status, namely popularity, played a moderating role in the association between defending, and later social anxiety and depressive symptoms [14]. The use of popularity rather than peer (dis)liking in the study of Malamut and colleagues [14] could explain why the current study could not find evidence for peer status as a moderating factor. Popularity and peer liking have been found to be strongly associated at a younger age, while the association weakens with age [74]. That is, in the second part of elementary school, popularity becomes increasingly important [75] and may therefore be a better indicator of a risk or protective factor in the association between defending behavior and social-emotional adjustment than peer (dis)liking in this target group.

A second possible explanation for the unexpected findings is that defending was operationalized as a homogeneous overarching concept, which can also be considered a first

limitation of this study. Recent, Lambe and Craig [76] found evidence for four distinct defending behaviors, i.e., two direct defending behaviors (aggressive behavior towards the bully and solution-focused behaviors), and two indirect defending behaviors (comforting the victim and reporting the bullying to an authority). Accordingly, it has been hypothesized that indirect defending behaviors might be associated with better social-emotional adjustment compared to the direct defending behaviors [14]. Indirect defending behaviors are performed after the bullying occurred and do not directly concern the bully, probably causing defending students to be less at risk for becoming the next victim. Consequently, it might be interesting to investigate the associations between different types of defending behavior and defending students' later social-emotional adjustment in future research.

In addition, it is possible that other moderator variables have more impact in the association between defending behavior and later social-emotional adjustment. For instance, one could argue the importance of the broader class and school environment. As such, the assimilation and contrast hypotheses assume that individual relationships are perceived as more negative in classrooms with warm climates than in classrooms with less warm climates [77,78]. That is, participants compare themselves or a fellow student with a reference group, in this case the class group. If there is a warm classroom climate, participants may give lower scores to their classroom relationships because they are comparing to the climate of the overall class group. Thus, it might be worthwhile to take control for the broader classroom climate in future studies investigating the moderating role of classroom relationships in the association between defending behavior and social-emotional adjustment. Alternatively, classroom climate and class norms might play a moderating role in the association between defending and later social-emotional adjustment. That is, research showed that adolescents attempt to behave in line with peer group norms in their class and consistent with actions perceived as being associated with high peer status [79]. However, adolescents who differ

from these peer group norms are more likely to experience social-emotional maladjustment [80,81]. Malamut and colleagues [19] showed that the association between defending behavior and concurrent levels of victimization was moderated by class norms. That is, defending students in classrooms with high bully popularity norms showed high levels of concurrent victimization, while defending students in classrooms with high defending popularity norms showed low levels of concurrent victimization. Nevertheless, the association between defending and later levels of victimization did not appear to be affected by bullying descriptive norms, bullying popularity norms, defending descriptive norms and defending popularity norms in previous research [19].

Strengths, Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Methodological strengths of this study include the use of a longitudinal design and the large sample of elementary school students. In addition, whereas peer nominations were used to assess the predictor and moderators, the outcomes were measured with self-report questionnaires, thereby avoiding the risk of same informant bias. Another strength is the use of a continuous approach for defending behavior rather than a categorical approach [13,20]. The continuous approach uses a proportion score with a value between 0 and 1 [20]. The categorical approach, in contrast, uses cut-off scores through which a student can be assigned to only one participant role. Using the continuous approach takes students' engagement in all participant role behaviors into account.

Besides these strengths and the limitation that defending behavior was operationalized as a homogeneous overarching concept, other limitations should also be considered in future research. Despite the strengths of peer nominations, there are also some limitations in using peer nominations for assessing defending behavior and classroom relationships. That is, peers may be less aware of some defending behaviors, such as indirect defending behaviors as they

are performed more below the surface. In addition, Malamut and colleagues [19] considered the possibility that unsuccessful defending attempts may be less visible to peers than successful defending attempts and, as a result, peer nominations may primarily capture successful defending behavior rather than both. Therefore, peer nominated defending behavior scores could be lower than self-reported defending behavior scores, as not all defending behaviors are visible to peers and peers are not always aware of all defending behaviors. This can also be the case for dimensions of teacher-student relationships, resulting in lower scores than if students have to report about their own relationship with their teacher. Besides, it is possible that peers only remember certain highly visible interactions of their classmates and their teacher, such as the teacher yelling at the classmate or the classmate hugging the teacher, coloring their nominations. Descriptive statistics indeed showed that the mean scores and standard deviations for defending behavior, teacher-student closeness and teacher-student conflict were low (Table 1), suggesting that most participants centered around low values for these constructs.

Furthermore, relationships perceived by others, such as peer perceived peer relationships and teacher-student relationships, may be less predictive for students' social-emotional adjustment compared to students' own perceptions of the relationships with their teacher and peers. That is, previous studies found that self-reported victimization showed stronger associations with internalizing problems than peer-reported victimization [82,83]. Additionally, Rey and colleagues [84] found that student reports of teacher-student relationship quality were superior to teacher reports of teacher-student relationship quality in predicting student's self-reported school-related adjustment, such as school interest, school involvement and school connectedness. Taking the previous considerations into account, future research should use multi-respondent methods for investigating constructs such as defending behavior, peer relationships and teacher-student relationships. In this way, it would

be possible to examine these constructs as perceived by all parties involved, rather than only by peers.

Besides, none of the intercepts in the regression analyses with self-esteem as the outcome variable was significant (Table 3, 4 and 5) and the range of the intercept in all 20 imputed datasets included both negative and positive intercepts, suggesting many individual differences in levels of self-esteem when all other variables are assumed to be zero. A third limitation thus relates to the statistical analyses used, namely multiple linear regression analyses clustered for classes, which do not allow random intercepts. Future research might therefore consider investigating the defender protection and vulnerability hypotheses through multilevel analyses that account for individual differences among students.

Practical Implications

Because bullying can have detrimental outcomes for victimized students, anti-bullying interventions have been developed to prevent and stop bullying [12]. As previous research has found beneficial effects of peer defending on the psychological wellbeing of victims and levels of victimization [8,9], several of the more recent anti-bullying interventions include the encouragement of students to defend their victimized peers [10,11]. The results of the current study did not indicate that defending puts defending students at risk for later social-emotional maladjustment, even if they have a risk factor such as poor relationships with their teacher and peers. These findings suggest that anti-bullying interventions may continue to encourage students to defend victimized peers in the future. Nevertheless, the results of Malamut and colleagues [14,19] already indicated that defending students experienced different outcomes, depending on psychosocial risk and protective factors. In conclusion, it thus is important to get more insight into the variables that make defending behavior less or more harmful for defending students before encouraging students as a whole to defend their victimized peers

[13]. In other words, additional research on risk and protective factors is needed to formulate practical implications on which students may be encouraged to defend their victimized peers and which students may not.

Conclusions

The results of the current study show that defending of victimized peers did not predict later depressive symptoms or later self-esteem in elementary school children. In addition, relationships with teachers and peers did not moderate the association between defending and later social-emotional adjustment. That is, teacher-student closeness and conflict, and peer acceptance and rejection did not make a difference in the association between defending and later depressive symptoms or self-esteem. Hence, this study does not support either the defender protection hypothesis, or the defender vulnerability hypothesis for relationships with teachers and peers. In conclusion, additional research on risk and protective factors for defending behavior is needed to gain a better understanding of defending students' social-emotional adjustment.

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