

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Differences in adolescents' motivations for indirect, direct, and hybrid peer defending

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Abstract

Adolescents' defending of peers who are being bullied—or peer defending—was recently found to be a heterogeneous behavioral construct. The present study investigated individual differences in adolescents' motivations for executing these indirect, direct, and hybrid defending behaviors. In line with the literature on bullying as goal-directed strategic behavior, we adopted a social evolution theory framework to investigate whether these peer-defending behaviors could qualify as goal-directed strategic prosocial behaviors. A sample of 549 Dutch adolescents (49.4% boys; $M_{\text{age}} = 12.5$ years, $SD = 0.6$ years) participated in this study. Their peer reported defending behaviors (including bullying behavior as a control variable) and the following behavioral motivations were assessed: (a) agentic and communal goals (self-report), (b) prosocial and coercive social strategies (peer report), and (c) altruistic and egocentric motivations for prosocial behavior (self-report). The outcomes of hierarchical linear regression analyses suggest that adolescents' motivations for executing the different subtypes of peer defending partially overlap but are also different. While indirect defending was fostered by genuine concerns for victims' well-being, direct defending was more motivated by personal gains. Hybrid defending

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combined favorable aspects of both indirect and direct defending as a goal-directed, strategic, and altruistically motivated prosocial behavior. The implications of these findings are discussed.

KEYWORDS

behavioral strategies, defending, prosocial motivations, social goals

1 | INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a dynamic group process, with at its core dominant bullies who persistently perform goal-directed aggressive behaviors towards weaker victims (Salmivalli, 2010). Bullying is the most prevalent subtype of aggression during adolescence, with potentially high costs for victims' mental health (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Being less powerful than their bullies, victims depend on help from peers to cope with—the emotional consequences of—victimization (Troop-Gordon, Rudolph, Sugimura, & Little, 2014). While peers are almost always present when the bullying unfolds, only few of them come to the victims' aid by defending them and/or they only do so infrequently (Hawkins, Pepler, & Craig, 2001). Yet, when provided, peer defending tends to be effective for, and beneficial to victims' well-being (Nishina, 2012). Moreover, meta-analytical findings suggest that antibullying programs that emphasize peer defending effectively combat bullying (Polanin, Espelage, & Pigott, 2012). Unfortunately, bullying still prevails in classrooms and our knowledge of adolescents' motivations for defending their victimized peers is limited. The present study therefore aimed at investigating adolescents' motivations for peer defending.

Adolescence is a critical developmental period for investigating the driving mechanisms behind peer defending for three reasons. First, bullying becomes a more accepted social behavior during adolescence (Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). Second, adolescents become increasingly more likely to avoid involvement in witnessed victimization than to defend their victimized peers during adolescence (Pozzoli, Gini, & Vieno, 2012). And third, adolescents' general attitudes and behaviors become increasingly shaped by the prevailing peer group norms (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). This suggests that the social climate in adolescent peer groups becomes increasingly harsh and that victims become increasingly isolated within their peer groups. If we want to counteract these detrimental social developmental trends, it is imperative to increase our knowledge about what drives adolescents to defend victims.

The present study starts from the assumption that our limited knowledge about adolescents' motivations for defending victims stems from the prevailing operational definition of peer defending. Peer defending is mainly viewed and approached in research as a unitary behavioral construct for provictim intervention. However, Martin and Bateson (1993) have pled that observable behaviors should be categorized based on their morphological and functional (dis)similarity. As such, two subtypes of peer defending can be distinguished (Pronk, Goossens, Olthof, de Mey, & Willemsen, 2013; Reijntjes et al., 2016): (a) indirect defending, which encompasses all victim-oriented peer-defending behaviors like consoling victims and being nice to them, and (b) direct defending, which encompasses all bully-oriented peer-defending behaviors like verbally or physically putting an end to the bullying. The terms indirect and direct defending reflect the effect these behaviors have on the continuance of the bullying. Indirect defending—unlike direct defending—does not stop the bullying, while direct defending—unlike indirect defending—does not help victims to cope with the consequences of the bullying.

Reijntjes et al. (2016) were the first to explicitly investigate the potential heterogeneity of adolescents' peer defending. In their study, three defender groups with distinct status patterns surfaced: (a) indirect defenders, who

were high in social preference but low in popularity, (b) direct defenders, who were low in social preference but high in popularity, and (c) hybrid defenders, who were high in both social preference and popularity. Now that we know that peer defending is a heterogeneous construct, we may finally be better able to activate adolescents' peer defending in antibullying programs. The present study therefore investigated whether the different subtypes of peer defending stem from different behavioral motivations.

1.1 | Peer defending as goal-directed and strategic prosocial behavior

Bullying is increasingly viewed as a goal-directed and strategic social behavior (e.g., Huitsing, Snijders, van Duyn, & Veenstra, 2014; Olthof, Goossens, Vermande, Aleva, & van der Meulen, 2011). Defending, on the other hand, is mainly viewed as a morality-based and/or empathic response to witnessed bullying and victims' fate (for a review see Lambe, Della Cioppa, Hong, & Craig, 2018). However, there is evidence to support the claim that peer defending is goal-directed and strategic behavior like bullying, albeit a prosocial one. First, adolescents' peer defending was found to be motivated by the expectation of status improvement (Pöyhönen, Juvonen, & Salmivalli, 2012). Second, through peer defending, adolescents were found to increase their peer-group status (van der Ploeg, Kretschmer, Salmivalli, & Veenstra, 2017). Finally, for the different defending subtypes specifically, strong associations with peer-group status in terms of popularity and/or social preference were found (Reijntjes et al., 2016). The present study sought to further examine whether the defending subtypes qualify as goal-directed and strategic prosocial behaviors. Specifically, the present study investigated whether and how the defending subtypes are associated with: (a) social goals, (b) social strategies, and (c) prosocial behavioral motivations.

In line with the bullying as goal-directed and strategic behavior literature, we adopted a social evolution theory framework to investigate this hypothesis. Social evolution theory suggests that individuals aim their social behavior towards procuring and preserving their status position within their group's social hierarchy, as this increases their personal survival chances (Hawley, 1999; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). A prominent social evolution theoretical view within the bullying research field is Resource Control Theory (RCT; Hawley, 1999, 2003). In RCT status equals (social) dominance, or an individual's success in the competition for the social resources in their social group (e.g., social contacts). Dominance is linked to popularity (i.e., social impact and visibility). However, adolescents' peer-group status is not only determined by their popularity (i.e., social dominance), but also by their social preference (i.e., likeability). Previous studies have quite robustly shown that peer defending is associated with social preference (e.g., Lambe et al., 2018; Pronk et al., 2017; Reijntjes et al., 2016).

RCT seems unable to adequately explain adolescents' drive for social preference within the peer group. However, this alternative status route is central in Information Goods Theory (IGT; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). IGT acknowledges dominance as the status that someone can obtain by inducing fear on others and by intimidating them (Cheng, Tracy, Foulsham, Kingstone, & Henrich, 2013; Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). However, IGT also posits a second route to status in terms of prestige, or the deference someone is freely granted by others based on their excellence in desirable skills and competences. Prestige is linked to social preference and encompasses being respected, liked, and admired (Cheng et al., 2010). Moreover, prestige—unlike dominance—has (only) evolved in humans, as natural selection pressured us to create social learning opportunities from successful others to improve our personal survival chances (Cheng et al., 2013; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001).

IGT—a novel social evolution theoretical view for the bullying research field—can serve as a plausible explanation for adolescents' motivation for peer defending, especially when peer defending is framed as a heterogeneous construct. Previous studies have related defending to being skilled and competent at the social, emotional, and physical levels (e.g., Gini, Albiero, Benelli, & Altoè, 2008; Lambe et al., 2018; Pronk et al., 2013). Moreover, indirect and hybrid defending were found to be associated with social preference, while direct and hybrid defending were found to be associated with popularity (Reijntjes et al., 2016). Following from this, the hypothesis that peer defending is goal-directed and strategic prosocial behavior is theoretically plausible.

1.1.1 | Peer defending as goal-directed prosocial behavior

The first aspect of this hypothesis—peer defending is goal-directed prosocial behavior—was investigated in the present study through the associations of peer defending with adolescents' interpersonal social goals. Adolescents' social behavior can be aimed at obtaining two types of interpersonal social goals (Buhrmester, 1996; Ojanen, Grönroos, & Salmivalli, 2005). That is, adolescents can be motivated by: (a) agentic goals, or the desire to obtain and maintain a powerful, dominant, and influential position within their peer group, and/or (b) communal goals, or the desire to obtain and maintain positive and warm relationships with others in their peer group. In previous research, agentic goals were found to be associated with popularity and antisocial behavior, while communal goals were found to be associated with social preference and prosocial behavior (Caravita & Cillessen, 2012; Ojanen et al., 2005). Similarly, dominance has been associated with popularity and aggression or coercion (e.g., Hawley, 1999; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001), while prestige has been associated with social preference and prosocial behavior (e.g., Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Adolescents who are behaviorally motivated by agentic goals are therefore more likely to strive for dominance, while those motivated by communal goals are more likely to strive for prestige.

To our knowledge, no previous studies have investigated the associations of peer defending or the defending subtypes with these two social goals. As all peer defending is ultimately prosocial behavior, all defending subtypes may well be associated with communal goals. However, based on Reijntjes et al. (2016), differential associations for the defending subtypes with the social goals can be expected in the present study. Specifically, it is expected that: (a) indirect defending will be associated with communal goals, as it was associated with social preference; (b) direct defending will be associated with agentic goals, as it was associated with popularity; and (c) hybrid defending will be associated with both agentic and communal goals, as it was associated with both social preference and popularity.

1.1.2 | Peer defending as strategic prosocial behavior

The second aspect of the present study's main hypothesis—peer defending is strategic prosocial behavior—was investigated through the associations of the defending subtypes with the strategies and motivations for dominance and prestige derived from RCT and IGT. Dominance can be strategically obtained by using coercive (i.e., instrumental aggression) and/or prosocial (i.e., instrumental prosocial behavior) behavioral strategies (Hawley, 2003). Olthof et al. (2011) have previously suggested that compared with bullying, defending is a suboptimal dominance-oriented social behavior. Defenders seem to limit themselves to (instrumental) prosocial strategies and obtain only an average dominance.

Prestige on the other hand can be obtained by executing prosocially motivated behaviors (Cheng et al., 2010). Besides using prosocial strategies to obtain resource control, two altruistic motivations for prosocial behavior—not reserved for genetically related others—can be distinguished. First, reciprocal altruism or executing prosocial behaviors with the expectation of being reciprocated prosocial behavior by the receiver in the future (Trivers, 1971). Second, competitive altruism or competing with others in prosocial behaviors for the sake of doing good (Hardy & van Vugt, 2006). While competitive altruism ultimately benefits the actor in terms of status, the prosocial behaviors are not executed with this intention in mind. Although defending is a subtype of prosocial behavior, it is unclear whether the motivation for defending is ultimately selfish (i.e., egocentric) or selfless (i.e., altruistic) in nature and whether this motivation may be different for the different subtypes of peer defending.

According to RCT, prosocial strategies are used with the intention to improve one's own peer-group position, rather than out of a concern for others (Hawley, 2003). Indirect defending was previously found to be executed out of a concern for victims' well-being (Sainio, Veenstra, Huitsing, & Salmivalli, 2011). It is therefore unlikely that indirect defending will be associated with prosocial strategies. It is more likely that indirect defending is associated with an altruistic motivation for prosocial behavior. For direct defending, on the other hand, an association with prosocial strategies is likely. Direct defending was previously found to be executed by bullies (Reijntjes et al.,

2016), presumably to help each other out and to further their own position within their peer group (Huitsing et al., 2014). However, direct defending may also be viewed as egocentrically motivated prosocial behavior that is used to acquire and maintain friends' loyalty. Finally, from the perspective of hybrid defenders, direct defending could be used with the intention to aggress against bullies in order to maintain peer-group coherence (i.e., a coercive strategy), while indirect defending could be used with the intention to cultivate one's social network connections by being nice to others (i.e., a prosocial strategy). Then again, peer defending was also found to put individuals at risk of becoming victimized themselves (Huitsing et al., 2014). Intuitively, this risk of retaliation by bullies seems higher for those who (also) directly confront the bullies than for those who (only) indirectly support victims. The direct defending aspect of hybrid defending could therefore technically be both strategic and selflessly motivated, thereby qualifying hybrid defending for being both strategic and altruistically motivated prosocial behavior.

1.2 | The present study

Starting from the assumption that peer defending is not a unitary construct, we may be better able to uncover what drives adolescents to defend their victimized peers. The heterogeneity of peer defending may well prove valuable in attempts to activate adolescents' defending behaviors and attitudes in antibullying programs. The present study therefore investigated adolescents' motivations for executing indirect, direct, and hybrid defending behaviors. Adopting a social evolution theory approach, the hypothesis that peer defending is goal-directed and strategic prosocial behavior was investigated. Specifically, the present study investigated the potentially differential associations of the defending subtypes with: (a) social goals, (b) social strategies, and (c) prosocial motivations.

While not a primary focus of this study, gender differences cannot be ignored within the context of peer defending. Gender differences in defending favoring girls are quite consistently reported (Lambe et al., 2018). Girls were also found to prefer indirect and hybrid defending specifically, while boys seem to prefer direct defending (Pronk et al., 2013; Reijntjes et al., 2016). Gender may also moderate the associations between some of the motivations for defending and actual peer defending. Boys were previously found to prefer using agentic goals and coercive strategies, while girls seem to prefer using communal goals and prosocial strategies, and were found more likely to motivate their prosocial behavior both altruistically and egocentrically (Ojanen et al., 2005; Reijntjes et al., 2018; van Baardewijk, 2010). Therefore, the potential confounding influence of gender on defending was controlled for in all analyses, and the potential moderating role of gender on all motivations for defending was investigated as well.

Finally, it must be noted that Reijntjes et al. (2016) found that direct defending had positive ties with bullying and was strongly present in peer-classified probullying adolescents. Similarly, Huitsing et al. (2014) suggested that adolescents in probullying cliques use peer defending to help each other. Peer defending, and direct defending specifically, may therefore—in part—be used by bullies to acquire and/or maintain their friends' loyalty. This bully-sourced defending will be taken into account in the present study as it does not constitute peer defending that is used with the intention to help alleviate the suffering of bullied peers.

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Participants

Data were collected during the second half of the school year in 25 seventh-grade classrooms of five randomly selected medium-sized Dutch secondary schools located in the vicinity of Amsterdam. In the Netherlands, students transition to secondary school after sixth grade. In these secondary schools, students are streamlined into education levels that prepare them for different educational trajectories (i.e., vocational training or university). All seventh-grade classrooms of the participating schools participated in this study. Permission from schools and classroom teachers was obtained first and—following school preferences and with IRB approval—an informed

consent procedure was subsequently used to recruit participants via their parents ($N = 624$). Parents could decline their child's participation by returning a signed preprinted objection note in a stamped addressed envelope ($n = 53$; 8.5%). Participants themselves could actively decline participation at any moment during testing ($n = 22$; 3.5%). The resulting final sample consisted of 549 adolescents (49.4% boys; $M_{\text{age}} = 12.5$ years, $SD = 0.6$ years). This sample was previously included in a study about the interrelations between empathy and social goals in explaining adolescents' aggressive behavior (van Hazebroek, Olthof, & Goossens, 2017).

2.2 | Measures

2.2.1 | Bullying role behavior

The Bullying Role Nomination Procedure (BRNP; Olthof et al., 2011) was used to assess participants' bullying role behavior. Participants were first presented an elaborate definition of bullying. Subsequently, they completed 19 peer nominations pertaining to their classmates' bullying role behavior. Only the items used to assess bullying (five items in total for physical, material, verbal, indirect, and direct relational bullying, including examples of cyberbullying in the latter three items), indirect defending (one item for helping victims by consoling them, being nice to them, and/or warning the teacher), and direct defending (one item for helping victims by intervening on their behalf, telling the bullies to stop, or stepping into the situation) were used in the present study. Students could nominate only—and in theory all—classmates from dropdown classmate name lists containing all classmates' names.

Participants' received nominations were aggregated to obtain reliable behavioral assessments (Pellegrini, 2002). Proportion scores were calculated for each participant as the quotient of received nominations from classmates and the total number of classroom nominators, with a theoretical range of 0 (not nominated) to 1 (nominated by all). Overall, participants' received nominations from classmates ranged from 0% to 68% ($M = 4\%$). To not underestimate participants' bullying, this variable was calculated as the average of the two items on which they received the most nominations (cf., Witvliet et al., 2010). The Spearman-Brown coefficient for bullying was 0.96. To create a variable reflective of participants' hybrid defending, the product of their indirect and direct defending was calculated. Higher scores on this variable reflected participants' likelihood to combine both types of defending. Finally, to correct the positive skews in the normality distributions, to remove class-/nominator-related variance, and to obtain final variables measured on a similar scale, the final scores were within-classroom Rankit normalized.

2.2.2 | Social goals

The Interpersonal Goals Inventory (IGI; Ojanen et al., 2005) was used to measure participants' agentic and communal goals (i.e., their desire for social status and for intimate social relationships respectively). This self-report questionnaire consists of 33 items measuring how important it is for participants to reach certain social goals on a 4-point scale (1 = *not at all*; 4 = *very*). These items are divided over eight subscales: (a) agentic (three items; example: ...that others respect and admire you), (b) communal (four items; example: ...that you feel close to others), (c) separate (six items; example: ...that you keep your thoughts to yourself), (d) submissive (four items; example: ...that you do not make others angry), (e) agentic and communal (four items; example: ...that you state your opinion clearly), (f) agentic and separate (three items; example: ...that the group does what you say), (g) submissive and communal (five items; example: ...that your peers like you), and (h) submissive and separate (four items; example: ...that your peers do not laugh at you). The coefficient alphas of the subscales averaged at 0.73 (range: 0.60–0.80), with only the submissive and communal subscale below the satisfactory 0.70 threshold. Final scores for agentic and communal goals were calculated following the procedures and formulas described in Ojanen et al. (2005). Higher scores are indicative of a stronger pursuit of these types of social goals. Finally, both variables were centered around the mean.

2.2.3 | Behavioral strategies

Peer reports adapted from Hawley (2003) by Olthof et al. (2011; see also Reijntjes et al., 2018) were used to measure participants' use of coercive and prosocial behavioral strategies to obtain resource control (i.e., aggressive vs. self-serving cooperative strategies respectively). Participants completed 11 peer nominations pertaining to their classmates' prosocial (five items; example: Which students in your class act nicely in order to get what they want?) and coercive (six items; example: Which students in your class try to get what they want by forcing others?) strategic behavior. Nomination procedures were the same as those used for bullying role behavior. To avoid overlap with the bullying role behavior items, none of the behavioral strategy items referred to bullying or defending. Proportion scores were calculated by using the same procedures as for bullying role behavior. Variables were calculated by summing the subscale items. Higher scores are indicative of behavior being more strongly motivated by this behavioral strategy. Coefficient alphas were 0.86 for prosocial and 0.93 for coercive strategies. Both variables were within-classroom Rankit normalized and subsequently centered around the mean.

2.2.4 | Prosocial motivations

The Prosocial Behavioral Motivation Questionnaire (van Baardewijk, 2010) was used to measure participants' altruistic and egocentric prosocial motivation for prosocial behaviors (i.e., their tendency to act in a prosocial way for selfless reasons or for personal gain respectively). This self-report questionnaire consists of 20 items measuring participants' prosocial behavioral motivations during peer interactions on a 5-point scale (1 = *completely not true*; 5 = *completely true*). Final scores for altruistic (12 items; example: I do nice things for others because I want others to feel good) and egocentric (eight items; example: I do nice things for others so I will make a good impression) prosocial motivation were calculated as the average sum score for both scales. Coefficient alphas were 0.82 for altruistic and 0.71 for egocentric prosocial motivation. Higher scores are indicative of a stronger drive of prosocial behavior by this type of motivation. Finally, both variables were centered around the mean.

2.3 | Procedure

Data were collected as part of a large-scale study including self- and peer-report procedures that were not included in the present study. Participants were tested in their school's computer room during two class period testing session. A written research protocol was followed during data collection to ensure that all data were collected consistently across classrooms. Participants were instructed not to talk with or look at each other's responses during testing. Questionnaires were presented via an internet procedure, only accessible with a unique login code to ensure correct and confidential response recording. All questionnaires used in the present study were presented in a fixed order and were answered in roughly 25 min.

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Preliminary analyses

The correlations between all study variables are presented in Table 1. Strong positive correlations were found between indirect and direct defending. Moreover, indirect defending was negatively correlated with bullying, and direct defending positively. Furthermore, all defending behaviors were positively correlated with communal goals, and with altruistic motivation. Only direct defending was also positively correlated with prosocial and coercive strategies. Finally, no strong correlations were found between the predictors, with the exception of a strong positive correlation between prosocial and coercive strategies.

TABLE 1 Correlations between study variables (N = 549)

	Behaviors				Social goals		Strategies and motivations			
	01.	02.	03.	04.	05.	06.	07.	08.	09.	10.
Behaviors										
01. Indirect defending	—									
02. Hybrid defending	0.69*	—								
03. Direct defending	0.50*	0.87*	—							
04. Bullying	-0.14*	-0.02	0.09*	—						
Social goals										
05. Agentic goals	-0.05	0.02	0.06	0.19*	—					
06. Communal goals	0.20*	0.20*	0.17*	-0.16*	-0.23*	—				
Strategies and motivations										
07. Prosocial strategies	0.01	0.04	0.10*	0.57*	0.11*	-0.02	—			
08. Coercive strategies	-0.07	0.02	0.11*	0.68*	0.16*	-0.07	0.64*	—		
09. Altruistic motivation	0.28*	0.23*	0.19*	-0.11*	-0.18*	0.37*	0.04	-0.07	—	
10. Egocentric motivation	-0.06	-0.05	-0.03	0.08	0.08	-0.16*	0.03	0.02	0.11*	—

Note. As hybrid defending was calculated as the product of indirect and direct defending, no empirical or theoretical conclusions can be drawn from the correlations of hybrid defending with indirect and direct defending. These correlations are only included for full disclosure.

* $p < 0.05$.

The outcomes of a MANOVA investigating gender differences (including *M*s and *SD*s for boys and girls) are presented in Table 2. Girls scored higher on all defending subtypes, communal goals, and altruistic motivation. Boys scored higher on bullying and agentic goals. No gender differences were found for prosocial strategies, coercive strategies and egocentric motivation.

3.2 | Hierarchical regression models predicting peer defending

The three defending criteria could not be analyzed simultaneously in one path model, as hybrid defending combines indirect and direct defending. Furthermore, pure indirect and direct defending criteria—free of each other's confounding influence—needed to be modelled next to the hybrid defending criterium. Therefore, separate hierarchical linear regression models were built to predict indirect, hybrid, and direct defending. Each model was built in four consecutive steps. In step 1, all criteria were corrected for the potential confounding influence of gender, and indirect and direct defending were corrected for each other's confounding influence. In step 2, the social goals were included into the models. In step 3, the strategies and motivations were included into the models. Finally, in step 4, the interactions of all predictors with gender were included into the models (each interaction separately). The outcomes of these models are summarized in Table 3.

The largest proportion of total variance explained for all defending subtypes was contributed by the correctional first steps. Girls were more likely to show indirect defending and hybrid defending, while no gender difference was found for direct defending. Moreover, indirect and direct defending were positively associated with

TABLE 2 Gender comparisons of study variables ($N = 549$)

	(M)ANOVA			Boys ($n = 271$)		Girls ($n = 278$)	
	Pilai's trace	F	η_p^2	M	SD	M	SD
Gender	0.29	21.47*	0.29				
Indirect defending		89.88†	0.14	-0.29	0.67	0.35	0.89
Hybrid defending		42.25†	0.07	-0.14	0.56	0.26	0.85
Direct defending		12.75†	0.02	-0.06	0.68	0.17	0.82
Bullying		28.82†	0.05	0.25	0.92	-0.14	0.78
Agentic goals		20.09†	0.04	0.17	0.91	-0.17	0.88
Communal goals		73.98†	0.12	-0.42	1.10	0.41	1.17
Prosocial strategies		0.98	0.00	-0.02	0.80	0.02	0.95
Coercive strategies		6.75	0.01	0.08	0.87	-0.08	0.85
Altruistic motivation		43.36†	0.07	-0.16	0.62	0.16	0.52
Egocentric motivation		5.52	0.01	0.08	0.79	-0.08	0.78

Note. Multivariate model dfs are (10, 538). Univariate model dfs are (1, 547).

* $p < 0.05$.

†Significant at Bonferroni-corrected $p < 0.005$.

each other. Adding the social goals into the models at the second step, significantly increased the total proportion of variance explained for direct and hybrid defending, but not for indirect defending. The social goals explained an equal additional proportion of variance for direct and hybrid defending. Both direct and hybrid defending were positively predicted by agentic and communal goals. Adding the strategies and motivations into the models at the third step, further significantly increased the total proportion of variance explained for all defending subtypes. The strategies and motivations explained the largest additional proportion of variance for hybrid defending. Only direct defending was positively predicted by coercive strategies, while both indirect and hybrid defending were positively predicted by altruistic prosocial motivation. Finally, the fourth-gender interaction step only further significantly increased the total proportion of variance explained for hybrid defending. Hybrid defending was predicted by prosocial strategies for boys specifically.

As some defending may be executed by bullies, the confounding influence of this bully-sourced defending was discounted for by also running all regression models with bullying as an extra control variable in the first step. This extra behavioral correction did not influence the total proportion of variance explained for hybrid defending but did do so for indirect (+1%) and direct defending (+2%). The additional proportions of variance explained were due to a negative association of bullying with indirect defending ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = 0.001$) and to a positive association of bullying with direct defending ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$). Including bullying as an extra control variable in the regression models only altered the outcomes in the strategies and motivations step for direct defending. Coercive strategies no longer significantly increased the proportion of variance explained for direct defending.

4 | DISCUSSION

During adolescence, the social peer-group climate becomes increasingly harsh. Adolescents become more accepting of bullying (Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004) and less willing to help victims (Pozzoli et al., 2012). These social developmental processes need to be counteracted if we want to be able to improve victims' well-being. Yet, despite an exponential increase in scientific attention to peer defending over the last decade, our knowledge about adolescents' motivations for peer defending is still limited. The present study started from the

TABLE 3 Hierarchical regression models predicting peer defending ($N = 549$)

	Indirect defending		Hybrid defending		Direct defending	
	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2	β
Step 1—Corrections	0.35 [*]		0.07 [*]		0.26 [*]	
Gender		0.31 [*]		0.27 [*]		-0.05
Non-criterion behavior		0.46 [*]				0.52 [*]
Step 2—Social goals	0.00		0.02 [*]		0.02 [*]	
Gender		0.30 [*]		0.24 [*]		-0.06
Non-criterion behavior		0.45 [*]				0.51 [*]
Agentic goals		-0.02		0.10 [*]		0.10 [*]
Communal goals		0.02		0.15 [*]		0.11 [*]
Step 3—Strategies and motivations	0.02 [*]		0.03 [*]		0.02 [*]	
Gender		0.27 [*]		0.22 [*]		-0.05
Non-criterion behavior		0.45 [*]				0.51
Agentic goals		0.01		0.11 [*]		0.09 [*]
Communal goals		-0.03		0.09 [*]		0.10 [*]
Prosocial strategies		0.03		-0.05		-0.03
Coercive strategies		-0.10		0.08		0.16 [*]
Altruistic motivation		0.13 [*]		0.17 [*]		0.05
Egocentric motivation		-0.04		-0.05		0.00
Step 4—Gender interactions			0.01 [*]			
Gender × Prosocial strategies				-0.13 [*]		
Total R^2	0.37 [*]		0.13 [*]		0.30 [*]	

Note. Gender was coded as 0 (Boys) and 1 (Girls). Non-criterion behavior implies direct defending when indirect defending is the criterion behavior and indirect defending when direct defending is the criterion behavior. Step 4 is only reported when significant.

^{*} $p < 0.05$.

assumption that an incomplete operationalization of peer defending is at the root of this knowledge gap. Peer defending was recently reconceptualized as a heterogeneous construct (Reijntjes et al., 2016). That is, peer defending consists of indirect, direct, and hybrid subtypes that differentially affect victims' well-being and defenders' peer-group status. The present study further adopted a social evolution theory framework to investigate whether the peer defending subtypes qualify as goal-directed and strategic prosocial behavior. The evidence in support of this hypothesis will be discussed separately for indirect, direct and hybrid defending respectively. Please note that, indirect and direct defending indicate "pure" indirect and direct defending—controlled for both each other's confounding influences and that of bullying—unless explicitly otherwise indicated.

4.1 | Motivations for indirect defending

Taken together, the data suggest that indirect defending is altruistically motivated prosocial behavior, rather than goal-directed or strategic behavior. Contrary to expectation, the present findings suggest that indirect defending is

not associated with communal goals. Thus, despite being associated with social preference (Reijntjes et al., 2016), indirect defending does not seem to be executed from a desire to obtain and maintain positive relationships with their peers. This conclusion is in line with Pronk et al. (2018), who recently found that social preference is the cause, rather than the effect of adolescents' indirect defending. Furthermore, while communal goals did not predict indirect defending in the present study, indirect defending and communal goals were positively correlated (see Table 1). Thus, while indirect defending may not be a goal-directed behavior, adolescents with a communal goal drive may use indirect defending to reach their goals. Future (longitudinal) studies are needed to investigate this. Be it as it may, the present findings suggest that pure indirect defending is fostered by a concern for victims' well-being.

In line with expectation, but diverging from Olthof et al. (2011), indirect defending was not found to be associated with prosocial strategies. Olthof et al.'s diverging findings may well be attributed to methodological differences. In the Olthof et al. study, participants were classified as defenders based on nominations received for indirect defending only. We know from both Reijntjes et al. (2016) and the present findings that indirect and direct defending are strongly positively correlated (see Table 1). Thus, Olthof et al.'s findings may have been influenced by not controlling their indirect defender measure for the confounding influence of direct defending. In the present study, direct defending was correlated with prosocial strategies (see Table 1) and hybrid defending was found to be associated with prosocial strategies for boys. Further strengthening this conclusion, prosocial strategies are defined in RCT as social strategies that are used with the intention of obtaining group resources (Hawley, 2003). Indirect defending was previously found to be associated with social preference (Pronk et al., 2018; Reijntjes et al., 2016), which can be viewed as a social group resource. However, indirect defending was recently found to not increase adolescents' social preference over time (Pronk et al., 2018). Moreover, the present findings suggest that indirect defending is also not executed from a desire to reach these types of (communal) goals in the present study.

Looking at the morphology and function of indirect defending—consoling and caring for victims—it makes intuitive sense that indirect defending is motivated by a concern for victims' well-being, in line with the hypothesis previously put forth by Sainio et al.'s (2011). The present study found evidence to support this hypothesis, as indirect defending was associated with an altruistic motivation for prosocial behavior. Helping victims by supporting them may put someone on the bullies' radar and thereby at risk for becoming a future target. Indirect defending thus does not necessarily seem to be in someone's own best interest and may thus not be a smart social behavior, as it does not—directly—benefit the executor. However, indirect defending can be highly beneficial for victims' well-being, which may be exactly why some adolescents do it.

4.2 | Motivations for direct defending

Taken together, the data suggest that direct defending is a goal-directed behavior, rather than a prosocially motivated behavior fostered by concerns for victims' well-being like indirect defending. Moreover, for those adolescents who also bully others, direct defending was also associated with coercive strategies. Consistent with expectation, direct defending was associated with agentic goals. When combined with the previous finding of Reijntjes et al. (2016) that direct defending is associated with popularity, the present findings suggests that direct defending is not only intended to reach agentic goals but is also successful in this regard. Unexpectedly, direct defending was also associated with communal goals. As direct defending was previously found to be associated with a low social preference (Reijntjes et al., 2016), direct defending seems to be an unsuccessful behavior in this regard. Of course, direct defending may still be motivated from a desire to obtain and maintain positive social relationships. Adolescents may for example only use direct defending to help their friends. If this is true, they are likely to be socially preferred by these friends, but not necessarily by the larger peer group. It may also be that exclusively using direct defending to help others is not viewed by peers as an appropriate response to bullying. Future studies should investigate how the defending behaviors are received and interpreted by classmates.

Consistent with expectation, direct defending was found to be strategic behavior. Then again, it was hypothesized that direct defending would be associated with prosocial strategies, as it was suggested to be used to

help friends, specifically for probullying adolescents (Huitsing et al., 2014; Reijntjes et al., 2016). However, direct defending was associated with coercive, rather than prosocial strategies in the present study and this association was only found when bullying was not controlled for. Looking at the morphology and function of direct defending—verbal or physical interventions—this behavior may be observed by others as another coercive strategy in bullies' behavioral repertoire (i.e., using aggression to get ahead; Hawley, 2003).

Finally, direct defending does not seem to be driven by a concern for victims' well-being. It was not found to be associated with either an altruistic or egocentric motivation for prosocial behavior. This suggests that adolescents who use direct defending know how to read social cues and how to make others behave in ways that are beneficial to them. This could mean that the decision to directly defend classmates is based on some type of cost-reward analysis. Direct defending may only be executed when someone perceives a lack of negative consequences of doing so (e.g., retaliation by bullies) and when they can obtain ultimate benefits (e.g., agentic goals), irrespective of the effect the bullying has on victims.

4.3 | Motivations for hybrid defending

Finally, taken together, the data suggest that hybrid defending is goal-directed and altruistically motivated prosocial behavior fostered by a concern for victims' well-being. Consistent with expectation, hybrid defending was associated with both agentic and communal goals. When combined with the previous findings of Reijntjes et al. (2016) that hybrid defending is associated with popularity and social preference, the present findings suggest that hybrid defending is not only intended to reach agentic and communal goals, but is also successful in doing so. These findings then, suggest that adolescents may use hybrid defending to earn their classmates' respect, admiration, and sympathy. As such, hybrid defending could qualify as a prestige-oriented behavior. According to IGT, prestige is the result of freely conferred deference (e.g., respect, admiration, and sympathy) from others based on someone's skills, competences, and expertise (Henrich & Gil-White, 2001). Prestige evolved alongside dominance and positively impacts individuals' personal survival chances (Cheng et al., 2013; Henrich & Gil-White, 2001).

The suggestion that hybrid defending may well be prestige-oriented behavior was further supported by the present study. Previously, prestige was found to result from competitive altruism (Hardy & van Vugt, 2006). In the present study, hybrid defending was found to be associated with an altruistic motivation for prosocial behavior. While we did not directly assess competitive altruism, the present findings suggest that hybrid defending may well be a form of competitive altruism. Future research should investigate whether hybrid defending could indeed be a viable and competitively altruistic alternative to bullying in climbing the classroom's social ladder.

Finally, hybrid defending was associated with prosocial strategies, but only for boys. However, hybrid defending was not associated with coercive strategies, neither for boys or girls. This suggests that hybrid defending does not include strategically aggressing against bullies to maintain peer-group coherence. Still, the present findings do link hybrid defending with prosocial strategies for boys, which suggests that hybrid defending can help boys in cultivating their social network in terms of popularity (i.e., dominance). This finding is in line with Olthof et al. (2011), although Olthof et al. found that defenders prefer using prosocial over coercive strategies regardless of their gender. It is unclear why hybrid defending was only associated with prosocial strategies for boys in the present study. It could be that—as peer reports were used—classmates perceive the hybrid defending of boys as prosocial strategic behavior because these types of behaviors are less normative, and therefore more noticeable, in boys than in girls.

4.4 | Considerations for peer defending theory

The present findings fall in line with some of the more consistent previous findings in the literature about peer defending. At the individual level, peer defending is most consistently found to be a morality-based response of empathic individuals (e.g., Gini et al., 2008; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013; for a review see Lambe et al., 2018). The

present findings suggest that indirect—rather than direct—defending contributes to this aspect of peer defending. Moreover, the most consistent peer-level predictors of peer defending seem to be due to direct defending. That is, peer defending is quite consistently associated with peer-group status (i.e., popularity and specifically social preference; e.g., Pronk et al., 2017; van der Ploeg et al., 2017; for a review see Lambe et al., 2018). In the present study, direct—unlike indirect—defending was found to be goal-directed behaviors towards these types of social goals (i.e., agency and communion).

More in general, the differences found between the peer-defending subtypes in the present study suggest that approaching peer defending in research as a heterogeneous construct has theoretical relevance. Reijntjes et al. (2016) already suggested that hybrid defending is the most favorable subtype of peer defending due to its positive associations with both popularity and social preference. In extension of this, the present findings showed that hybrid defending combines some of the more favorable aspects of both indirect and direct defending. Based on the present findings, it seems advisable for researchers who study peer defending to move their focus from one unitary construct to at least a dual construct consisting of indirect and direct defending.

4.5 | Limitations and practical implications

The present study was the first to investigate adolescents' motivations for peer defending by approaching defending as a heterogeneous construct. While defending is increasingly becoming a topic of scientific attention, we still know only little about adolescents' motivations for executing these behaviors. It must be noted that the behavioral motivations investigated in the present study explained only relatively small proportions of the total variance in the defending subtypes. Still, the present study offers practitioners in the field valuable information with regard to promoting defending, due to the novelty of studying it as a heterogeneous behavior. Before addressing these implications, three caveats that may hamper generalizability of the findings need to be addressed.

First, only one item each was used to assess direct and indirect defending. However, participants' nominations received on these items from potentially all classmates were aggregated. This supports the reliability of the behavioral measures (Pellegrini, 2002). Moreover, the items contained elaborate descriptions of both behaviors and Reijntjes et al. (2016) previously found longitudinally stable and strong effects that were consistent with expectation using the same items, which underscores their validity. Second, popularity and social preference were not included in the present study. Thus, we cannot conclude whether (hybrid) defending mediates the links between the social goals and status. Finally, self- and peer-report questionnaires were used to measure the behavioral motivations. Questionnaires, while a common methodology in the field, may not be the ideal methodology to measure the entire range of motivations for adolescents' behavior. Questionnaires allow researchers to assess explicit—rather than implicit—behavioral motivations. Future experimental studies might prove helpful in uncovering the more implicit behavioral motivations for defending victims. In experiments, controlled social situations can be realized in which participants or participant groups can act either selfishly or selflessly. By manipulating the social contexts and participants' available responses, it becomes possible to assess implicit behavioral motivations behind prosocial behaviors, like peer defending.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the findings of the present study have implications for how we can stimulate (hybrid) defending within classrooms and—as such—how we might be able to counteract the negative social developmental trend of increased harshness in adolescents' social classroom climate. Most importantly, we now know that defending is not only a heterogeneous construct with different consequences for ones' peer-group position, but also that there are individual differences in adolescents' motivations for executing these behaviors. In the ideal world, adolescents should defend victims in a hybrid manner as this may well have the best effects on both victim (i.e., well-being) and defender (i.e., enjoying prestige, or at least being popular and socially preferred by classmates). Supporting this, indirect and direct defending were found to be strongly positively related. This suggests that adolescents who use one of these behaviors could be persuaded to use the other type of behavior as well. Unfortunately, the present findings also suggest that not all adolescents may be eligible for being or becoming hybrid defenders.

Adolescents, who limit themselves to indirect defending, do not seem motivated by status and affiliation when they help victimized peers (cf., Pronk et al., 2018). The present findings suggest that hybrid defending may be stimulated in pure indirect defenders by increasing their awareness of the potential benefits direct defending can have on their peer-group status. However, adolescents who use indirect defending were found to not be reward-sensitive (Pronk, Olthof, & Goossens, 2015, 2016). Therefore, it is unclear whether this strategy will prove to be successful. Meanwhile, adolescents who directly defend victims may not be eligible for becoming hybrid defenders as a subgroup of them were found to combine defending with bullying to realize their status and affiliation drive (Huising et al., 2014; Reijntjes et al., 2016). On the positive side, the present findings suggest that the correlation between direct defending and bullying is only weak, especially when compared with the links between direct and indirect defending. Still, the present findings suggest that hybrid defending could be stimulated in direct defenders by educating them about the negative consequences bullying has on victims' well-being. Then again, this technique by itself may prove ineffective because of the links between direct defending and bullying. Direct defenders therefore also need to be educated about the realistic opportunity they have to realize their agentic and communal goal drive through prosocial means. That is, by incorporating indirect defending into their behavioral repertoire and becoming hybrid defenders.

In sum, the present findings suggest that adolescents' motivations for indirect, direct, and hybrid defending partially overlap, but are also different. Indirect defending seems to be altruistically motivated behavior with victims' best interest at heart, while direct defending seems to be a more goal-directed behavior for personal gains. Hybrid defending combines the best of both worlds, as a goal-directed, strategic, and altruistically motivated prosocial behavior. Combined with the previously found associations between hybrid defending and popularity and social preference (Reijntjes et al., 2016), the present findings suggest that hybrid defending may well be an effective behavioral strategy towards climbing the classroom's social ladder. However, it may not be realistic to expect hybrid defending from all adolescents. Still, the associations found in the present study with both communal and agentic goals suggest that adolescents' hybrid defending of victims may well be effectively promoted by focusing on the prestige—that is, the respect, admiration and sympathy—this behavior can reward them.

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