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Chapter 73
Moral Disengagement and Cyber Bullying, A Mediator Role of Emphatic Tendency

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate a mediator role of emphatic tendency in the relationship between moral disengagement and cyber bullying. The participants comprised 338 Turkish adolescents. The age of participants ranged between 11 and 18 years. The study data was gathered using the Moral Disengagement Scale, the Cyber Bullying Scale and the Emphatic Tendency Scale. The data was analyzed using structural equation modeling. A bootstrapping analysis was conducted in order to determine any indirect effects. The results show that moral disengagement predicted cyber bullying positively and emphatic tendency negatively, and that emphatic tendency predicted cyber bullying negatively. It was further found that the structural equation model, which proposes that moral disengagement, has a direct and an indirect effect through emphatic tendency on cyber bullying was confirmed. The results of the study are discussed in the light of Social Cognitive Theory, and suggestions for future studies are made.

INTRODUCTION

Becoming popular and being socially accepted is among adolescents, especially with the technological developments, cyber bullying (Reynold & Repetti, 2010; Werner & Hill, 2010) is a type of electronic aggression, and has negative consequences both in Turkey and throughout the world. Understanding the risks and protective factors of cyber bullying has recently become the focus of psychological research due to its adverse effects. Research during the past two decades has emphasized socio-cognitive processes

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affecting antisocial behavior, either in a facilitating way, such as moral disengagement (Menesini, et al. 2003) and enhancing prosocial behavior (Warden & Mackinnon, 2003), such as empathy. For this reason, in this study, the behavior of cyber bullying in adolescents is be examined in relation to moral disengagement and empathic tendency.

Cyber bullying is described as intentional, repetitive, and hostile aggression among adolescents through electronic media (Smith & Slonje, 2010). Ejecting individuals from chat rooms without reason, secretly taking shameful photos of someone, preparing websites discrediting or embarrassing someone, adding offensive, insulting, or threatening messages or pictures to a victim's website or blogs, sharing inappropriate images online, and spreading rumors about someone are among the most common examples of cyber bullying (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Topçu, 2008; Moses, 2013).

Cyber bullying results in adverse consequences in physical, psychological, and academic areas. Its results include higher absentee rates in schools, excuse making for non-attendance at school (Katzer, et al. 2009), low grades (Beran & Li, 2008), low self-esteem and high depression levels (Ybarra et al., 2006) and attempted suicide rates (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Schneider et al., 2012). Compared to traditional bullying, cyber bullying may hurt victims much severely since it can happen at any time of day, involve anonymous behaviors, and it has the capacity to reach many people through different means (Moses, 2013). Due to the widespread effect in a short time, research into the risk factors and protective factors of cyber bullying has been rapidly increasing. Moral disengagement (Wang, Lei & Zhao, 2017) was examined as one of the risk factors while empathy (Wang, Lei & Zhao, 2017) was focused as a protective factor that have an effect on bullying.

Regarded as an immoral behavior, cyber bullying was associated with moral disengagement (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). The term moral disengagement was addressed by Bandura in his social-cognitive theory of the moral self (Bandura, 1991). Moral disengagement is an internal cognitive mechanism which deactivates cognitive internal control in order to minimize the moral effects of impairing behaviors and avoid moral self-sanctions (Bandura, 1991). According to Bandura, individuals rationalize aggressive behaviors by activating moral disengagement mechanisms to avoid negative self-sanctions when they behave immorally (Bandura, 2002). This process enables the individual to reason his/her immoral behaviors or to allow his/her inappropriate behaviors to be accepted more easily (Gibbs, Potter, & Goldstein, 1995). Cyber bullies use cognitive reasoning and rationalization to start and maintain their aggressive behaviors (Pornari & Wood, 2010). They make use of moral disengagement mechanisms by isolating their victims, inhumane treatment, intimidation and controlling the behaviors of their victims (Bandura, 2002; Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). The electronic media is frequently used by individuals with higher moral disengagement behaviors because of its anonymity and opportunity to avoid face-to-face interaction with victims (Pornari & Wood, 2010). A cyber bully acts both immorally without feeling guilty (Slonje & Smith, 2008) and uses cognitive strategies in order not to take moral responsibility (Almeida et al., 2008), since interaction through the electronic media allows for communication without direct contact.

Empathic personality trait has been the focus of research as one of the protective factors of bullying. Empathy is considered to be a factor that can inhibit antisocial behavior and facilitate prosocial behavior (Wang, Lei, & Zhao, 2017; Warden & Mackinnon, 2003), and is an important construct to assess when examining bullying behavior. Bandura (1986) identified empathy as an important factor in social cognition, influencing one's ability to recognize and react appropriately to emotions presented by others. As a dimension of empathy, emphatic tendency is defined as the potential of forming empathy of people in their daily lives and social sensitivity (Dökmen, 1988). An empathic tendency is mostly related to an individual's potential to understand and feel the experiences and emotions of others and constitutes the

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basis of empathic abilities (Dökmen, 1994). The literature emphasizes the negative relationship between empathic tendency and bullying (Slonje et al., 2012; Steffgen et al., 2011; Tangney et al., 2007; Topçu, 2008). A higher empathic tendency reduces aggression since it makes it possible to anticipate possible harms given to others (Tangney et al., 2007). A lower empathic tendency, on the other hand, is seen as a risk factor for traditional and cyber bullying (Steffgen et al., 2011). It has been determined in studies that individuals who were bullies and who demonstrated the characteristics of victims were less empathic and displayed cyber bullying behaviors more often (Renati et al., 2012; Steffgen et al., 2011; Stavrinides et al. 2010). It is also asserted that a virtual environment decreases empathic communication since it is unable to receive nonverbal clues, such as facial expressions, which reveal the feelings or reactions of a person (Ang & Goh, 2010) and lack of immediate reaction (Steffgen et al., 2011). With respect to all of these explanations, it can be said that a virtual environment is frequently preferred by those whose empathic tendency is low and have a tendency for aggressive behaviors.

The relationship between empathy and moral disengagement has been the focus of especially bullying and cyber bullying research. Empathy is an essential element for pro-social behaviour (Wang, Lei, & Zhao, 2017) and moral development is risk factor (Wang, Lei, & Zhao, 2017) in bullying and cyber bullying. Recent studies found that lack of empathy (Renati et al., 2012; Steffgen et al., 2011) and high MD (Kyriacou, 2016; Meters, 2018; Runions, 2015) assists cyber bullying behavior. Moreover, in studies focusing on both variables, it was found that the lack of empathy increased moral disengagement and cyber bullying behaviors (Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2018; Postorino, 2014; van Noorden, Haselager, Cillessen, & Bukowski, 2015; Zelidman, 2014).

PRESENT STUDY

As it is in the world, cyber bullying behaviors among adolescents have been increasing in Turkey as well. In different studies, cyber bullying rate among adolescents in Turkey has been found as 16% (Ayas, 2011), 19.6% (Dilmeç & Aydoğan, 2010), 36% (Arıcak et al., 2008), and 48% (Topçu, 2008). In few studies, it was found that human values (Dilmaç & Aydoğan, 2010) and empathic tendency (Peker, Eroğlu, & Ada, 2015; Topçu, 2008) was associated with adolescents' cyber bullying behaviors and human values-based psycho-education program reduced the cyber bullying behaviors of adolescents (Peker & Iskender, 2015).

Social cognitive theory of human agency offers an inclusive framework within which the moral dimensions of bullying can also be described (Bandura, 2002). According to Bandura's theory, moral standards are used in self-regulation process through self-monitoring, judgement, and self-reaction to evaluate the possible consequences of one's intended behaviors (Bandura et al., 1996). When the moral standards indicate self-condemnation or the feeling of guilt, the behavior isn't performed (Bandura, 2002; 2017). However, Bandura (1990) also expresses that in cases where the individuals' self-regulation mechanisms don't function due to some psychological processes, the individuals might conduct inhuman behaviors without feeling guilty (Bandura, 2002; 2017). Based on Bandura's explanations, it can be stated that individuals experiencing moral disengagement might violate others' rights and damage others because they are unable to carry out a self-evaluation (Bandura, 2002; 2017). These individuals might perform bullying behaviors in cyber world like they do in the real life.

As far as the links between empathy, moral disengagement and bullying are concerned, it has been argued that bullies demonstrate morally disengaged behavior as a result of deficits in emotional aspects of empathy (Gini et al., 2007; Laible, Carlo, & Roesch, 2004; Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2018; van Noor-

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den, Haselager, Cillessen, & Bukowski, 2015). The positive association between bullying and morally disengaged behaviour has been mainly attributed to the lack of empathic caring of morally disengaged perpetrators towards their victims. In line with the above findings, it is assumed that high MD early adolescents may exhibit low empathy, which, in turn, will be linked to greater bullying involvement (Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2018; van Noorden, Haselager, Cillessen, & Bukowski, 2015). Moreover, empathy served as mediators affecting indirectly the relationship between MD and relational bullying. high MD exhibited lower empathy, which resulted in more bullying behavior (Gini et al., 2007; Kokkinos & Kipritsi, 2018; van Noorden et al., 2015).

Recent studies have investigated the role of moral disengagement and empathy in cyber bullying behaviors (Postorino, 2014) and the moderator role of empathy in moral disengagement, bullying, and cyber bullying (Zelidman, 2014). In both studies, it was found that empathy reduced the bullying and cyber bullying behaviors while moral disengagement increased them. In a study conducted by Zelidman (2014) on elementary school students, it was found that empathy had a moderator role between moral disengagement and bullying and cyber bullying. As a result of the study, it was found that higher empathy levels were associated with lower moral disengagement and cyber bullying levels. In studies conducted in Turkey for the last decade, cyber bullying that has been increasing considerably among adolescent has been associated with human values but its relationship with moral disengagement hasn't been investigated. Moreover, it has been found that empathic tendency of adolescents predicts their cyber bullying behaviors (Peker, Eroğlu, & Ada, 2015). Although cyber bullying behaviors of adolescents have been investigated in relation to different variables in Turkey, it hasn't been investigated in relation to empathic tendency and moral disengagement. Therefore, this study investigated the mediator role of empathic tendency in the relationship between moral disengagement and cyber bullying. It is considered that the findings will help understand the nature of cyber bullying among adolescents, reveal the risk and protective factors of cyber bullying, reduce cyber bullying, and take preventive measures.

METHOD

Participants

In this study was used convenience sampling method. The sample of 338 volunteered adolescents from different middle and high school in the northwest part of Turkey was recruited between September 2017 and December 2017. The mean age of the participants was 15.98 years (Standard Deviation = 1.79) with a range from 11 to 18 years. Of these 48.5% (N = 164) were female and 51.5% (N = 174) were male.

Measures

The data for this study was collected using the Collective Moral Disengagement Scale (Gini et al. 2014), the Cyber Bullying Scale (Topçu & Erdur-Baker, 2010) and the Empathic Tendency Scale (Dökmen, 1988). Detailed information concerning these measures is presented below.

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Collective Moral Disengagement Scale

Moral disengagement was measured with the Collective Moral Disengagement Scale (CMDS) developed by Gini and his colleagues (2014). The CMDS is a self-report questionnaire with 15 items. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1(no one) to 5 (everyone). Items include statements ''it is alright to fight to protect friends''. The total score of the Turkish-CMDS was the sum of the 15 items, with the range from 15 to 75, a higher score indicates a collective moral disengagement level. CMDS was translated into Turkish by Eraslan-Çapan and Bakioğlu (2016). The Turkish versions of the CMDS have good construct validity (χ^2/df = 3.20, RMSEA = .08, GFI = .89, AGFI = .85, CFI = .94, NNFI = .93 and SRMR = .06) and internal reliability (Cronbach's α = .86) and test-retest reliability coefficients (α = .86). In this study, the CMDS also exhibited excellent reliability (Cronbach's α = .83).

Cyber Bullying Scale

Cyber Bullying was measured with the Cyber Bullying Scale (CBS) developed by Topçu and Erdur-Baker (2010). The CBS is a self-report questionnaire with 14 items. Items were rated on 4-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 4 (more than three times). Items include statements ''to send hurtful e-mails someone known''. The total score of the CBS was the sum of the 14 items, with the range from 14 to 56, a higher score indicates a cyber bullying level. CBS have good construct validity (RMSEA = .06, GFI = .93, AGFI = .89, CFI = .93, TLI = .90 and NFI = .89) and internal reliability (Cronbach's α = .86) and test-retest reliability coefficients (α = .82). In this study, the CBS also exhibited excellent reliability (Cronbach's α = .86).

Empathic Tendency Scale

Empathic tendency was measured with the Empathic Tendency Scale (ETS) developed by Dökmen (1988). The ETS is a self-report questionnaire with 20 items. Items were rated on 5-point Likert scale from 1 (completely contrary) to 5 (completely appropriate). Items include statements ''my close friends often tell me their troubles''. The total score of the ETS was the sum of the 20 items, with the range from 20 to 100, a higher score indicates a empathic tendency level. ETS have good construct validity and split-half reliability (α = .86) and test-retest reliability coefficients (α = .82). In this study, the ETS also exhibited excellent reliability (Cronbach's α = .86).

PROCEDURE

The participants completed paper-and-pencil questionnaires in a classroom environment. In the data collection stage of the research, the assessment tools were prepared as a leaflet and distributed to students in a classroom environment, all of whom had volunteered to participate in the research. Before each assessment application, the researchers introduced themselves and explained the importance and purpose of the research. In addition, the researchers told the participants that there would be no individual evaluation and no requirement for identity information and that the results would be used for scientific purposes only. The participants were allowed to answer the questionnaires at their own pace and typically took about 20 minutes to complete all of the sections.

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DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive analysis and correlation analysis were performed in IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to examine the measurement model and mediation models in AMOS Graphics. We tested the structural model using maximum likelihood estimation. A parceling technique was used in order to avoid errors sourcing from one-dimensional measures (Little et al. 2002). Three, four, and two parcels were obtained from the Collective Moral Disengagement Scale, the Empathic Tendency Scale, and the Cyber Bullying Scale, respectively.

Several indices of goodness-of-fit were used as criteria for the above model selection. We used χ^2/df< 5, CFI, TLI, GFI, IFI >.90, SRMR and RMSEA <.08, as the assessment standards of the model fit index (Hu & Bentler 1999; MacCallum et al. 1996; Tabachnick & Fidell 2007). A bootstrap analysis was conducted in order to determine the mediator role of empathic tendency in the relationship between moral disengagement and cyber bullying (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). The Bootstrapping Confidence interval was estimated in the indirect impact of moral disengagement on cyber bullying. 10000 resampling and 95% confidence intervals were used in this process.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The total scores of all variables in this study are presented in terms of gender. The mean score obtained from cyber bullying ($\overline{X}$:15.74) was higher than the mean score of the female participants ($\overline{X}$:15.41), but lower than the score of the male participants ($\overline{X}$:16.01). Similarly, the mean score obtained from moral disengagement ($\overline{X}$:33.72) was higher than the mean score of the female participants ($\overline{X}$:30.53), but lower than score of the male participants ($\overline{X}$:36.71). The mean score obtained from empathic tendency ($\overline{X}$:72.74) was close to the mean score of both the female ($\overline{X}$:72.88) and the male participants ($\overline{X}$:72.61).

Preliminary Analyses

The relationships among moral disengagement, empathic tendency, and cyber bullying levels of adolescents were analyzed using structural equation modeling. The analysis was performed in two steps. In the first step, descriptive statistics were determined. In the second step, the hypothesized model was tested. The descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients are presented in Table 1.

When Table 1 is examined, it can be seen that there is a significant negative correlation between moral disengagement parcels and empathic tendency parcels (r= -.22 ≤ r ≤ -.38, p<.01) and between empathic tendency parcels and cyber bullying parcels (r= -.26 ≤ r ≤ -.38, p<.01. Moreover, there was a significant negative correlation between moral disengagement parcels and cyber bullying parcels (r= .37 ≤ r ≤.51, p<.01).

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Table 1. Descriptive correlations among study variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1.MDPar1	-								
2.MDPar2	.61**	-							
3.MDPar3	.63**	.66**	-						
4.ETPar1	-.26**	-.22**	-.26**	-					
5.ETPar2	-.29**	-.28**	-.34**	.65**	-				
6.ETPar3	-.34**	-.33**	-.38**	.61**	.71**	-			
7.ETPar4	-.31**	-.32**	-.40**	.56**	.63**	.73**	-		
8.CBPar1	.46**	.50**	.51**	-.26**	-.32**	-.38**	-.38**	-	
9.CBPar2	.37**	.43**	.42**	-.27**	-.30**	-.32**	-.36**	.60**	-
M	10.45	10.05	10.97	17.33	18.07	18.31	19.02	7.75	7.98
SD	4.05	4.06	4.08	4.26	3.83	3.94	3.97	1.30	1.56

Note. **$p < .01$, MDPar moral disengagement parcels, ETPar empathic tendency parcels, CBPar cyber bullying parcels, M mean, SD standard deviation.

Measurement Model

First, we tested the measurement model to assess whether each of the latent variables was represented by their indicators. The measurement model consisted of three latent factors, collective moral disengagement, empathic tendency, and cyber bullying, and nine observed variables. The measurement model test indicated a satisfactory model fit: $\chi^2(24, N = 338) = 31.35$, $p < .001$; CFI = .99; TLI = .99; GFI = .98; SRMR = .025; RMSEA = .030; C.I. [.50, .74]. The factor loadings of all the indicators were significant (ranging from .63 to .77, p <.001), demonstrating that respective indicators are true representative of their latent factors.

Mediation Analyses

In the second phase of the study, the structural equation model was tested in order to determine the mediator role of empathic tendency in the relationship between moral disengagement and cyber bullying. The results are presented in Figure 1.

All path coefficients were observed to be significant in the analysis. Moral disengagement predicted cyber bullying positively ($\beta = .63$, $p < .01$) and empathic tendency negatively ($\beta = -.49$, $p < .01$). In addition, empathic tendency predicted cyber bullying negatively ($\beta = -.21$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, the effect coefficient of moral disengagement predicting cyber bullying through the mediation of empathic tendency was estimated to be .10.

When the fit indexes of the model were examined, all of them were found to be at acceptable levels. The fit indexes were as follows: $\chi^2(24, N = 338) = 31.354$, $p<.001$; GFI = .98; CFI = .99; NFI = .98; TLI = .99; SRMR = .025; RMSEA =.030. Therefore, it can be stated that the structural equation model was confirmed.

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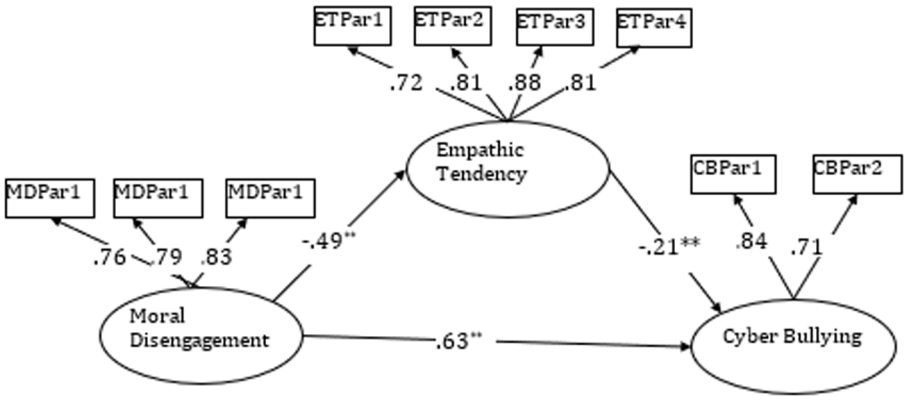
Figure 1. Mediation for moral disengagement on cyber bullying via empathic tendency



10,000 resample bootstrapping were conducted in order to provide additional evidence related to the significance of direct and indirect effects. The bootstrapping coefficients and the lower and upper bounds of 95% confidence intervals are presented in Table 2.

When Table 2 is examined, it can be seen that all of the effects in the structural equation model were significant. The bootstrapping confidence intervals lower and upper bounds of both the direct and indirect effects comprise not zero. Therefore, it can be stated that the adolescents' collective moral disengagement had an effect on their cyber bullying behaviors through the mediation of empathic tendency according to the bootstrapping results.

Table 2. Bootstrapping results

Model paths	Coefficient	95% C. I.	
		Lower bound	Upper bound
Direct effect			
Moral Disengagement → Cyber Bullying	.63	.50	.74
Moral Disengagement → Empathic Tendency	-.49	-.59	-.39
Empathic Tendency → Cyber Bullying	-.21	-.316	-.09
Indirect effect			
Moral Disengagement → Empathic Tendency →Cyber Bullying	.10	.05	.17

DISCUSSION

Cyber bullying is a major problem in the world. Therefore, it will be helpful to reveal protective and risk factors of cyber bullying. In this study, the mediator role of empathic tendency in the relationship between moral disengagement and cyber bullying behaviors of Turkish adolescents was investigated. As expected, the results show that the empathic tendency plays a mediator role in the relationship between moral disengagement and cyber bullying. Accordingly, empathic tendency is negatively correlated with

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moral disengagement and cyber bullying, and moral disengagement positively predict cyber bullying. In short, it can be expressed that as the adolescents' empathic tendency level increases, their moral disengagement and cyber bullying behaviors decrease, and vice versa. The findings of this study are partially supported by Postorino's (2014) findings. In his study, Postorino (2014) emphasizes that moral disengagement behaviors of high school students are associated with their cyber bullying behaviors more than their empathic tendency levels. It is asserted that the dominance of their moral disengagement behaviors, coupled with their ignoring their empathic feelings due to peer pressure, causes cyber bullying behaviors. Zelidman's (2014) findings, which show that empathy moderates the relationship between adolescents' moral disengagement and cyber bullying, support the findings of current study in terms of the relationship among three variables although not in terms of statistical methods used. Zelidman's (2014) findings which show that higher empathic levels are associated with lower levels of moral disengagement and cyber bullying support the findings of the current study.

Social cognitive theory regards empathy as an important factor that paves the way for social behaviors by making individuals become sensitive to others' feelings (Bandura, 2002; 2017). Empathic skills are related to understanding the feelings and experiences of others, and they encourage positive social behaviors while preventing bullying behaviors (Ang & Goh 2010; Postorino, 2014; Stefgen et al. 2011; Topçu, 2008; Wang, Lei, & Zhao, 2017). Empathy can prevent moral disengagement and cyber bullying since it involves looking from the viewpoint of others and being uncomfortable with the adverse experiences of others. A negative relationship between moral disengagement and empathy was observed in the study. Studies on this topic (Kokkinos and Kipritsi, 2018; Postorino, 2014; van Noorden, Haselager, Cillessen, & Bukowski, 2015; Zelidman, 2014) support this finding. Moral disengagement enables a person to look at aggressive behaviors from their own viewpoint and to rationalize them (Moses, 2013; Pornari & Wood, 2010). Empathy, on the other hand, enables an individual to look at things from the viewpoint of others, take responsibility for his/her behaviors, and behave more humanely (Ang & Goh, 2010; Postorino, 2014; Topçu, 2008). Individuals with higher empathic tendency are aware of how their behaviors and speech affect others. Higher empathic tendency will decrease aggression since it enables the individual to presume possible harm (Tangney et al., 2007). In short, higher empathy enables an individual to look at things from the viewpoint of others and prevents them from rationalizing their adverse behaviors, and it also gives rise to the taking of responsibility for their behaviors and, thereby, behaving more sanely. Despite certain opinions arguing that people are unable to develop empathy in an electronic environment since they do not see others (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Pornari & Wood, 2010; Schneider et al., 2012), a number of studies suggest that cyber bullies have the risk of becoming the victim at the same time, and that those that are both cyber bullies and victims have higher empathic skills (Renati et al., 2012). The relevant studies show that cyber bullies became the victims and were exposed to cyber bullying behaviors at least once in their lives (Postorine, 2014; Renati et al., 2012) or that 82.4% observed cyber bullying behaviors (Moses, 2013), which supports the preceding opinion. Therefore, even though there is no communication with victims' face-to-face, cyber bullies can develop empathy with victims and take the responsibility for their behaviors, since they learn what victims go through by experience or observation.

Another finding of this study is the positive relationship between moral disengagement and cyber bullying. This finding is supported by other studies (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007; Moses, 2013; Pornari & Wood, 2010; Williams & Guerra, 2007) arguing that the moral disengagement levels of adolescents, and a lack of moral values and moral feelings predicted cyber bullying. However, one study (Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012) was unable to reveal the relationship between moral disengagement

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and cyber bullying. The studies show that moral disengagement is an important factor causing cyber bullying to be accepted as a normal communication process among adolescents who underestimate its results (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007; Moses, 2013; Pornari & Wood, 2010; Williams & Guerra, 2007). Moses (2013) found that 45.4% of students accepted cyber bullying as normal behavior and used moral disengagement strategies for their behaviors. Cyber bullies used cognitive restructuring and distortion of consequences concerning victims' religious beliefs, ethnical identities, manner of speaking and dressing. They used cognitive restructuring regarding the physical appearance and popularity of victims. Finally, they used distortion of consequences with regard to sexual orientation, family income level, physical disability and learning disorders. Kyriacou (2015) expresses the view that adolescents demonstrate cyber bullying behaviors for a number of reasons: to amuse their friends; to socialize; to ease loneliness; to show strength; to enjoy harming others; to deliver perceived justice deserved to the victim; and to enjoy watching the victim suffer. Cyber bullies use moral disengagement strategies to justify their behaviors and to not feel regret, since moral disengagement makes it possible for unacceptable behaviors to become acceptable (Hymel et al., 2010).

CONCLUSION

The main result of the study is identifying the mediator role of empathic tendency in the relationship between moral disengagement and cyber bullying. According to social cognitive theory, antisocial behaviors such as cyber bullying exist through the reciprocal determinism among environment, personal characteristics, and behavior. Cyber bullying is a widespread and increasing concept affecting the physical, psychological, and academic well-being of adolescents in Turkey. Although there are numerous studies about the prevalence of cyber bullying among students in Turkey, studies on understanding the factors affecting cyber bullying and prevention of cyber bullying at schools are inadequate in terms of quantity. Schools have an important duty in preventing cyber bullying. Intervention programs should be conducted in schools. These programs should make students understand the nature of their harmful behaviors, take responsibility for their behaviors, and see the results of their behaviors from both their own and others' viewpoints. Schools should play their part in the prevention of cyber bullying in addition to traditional aggression and bullying. Teachers should inform students about the harm caused by cyber bullying, what they can do to against cyber bullying, and how to seek help in the face of cyber bullying. Cyber bullying and its effects should be covered in lessons, and elective courses and seminars should be conducted to address the issue. Moreover, students should be taught to use cell phones and the Internet responsibly and ethically. The researchers indicate that anti-bullying prevention and intervention programs at schools should involve moral and empathy education and focus on the development of social-emotional learning skills (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008). In Turkey which is taking the very first steps in the fight against cyber bullying, the schools are required to provide training to develop protective factors such as empathic tendency and reduce risk factors such as moral disengagement.

Certain limitations are evident in the current study. First of all, the responses of participants may include social desirability biases, since the data was collected using self-reported measures. The study sample includes only a limited number of schools in terms of variety. Therefore, the findings of the study should not be generalized as being typical of all high school students. Additionally, the findings are related to a general sample, and the behaviors of the male and female participants were not examined separately. Moreover, the type of cyber bullying and moral disengagement behaviors the students

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demonstrate were not examined in this study. It is recommended that more detailed information, using qualitative or other research methods, is obtained in future studies, and that the data obtained is investigated in terms of gender and age variables.

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Conflict of Interest

Both authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval

All procedures performed in the studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or with comparable ethical standards.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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