

**When it seems as something OK to do:
Moral disengagement in traditional and cyber bullying
Robert Thornberg**

By drawing on Bandura's theories about moral agency Robert Thornberg describes how theories of moral disengagement can help us understand and prevent bullying. He describes moral disengagement as "A set of socio-cognitive processes by which moral self-awareness and self-regulation can be selectively disengaged, which in turn makes people prone to behave inhumanely without feelings of guilt or remorse".

Four types of moral disengagement. There are four types of moral disengagement: cognitive restructuring, minimizing one's agentic role, distorting the consequences, and victim attribution. As examples of cognitive restructuring he talks about moral justification (e. g. excluding someone and justify this by saying that the group dynamics are better without that person), euphemistic labeling (e. g. argue that an action was "only a joke" and cannot therefore be considered bullying), and advantageous comparison (e. g. to compare verbal teasing with bullies who hit and fight). The second type of moral disengagement, minimizing one's agentic role, is described as displacement of responsibility (e. g. to argue that one is only following orders and thus have no personal responsibility for one's actions) and diffusion of responsibility, which means that responsibility for an action can spread out over a larger group of people, so that no one is experiencing personal responsibility for the action. The third type, distorting the consequences, is described as minimizing, ignoring, or distort the negative impact of one's actions. The fourth and final type of moral disengagement, victim attribution, is described by dehumanization and blaming the victim for one's actions. That is, to not acknowledge the victims' human qualities and view them as creatures of less value or to argue that the victims have themselves to blame for their suffering, because they for example look or dress differently.

Moral disengagement and schools. Research show that high levels of moral disengagement is connected to aggression and delinquency, whereas low levels of moral disengagement is connected to empathy, moral emotions, pro-social behavior and experiencing guilt when one does something that is against the moral. In schools, higher levels of moral disengagement have been found among pupils who bully others or cheer other bullies on. In contrast, pupils who defend bully victims, keep away from bullying situations, or experience guilt when witnessing bullying show lower levels of moral disengagement. Furthermore, he describes that pupils' belief in their own capacity to defend bully victims matters for their tendency to stay passive or defend victims in bullying situations. High belief in one's own capacity is connected to defending the victim, whereas low belief in one's own capacity is connected to remaining passive.

At the end of his talk Robert Thornberg makes the conclusion that moral disengagement has to be considered in efforts to prevent bullying, and that more research is needed about group processes and collective moral disengagement as most of the existing research focuses on the individual level.