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Cyberbullying Among Emerging Adults: The Role of Parental Practices and Morality

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Abstract

Parental figures provide significant guidance in their children's behavior to facilitate positive moral development. However, little is known about the moral implications of parental practices and its association with cyberbullying among emerging adults. The present study explored the potential mediating role of shame- and guilt-proneness in the association between parental practices and moral disengagement, and subsequently, the associations with cyberbullying behavior. Participants included postsecondary school students in Canada (N = 449; M_{age} = 21.85). Results from structural equation modeling revealed that guilt-proneness was a significant partial mediator between perceived psychological control and moral disengagement, which, in turn, was associated with cyberbullying perpetration. Overall, this study highlights the implications of social-emotional contexts beyond adolescence, especially its associations with moral and aggression outcomes among emerging adults.

Keywords: emerging adulthood, postsecondary school, psychological control, autonomy support, moral disengagement, bullying

1. Introduction

1.1 Cyberbullying and Morality

Cyberbullying is an immoral behavior, characterized by the intent to inflict harm on others, and is associated with detrimental consequences for the perpetrator and the victim, including greater suicidal ideation (John et al., 2018). Thus far, many studies have examined the role of morality on aggressive behavior, with consistent findings that point to moral disengagement as a positive predictor of cyberbullying (e.g., Gini et al., 2015). In looking at elements that promote or prevent moral violations, such as cyberbullying, a large number of studies have examined cognitive (moral disengagement) and affective (moral emotions) components of moral functioning (e.g., Gini et al., 2015; Perren & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, 2012; Thornberg et al., 2015). However, less have studied the factors that contribute to moral emotions and moral disengagement outcomes, such as the role of parental socialization (Zych et al., 2019). Given that parental figures are significant facilitators of children's moral functioning, (Bandura, 1991), further examinations of the parental role on individuals' moral outcomes are warranted.

Indeed, findings across multiple studies have found that specific parental practices influence children and adolescents' tendencies to feel shameful or guilty across various contexts (e.g., Walter & Burnaford, 2006), such that youth who perceived negative parenting reported higher levels of shame across different situations (shame-proneness), and a greater likelihood to morally disengage, while a perception of positive parenting was associated with more guilt across different situations (guilt-proneness), and less propensity for moral disengagement (Bartolo et al., 2019; Campaert et al., 2018; Mintz, 2017; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Walter & Burnaford, 2006; Zhang et al., 2021). Though studies with emerging adult samples have suggested negative consequences of cyberbullying for bullies and victims (e.g., Walker et al., 2011), much of the extant research on cyberbullying has focused on middle and high school populations (Cassidy et al., 2017). The present study sought to address these limitations, by examining whether and the extent to which perceived parental practices impact moral functioning beyond childhood and adolescence.

1.2 Cyberbullying and Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement is central in the understanding of morality for aggressive behaviors, including

cyberbullying (e.g., Bussey et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014). It is the process of justifying behavior that contrasts with one's internalized moral standards (Bandura, 1986; Caravita et al., 2019). Moral disengagement is argued to be significantly associated with cyberbullying due to various reasons. The lack of social-emotional cues in the online context facilitates the perception of distance between the aggressive behavior and negative consequences (Bandura, 2002; Runions & Bak, 2015). In addition, the lack of face-to-face interactions may allow the perpetrator to ignore the victim's humanistic qualities, thus dehumanizing them. These reasons suggest that cyberbullies commonly use moral disengagement mechanisms to shed responsibility from the inflicted harm on the victim, by either distorting the unseen consequences or disregarding how the victim may feel or react. Findings across a number of cross-sectional, longitudinal, systematic review and meta-analysis studies have found moral disengagement as a positive predictor of cyberbullying perpetration (e.g., Bussey et al., 2015; Kowalski et al., 2014; Lo Cricchio et al., 2021; Meter & Bauman, 2018; Perren & Sticca, 2011; Runions & Bak, 2015; Wang et al., 2017, 2019; Zhang et al., 2021), such that individuals with higher levels of moral disengagement were more likely to report cyberbullying others.

1.3 Moral Disengagement and Moral Emotions

Moral emotions influence decision-making and serve as a protection against moral violations (Bandura, 1999). These emotions, such as shame and guilt, can either lead to the anticipation of negative consequences from moral violations and prevent people from morally transgressing (Bandura, 2002), or be experienced after a moral violation (Bandura et al., 1996; Doramajian & Bukowski, 2015; Tangney et al., 2007). According to this perspective, shame and guilt are central in the moral disengagement process. For instance, shame-proneness, that is, feeling shameful across various situations, including those that normally do not arouse this emotion, is maladaptive as it invokes feelings of inadequacy and heightened fear of the disapproval from others (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 2007). Therefore, shame-prone individuals are found to resort to defensive strategies, such as withdrawal, avoidance, hostility, and displacing blame (Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005; Tangney et al., 1996; 2007). Due to the avoidant and self-defeating nature of shame, shame-prone individuals display less prosocial behavior and more aggression, and report greater levels of moral disengagement (Johnson & Connelly, 2016; Tangney et al., 1996; Tillman et al., 2018). Meanwhile, guilt-proneness can protect against moral disengagement because of its prosocial and reparative nature (Johnson & Connelly, 2016; Moore et al., 2012; Thornberg et al., 2015; Tillman et al., 2018). Thus, negative associations were found between guilt-prone individuals and delinquent, impulsive, or destructive behavior (Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005; Tangney & Dearing, 2002), and positive associations with perspective-taking (Killen & Smetana, 2015). Individual differences in shame- and guilt-proneness develop from our earliest social encounters (Bandura, 1991; Tangney et al., 1995). At the same time, moral disengagement is malleable and influenced by external social factors such as reciprocal parent-child interactions (Wang et al., 2019, 2020). Taken together, these findings suggest that parental figures may provide some of the earliest opportunities for children to learn and adapt to social norms and moral standards (Hinde, 2002).

1.4 Parental Associations With Moral Disengagement and Moral Emotions

The affect-cognition model (Malti & Keller, 2010) suggests that cognitive skills and moral emotions are increasingly integrated throughout development. Malti and Keller (2010) noted that children participate in social interactions to understand others cognitively, by integrating their own perspective with those of others, and affectively, by emphasizing with others to realize that their actions can bring negative consequences for others. In this context, parental figures are significant facilitators of children's moral functioning, by guiding their behavior and explicating appropriate moral conduct (Bandura, 1991). To corroborate, studies have revealed that children with negative, inconsistent or rejecting parents who focuses on criticizing the child's global self were more likely to report greater shame-tendencies and moral disengagement, whereas children with positive and warm parents who focuses on evaluating their child's behavior were more likely to be empathetic and guilt-prone, and engage in less moral disengagement (Bartolo et al., 2019; Campaert et al., 2018; dos Santos et al., 2020; Mintz, 2017; Qi, 2019; Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Walter & Burnaford, 2006; Zhang et al., 2021).

The present study examined two forms of parental practices, autonomy support and psychological control (Mageau et al., 2015). As this study was conducted with a North American sample, and in line with previous studies with Western samples (e.g., Barber, 1996; Costa et al., 2016; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Soenens & Vansteenkiste, 2010), autonomy support and psychological control were operationalized as positive and negative parental practices. Autonomy supportive parenting is characterized by promoting volition (e.g., facilitating children's self-endorsed interests), taking the perspective of the child (e.g., by displaying empathy), and providing rational reasoning when limits are imposed (Grolnick et al., 1997; Ryan & Deci, 2009). Emerging adults with a high

perception of parental autonomy support report less social anxiety and depression, greater life satisfaction (Kouros et al., 2017), and less loneliness and stress (Inguglia et al., 2015). On the other hand, psychologically controlling parents orient towards their own needs (Barber & Harmon, 2002). This type of parental practice is defined as negative, controlling behavior whereby parents endorse in coercing tactics such as inducing guilt, instilling anxiety, and display fluctuating love towards their child (Barber, 1996). Psychological control is associated with maladaptive outcomes among emerging adults, such as fewer displays of prosocial behavior (Barber & Harmon, 2002; Padilla-Walker et al., 2016), maladjustment in academic and occupational settings (Desjardins & Leadbeater, 2017), as well as depression symptoms (Reed et al., 2015).

1.5 Emerging Adulthood

Amidst the tectonic shift towards adulthood, emerging adults, characterized by individuals between ages 18 to 25 (Arnett, 2000), are particularly susceptible to moral and identity changes (Lapsley & Hardy, 2017). Though cyberbullying has detrimental consequences among emerging adults (Kowalski et al., 2012), less is known about how parental practices are associated with moral outcomes and cyberbullying behavior among this population (Kowalski et al., 2019; Myburgh, 2018; Orel et al., 2015). As parents remain a strong source of emotional support for emerging adults (Kouros et al., 2017), it is crucial to examine how positive and negative forms of parental practices are associated with moral outcomes among this age group.

1.6 The Present Study

In an effort to address the gap in the literature, this study examined whether and the extent to which perceived parental practices may facilitate or prevent cyberbullying, through its influences on moral emotions and moral disengagement among emerging adults. Specifically, this study explored the following five hypotheses:

H1: Parental autonomy support would be positively associated with guilt-proneness and negatively associated with shame-proneness, whereas parental psychological control would be associated with shame-proneness but negatively associated with guilt-proneness.

H2: Parental autonomy support would be negatively associated with moral disengagement, while parental psychological control would be positively associated with moral disengagement.

H3: Shame- and guilt-proneness are differentially associated with moral disengagement, as previous studies with adolescents and adults found that those reporting greater levels of shame-proneness scored higher on reports of moral disengagement, whereas higher levels of guilt-proneness was associated with less reports of moral disengagement.

H4: Moral disengagement is positively associated with cyberbullying.

H5: Given that moral emotions arise to anticipate negative consequences and guide moral behavior, shame- and guilt-proneness were considered necessary prerequisites for variations in the display of moral disengagement. It was hypothesized that shame- and guilt-proneness would mediate the association between parental practices and moral disengagement, and moral disengagement would then be positively associated with cyberbullying perpetration. (see Figure 1).

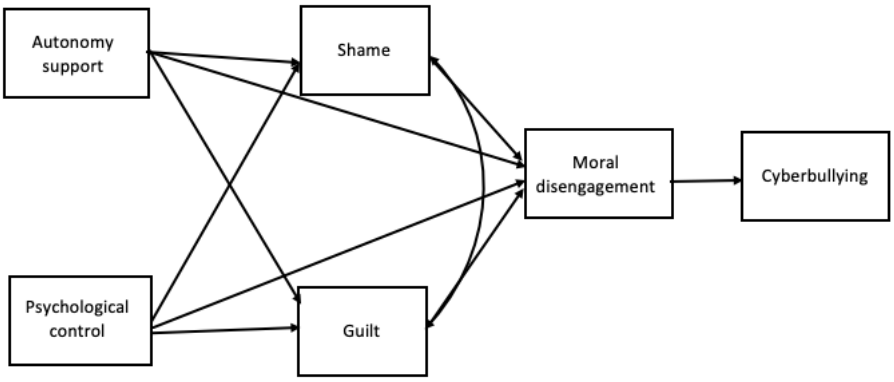

Figure 1. Hypothesized Mediation Model of Perceived Parental Practices, Moral Emotions, Moral Disengagement, and Cyberbullying

2. Method

2.1 Participants and Study Procedure

Postsecondary students across Canada between the ages of 19 to 25 participated in the study. The final dataset for the present study involved 449 participants (M_{age} = 21.85, *SD* = 1.93). The majority identified as female (74%). Thirty-seven percent of participants identified as Caucasian, 21.6% as East Asian, 16.3% as First Nations, 7.1% as African/Caribbean, 6.2% as South Asian, 6.0% as Southeast Asian, 4.5% as Latin American, 4.2% as Middle Eastern, .7% as Biracial or Multiracial, and .4% as North American. This online survey study was approved by the university's Research Ethics Board (REB #20-05-060). Participants were recruited through social media platforms and university listservs. Consent was obtained before data collection.

2.2 Measure

2.2.1 Demographics

Participants completed a demographics questionnaire regarding their gender, age, ethnicity, and level of study.

2.2.2 Perceptions of Parental Practices

To measure perceptions of parental autonomy support and psychological control, the Perceived Parental Autonomy Support Scale (P-PASS; Mageau et al., 2015) was used. The P-PASS consists of 2 subscales with a total of 48 items measuring autonomy support (e.g., "My parents encouraged me to be myself") and psychological control (e.g., "My parents insisted that I always be better than others"). Participants responded to the items using a 7-point Likert scale with 1 being "Do not agree at all" to 7 being "Very strongly agree". A maximum likelihood factor analysis (MLFA) with direct oblimin rotation was performed and revealed support for a one-factor structure on both subscales. Results were interpreted by eigenvalues greater than 1 (Nunnally, 1978) and a scree test which graphically depicts the eigenvalues (Cattell, 1966). For the autonomy support subscale, the proportion of the variance accounted for by the predominant factor was 49.10%. This study used the recommended factor loading cut-off of .30 and above as acceptable factor loading values (Hair et al., 1998). All 24 items had loadings between .63 to .75 and were retained for analysis. Meanwhile, for the psychological control subscale, the predominant factor explained 42.23% of the proportion of the variance. All 24 items had loadings in the range between .41 to .80 and were included for analysis. In this study, the two subscales demonstrated excellent reliability (autonomy support: α = .95; psychological control: α = .94).

2.2.3 Shame and Guilt

The Test of Self-Conscious Affect-3 (TOSCA-3; Tangney et al., 2000) was used to measure shame- and guilt-tendencies. The TOSCA-3 includes 16 scenario vignettes. Each scenario is followed by responses to assess shame, guilt, detachment, externalization, and pride. For the purpose of this study, items only under the shame and guilt subscales were used. An example of a scenario is: "While out with…friends, you make fun of a friend who's not there". The shame-prone response would be: "You would feel small…like a rat", while the guilt-prone response would be: "You would apologize and talk about that person's good points". Participants rated their answers on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being "Not likely" to 5 being "Very likely". A one-factor structure was supported on both the shame and guilt subscales by conducting a MLFA with direct oblimin rotation, where the principal factor on the shame subscale accounted for 32.58% of the proportion of variance, and 37.13% on the guilt subscale. For the shame subscale, four items had poor factor loadings between the range of .11 to .28, while all other items loaded onto the factor with acceptable loadings between .30 to .72. On the guilt subscale, four items revealed low factor loadings between .14 to .29, and were omitted. The other 12 items had factor loadings ranging from .35 to .70, and were retained for analysis. In this study, the two subscales showed satisfactory reliability (shame: α = .80; guilt: α = .83).

2.2.4 Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement was measured using the Civic Moral Disengagement Scale (CMDS; Caprara et al., 2009). The scale consists of 32 items, with 4 items measuring each of the 8 moral disengagement mechanisms. An example of an item is, "There is no sense in blaming individuals who evade a rule when everybody does the same thing". Items are rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 being "Strongly disagree" to 5 being "Strongly agree". An MLFA with direct oblimin rotation supported a one-factor structure, where the principal factor accounted for 28.92% of the proportion of variance. All items showed adequate factor loadings between .31 to .69, except for five items with loadings between .19 to .28. These items were omitted from further data analysis. In this study, the CMDS demonstrated good reliability (α = .89).

2.2.5 Cyberbullying Perpetration

The Cyberbullying Perpetration Scale (CBP; Lee et al., 2017) measured cyberbullying perpetration. The CBP consists of 20 items with 3 subscales, Verbal/Written Perpetration (e.g., "I have sent someone mean text messages…"), Visual/Sexual Perpetration (e.g., "I have made sexual jokes about someone…"), and Social Exclusion (e.g., "I have blocked someone in a chat room…"). All items are rated on a 5-point scale, from 1 as "Not at all" to 5 as "Very often". The results from a MLFA with direct oblimin rotation was conducted supporting a one-factor structure for the CBP. Specifically, the predominant factor explained 52.89% of the proportion of variance. Three reverse-scored items revealed poor factor loadings between -.003 to .13, and were thus removed. The remaining 17 items showed good factor loading values between the range of .49 to .82. In this study, the CBP showed excellent reliability (α = .94).

2.3 Data Analytical Plan

All procedures were conducted using SPSS (Version 26; IBM Corp., 2020) and Mplus (Version 8; Muthén & Muthén, 2010). No violations of normal distribution were found; all values were within normal ranges. To show the relationships between study variables, Pearson correlations was conducted. To test the research hypotheses, structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted in Mplus (Version 8; Muthén & Muthén, 2010).

3. Results

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

Using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26), a bivariate Pearson Correlations analysis was conducted to test for the mean (*M*), standard deviation (*SD*), correlations and Cronbach's alpha values among the study variables (see Table 1). Results revealed a significant negative correlation between autonomy support and psychological control (r = -.146, p = .002). While autonomy support showed a significant negative correlation with shame, (r = -.121, p = .010), psychological control was positively correlated with shame (r = 132, p = .005). Psychological control had a significant positive correlation with guilt (r = .137, p = .004). Psychological control also showed a significant positive correlation with moral disengagement (r = .305, p < .001). Similarly, it was significantly correlated with cyberbullying (r = .300, p < .001). Guilt had a significant negative correlation with moral disengagement (r = -.405, p < .001), and was negatively correlated with cyberbullying (r = -.458, p < .001). Finally, there was a significant positive correlation of moral disengagement with cyberbullying (r = .577, p < .001).

Table 1. Correlation Matrix for Autonomy Support, Psychological Control, Shame-proneness, Guilt-proneness, Moral Disengagement and Cyberbullying Perpetration

Variable	*M* (*SD*)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Autonomy Support	104.42 (31.62)	-					
Psychological Control	79.46 (29.65)	-.146**	-				
Shame	40.53 (8.94)	-.121**	.132**	-			
Guilt	50.48 (7.21)	.021	-.137**	.468***	-		
Moral disengagement	59.72 (16.91)	-.018	.305***	-.044	-.405***	-	
Cyberbullying	23.76 (9.71)	-.022	.300***	-.081	-.458***	.577**	-

Description: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

3.2 Test of Hypotheses

A mediation model was tested using SEM on Mplus to examine the hypothesized relationship of perceived

autonomy support and psychological control being indirectly associated with moral disengagement through shame or guilt, and subsequently, whether moral disengagement would be associated with cyberbullying (see Figure 1). The χ^2 goodness-of-fit test, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) were used to assess model fit. A non-significant χ^2 goodness-of-fit test indicates good fit, although the test is sensitive to sample size (Bentler & Bonett, 1980). Recommended cut-off values for the CFI between .80 to .89 indicates an adequate fit, while .90 and above indicates an excellent fit (Evers et al., 2012; Knight et al., 1994; Sears et al., 2014), while RSMEA values between .05 and .08 indicates a good model fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1992). The present study's model approached the recommended cut-off values of acceptable fit, $\chi^2(5) = 33.75$, $p < .001$, CFI = .88, RMSEA = .17 (see Figure 2).

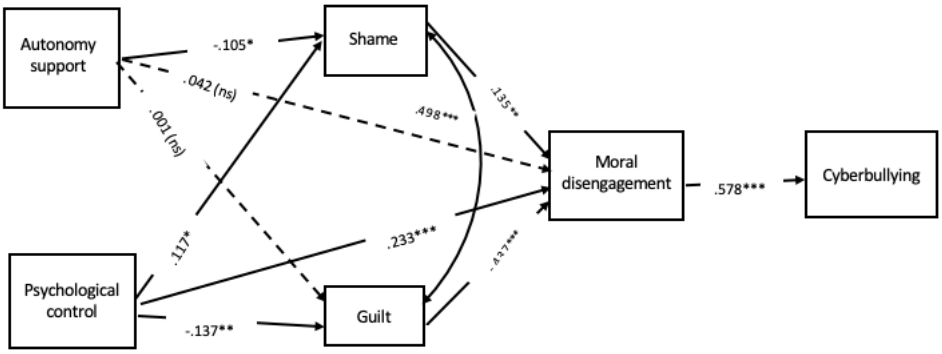

Figure 2. Mediation Model of Perceived Parental Practices, Moral Emotions, Moral Disengagement and Cyberbullying

Description: Dashed lines denote nonsignificant paths (ns = non-significant). *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

3.2.1 Perceived Parental Practices on Moral Emotions (H1)

Hypothesis H1 was partially supported. Autonomy support was insignificantly associated with guilt (β = .001, p = .988), but revealed a significant negative association with shame (β = -.105, p = .026). Meanwhile, psychological control showed a positive association with shame (β = .117, p = .012) and negative association with guilt (β = -.137, p = .003).

3.2.2 Perceived Parental Practices on Moral Disengagement (H2)

Results partially support Hypothesis H2. Autonomy support was not significantly associated with moral disengagement (β = .042, p = .318). However, psychological control revealed a significant positive association with moral disengagement (β = .233, $p < .001$).

3.2.3 Moral Emotions on Moral Disengagement (H3)

Results from the present study fully supports Hypothesis H3, indicating a significantly negative association between guilt and moral disengagement (β = -.437, $p < .001$), and a significant positive association between shame and moral disengagement (β = .135, p = .005).

3.2.4 Moral Disengagement on Cyberbullying (H4)

Hypothesis H4 is supported by the present study's findings. Moral disengagement was a significant positive predictor of cyberbullying perpetration (β = .578, $p < .001$).

3.2.5 Perceived Parental Practices on Cyberbullying Through the Mediation of Moral Emotions and Moral Disengagement (H5)

Results revealed partial support for Hypothesis H5. The total, direct, and indirect effects of the mediation model are specified in Table 2 and Figure 2. Indirect effects of guilt on the association between perceived psychological control and moral disengagement were significant (β = .060, p = .005). Subsequently, moral disengagement was significantly associated with cyberbullying perpetration (β = .578, $p < .001$). Furthermore, results indicate that the direct effect of perceived psychological control on moral disengagement, after controlling for guilt, remains significant (β = .233, $p < .001$). This suggests that guilt partially mediates the relationship between perceived psychological control and moral disengagement, and in turn, moral disengagement positively predicts cyberbullying perpetration.

Table 2. Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects

Paths	Estimate of Effect	*S.E.*	*p*
Total effect			
1. AS → MD	.027	.045	.548
2. PC → MD	.309	.043	.000***
Direct effect			
1. AS → MD	.042	.042	.318
2. PC → MD	.233	.042	.000***
Indirect effect			
1. AS → Shame → MD	-.014	.008	.081
2. AS → Guilt → MD	.000	.021	.988
3. PC → Shame → MD	.016	.008	.062
4. PC → Guilt → MD	.233	.021	.005**

Description: AS = autonomy support, PC = psychological control, MD = moral disengagement. Total, direct, and indirect effects = the effects between perceived parental practices and moral disengagement without mediators, including mediators, and through mediators.

**$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

4. Discussion

Under the frameworks of the socio-cognitive theory (Bandura, 1999) and the affect-cognition model (Malti & Keller, 2010), the present study examined social-emotional and moral factors that contribute to cyberbullying perpetration. A major finding of this study was the evidence of significant indirect effects of perceived psychological control on emerging adults' moral disengagement through guilt-proneness, and subsequently, moral disengagement significantly predicted cyberbullying perpetration.

4.1 Perceived Parental Practices and Moral Emotions

Perceived psychological control was positively associated with shame-proneness and negatively associated with guilt-proneness. Participants who reported greater perceptions of psychological control from their parents were more likely to experience shame, and less likely to experience guilt across various situations. This finding is in line with previous research (Mintz et al., 2017; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005) that showed individuals are more shame-prone when their parents explicitly express negative behavior towards them. Furthermore, as expected, perceived autonomy support had a significant negative association with shame-proneness, such that individuals perceiving greater autonomy from their parents were less likely to experience maladaptive shame across contexts. This supports the notion that in contrast to negative parenting, perceiving positive, warm parenting is associated with an increase in self-acceptance and feelings of relatedness (Costa et al., 2016), and more positive development among children and emerging adults (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2009).

4.2 Perceived Parental Practices and Moral Disengagement

Psychological control revealed a significant positive association with moral disengagement. In other words, emerging adults who perceive more psychological control are more likely to morally disengage. This finding extends existing knowledge on the association between negative parenting and moral disengagement (e.g., Campaert et al., 2018; Hyde et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2021) by demonstrating that psychologically controlling tactics may increase the propensity to morally disengage.

4.3 Moral Emotions and Moral Disengagement

Findings from this study were in accordance with previous studies which suggested that while guilt-prone individuals have increased empathic concern and acceptance of responsibility for wrongdoings, which serves as a protective factor against moral disengagement, shame emphasizes on self-blame and facilitates feelings of incompetency and avoidance (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tangney et al., 1996), thus generating moral disengagement tendencies to resolve their shameful feelings (Bandura et al., 1996; Johnson & Connelly, 2016; Mazzone et al., 2018).

4.4 Moral Disengagement and Cyberbullying

Although several studies have found that moral disengagement and cyberbullying decline with age (e.g., Paciello et al., 2008; Slonje & Smith), such that adults report lower levels of moral disengagement and cyberbullying when compared with children or adolescence, the present study provides potential evidence that the positive association between moral disengagement and cyberbullying continues beyond adolescence. This study found that emerging adults who reported higher levels of moral disengagement were also more likely to engage in cyberbullying, extending previous research that found a positive association between moral disengagement and aggressive online behavior among emerging adults (Zhang et al., 2021).

4.5 Parental Practices, Moral Emotions, Moral Disengagement, and Cyberbullying

Results also revealed that individuals perceiving high levels of psychological control were less prone to guilt and more likely to morally disengage. This supports studies which found that negative parenting increases the child's feelings of incompetency and self-blame, including more proneness to shame (Bartolo et al., 2019; Campaert et al., 2018; dos Santos et al., 2020; Mintz, 2017; Sheikh & Janoff-Bulman, 2010; Stuewig & McCloskey, 2005; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Walter & Burnaford, 2006). Furthermore, shame and guilt are well-known behavior regulators that are associated with moral disengagement (e.g., Johnson & Connelly, 2016), and subsequently, moral disengagement is found to be positively associated with cyberbullying perpetration (e.g., Kowalski et al., 2014; Olweus & Limber, 2018). The present study extended these findings by simultaneously examining the mediating role of moral emotions in the association between parental practices and moral disengagement.

4.6 Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations should be noted. Firstly, this study utilized self-report questionnaires, which may include several reporting biases (Richman et al., 1999). Additionally, while this study used a cross-sectional design, future studies should consider a longitudinal study design to inform on developmental changes in parent-child dynamics and individuals' perceptions of parental practices across childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Future studies could also consider cultural differences when examining autonomy support and psychological control. For instance, psychological control may not be negatively perceived in certain cultures, such as among Asian and Asian American samples (Fung et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2018).

4.7 Conclusion

The present study reveals that, beyond adolescent years, parental figures remain salient. In particular, findings provide further evidence of the negative moral implications of parental psychological control among emerging adults (e.g., Nelson et al., 2019). Meanwhile, moral disengagement and cyberbullying continues to be prevalent among this population. Therefore, school and mental health professionals are encouraged to seek ways to reduce maladaptive self-defeating strategies for shame-prone individuals, such as by providing workshops that can guide the identification and management of shame tendencies. Supporting young adults in gaining balance and perspective of their thoughts, emotions, and actions is vital in the ever-shifting postsecondary years.

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