MECHANISMS OF MORAL DISENGAGEMENT IN SUPPORT OF MILITARY FORCE: THE IMPACT OF SEPT. 11

ALFRED L. McALISTER
University of Texas

ALBERT BANDURA
Stanford University

STEVEN V. OWEN
University of Texas

The present study examined the relation between disengagement of moral self–sanctions and support of military force. The modes of moral disengagement included moral sanctioning of lethal means, disavowal of personal responsibility for detrimental effects accompanying military campaigns, minimization of civilian casualties, and attribution of blame and dehumanization of one's foes. The respondents were drawn nationally through a random digit dialing interview system. Partway during this nationwide study the country experienced the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The Sept. 11 terrorist strikes raised the level of moral disengagement for the use of military force compared to the pre–strike level. The higher the moral disengagement the stronger the public support for immediate retaliatory strikes against suspected terrorist sanctuaries abroad and for aerial bombardment of Iraq. Moral disengagement completely mediated

Alfred L. McAlister, School of Public Health, University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, Albert Bandura, Department of Psychology, Stanford University, Steven V. Owen, University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

the effect of the terrorist attack. Moreover, moral disengagement completely mediated the effect of sociodemographic factors on support of military force against terrorist sanctuaries and partially mediated the effect on military force against Iraq.

In the development of moral agency, individuals construct standards of right and wrong that serve as guides and deterrents for conduct. In the ongoing exercise of moral agency individuals judge their conduct against their personal standards and situational circumstances and react to it with affective self–sanctions (Bandura, 1991; 1986). They do things that give them satisfaction and a sense of self–worth, and refrain from behaving in ways that violate their moral standards because such conduct will bring self–condemnation. It is through the ongoing exercise of evaluative self–sanctions that moral conduct is motivated and regulated.

Development of self–regulatory capabilities does not create an immutable internal moral control system. The self–regulatory mechanisms governing moral conduct do not operate unless they are activated and there are many psychosocial maneuvers by which moral self–sanctions can be selectively disengaged from inhumane conduct (Bandura, 1999). Selective disengagement of moral control permits different types of conduct with the same moral standards. Figure 1 shows the points at which the disengagement of moral control can occur. The figure is a schematic designation of the loci at which the different mechanisms of moral disengagement operate not a sequential process model.

At the *behavior locus*, people transform lethal means into benevolent and moral ones through moral justification, advantageous comparison, and sanitizing language. At the *agency locus*, they are relieved of a sense of personal accountability by displacement and diffusion of responsibility. At the *outcome locus*, the injurious effects of lethal means are disregarded, minimized, or disputed. At the *recipient locus*, foes are dehumanized and blamed for bringing the suffering on themselves.

The present article examines the selective disengagement of moral agency in support of military force. Combat activities pose grave moral predicaments because they not only require killing combatants but inevitably take a heavy toll of civilian casualties. Therefore, when a nation goes to war it must create conditions that enable soldiers to inflict death, destruction and suffering without exacting a heavy personal toll of chronic stress, guilt and anguish. This can be achieved by suspending moral self–sanctions through the various mechanism of moral disengagement.

Moral justification plays a key role in sanctifying violent means (Kramer, 1990; Rapoport & Alexander, 1982; Reich, 1990). In this pro-
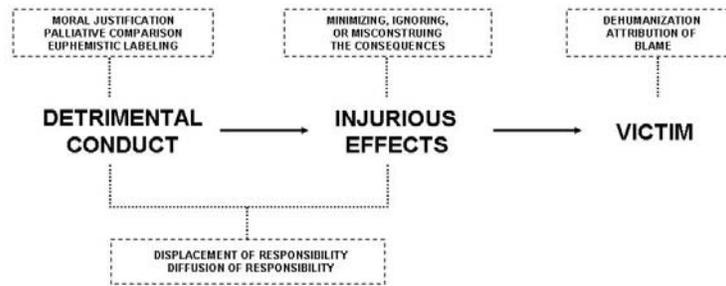
FIGURE 1. Mechanism through which moral self-sanctions are selectively
activated and disengaged from detrimental behavior at different loci
in the self-regulatory process (Bandura, 1986).

cess, destructive conduct is made personally and socially acceptable by
portraying it as serving socially worthy or moral purposes. Advanta-
geous comparison, in which one's injurious conduct is contrasted with
more flagrant inhumanities, is another way of sanctifying destructive
conduct. This mechanism relies heavily on moral justification by the
utilitarian standard that one's injurious actions will prevent more
human suffering than they cause.

Activities can also take on a markedly different character depending
on what they are called. Sanitizing euphemistic language provides a
convenient means for masking lethal activities or even conferring a re-
spectable status upon them (Bollinger, 1982; Lutz, 1987; Smith, 2002).
For example, in military euphemisms, bombing missions are character-
ized as "servicing the target," in the likeness of a public utility, the civil-
ians the bombs kill are sanitized as "collateral damage," and combat
deaths are KIAS. People behave much more aggressively when assault-
ing a person is given a sanitized label than when it is called aggression
(Diener, Dineen, Endresen, Beaman, & Fraser, 1975).

Moral and utilitarian justification serve a dual function. Investing le-
thal means with moral and humanitarian purposes enlists moral en-
gagement in the military mission. To the extent that those who have to
do the fighting are convinced of the morality of the cause, they are re-
lieved of self–censure for inflicting human destruction and suffering. In-
deed, effective moral justification not only eliminates self–censure but
can engage self–approval in the service of destructive exploits. Combat-

ants work hard to become proficient in warfare and may take pride in their military achievements.

Moral justifications can be used in the service of just causes or wrongful ones. Evaluation of moral justifications involves judgments of how well the military interventions meet the standards for a justifiable war and how they are implemented militarily. The justness of the cause is not the object of the present study. This project focuses on moral justifications as a means for enlisting moral engagement in the use of military force and to allay moral self–sanctions in those who have to execute the military campaigns.

Moral control operates most strongly when people acknowledge that they are contributors to injurious outcomes. Two disengagement mechanisms operate through disavowal of personal agency in the harm one causes. This is achieved by diffusion and displacement of responsibility. In displacement of responsibility, people view their actions as stemming from the dictates of authorities rather than being personally responsible for them (Kelman & Hamilton, 1989; Milgram, 1974). Because they do not see themselves as the actual agent of their actions they are spared self–censuring reactions.

The exercise of moral control is also weakened when personal agency is obscured by diffusing responsibility for detrimental behavior (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975; Zimbardo, 2004). Kelman (1973) designates several ways of diffusing personal accountability. Personal agency is obscured by group decision making so that no one really feels personally responsible; by division of labor that fractionates a destructive enterprise into seemingly harmless subtasks when viewed in isolation; and by collective action that affords anonymity and minimization of personal contributions to harm caused collectively. Under these self–exonerative social arrangements, people do not view themselves as the actual agent of their actions and thus do not consider themselves personably accountable for what they do collectively or under chains of command.

Disregarding, minimizing, distorting, or disputing the harmful effects of one's actions is another way of weakening moral self–sanctions. As long as harmful outcomes go unnoticed, are minimized, or disputed there is little reason for self–sanctions to be activated. In studies of obedient aggression, people are less compliant to the injurious commands of authorities as the victims' suffering becomes more evident or when its infliction is personalized (Milgram, 1974). Even a high sense of personal responsibility for the harmful effects of one's actions is a weak restrainer of injurious conduct when aggressors do not see the harm they inflict on others (Tilker, 1970).

The final set of disengagement practices operates on the recipients of detrimental acts. To perceive another in terms of common humanity ac-

tivates empathetic emotional reactions to the plight of others through perceived similarity and a sense of social obligation (Bandura, 1992; McHugo, Smith, & Lanzetta, 1988). Self–censure for harmful conduct can be disengaged by stripping people of human qualities or attributing bestial qualities to them (Bandura et al., 1975; Haritos–Fatouros, 2002). For example, during wartime, nations cast their enemies in the most dehumanized, demonic, and bestial images to make it easier to kill them (Ivie, 1980; Keen, 1986). Humanization serves as a restraining influence. People refuse to behave cruelly, even under authoritarian pressure, toward humanized others (Bandura, 2004; Bandura et al., 1975).

Blaming adversaries for bringing the suffering on themselves is still another expedient that can serve self–exonerative purposes (Ferguson & Rule, 1983; Suedfeld & Epstein, 1973). People view themselves as faultless victims driven to injurious conduct by offensive provocation. Violent conduct then becomes a justifiable defensive reaction to belligerent actions. Victims get blamed for bringing suffering on themselves. Self–exoneration is also achievable by viewing one's harmful conduct as forced by compelling circumstances rather than as a personal decision. By fixing the blame on others or on compelling circumstances one's own injurious actions are not only excusable but one can even feel self–righteous in the process.

Rapid radical shifts in lethal conduct through moral justification are most strikingly revealed in military pursuits. The conversion of socialized people into combatants dedicated to killing foes is achieved not by altering their personality structures, aggressive drives, or moral standards. Rather, it is accomplished by restructuring the morality of lethal means so they can be free from self–censure.

Military campaigns require ongoing public support for the use of military force in international disputes. The present study sought to clarify the role of moral disengagement in the public's support of the use of military force. Randomly selected national and regional samples of participants were assessed for their level and pattern of moral disengagement regarding the use of military force in international conflicts and their sanction of military action against Iraq. Partway through this nationwide study the nation experienced the aerial demolition of the World Trade Center and part of the Pentagon by the Al Qaeda network. Following this terrorist attack subsequent participants were also tested for level of moral disengagement and rated their support of military action against suspected terrorist sanctuaries as well as Iraq. It was predicted that the terrorist attack, which posed a grave national threat, would increase the level of moral disengagement for military campaigns.

We also measured a variety of sociodemographic factors as potential contributors to both moral disengagement and support of military force,

and thus required control in estimating the unique contribution of moral disengagement. These factors included gender, level of education, income, age, ethnicity, and regional milieu. Previous research has shown that males are higher moral disengagers than females (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). Moreover, moral disengagement is more likely to foster ruminative affectivity conducive to aggression in males than in females (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, Pastorelli, & Regalia, 2001).

Many people rely on television for information about international conflicts and possible solutions to them. The higher the dependence on televised broadcasts, the stronger is their impact (Ball–Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976). The more highly educated are likely to have greater access to a multiplicity of voices in sociopolitical networks, the print media, and participatory debates on the Internet unfettered by institutional controls. Deeper understanding of international strife may increase wariness toward moral pretensions and suspect moral appeals. It was, therefore, predicted that people at higher levels of education and economic status would be less susceptible to cognitive and social machinations conducive to moral disengagement.

Military campaigns relying on a volunteer army will be fought by predominantly young combatants, many of whom are of minority ethnic and less advantaged status. It was hypothesized that older members will more readily give moral sanction to the use of military force because they will not be the combatants, whereas, the younger members who have to fight the battles would be more reluctant moral disengagers.

In many culturally oriented analyses, regions are used as proxies for the inhabitants' psychological orientation (Bandura, 2002). For example, inhabitants in the South are said to be especially prone to justify aggression in terms of a code of honor (Cohen & Nisbett, 1994). However, territorial ascriptions may mask notable diversity in moral disengagement within regional groupings. Different regions of Texas provided a basis for examining how regional subcultures may affect propensities for moral disengagement. It was predicted the residents in the more liberally oriented university region of Austin, Texas, would display a lower level of moral disengagement and support of military interventions than their counterparts residing in the other regions.

The categorical sociodemographic factors are, in large part, proxies for self–referent determinants and processes resulting from the distinctive experiences accompanying one's age, gender, education, income level, ethnicity, and residential milieu. The moral self system that has evolved from these multiple formative experiences is one such developmental outcome. We, therefore, hypothesized that the propensity for moral dis-

engagement would partly mediate the relation of sociodemographic factors of support for military force.

Figure 2 presents the posited structural model. For reasons given earlier, it was hypothesized that both the terrorist attack and sociodemographic factors are linked to support of military force through the mediating influence of disengagement of moral self–sanctions, and that the mediated path of influence would be stronger than the direct path. Moral disengagement would, in turn, be accompanied by support for the use of military force.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

A total of 1,499 participants, drawn nationally, regionally, and locally were studied. The assessment was conducted by trained interviewers using a random digit dialing interviewing system at the Office of Survey Research in the College of Communication at the University of Texas in Austin. The samples were randomly selected from identified working telephone exchanges and systematically generated telephone numbers (four–digit randomization), deleting numbers listed in a database of business directories. Within each household, an adult who was 18 or older with the most recent birthday was selected as the respondent. Up to five callbacks at varying times of day were made to unanswered phones and unavailable respondents. The response rate for participation in the study was 59%.

Approximately 25% of the total sample was selected from each of the four populations—national sample, Houston metropolitan area, Austin area dominated by University of Texas and State government offices, and the remaining Texas region. Of the participants, 46% were male and 54% were female. They varied in age from 18 to 90 years with a mean age of 42 years. The ethnic composition was 72% White, 15% Hispanic, 9% African American, 2% Asian, and 2% other ethnic groups. The educational levels were 9% below high school, 29% high school graduates, 24% some college education, 24% college graduates and 15% with postgraduate education. Due to differences in sample size in the models tested, these characteristics vary slightly in the analyses.

Seventy–five percent of the participants were assessed prior to the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, and the rest of the participants were assessed after a three day pause following the terrorist attack. The two samples were tested for possible differences in sociodemographic characteristics. Only two small differences emerged in this set of comparisons. The pre Sept. 11 sample was 2 years older (44
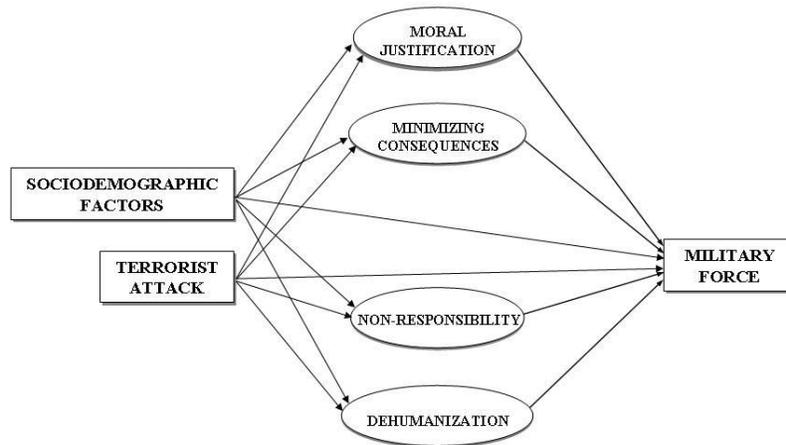
FIGURE 2. Posited structural model of the paths of influence through which
sociodemographic factors, modes of moral disengagement, and the Sept. 11
terrorist attack affect support of the use of military force.

vs. 42) than in the post sample. There was also a minor regional differ-
ence with a 7% larger national post Sept. 11 sample. The similarity on the
other sociodemographic characteristics and the trivial effect sizes of .008
for region and .002 for age attest to the comparability of the samples
before and after the terrorist attack.

MORAL DISENGAGEMENT

Based on the conceptual structure of moral disengagement and tests of
its predictiveness in other morally–relevant domains (Bandura et al;
1996; 2001; Osofsky, Bandura & Zimbardo, 2005), the various mecha-
nisms of moral disengagement were measured with 10 items. The fol-
lowing numbers identify the content of the items. They included moral
justification for use of military force when:

  (1) a nation's economic security is threatened,
  (2) as preemptive military strikes against nations that threaten one's
      security

(3) when diplomacy and negotiations drag on without resolving conflicts, and

(4) advantageous comparison that it is right to use military force because it prevents more suffering than it causes.

Euphemistic language and minimization of inflicted harm included items that

(5) "collateral" damage is an acceptable part of military action, and

(6) reports of "collateral" damage resulting from military campaigns are usually exaggerated.

Diffusion and displacement of responsibility included items that

(7) a given member of a group should not be held accountable for military decisions made collectively, and that:

(8) soldiers should not be held responsible for the effects of following orders in military campaigns.

In dehumanization, the characterizations stated that

(9) terrorists do not deserve to be treated like human beings, and

(10) enemy rulers and their followers are no better than animals.

For each item, the participants rated their responses on a 5–point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree (+2), through unsure (0), to strongly disagree (–2). The positive values represent espousal of the various modes of moral disengagement; the negative values represent disavowal of them. The bipolar format provided participants with a full scope of choices ranging from strong advocacy, through neutrality, to strong disavowal of modes of moral disengagement.

SUPPORT FOR MILITARY FORCE

Participants' support for military force was measured separately for the two international conflicts. Participants rated on a 5–point Likert scale ranging from –2 (strongly disagree) , through unsure (0), to +2 (strongly agree) the strength of their endorsement of immediate military strikes against suspected terrorist sanctuaries, and recorded whether they supported aerial bombardment of Iraq (+1), opposed it (–1), or were unsure (0). In the case of Iraq, which already involved ongoing aerial surveillance and periodic bombardment of communication and missile facilities, support of military force was measured before and after Sept. 11. Support for

immediate strikes against suspected terrorist sanctuaries was measured only after Sept. 11, when it became a relevant national issue.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

For reasons given earlier, gender was selected as one of the relevant sociodemographic factors. Age was a continuous variable ranging from 18 to 90 years of age. Level of education was classified in categories of 0–4 years, 5–8 years, 9–11 years of elementary school education, high school graduate, some college education, college graduate, and postgraduate education. Income level was measured in terms of four gradations of thousands (K): <20K, 20–40K, 40–70K, and >75K.

Ethnic status was recorded as White, Hispanic, African American, Asian, or other ethnic groups. However, because the separate minorities constituted relatively small samples, ethnic status was recorded into a binary variable of White non–Hispanic, labeled White, and the minority samples, labeled Other. The regional variations included participants drawn nationwide and from the Houston metropolitan region, the Austin region, and Texas at large. In preliminary analysis, Austin differed significantly in moral disengagement and support for military force from the other regions, which did not differ from each other. Therefore, Region was coded as a binary variable representing Austin and the other regions combined.

RESULTS

ANALYSES

We used structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the posited structural model. SEM was chosen because it allows for both an evaluation of a nested confirmatory factor analysis and model testing of the hypothesized theoretical structure of the predicted relations. This method allows evaluation of the complete theoretical model. The SEM software used for the analyses was AMOS 5.0 (Arbuckle, 2003). The statistical approach was full information maximum likelihood.

FACTOR STRUCTURE OF MORAL DISENGAGEMENT

The confirmatory factor analysis corroborated the hypothesized four–factor structure of moral disengagement, that is, moral justification, minimization of detrimental effects, disavowal of responsibility, and dehumanization.

Several goodness of fit indicators were computed. We selected two of the more sensitive measures of close fit, the root mean square error of ap-

proximation (RMSEA), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI). The RMSEA calculates an amount of error per estimated parameter, so smaller values are better. An RMSEA value of .05 or smaller is a good model, while values up to .08 suggest an adequate model (Browne & Cudek, 1993). The CFI represents the percent by which the proposed model improves over the worst possible model. For the CFI, a value of .95 or higher is preferred (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Both of the tests of close fit, CFI = .97 and RMSEA = .039 are well within the required criteria. We also included the χ^2 test, although with its dependence on sample size, it often produces a significant value with large samples when there is a good fit on more sensitive indices. As expected with our large samples, the χ^2 (29) = 126.34, $p < .01$.

The moderate intercorrelations among the four factors suggest that a higher–order structure is possible, with a single latent variable responsible for the four subfactors. Because the four–factor structure is nested within a second–order structure, a second model representing a single superordinate construct was tested. The difference test may be used to evaluate whether one model is preferred over the other. This test showed that the two models differ, $\chi^2_\Delta(2) = 13.05$, $p < .01$, with the four–factor model favored. In short, the four factors of moral disengagement showed acceptable measurement properties and thus lend confidence to the interpretation of the full SEM.

ROLE OF MORAL DISENGAGEMENT, SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS, AND TERRORIST ATTACK ON SUPPORT OF MILITARY FORCE AGAINST IRAQ

After Sept. 11, support for aerial bombardment of Iraq increased from 70% to 81%. As shown in Figure 3, the terrorist attack was also accompanied by increases in all four modes of moral disengagement.

Table 1 summarizes the direct and indirect effects of sociodemographic factors, the terrorist attack, and the different modes of moral disengagement on support of military force. The indirect effects represent the mediating influence of moral disengagement. All sociodemographic factors were single indicators, as was the terrorist attack and support for the bombardment of Iraq.

As shown in Table 1, the sociodemographic factors accounted for some of the variance in the different modes of moral disengagement. Males, the less educated, and those from the non–Austin region displayed higher levels of moral disengagement across all four modes. Whites and those at higher income levels were more prone to morally justify the use of military force and to minimize civilian casualties than

did their minority counterparts and those at lower income levels. Older participants were also prone to minimize civilian casualties.

Figure 4 presents the significant coefficients for the posited model. For schematic simplicity the direct and indirect sociodemographic effects, which are summarized in Table, 1, are not presented graphically. The six sociodemographic factors would produce a profusion of paths among the different variables.

As can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 4, moral justification, minimization of consequences, and dehumanization all had sizable direct effects on support of military force against Iraq. However, non–responsibility for military operations was unrelated to backing military action against Iraq. Moral disengagement partially mediated the relation of sociodemographic factors to support of the military campaign. The indirect effects of sociodemographic factors operating through moral disengagement were as large or larger than the direct effects. This is especially true for the regional effect which was entirely mediated through level of moral disengagement. The significant impact of the terrorist attack on support of military action against Iraq was also entirely mediated through the increases in moral disengagement (Table 1).

The RMSEA = .068 and the CFI = .99, indicate a close fit between the posited model and the empirical data. Given the large sample, the chi square is predictably significant, $\chi^2(84) = 935.89$, $p < .001$. The full model accounted for $R^2 = .26$, $p < .001$ of the variance in support of military force, with moral disengagement contributing the major share. The $R^2 = .21$, $p < .001$ when the contribution of the terrorist attack and the sociodemographic factors are removed.

ROLE OF MORAL DISENGAGEMENT AND SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS IN SUPPORT OF MILITARY FORCE AGAINST TERRORISTS

Of the participants, 48% supported immediate bombardment of suspected terrorist sanctuaries. Table 2 summarizes the effects of sociodemographic factors and the different modes of moral disengagement on support of counterstrikes against suspected terrorists. Because backing for military force against terrorist camps was measured after the Sept. 11 terrorist attack, the sample size for this model is $n = 453$.

Region contributed to all modes of moral disengagement, with the non–Austin regions being more prone to suspend moral sanctions for military intervention. Males and White members were more prone to moral justification and minimization of civilian casualties. In contrast, minority members were less supportive of moral justifications and less disinclined to minimize civilian casualties than their white counterparts.
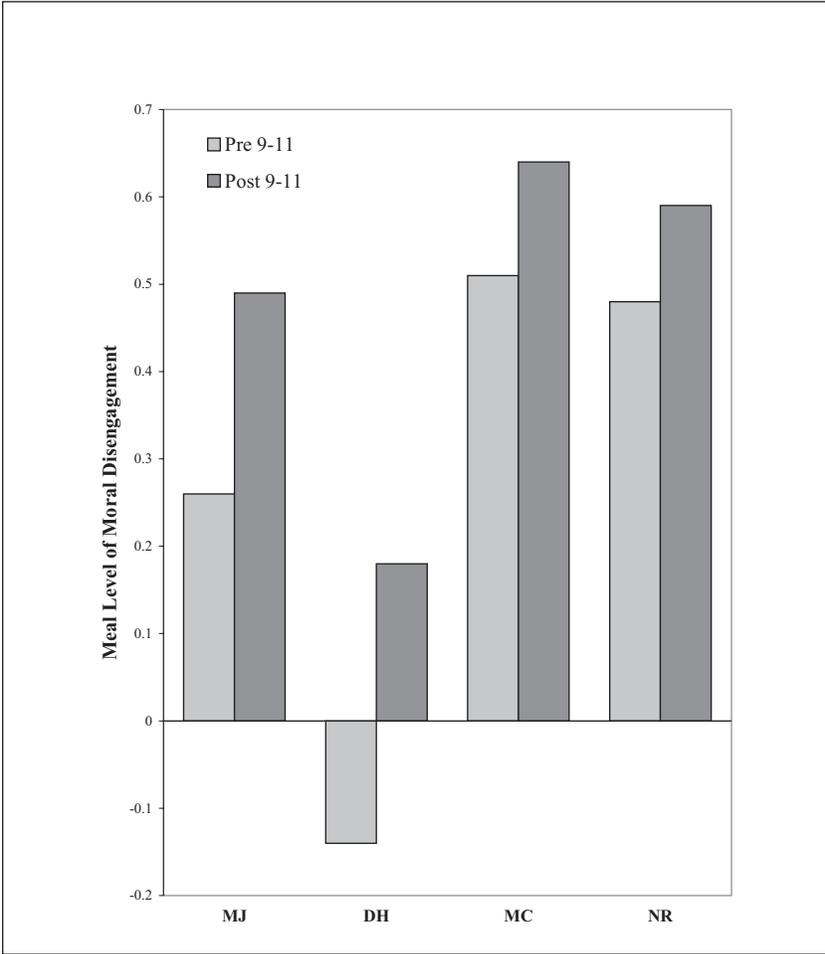
FIGURE 3. Mean level of moral disengagement before and after the Sept. 11 terrorist strike. MJ = moral justification; DH = dehumanization; MC = minimization of consequences; NR = nonresponsibility.

The lower educated were more prone toward moral justification, non–responsibility, and dehumanization. However, moral disengagement did not vary as a function of age and income.

Figure 5 shows the contribution of the different modes of moral disengagement to backing counterstrikes against suspected terrorists. For schematic simplicity the specific sociodemographic contributors, which

TABLE 1. Impact of Sociodemographic Factors, the Terrorist Attack, and Moral Disengagement on Support of Military Force against Iraq (Standardized Path Coefficients)

Variables	Moral Justification	Minimizing Consequences	Non–Responsibility	Dehumanization	Military Force	
	Direct	Direct	Direct	Direct	Direct	Indirect
Sociodemographics						
Region	.14***	.17***	.14***	.10***	–.02	.11***
Gender	.10***	.24***	–.08**	.06**	.09***	.10***
Ethnicity	.14***	.19***	.03	–.02	.10***	.09***
Education	–.23***	–.10**	–.23***	–.20***	.11***	–.13***
Income	.04***	.13***	–.02	.05	.06*	.05*
Age	.00	.13***	–.02	.04	.04*	.04*
Sept. 11 Terrorist Attack	.15***	.11***	.08**	.21***	–.01	.10***
Moral Disengagement						
Moral Justification					.25***	
Minimizing Consequences					.29***	
Non–Responsibility					.06	
Dehumanization					.13***	

Note. The link between sociodemographic variables and the different modes of moral disengagement includes only direct effects, because no mediators are involved. The impact of the sociodemographic variables on support of military force was posited to be mediated by moral disengagement. The indirect effects represent the mediating influence of moral disengagement. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
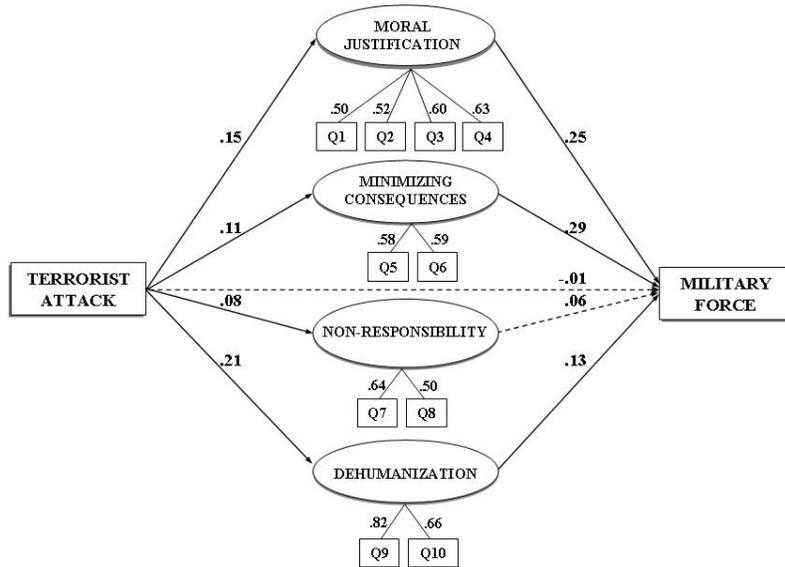
FIGURE 4. Structural Equation Modeling of the pattern of influences through which sociodemographic factors, the Sept. 11 terrorist attack, and the different modes of moral disengagement contribute to support of military force against Iraq. The solid paths represent coefficients significant beyond the $p < .05$ level; the dash paths are the nonsignificant coefficients.

are presented in Table 1, are not presented graphically. As in the case of military action against Iraq, all three modes of moral disengagement—moral disengagement, non–responsibility for military operations, and minimization of civilian casualties were sizeable contributors to support aerial counterstrikes against the terrorist sanctuaries.

The goodness of fit indicators showed an acceptable fit to the empirical data. The more sensitive fit indices of RMSE = .079, the CFI = .97, and the standardized measurement loadings are within ranges that suggest an adequate explanatory model. However, the less sensitive chi–square $\chi^2(77) = 292.96$, $p < .01$, was significant.

The model accounts for $R^2 = .26$, $p < .001$ of the variance in support of military force against suspect terrorist sanctuaries. Here, too, moral disengagement accounts for most of this variance, with the $R^2 = .22$, $p <$

.001 when the contribution of the sociodemographic factors is re-moved.

DISCUSSION

In the findings of the present study, disengagement of moral sanctions for lethal means accounts uniquely for a significant share of the variance in support of the use of military force against Iraq and suspected terror-ist sanctuaries. Most of the departures from the posited model lend fur-ther support to the influential role of moral disengagement rather than lessen it. Both the terrorist strike and the sociodemographic factors were expected to have significant direct effects on support of military action. Rather, moral disengagement completely mediated the effect of the ter-rorist attack. And, it also completely mediated the relation of socio-cognitive factors to support of the military campaign against terrorists and partially mediated the relation for the military campaign against Iraq. The replication of the significant moral disengagement path across samples before and after the terrorist attack, different modes of moral disengagement, and for military campaigns against different foes attests to the generality of the theory.

The terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon was accompanied by significant rise in moral disengagement for military ac-tion. Both the searing nature of this disastrous event and the close prox-imity of assessment lend credence to the view that the terrorist strike, rather than some other occurrence, was the major contributor to the re-duction in moral restraint. It was an overwhelming event that thor-oughly dominated the public consciousness for a long time. The assess-ment of moral disengagement was conducted in close temporal proximity to the attack. Whatever other events may have occurred paled by comparison with the enormity of the suicidal terrorism.

Among the various disinhibiting mechanisms, the reconstrual of violent means as moral actions was one of the widely used to disengage moral agency at the behavior locus. Sanctifying violent means by appeal to reli-gious moral imperative has been, of course, the primary vehicle for disen-gaging moral sanctions in large–scale holy terror across time and religious doctrines. Pope Urban launched the Crusades with the following impas-sioned moral proclamation: "I address those present, I proclaim it to those absent, Christ commands it. For all those going thither, there will be remis-sion of sins if they come to the end of this fettered life." He then dehuman-izes and beastializes the Muslim enemies: "What a disgrace if a race so de-spicable, degenerate, and enslaved by demons, should overcome a people endowed with faith in Almighty God and resplendent in the name of

TABLE 2. Impact of Sociodemographic Factors and Moral Disengagement on Support of Military Force against Terrorists' Sanctuaries (Standardized Path Coefficients)

Variables	Moral Justification	Minimizing Consequences	Non–Responsibility	Dehumanization	Military Force	
	Direct	Direct	Direct	Direct	Direct	Indirect
Sociodemographics						
Region	.18***	.22***	.16**	.13*	.02	.15**
Gender	.14*	.36***	.03	.04	.02	.14*
Ethnicity	.22***	.21**	.01	.15	–.09	.16**
Education	–.22***	–.08	–.15*	–.23***	–.01	–.16**
Income	.08	.04	.03	.03	.00	.04
Age	.00	.12	–.02	.02	–.08	.04
Moral Disengagement						
Moral Justification					.28***	
Minimizing Consequences					.25**	
Non–Responsibility					.06	
Dehumanization					.29***	

Note. The link between sociodemographic variables and the different modes of moral disengagement includes only direct effects, because no mediators are involved. The impact of the sociodemographic variables on support of strikes against terrorists was posited to be mediated by moral disengagement. The indirect effects represent the mediating influence of moral disengagement. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.
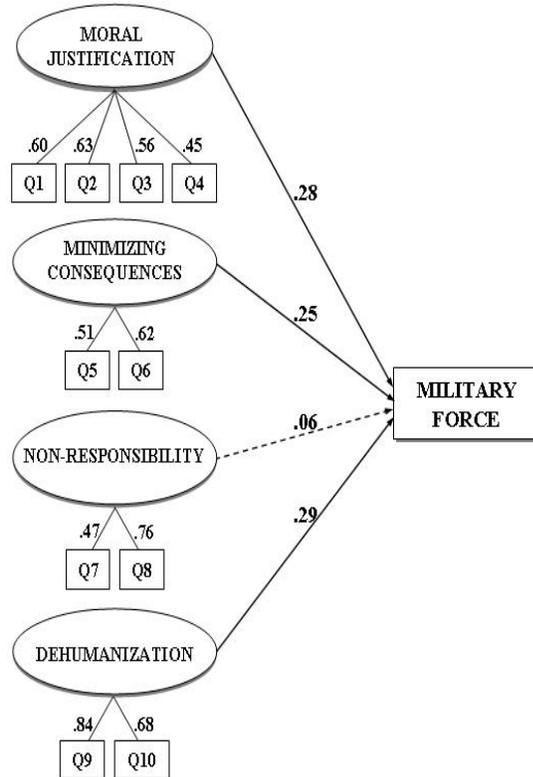
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FIGURE 5. Structural Equation Modeling of the contribution of the different modes of moral disengagement to support of military force against suspected terrorist sanctuaries.

Christ! Let those who once fought against brothers and relatives now rightfully fight against the barbarians under the guidance of the Lord."

   Islamic extremists mount their jihad, by construing it as self–defense against tyrannical, decadent infidels who despoil and seek to enslave the Muslim world (Borger, 2001; Ludlow, 2001). Bin Laden ennobled his global terrorism as serving a holy imperative. "We will continue this course because it is part of our religion and because Allah, praise and glory be to him, ordered us to carry out jihad so that the word of Allah may remain exalted to the heights." In the jihad they are carrying out Allah's will as a "religious duty." The prime agency for the holy terror is displaced to Allah. By attribution of blame, terrorist strikes are con-

strued as morally justifiable defensive reactions to humiliation and atrocities perpetrated by atheistic enemies, "We are only defending ourselves. This is defensive Jihad." By advantageous comparison with the nuclear bombing of Japan, and the toll of the economic sanctions on Iraqi children, the Jihad takes on an altruistic appearance: "When people at the ends of the earth, Japan, were killed by their hundreds of thousands, young and old, it was not considered a war crime, it is something that has justification. Millions of children in Iraq is something that has justification." Bin Laden beastializes the American enemy as "lowly people" perpetrating acts that "the most ravenous of animals would not descend to." Terrorism is sanitized as "The winds of faith have come" to eradicate the "debauched" oppressors. His followers see themselves as holy warriors who gain a blessed eternal life through their martyrdom.

The minimization of civilian casualties was also found to be an important contributor to support of military force. Moral sanctions are diminished if destructive effects are sufficiently minimized or obscured. With the advent of satellite transmission, battles are now fought over "collateral damage" in the airways to shape public perceptions of military campaigns and debates about them. For example, drawing on the experiences of Vietnam, the U.S. military banned cameras and journalists from battlefield areas in the Middle East to minimize disturbing images. The Arab satellite network, Al Jazeera, on the other hand, airs graphic real–time images of death and destruction round–the–clock (El–Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002). In the Iraq war, reporters were again allowed to accompany combat forces to present a different perspective from the one broadcast by Al Jazeera. Satellite television has thus become a strategic tool in the social management of moral disengagement at the locus of the human consequences of lethal means (Bandura, 2004).

Absolving soldiers of responsibility for the detrimental effects of military operations was unrelated to support of military campaigns. Displacement and diffusion of responsibility does, of course, figure importantly as a moral neutralizing device for the people who have to devise military campaigns and have to fight the battles (Bandura, 2004; Kelman & Hamilton, 1989). However, since the general public is not doing the fighting, this means of moral disengagement may be less relevant to their advocacy of warfare. But more important, in hierarchically organized systems with a strict chain of command, displacement and diffusion of responsibility are built into the policy and operational structure of military forces, thus providing sociostructural exemptions from accountability at lower ranks.

Dehumanization of foes makes it easier to kill them without remorse (Ivie, 1980; Keen, 1986). The most striking difference in moral disengagement following the terrorist attack was a change from disavowal of de-

humanization to bestialization of the enemy. The unique contribution of this mode of disengagement was weaker prior to the terrorist attack but more than twice as strong in support of a military campaign against the sanctuaries harboring the terrorists. The most likely explanation for this reversal and increase in mediating function was the heightened sense of personal vulnerability instilled by the enormity of the terrorist violence on one's homeland. This finding is all the more striking because dehumanization was measured in terms of a beastly nature. The less extreme forms of dehumanization, which are currently in vogue, tend to characterize terrorists and enemy rulers as inherently evil devoid of any moral sense rather than as beastly creatures.

The various sociodemographic factors were related to proneness to moral disengagement for the use of military means. Disengagement was stronger for males, the lesser educated, those of White ethnicity, and residents outside the Austin region. That males are more facile moral disengagers than females is in accord with a similar gender difference evident even at an early age with regard to transgressive conduct (Bandura et al., 1996, 2001). The differential gender proneness for moral disengagement may arise, in large part, from the gendered socialization of aggression. For males, aggressive styles of behavior are more extensively modeled, socially condoned, and invested with functional value (Bandura, 1973; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). This makes it easier for males to sanctify violent means.

Individuals of lower education were more inclined toward disengagement of moral sanctions than the more highly educated. The public is exposed daily to televised newcasts with political pundits and talk shows featuring prominent officials with carefully crafted justifications for the courses of action they favor. As previously noted, this medium is increasingly used as a vehicle for legitimizing military means to resolve international conflicts. Those of lower education rely more heavily on television for the information about international conflicts and remedies for them. In experimental research (McAlister, 2001), persuasive communications favoring suspensions of moral restraints in military campaigns raised espousal of moral disengagement practices, whereas communications promoting engagement of moral agency fostered disavowal of moral exoneration.

Interestingly, there was a notable difference in the direction of the relation between some of the sociodemographic factors and support of military force against the two foes. The wealthier, more highly educated, and older Whites were more supportive of military action against Iraq, but not for immediate counterstrikes against likely terrorist sanctuaries. Administration policy makers and many influential media pundits championed military action against Iraq as a humanitarian mission that

would free long–suffering Iraqis from brutal tyrannical rule. In this scenario, the military intervention would establish a model of secular democracy to be used to liberalize the autocratic regimes in the Mideast and pacify the region. Some prominent liberal intellectuals, dubbed "humanitarian hawks," also became advocates of military intervention, citing Bosnia as evidence that military power can be used for humanitarian ends (Packer, 2002). The terrorists presented a new type of global enemy that is decentralized, mobile, operating surreptitiously worldwide through loosely connected affiliates, and cannot be eradicated by ousting a leader. The more highly educated and well–to–do participants in the study were wary of precipitous unilateral military action against such a dispersed, shadowy enemy.

The dependence of the relation between sociodemographic factors and support of military means on the mediating effect of moral disengagement also differed across foes. The sociodemographic effect depended entirely on level of moral disengagement for military force against terrorists, but it operated both directly and mediationally for bombardment of Iraq. A possible explanation for this difference is that the construal of the military action against Iraq as a humanitarian intervention brought personal predilections into play as well. Given the Gulf War and the lengthy military containment, views regarding the control of Iraq had a long time to crystallize along demographic and social structural lines. In contrast, the terrorist posed a new shadowy domestic threat. Alternatively, the differential structural paths may be due to differences in level of personal threat. Iraq, which was boxed in by no-fly zones with continuous aerial surveillance by Allied warplanes and bombardment of their defense and communication facilities, posed a more remote threat. By contrast, the elusive Al Qaeda network presented a continuous terroristic threat on one's own soil reinforced periodically by governmental warnings of possible new attacks. The warnings do not specify the timing, location, or method of attack so everyone may feel vulnerable. Under high personal threat proneness to moral disengagement can override the influence of sociodemographic factors.

In analyses of the multicausation of behavior, sociodemographic factors are typically assigned priority as the background distal determinants against which the unique contribution of other factors are evaluated. As previously noted, the categorical sociodemographic factors are essentially proxies for personal attributes that are the product of experiences typically associated with gender, age, and the like. Obtained empirical relations often get interpreted at the categorical level in terms of ascribed attributes rather than at the individual level of the actual attributes of persons cast in the particular category. Not all individuals fit the attribute typicality of the assigned group. Thus, for example, not all col-

lege graduates think alike or share the same beliefs on sociopolitical matters. The findings of the present study underscore the need to evaluate the unique contribution of categorical sociocognitive factors when, as in the present case, the influence of proneness to moral disengagement is partialed from them.

Verification of the selective exercise of moral agency in the use of lethal means requires converging evidence from diverse methodologies (Bandura, 1999). The present study examined the role of moral disengagement in sanction of military means to a national threat under a tragic occurrence of immense magnitude. The disinhibitory power of moral disengagement practices is well established experimentally. Systematic variation in moral justification, displacement and diffusion of responsibility, sanitizing language, minimizing or obscuring injurious effect, and dehumanization enable otherwise considerate people to carry out injurious behavior (Bandura et al., 1975; Diener et al., 1975; Milgram, 1974; Zimbardo, 1969). Conversely, enhancement of moral engagement reduces preference for lethal means (McAlister, Ama, Barroso, Peters, & Kelder, 2000). In developmental analyses, level of moral disengagement predicts subsequent injurious conduct after controlling for prior level of injuriousness and other possible psychosocial contributors to such conduct (Bandura et al., 2001). Verification of relations between moral disengagement practices and inhumanities perpetrated under conditions of social strife and tyranny lend further support to the contributory role of moral disengagement (Andrus, 1969; Bandura, 1990, 2004; Ivie, 1980; Kelman & Hamilton, 1989; Rapoport & Alexander, 1982; Reich, 1990). The findings of these diverse lines of research lend support to the contribution of moral disengagement.

The terrorist attacks on U. S. consulates and military installations abroad and the devastating strike on its homeland presented a grave national threat with reverberating international consequences. There is no absolute prohibition against the use of military force. A nation has a right to self–defense to protect the welfare of its people from outside attacks. However, military means can vary in their form, scope, and intensity. Not all forms of military self–defense may be morally permissible (Boyle, 2003). The use of military force also brings into play international constraints and supports that pose further moral dilemmas (Byers, 2003).

The terrorist attacks called for national protective countermeasures against further terrorist strikes. Terrorism and fighting it with military means involves two–sided moral disengagement. The ways in which the mechanisms of moral disengagement are enlisted by terrorists to terrorize populations is addressed in some detail elsewhere (Bandura, 1990, 2004). But lethal means must also be morally justified and moral

self–sanctions disengaged by targeted nations to enable them to gain public support for military force, and to mount military campaigns that will necessarily inflict death and destruction (Bandura, 2004).

For reasons given earlier, even when military interventions meet the moral standards for a justifiable war, a nation has to invest the military campaign with moral purpose to mobilize public support, convince the public that the intervention will prevent more harm than it causes, spare its fighters disturbing images of the gory horrors of war, relieve them of responsibility for the effects of military operations over which they do not command control, depersonalize the foes, and portray them as bringing the suffering on themselves.

The just war principles specify the conditions for the permissibility of military self–defense (Boyle, 2003; Walster, 1992). These conditions include necessity, proportionality, discrimination, humanity, justness of cause and rightness of intention. Judged by these criteria, the military force is used for a just cause and right intent rather than for vengeance, or as a pretext for gaining control of resources or geopolitical advantage. The counterstrikes against the terrorists are justified as the last resort after nonviolent means have been exhausted. The military campaign is limited to the level of force needed to eradicate the threat. The counterstrikes are conducted in ways that minimize civilian casualties. A fruitful line for further research is to clarify how moral disengagement affects the form, scope, and intensity of military countermeasures that a public will support under different levels of national threat.

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