Moral Emotions and Moral Judgments in Children's Narratives:

Comparing Real-Life and Hypothetical Transgressions

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Abstract

How children make meaning of their own social experiences in situations involving moral issues is central to their subsequent affective and cognitive moral learning. Our study of young children's narratives describing their interpersonal conflicts shows that the emotions and judgments constructed in the course of these real-life narratives differ from the emotions and judgments generated in the context of hypothetical transgressions. In the narratives, all emotions mentioned spontaneously were negative. In contrast, emotions attributed in the interview part covered a broader spectrum. One's own real-life transgressions were judged less severe and more justified than hypothetical transgressions.

Keywords: narratives, moral emotions, moral judgments, childhood

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Emotions and cognitions experienced in real-life situations involving moral conflicts are an important source for children's moral learning (e.g., Malti & Latzko, this volume; Smetana & Killen, 2008). One promising methodological approach for gaining insight into how children reconstruct and attach meaning to their emotions and cognitions in social experiences is to use narratives of the child's own social experiences, especially when interpersonal conflicts and moral issues are involved (e.g., Wainryb, Brehl, & Matwin, 2005). According to Tappan (1991), narrative (storytelling) represents a central aspect of human existence and captures much of an individual's real-life moral experiences, including both personal (e.g., cognitive, emotional, conative) and contextual elements (e.g., gender, race, class, culture). In this chapter, we discuss children's moral emotions and judgments in a narrative context and compare them to emotions and judgments generated in the context of hypothetical transgressions. Such an analysis provides an improved understanding of how affective and cognitive aspects of sociomoral development are coordinated in different contexts.

Narratives and Moral Development

A narrative, defined as "the recounting of events" (Packer, 1991, p. 64), is constructed in such a way as to place these events in a particular narrative context, linking them coherently in time (Packer, 1991). Narratives are an essential tool for representing and interpreting human experience (Tappan, 1991), providing the experience with both shape and structure (Bruner, 1990). Narratives are embedded in the individual's culture and provide what Tappan (1991) calls "common discursive forestructures", which both guide individuals' interpretation and making sense of their actions and experiences over time and "shape and organize those actions and experiences in the first place" (Tappan, 1991, p.10; see

also Gergen & Gergen, 1986). These forestructures can be conceptualized as mental representations of past experiences which are activated in new situations and used as a framework for integrating (and interpreting) new experiences.

In this chapter, we focus on *personal narratives* as distinguished from scripts and stories (Hudson & Shapiro, 1991). Personal narratives are accounts of a person's own experiences and represent specific events. They are reported in the past tense and are told from the narrator's (i.e., first person) perspective (Hudson & Shapiro, 1991). Personal narratives derive their complexity from various sources, such as human cognitive organization, the narrator's characteristics, the influence of life experiences, and age (De Vries & Lehman, 1996).

Narratives can be conceptualized as *reconstructions* of personal experiences. It is important to note that only what was salient at the time of the experience becomes part of a narrative (cf. Wainryb et al., 2005). Narratives are thus not identical copies of all that happened but, rather, structured representations of the salient features of those experiences (e.g., Tappan, 1991) or selective representations, including the individual's actual interpretation of the event at the time of telling (e.g., Bruner, 2002). We know that already small children make sense of and construct meaning from their experiences. By three years of age, children actively coconstruct their past experiences when conversing with adults, and by the end of preschool they can give fairly coherent accounts of their own (moral) experiences without adult guidance (McAdams, 2008). From early on, therefore, narratives indicate what features of an experience were salient to the child and were thus integrated into the child's interpretation of the situation, thereby providing the foundation for future behavior.

What functions do narratives serve in moral development? First, they can "provide powerful models of moral behavior" (Tappan, 1998, p. 151), as well as express and represent a person's moral experience consisting of

real-life moral conflicts and dilemmas (Tappan, 1998). For example, one might tell a child the story about the boy who cried "wolf" to illustrate how important it is to tell the truth. In this tale, the fact that no wolf came when the boy first claimed its presence led the adults in the village not to believe him when the wolf really did appear and ate all the sheep. Telling children how guilty someone felt after stealing candy from a shop helps them see that stealing is not okay and makes one feel bad. Taking a Vygotskian and sociocultural perspective, Tappan (2006) proposes a "meditational" position that stresses the *mediatory and shaping* function of narratives: Narratives not only provide a structural framework for integrating and assigning meaning to moral experiences (see also Narvaez, this volume) but also mediate and shape these experiences in critical ways. In this sense, narratives operate as a cultural tool through which these experiences can be expressed, thereby adapting them to the child's particular narrative culture and tradition by using the symbols and discursive forms that the culture provides.

Day's (1991) concept of the *moral audience* is related to this mediatory function. According to this view, individuals, while telling narratives about their own moral experiences also construct an internalized audience that includes both real and imaginary persons who represent specific moral principles; these persons then "judge" the experiences. Accordingly, both the internalized moral audience and the real audience (i.e., the actual listener) are important social counterparts or "coplayers," because they give meaning to the moral experience. However, moral development shaped through narratives involves not only a moral audience, but also a *moral self*, which according to Day and Tappan's (1996) approach is referred to as a "dialogical self". This dialogical self is constructed socially and intersubjectively and is by its very nature relational. Moral life is aimed at understanding and managing the relationships among the ongoing dialogues that occur between (and within) actors, as well as among their stories. This relational aspect stresses the

central role narratives play in interviewees' self-reports of the real-life moral conflicts and dilemmas they have faced (cf. Day & Tappan, 1996).

Accordingly, *moral internalization* can be seen as part of this ongoing dialogue, the result of an individual's active transformation and reconstruction of language and discourse into new forms of inner speech, that is, the individual's own inner moral thought and language (cf. Tappan, 1998). Moral norms, rules, and values are thus part of this socially and culturally based language and discourse, and their different meanings are both coconstructed and reconstructed during internal and external dialogical interactions.

Narratives and Understanding Moral Emotions

Moral emotions are considered to be a key element of human moral experience. They also may be key to understanding why individuals adhere or fail to adhere to their own moral standards (Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). Haidt (2003) described moral emotions as those "that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent" (p. 853). Tangney et al. (2007) distinguished between self-conscious moral emotions (shame, guilt, embarrassment, and moral pride) and other-focused moral emotions (righteous anger, contempt, disgust, elevation, and gratitude). Moreover, they discussed other-oriented empathy as a morally relevant emotional process with both affective and cognitive components (Eisenberg, 2000; Hoffman, 2000; for an in-depth discussion of empathy see Maxwell & DesRoches, this volume). We, as well as other researchers, have argued that moral emotions are inevitably associated with moral cognitions, because emotions such as sympathy are based on an understanding of the other person's circumstances and constitute the basic motive in situations calling for moral actions (e.g., Eisenberg, 2000; Malti, Gasser, & Gutzwiller-Helfenfinger, in press).

What role does emotion, especially moral emotion, play in narratives? Although moral emotions are not specifically addressed in the literature on narrative development, Nicolopoulou (1997) has emphasized the central role emotions play in narrative development. The impact of a narrative is primarily due to both the "extent to which it can engage both speakers and listeners *emotionally*" (Nicolopoulou, 1997, p. 201) and the ways individuals can use it symbolically to express and handle situations and themes that move (i.e. fascinate, perplex, or trouble) them emotionally. Effective narratives embody the interplay between cognitive processes and emotional life, such that they "can be used to mobilize emotions for cognitive ends" (Nicolopoulou, 1997, p. 201).We can therefore assume that the more a narrative engages the speaker and listener emotionally, the more attention it receives, and the higher the probability that the plot will be integrated into the listener's narrative repertoire. The theme of the narrative can then be used to convey the specific interpretation and emotional valence attached to it. When similar situations or experiences (or narratives about them) are encountered, that narrative and its meaning can be retrieved, thereby providing an interpretative framework for integrating the new situation. In other words, the narrative is used as a discursive forestructure. This ongoing process of creating structures of meaning and using and further adaptation of the structures can be conceptualized as the assimilation and accommodation of schemata, as described by Piaget (e.g., Piaget, 1967).

What about the *emotional engagement* mentioned by Nicolopoulou (1997)? Emotions give meaning and valence to interactions, actions, and events (e.g., Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003), either accompanying the actor's actions (e.g., feeling happy while playing the piano) or following it, and they apply both to the actor and the person to whom the action is directed (e.g., a child feels happy after grabbing another child's candy, and the other child feels sad about losing the candy). Even the anticipation of an action (either by the actor or the recipient) can be accompanied by

emotions (e.g., a girl feeling happy because she knows she is going to watch a TV show, or feeling afraid because she knows she will be scolded for losing her sister's doll). Accordingly, actual and inferred emotions can give meaning to actions and events by serving as signposts that direct an individual's attention to the things that seem important (cf. Nicolopoulou, 1997).

Moreover, because actions and events—as they are normally told to others—are often organized as narratives, the emotions these narratives *include* also have meaning and significance for both the speaker and the listener. Accordingly, both the inclusion and omission of emotions in a narrative, as well as the nature of the emotions when they are included, provide important additional information about the judgments and evaluations children make in these contexts. They also influence how the narrative is interpreted. In a transgression context, whether or not emotions are included, and if they are, whether both the perpetrator and victim are endowed with emotions can guide the listener's interpretation of the transgression, as well as its severity and consequences. Stating a mere fact, such as "He had a toy I wanted so I took it", provides minimal information and says nothing about what aspects of the situation are being emphasized. The following two descriptions of that same situation can emphasize different aspects. Consider the statements, "He had a toy I wanted, and I was so angry he would not give it to me that I just took it" and "He had a toy I wanted, so I took it, and he was so sad he started crying". The first statement gives the perpetrator's perspective and explains the urge to grab the toy, perhaps hinting at the extenuating circumstance of the victim refusing to hand over the toy. The second statement conveys the emotional state of the victim caused by the perpetrator's action, thereby acknowledging the victim's suffering. Thus, the emotions a narrator ascribes to the protagonist direct the listener's attention to those aspects of the situation that the narrator wants to emphasize, thereby dictating the listener's interpretation of the

situation. When no emotions are mentioned, as in the first statement, the account is more matter-of-fact, indicating that the narrator is not emphasizing or even paying attention to emotions. This is often the case in the narratives of young children, because the understanding of one's own emotions and the emotions of others, as well as the relation between emotions and the accompanying mental states or thought processes, develops in the preschool and early primary school years (e.g., Flavell, Flavell, & Green, 2001).

From a *moral development perspective*, moral emotions are important in several respects. First, moral emotions indicate that moral events are more salient than nonmoral events and are thus central to the development of moral judgments (Smetana & Killen, 2008) and moral motivation (Nunner-Winkler, 2007). Second, a child's immediate moral emotional reaction to a moral rule violation indicates the importance the child assigns to the moral issues involved (Malti, Gummerum, Keller, & Buchmann, 2009). Accordingly, when children include moral emotions (e.g., guilt) in their narrative accounts of their interpersonal conflicts, we can interpret this inclusion as representing their moral sensitivity to the moral aspects of the situation (cf. Gasser & Keller, 2009; Malti et al., in press). Thus, bearing in mind (a) the power of narratives to engage both speakers and listeners emotionally, (b) the "tool character" of narratives as a way of constructing, integrating, and conveying meaning, and (c) Nicolopoulou's (1997) tenet that effective narratives are an embodiment of the interplay between cognitive processes and emotional life, studying children's narratives helps elucidate just this interplay, which is central to moral functioning.

The above is in line with recent trends in the sociocognitive research literature, particularly the call for a more integrative developmental view of moral judgments and moral emotions (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004; Arsenio, Gold, & Adams, 2006; Smetana & Killen, 2008). Accordingly, children judge moral transgressions negatively because they experience them as emotionally salient,

and they associate moral emotions such as sympathy with these transgressions (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004). Thus, children's moral judgments are essential to morality, whereas moral emotions, particularly sympathy, are assumed to help children anticipate the negative outcomes of moral transgressions and coordinate their moral action tendencies accordingly (Malti, Gasser, & Buchmann, 2009).

Development of Children's Understanding of Moral Emotions

Central to the developmental approach to moral emotions is the study of emotions that children expect will result from various (im)moral acts, as well as how these emotion expectancies influence their moral judgments and eventual behavior (Arsenio et al. 2006; Krettenauer, Malti, & Sokol, 2008). Within this approach, the decrease in the attribution of future positive emotions to perpetrators (i.e. a decrease in the happy victimizer phenomenon) signals an important developmental transition in children's emotion understanding (Arsenio et al., 2006). This transition, which takes place around age 6 or 7 years, involves a child understanding that immoral conduct causes a transgressor to feel sad, guilty, or remorseful. The core question is why young children, despite having already developed an intrinsic understanding of moral rules by age 3 or 4 years, still lack the corresponding emotional morality (Lourenço, 1997). In other words, young children attribute positive rather than negative feelings to victimizers (Krettenauer et al., 2008). Several studies have elucidated the role of moral emotion expectancies or attributions in causing (mal)adaptive behavior. These studies underscore the value of considering emotional processes in explaining moral functioning (e.g., Gasser & Keller, 2009; Krettenauer & Eichler, 2006; Malti et al., 2009; Malti et al., in press).

To further explore the role of emotions and judgments in children's moral development, and especially the happy victimizer phenomenon, we propose a complementary, narrative approach. The emotions that are

generated in children when they produce a narrative about their own moral transgression can be conceptualized as *reconstructed emotions*. As such, they are assumed to represent the aspects of the situation that are salient to the child. Such reconstructed emotions can then be contrasted with the emotion expectancies generated during a subsequent interview. Previous research by Wainryb et al. (2005) examined only the emotions that are actively produced during a narrative; it did not systematically assess the emotion expectancies attributed to both perpetrator and victim in the narrative. The assessment of both the reconstructed emotions and emotion expectancies referring to the same real-life situation can provide separate insights into children's understanding of the emotional aspects of their own moral transgressions.

We also wanted to examine potential differences between the emotions attributed to both perpetrators and victims in narratives of real-life events compared to those attributed in the context of hypothetical scenarios. To date, it seems that no such comparison has been undertaken, although a study by Smetana et al. (1999) is a step in the right direction. Comparing hypothetical transgressions to actual classroom transgressions, Smetana et al. (1999) assessed maltreated and nonmaltreated preschool children's emotion expectancies for both the transgressor and the victim. The children were (a) presented with six hypothetical transgressions and (b) interviewed about naturally occurring events in their classrooms and had to say how both the transgressor and the victim felt when the transgression occurred. Even though no differences were found in the children's affective responses to the hypothetical and real-life situations, their moral judgments and justifications differed in the two contexts. Specifically, the hypothetical situations were viewed as deserving more punishment than the real-life situations. Moreover, the children focused more on the intrinsic consequences of the transgressions for others when justifying the perpetrator's conduct in hypothetical situations, but they were less able to justify why the transgression was

wrong in the real-life scenario than in the hypothetical scenario. To Smetana et al. (1999), these findings confirm the earlier proposition (e.g., Smetana et al., 1993) that events contextualized in real-life social interactions require children to consider, weigh, and coordinate factors such as their relationship with the victim or the perpetrator, potential extenuating circumstances, and the potential consequences of their actions; these considerations then influence the children's judgments.

Because narratives can be conceptualized as *representations of contextualized social interactions*, we can assume that moral judgments and emotion expectancies, as well as their justifications, are different for narratives of real-life situations than for hypothetical scenarios. Moreover, real-life situations are more complex than hypothetical situations because, in addition to the moral considerations, perpetrators must justify their own transgressions by referring to their own goals (Wainryb et al., 2005). These authors demonstrated that when narratives were told from the perpetrator's perspective as compared to the victim's perspective, the children were required to pay more attention to the transgressor's goals, and they were more engaged in coordinating their intentions with the inferred perspective of the victim. Because these children coordinated different and partly contradictory aspects of their own behavior (talking about harming someone while simultaneously trying to maintain a positive moral self-image), their narratives were less coherent; that is, they included various shifts between the perpetrator's (the narrator's) and the victim's perspectives (Wainryb et al., 2005). Thus, providing a narrative about one's own transgression is a highly demanding task, which requires the inclusion of rich, contextualized information with the self as the central agent. This complexity prevents the narrator from engaging in the more objective reflection processes involved in hypothetical situations. In hypothetical situations, on the other hand, the child is primarily concerned about the harmful consequences of the moral

transgression and can concentrate on this central issue without having to establish and maintain a primarily positive self-image.

Studying Children's Narratives

Two broad approaches to the study of children's sociomoral narratives can be distinguished. The first approach uses narratives of real-life experiences based on actual behavior, as well as the reconstructed emotions and thoughts that the behavior engenders. This is the approach presented so far in this chapter (e.g., Day & Tappan, 1996; Hudson & Shapiro, 1991; Tappan, 1991; 1998; Wainryb et al., 2005). The second approach uses *hypothetical narratives*, that is, narratives elicited after presenting children with standardized story beginnings, to assess their declarative knowledge. This approach, commonly used in attachment research, provides insight into children's emotions, thoughts, and action tendencies. To elicit these narratives, standardized story stems (i.e. beginnings) have been used (MacArthur Story Stem Battery [MSSB]; e.g., Bretherton, Prentiss, & Ridgeway, 1990). In conducting moral development research, Kochanska, Padavich, and Koenig (1996) adapted these story stems to include moral stems (cf. Ramos-Marcuse & Arsenio, 2001; Waldinger, Toth, & Gerber, 2001). This latter approach is not described in more depth here, because it does not use the assessment of personal experiences to tap children's understanding of social situations but uses instead stories produced on the basis of standardized cues. For a comprehensive overview of this approach, see Emde, Wolf, and Oppenheim (2003).

The features and functions of personal narratives presented so far show that narratives are an ideal way to capture the multidimensional aspects of moral experience. Time, place, actors, actions (behavior), relationships, intentions, motives, and emotions are not only the basic elements of a moral experience but also the elements of a narrative. Narratives—as cognitive and sociocultural forestructures—enable individuals

to meaningfully organize these elements in order to interpret their moral experiences, to reflect on them, and to use them as a basis for subsequent behavior. Accordingly, the research method of eliciting personal moral narratives can provide insight into these individual construals by showing what features of children's social interactions are salient to them and subsequently form the basis for understanding them. As recognition of the salient features of situations and experiences is the basis for subsequent moral judgments and the development of moral understanding (Wainryb et al., 2005), gaining access to these narrative construals helps the researcher identify the "raw materials of which moral development is made up" (Wainryb et al., 2005, p.2). Moreover, in accordance with Day's (1991) concept of the moral audience, children giving narratives to adult researchers may strive to present themselves as morally "good" and thus construct the narrative to correspond with the moral principles they assume the adults adhere to. We may also speculate that already in preschool, children attempt to construct moral self-consistency, which can form the basis for later development of a moral self. As a consequence, and in line with Smetana et al.'s (1999) conception of contextualization, we may expect that children consider the real-life transgressions that they report in narratives to be less severe than hypothetical transgressions, and that the justifications for their moral judgments differ accordingly. Thus, we may speculate that real-life transgressions might be justified as more excusable and thus less subject to moral standards.

Wainryb et al.'s (2005) seminal study of children's narratives and the moral judgments they make about their interpersonal conflicts shows that narratives are indeed well suited to unveiling those aspects of social situations that form the basis of children's moral understanding and development. Their core findings demonstrate that when children and adolescents produce narrative accounts and moral evaluations of their own interpersonal conflicts involving moral transgressions, one from the perspective of the victim and one from the perspective of the perpetrator,

the content and coherence of the accounts vary as a function of this perspective, as do the moral evaluations. The victim narratives were mainly self-referential; that is, they referred to the narrator's experience and were more coherent than the perpetrator narratives, which frequently shifted between references to the narrator's own experience and the other's experience. Moreover, in the victim narratives, the children mostly judged the transgressions to be wrong. In contrast, in the perpetrator narratives, almost half of the moral judgments were positive or mixed (right or both right and wrong). However, the perpetrator narratives were just as long and detailed as the victim narratives, and they referred to similar types of harmful behavior (Wainryb et al., 2005). These systematic effects of perspective on both narrative interpretations and moral judgments highlight the importance of including children's interpretations of their social interactions in the study of moral understanding and development, as these interpretations are the basis of moral thinking (cf. Wainryb et al., 2005).

Wainryb et al. (2005) reported that the narrator's emotions were present in 35% of the perpetrator narratives, but the other person's were present in 71%. In contrast, the narrator's emotions were present in 67% of the victim narratives and the other child's emotions in only 16%. Generally, the victim narratives centered mainly on emotions, whereas intentions were predominant in the perpetrator narratives. Thus, to perpetrators, the other child's (i.e. the victim's) emotions were more salient and relevant than their own, thereby emphasizing the victim's emotional reaction to the transgression. Accordingly, the emotions attributed to the perpetrator were mainly guilt and anger. Guilt appeared significantly more often in the perpetrator narratives than in the victim narratives, whereas the victims more often described themselves as feeling sad or generally unwell (unelaborated negative emotions). Inclusion of both the narrator's and the other person's emotions increased with age (Wainryb et al., 2005). However, as the sample was cross-sectional, the elucidation of developmental trends awaits longitudinal studies.

The currently available findings thus show that children spontaneously refer to both their own and the other's emotional state, and that the emotions reflected in narratives-sadness, guilt, and anger-are moral or morally relevant. In cases where no specific moral emotion was mentioned, references were made to unelaborated *negative* feelings, mainly in the victim. Thus, the evidence shows that children are aware that real-life moral transgressions cause both specific and nonspecific negative feelings in both the victim and the perpetrator.

Our Empirical Study: Children's Narratives of Their Own Moral Transgressions

We now present our own research on preschool and primary school children's narratives of their own interpersonal conflicts involving a moral transgression, addressing the role of both moral emotions and moral judgments. Our primary research questions were the following: (a) Which moral emotions attributed to self (perpetrator) and other (victim) are mentioned, both spontaneously and after prompting, in preschool and schoolchildren's narratives of harming another child? In accordance with Wainryb et al.'s (2005) findings, we expected the children to mention mainly negative emotions, especially guilt, anger, and sadness; (b) What motives for transgression do the children mention spontaneously in their narratives? (c) What justifications do the children give in their narratives for both their emotion attributions and moral judgments? (d) How do moral judgments and emotion attributions, and their justifications, differ as a function of whether the events are real or hypothetical? Based on Smetana et al.'s (1999) findings, we expected that both judgments and justifications would be based to a greater extent on moral principles if the transgressions are hypothetical.

We made no predictions regarding emotion expectancies and their justifications. We assumed that by prompting standardized emotions in the

interview following the narrative, the constructed, real-life character of the narrative would be partly lost. The task of evaluating each emotion acquires a more hypothetical character, because if a particular emotion is not mentioned spontaneously in the narrative, we must assume that it is not part of the child's reconstruction of the situation. Thus, this task is very similar to evaluating the emotions attributed to the characters in a hypothetical scenario. Accordingly, it was not clear whether children's emotion attributions would differ in the real-life narratives and in the hypothetical scenarios.

Method

General Procedure. We developed a method to elicit children's narratives of their own moral transgressions based on that used by Wainryb et al. (2005). After eliciting the narrative, we used a half-standardized interview to probe (a) the children's motives, (b) their moral judgments, (c) their justifications for these judgments, (d) the emotions they attribute to both themselves and others, and (e) their justifications for the emotions attributed to the self. The children were also presented with two hypothetical scenarios of moral transgressions. They had to (a) morally judge these transgressions, (b) justify their judgments, (c) attribute emotions to both the perpetrator and the victim, and (d) justify the emotions attributed to the perpetrator.

Participants. The sample consisted of 190 Swiss preschool and school children. There were 92 girls and 98 boys, 59 of whom (25 girls and 34 boys) were ca. 5 years old (M = 5.5) and 131 of whom (67 girls and 64 boys) were ca. 9 years old (M = 9.5 years). The children attended kindergarten and primary school, respectively. Their socioeconomic status was representative of the German speaking part of Switzerland.

Real-Life Narratives. One narrative was elicited from each participant. The children were asked to talk about a situation where they – as perpetrator– did or said something that hurt another child: "Now you may tell me something that happened to you, and I am going to listen first and

ask you some questions afterwards. Tell me about a time when you did or said something, and a child you know well ended up feeling hurt by it. Pick a time that you remember really well, and tell me everything that you remember about that time."

The researchers allowed the participants to give their narratives without interruption, making no comments and asking no questions. Thus, the participants talked until they reached the end of their respective narratives, indicated by keeping silent or making a brief comment such as "that's it". At that point, the researcher asked "Is there anything else you remember about that time?" This procedure ensured that the researcher did not provide any cues that could influence the content or structure of the narrative (cf. Wainryb et al., 2005). If the children did not mention a motive for their harmful actions, the researchers asked them why they had acted this way. If the harmful action was not described clearly (e.g., "I just did something…"), the researcher asked what exactly the child had done. These two probes were included to ensure that both the motive for and the nature of the harmful action were made explicit.

After the narrative, the interview began. The researchers asked the children to morally judge the harmful act they described in their narratives and to justify these judgments. If the children judged the acts to be wrong, they were asked to rate how serious the transgression was. Afterwards, the children were asked to tell the researcher both how they felt after harming the other child and how the other child felt. The child also had to justify the moral emotion attributed to the self.

Hypothetical Scenarios. The same interview procedure was used for the two hypothetical transgression scenarios as for the real-life narratives, but data collection took place on a different day. The participants were told two stories, each containing a moral transgression representing typical overtly aggressive behavior: physical (hitting) and verbal attacks (teasing). The stories were illustrated with colored pictures and matched for the child's sex. Again, the children were prompted for moral judgments

and their justification, degree of seriousness, emotions attributed to the perpetrator and victim, and justification of the emotion attributed to the perpetrator.

Coding of Real-life Narratives. The number of occurrences of each narrative element was noted. The coding procedure was based on Wainryb et al. (2005).

Narrative Elements. The following *moral emotions* were coded for both self (perpetrator) and other (victim): sadness, guilt, anger, unspecified negative, and other emotions (e.g., jealousy, anxiety, hurt feelings). The perpetrator's *justifications* for harmful acts were coded as follows: (a) deontic (refers to moral norms and rules), (b) empathic (mentions the victim's plight), (c) sanction-oriented (mentions praise, blame or punishment by others), (d) hedonistic (mentions satisfying a personal need), (e) legitimate (mentions a harmful reaction to provocation), (f) alternative action (mentions nonaggressive alternatives), (g) repetition of the harmful act (repeats mention of the act), (h) guilt (mentions feelings of guilt or a bad conscience), and (i) undifferentiated or inappropriate justifications (e.g., "I just did it").

The perpetrator's *motives* were coded as follows: (a) instrumental goal (acts harmfully to pursue own goals), (b) vengeance (feels provoked), (c) false assumption (recognizes own misconstrual of the situation, which nonetheless was the basis for the harmful behavior), (d) impulsivity (acts out of anger, jealousy, or frustration), (e) harmful intent (wants to harm the victim and does not care about the victim's welfare), (f) accidental (intends no harm), (g) fun (mentions fun as the motive), and (h) incomprehensible (gives no reasons for the harmful behavior).

Both the justification and the motive codings were dichotomized: If a category was used, the element was coded as 1, if not, it was coded as 0. To account for narrative length, the number of words in the narrative, including the answers to probes within the narrative phase, was counted for each narrative.

Coding of Moral Judgments, Emotion Attributions, Justifications for Both Real-life and Hypothetical Transgressions. Moral judgments, emotion attributions, and justifications of judgments and attributions were coded identically for both the real-life and hypothetical transgressions. *Moral judgment* was coded as 0 if the child said that it was okay and 1 if the child said it was wrong to transgress. In the latter case, the child had to indicate how *serious* the transgression was: The judgment was coded as 1 if the transgression was described as only a little bad and 2 if it was described as being very bad.

The coding of justifications for moral judgments was identical to the coding of spontaneous justifications for harmful acts. The emotion categories (happy, angry, sad, fearful, neutral) were dichotomized, with 1 indicating that the emotion had been attributed and 0 indicating that it had not been attributed.

Twenty of the narratives (16%) were fully coded by two raters. Interrater reliability was good, with 84% agreement on the narrative elements (Cohen's κ = .74).

Results

Real-Life Narratives. Of the190 children tested, 126 (60 girls and 66 boys) produced codable narratives. Of the remaining 64, 20 had nothing to tell, 38 told stories that did not involve them harming another child, and 6 gave narratives that were flawed due to incorrect assessments. Of the 126 children whose narratives were valid and included for analysis, 27 (21.4%) were 5 years old and 99 (78.6%) were 9 years old.

Eighty-six (68.3%) of the narratives were told from a retaliatory point of view in that the perpetrators stated that they had been provoked. In the remaining 40 narratives (31.7%), no initial provocation was mentioned, and they were labeled as prototypic. The number of words in the narratives ranged from 7 to 169 (M = 47.6, SD = 34). The 9-year-olds told significantly longer narratives than the 5-year-olds (M = 53.93 vs. M = 24.33).

Moral Emotions. Moral emotions were mentioned in 50 of the 126 narratives (39.7%). In 35 narratives (27.8%), only one emotion was mentioned; in 8 (6.3%), two; in 4 (3.2%), three; and in 3 (2.4%), four were mentioned.

In all but one of the prototypic narratives, all the spontaneously mentioned emotions were negative, regardless of whether they were attributed to the self (perpetrator) or the other (victim). In the one prototypic narrative where a positive emotion was mentioned, the victim was described as feeling content after the perpetrator had apologized and made amends.

Regarding the perpetrator's emotions, sadness was mentioned in three narratives (2.4%); guilt was mentioned in seven narratives (5.6%); anger was mentioned in 14 narratives (11.1%); undifferentiated, negative emotions were mentioned once (0.8%); and other negative emotions were also mentioned once (0.8%). For the victim, sadness was mentioned in 22 narratives (17.5%), anger in 8 (6.4%), and other negative emotions in 6 (4.8%). Guilt and undifferentiated negative emotions were never mentioned. Moral emotions were mentioned significantly more often by 9-year-olds than by 5-year-olds (M = .71 vs. M = .19).

Motives for Spontaneously Mentioned Transgressions. All but one of the motive categories (harmful intent) were mentioned. The most frequently mentioned motive was vengeance (66 instances), followed by impulsivity (11), and instrumental goals (8). Accidental, fun, and incomprehensible motives were mentioned five times each, and a false assumption was stated twice. Overall, some kind of motive was mentioned in 93 narratives (74.8%). In 79 narratives (62.7%), only one motive was mentioned; in 13 (10.3%), two were mentioned; and in 1 (1.0%), four were mentioned.

Emotions Attributed to Perpetrator and Victim After Prompting. When the children were asked directly to attribute moral emotions both to the perpetrator (self) and to the victim (other) during the interview part of the session, they distributed their attributions as follows. Regarding the

perpetrator (self), 14 participants (11.1%) attributed happiness; 22 (17.5%), anger; 49 (38.9%), sadness; 12 (9.5 %), fear; and 17 (13.5%), neutral emotions. Twelve (9.5%) participants either gave no answer or mentioned undifferentiated negative emotions. To the victim (other), 15 children (11.9%) attributed happiness; 27 (21.4%), anger; 54 (42.9%), sadness; 11 (8.7), fear; and 9 (7.1%), neutral emotions. Ten participants either gave no answer or attributed undifferentiated negative emotions.

Justifications of Moral Judgments and Emotions Attributed to the Perpetrator (Self). With respect to moral judgments, 19 children (15.1%) said it was okay to harm the other child, but 104 (82.5%) said it was wrong. Three children made no judgments at all. The predominant justification categories were deontic, empathic, sanction-oriented, and legitimate. Deontic justifications were more frequent for judgments (21%) than for emotion attributions (10%). A quarter of the children (25%) mentioned empathic justifications in the judgment context and 10% in the emotion attribution context. Only 4% referred to sanctions in the judgment context, whereas 21% mentioned them in the emotion attribution context. In the judgment context, 18 % mentioned legitimate justifications, whereas in the emotion attribution context 12% referred to it.

Comparing Real-life Narratives and Hypothetical Scenarios. In keeping with previous research, we computed several measures of judgments, attributions, and justifications for both real-life narratives and hypothetical scenarios. Children's combined moral and severity judgments were coded as 1(okay), 2(serious), and 3(very serious). For two justification categories, former categories were collapsed: (a) moral: others' welfare or the unfairness of the action (merging of deontic, empathic, and guilt); and (b) undifferentiated (merging of repetition of harmful act and undifferentiated/inappropriate). Sanction-oriented, legitimate, hedonistic, and alternative action were left unchanged (cf. Smetana et al., 2003). To account for multiple justifications, the mean proportion of each type of justification was calculated for each child.

To analyze severity judgments, emotion attributions, and their justifications, separate mixed ANOVAs were performed, with Gender and Age (5- vs. 9-year-olds) as the between-groups factors and Context (narrative vs. hypothetical scenarios) as the within-groups factor. Only the significant main effects for context and interaction effects including context are reported. The means are displayed in Table 1.

Severity Judgments. A significant main effect for Context was found. Children judged hypothetical transgressions more severely than their own transgressions.

Justifications for Moral Judgments. A significant main effect for Context was found. Children gave more justifications for moral judgments of hypothetical than real-life transgressions. This main effect was superseded by a significant Age x Context interaction, with older children giving more moral justifications than younger children for hypothetical transgressions.

A significant Context effect was also found for *legitimate* justifications. Children more often referred to legitimate justifications for real-life than for hypothetical transgressions. The same Context effect was found for *alternative action*. Children more often referred to an alternative strategy when the transgression was real-life than when it was hypothetical.

Finally, a significant Context effect was found for *undifferentiated* justifications. Children gave more such justifications for hypothetical than for real-life transgressions. This main effect was superseded by a significant Age x Context interaction, indicating that the younger children gave more undifferentiated justifications than the older children for hypothetical transgressions.

Emotions Attributed to Perpetrator. Only for *fear* was a significant Gender x Age x Context interaction found. In the hypothetical context, 9-year-old girls attributed more fear to the perpetrator than 9-year old boys.

Justification of Emotions Attributed to Perpetrator. For *moral justifications*, a significant main effect for Context was found. Children gave more moral justifications for the emotions they attributed to the perpetrator if the transgression was hypothetical than if it was real-life. This main effect was superseded by a significant Age x Context interaction, showing that older children gave more moral justifications than younger children for hypothetical transgressions.

A significant main effect for Context was found for *sanction-oriented* justifications. Children gave more sanction-oriented justifications for hypothetical transgressions than for real-life transgressions. For *legitimate* justifications, a significant Age x Context interaction was found, indicating that 9-year-olds used legitimate justifications more often than 5-year-olds if the transgression was hypothetical.

For *hedonistic* justifications, a main effect for Context was found. Children gave more hedonistic justifications for hypothetical transgressions than for real-life transgressions. For *undifferentiated* justifications, a main effect for Context was also found. Children gave more undifferentiated justifications for hypothetical than for real-life transgressions. This main effect was superseded by a significant Age x Context interaction, indicating that younger children gave more undifferentiated justifications than older children for hypothetical transgressions.

Narrative, Moral Emotions, and Moral Cognition: Concluding Remarks

The aim of this chapter was first to integrate our research findings with the literature on both narrative and moral development, and second, to emphasize the importance of merging moral emotions and moral cognitions (cf. Malti & Latzko, this volume). We argue that the way children construct and – by narrating them – re-construct the meaning of their own interpersonal encounters in morally relevant situations represents a central vantage point for their development of a concern for others. This concern may then become part of their moral self.

Our results indicate that for a majority of the children (68%), the real-life narratives were retaliatory; that is, the children reported acting as perpetrators in situations where they felt provoked by the other party, an interpretation they used to legitimize their own harmful acts. The remaining 32% were set in a so-called prototypic context that involved no visible provocation on the part of the victim. Except for one prototypic narrative, all the *spontaneously* mentioned emotions were negative, regardless of whether they were attributed to the self (perpetrator) or the other (victim). Also, the 9-year-old school children reported more of these emotions than the 5-year-old preschool children. Whereas anger and guilt were the emotions most frequently attributed to the perpetrator, sadness was the predominant emotion attributed to the victim. These results correspond well to Wainryb et al.'s (2005) findings, and they show that, in the context of moral transgressions, the emotions produced spontaneously in children's narratives are *always* morally relevant; that is, they are moral emotions. Moreover, no indications of the happy victimizer phenomenon were found, as all emotions attributed to the perpetrator were negative.

In the interview per se, the variety of response choices offered allowed a broad spectrum of moral emotions to be attributed to both perpetrator and victim. For perpetrators as well as victims, the predominant emotion attributed was sadness. Satisfaction, fear, and neutral emotions were also attributed to both perpetrator and victim, even though these emotions were never mentioned in the narratives. These findings reveal that different pictures emerged about the details the children provided when talking about the same (personal) moral transgressions, depending on the method used to elicit the information. Thus, the narratives yielded a relatively narrow spectrum of exclusively negative emotions, whereas the interviews yielded a broader spectrum that included both positive and neutral emotions as well as negative emotions.

When the moral judgments, emotion attributions, and justifications given in the context of real-life and hypothetical transgressions were

compared, distinct patterns emerged. Both main effects and interactions were found involving Context (real-life or hypothetical), and the interactions mostly involved age. Hypothetical transgressions were judged by all the children to be more severe and were given more moral justifications (by the older children) and more undifferentiated justifications (by the younger children) than were real-life transgressions. Conversely, real-life transgressions were more often presented as justified or legitimate, whereas moral judgments were more often justified by proposing an alternative strategy, indicating that when children refer to their own transgressions, they try to present themselves as morally intact by eliminating or attenuating inconsistencies between their actions and their claims to be moral persons. This result is in line with Day's (1991) conception of narratives as giving the narrator a moral audience, as well as research investigating the role of narratives in developing moral self and a moral identity (e.g., Day & Tappan, 1996; Mc Adams, 2008): Both require narrators to present themselves as basically "good" and moral people.

Our results also confirm findings by Smetana et al. (1999) indicating that hypothetical and actual transgressions are judged and justified differently. Personal narratives, by definition, are highly relevant to the self. Accordingly, reducing or eliminating cognitive inconsistencies or dissonance (cf. Festinger, 1957) by presenting oneself as a "good" person is aimed not only at others but also at oneself. Metaphorically, you would want to be able to look at yourself in the mirror without shuddering with horror or disgust at what you see (cf. Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, where the beautiful but depraved Dorian senses that the more he sins, the uglier and more monstrous his painted portrait becomes). It seems that even young children strive to present themselves as morally good persons, thereby showing a basic understanding of what a moral audience expects of them.

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Table 1

Mean Proportional Scores and Standard Deviations for the Dependent

Variables in Real-life (Narratives) versus Hypothetical Scenarios as a

Function of Age

	Real-Life		Hypothetical	
	5 Years	9 Years	5 Years	9 Years
Moral Judgment (Severity)	1.00 (0.00)	2.14 (.70)	2.25 (.35)	2.54 (.40)
Justifications of Moral Judgment (Merged Categories)				
Moral	.16 (.17)	.17 (.17)	.70 (.44)	.95 (.15)
Legitimate	.07 (.27)	.20 (.40)	.00 (.00)	.01 (.05)
Alternative Action	.07 (.27)	.07 (.26)	.00 (.00)	.01 (.08)
Emotions Attributed to Perpetrator				
Fear*	.04 (.21)	.12 (.33)	.09 (.19)	.25 (.34)
Justifications of Emotion Attributions to Perpetrator (Merged Categories)				
Moral	.07 (.14)	.09 (.15)	.15 (.36)	.38 (.39)
Sanction-Oriented	.11 (.32)	.24 (.43)	.30 (.44)	.45 (.39)
Legitimate	.00 (.00)	.15 (.36)	.02 (.10)	.01 (.07)
Hedonistic	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.04 (.19)	.03 (.14)
Undifferentiated	.09 (.20)	.10 (.24)	.28 (.45)	.11 (.24)

* A significant effect involving context was found for fear only.