



The multifaceted phenomenon of ‘happy victimizers’: A cross-cultural comparison of moral emotions

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This study examines whether German and Portuguese 5- to 6-, and 8- to 9-year-old children distinguish between the feelings attributed to a victimizer or to themselves if they were the victimizers in two hypothetical moral violations (stealing and breaking a promise), and how they morally evaluate the emotions they attribute to victimizers and the person of the victimizer. The results showed that in spite of some developmental and cultural differences, children’s attribution of negative emotions was substantively more frequent when they made attributions to themselves. Furthermore, most children judged the positive (immoral) emotions they had attributed to victimizers as not right and evaluated the person of the hypothetical victimizer negatively. The results clarify contradictory findings in the field and may provide a better understanding of the moral and developmental meaning of the positive and negative emotions attributed in acts of victimization.

Over recent years, there has been considerable interest in children’s understanding of the emotions experienced by a transgressor who committed a desired but immoral action. Most of this research (e.g. Arsenio & Kramer, 1992; Murgatroyd & Robinson, 1993; Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988; Yuill, Perner, Pearson, Peerbhoy, & van den Ende, 1996) has been focused on the following three questions:

- (1) What type of emotions (i.e. positive, negative, or mixed) do children tend to attribute to transgressors involved in acts of victimization?

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- (2) Are there developmental patterns in children's attributions of (moral) emotions to victimizers?
- (3) What is at issue in children's attributions of emotions in acts of victimization?

Children's attributions of emotions to victimizers have generally been classified into three distinct patterns (see Arsenio & Lover, 1995): (a) a *happy victimizer pattern* where children expect a wrongdoer to feel good (attribution of positive emotions), which is considered to indicate an immoral emotion; (b) an *unhappy victimizer pattern* where children expect a transgressor to feel bad, which is considered an attribution of moral emotions; and (c) a *mixed victimizer pattern* where children expect a wrongdoer to feel ambivalent (positive and negative) emotions at the same time. These emotion attribution patterns are supported by different reasons. The emotion attribution patterns, however, are less clear than it appears at first. While there seems to exist only one happy victimizer pattern, i.e. positive emotions justified with outcome-oriented reasons (e.g. the transgressor feels good because he or she satisfies his or her interests: Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988), two distinct unhappy victimizer patterns seem to exist: one is focused on the moral rule and/or the victim's loss and pain (e.g. the victimizer feels bad because of the harm inflicted upon the victim), the other focused on the victimizer's interests and concerns (e.g. the victimizer feels bad because she might be caught and punished; Murgatroyd & Robinson, 1997). Only the first type of reasoning can be called truly moral, and most studies show that nearly all children who attribute negative feelings support them with genuine moral reasons, while external sanctions hardly play a role. This is consistent with findings from studies on early moral reasoning (Turiel, 1998).

Concerning the relationship between age and emotion-attribution patterns, several studies have shown that if the transgression produces a tangible outcome for the transgressor (as in the case of stealing chocolate from another child), 4- to 6-year-olds tend to attribute positive emotions supported by outcome-oriented reasons (Barden, Zelko, Duncan, & Masters, 1980; Murgatroyd & Robinson, 1993; Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988). In contrast, 8-year-olds and older children tend to attribute negative and mixed emotions, mainly supported by moral reasons (e.g. Arsenio & Kramer, 1992; Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988). Nunner-Winkler (1993) has interpreted this shift in attribution in terms of moral motivation. She proposes a two-step theory of moral development where children first acquire moral knowledge and only later the motivational disposition to feel guilty over a violation or to act according to the moral knowledge (see also Blasi, 1999). The picture of findings, however, is more complicated if we look at the previous studies in detail. For example, one study surprisingly did not report any judgments of positive emotions among children aged 5 to 8 years (Harter & Whitesell, 1989). Other studies found that the attribution of positive emotions following a transgression continued well into middle childhood and even adulthood (Murgatroyd & Robinson, 1993, 1997). Surprisingly again, these children would not develop moral motivation at all. There is also no research in which younger children attributed only positive emotions, and older children only negative or mixed feelings (e.g. Arsenio & Ford, 1985; Barden *et al.*, 1980; Yuill *et al.*, 1996) and the same child sometimes evidenced a happy, unhappy, and mixed victimizer pattern across different transgressions (e.g. Lourenço, 1997). While some studies reported a strong age-related attributional shift from younger to older children's moral orientation (transgressors are happy if they get what they desire versus transgressors feel bad because they inflict harm upon others), there were others in which this change from

positive to negative emotions was only moderate (Arsenio & Kramer, 1992; Lourenço, 1997). In a study with Chinese 3- to 9-year-old children (Keller, Schuster, Fang, Tang, & Edelstein, 1996; Keller, Fang, Tang, Schuster, & Gummerum, 2002), the predicted shift in emotions was non-existent. Keller and her colleagues suspected that their finding was due to the fact that Chinese participants did not spontaneously identify with the hypothetical victimizer. When the Chinese children were asked how they themselves would feel in such a situation, children from age 5 onwards and even some of the youngest 4-year-olds attributed negative feelings to the self. This attributional difference between the protagonist in the stories and self increased over time. Keller and Malti (1999) replicated the self-other attributional split also in German children between the ages of 3 and 6 years. This finding contradicts an earlier study by Murgatroyd and Robinson (1993) who found no self-other difference in the attribution of emotions, but that it supports numerous findings in social psychology where this difference is consistently reported (Nisbett & Ross, 1980). The finding by Keller *et al.* (1996, 2002) suggests that the happy victimizer attribution in older children may be due to the fact that they reject and differentiate themselves from the hypothetical transgressor. This could be one explanation as to why some studies did not show the predicted developmental shift from positive to negative emotions in older children. Therefore, it seems necessary to ask children who attribute positive feelings to a hypothetical transgressor about the feelings they themselves would have in such a situation of transgression—which they themselves may reject morally and might not have committed.

The reported contradictory findings show that we are far from a clear understanding of children's attribution of emotions to victimizers. For example, it seems natural that older children, due to their higher social, cognitive, and emotional maturity, tend to attribute negative (moral), and not positive (immoral), feelings to the victimizer, just the opposite of what generally happens with younger children. But we have to explain why this is not always the case, or why it is mainly the case for attributions to the self but not to the hypothetical victimizer. Of course, it may be that we have to take into account the role of motivational variables, cultural influences, speed of social-cognitive development, methodological procedures, and so forth, as proposed by Arsenio and Lover's (1995, p. 90) four-step model. But if this is the case, how does one explain the regularities in the attributions of younger children referred to earlier and found in different countries such as Germany (Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988), Portugal (e.g. Lourenço, 1997), the UK (e.g. Murgatroyd & Robinson, 1993), and the USA (e.g. Arsenio & Kramer, 1992) and the irregularities in the attributions of the older children? One possibility is that the consistent attribution of positive emotions in younger children is a developmental phenomenon due to cognitive limitations, while the attributions of older children are dependent on motivational factors such as a self-other differentiation. In our empirical study, we will follow up these questions in a cross-cultural context.

Although the happy victimizer phenomenon has been studied in different countries and cultures, there are no explicit cross-cultural comparisons. Given the contradictory findings mentioned above, cross-cultural studies using the same methodology may help to clarify divergent findings and also to disentangle cognitive and motivational influences on children's emotions. For example, the fact that the strong age-related attributional shift in German children (Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988) did not appear among their Portuguese counterparts (Lourenço, 1997), may be due to cultural influences on the speed of social-cognitive development or on motivational factors or to a self-other split in emotion attributions. Clarification of this question was the first goal of the cross-cultural comparison between German and Portuguese children.

A further goal of our study was to clarify children's attributions of emotions to victimizers according to a deontic or moral point of view. In all the studies referred to above, children were asked 'is' or factual questions, e.g. 'How does the victimizer feel at the end of the story, and why?', not 'ought' or deontic questions, e.g. 'How should the protagonist feel at the end of the story, and why?' Thus, children were asked a cognitive-predictive question ('How *does* the protagonist feel after *getting* what he or she desired?'), not a moral-prescriptive question ('What is the (morally) right feeling after the violation?', see Grice, 1975; and also Siegal & Beattie, 1991, for an analysis of the conversational rules assumed in everyday life). Some children may have attributed positive (immoral) emotions to the victimizer because they interpreted the traditional 'is' question as a question of consistency between the protagonist's previous wishes, where the immoral behavior served the realization of the wishes, and the subsequent positive (immoral) emotions: 'Is it not to be expected from a protagonist behaving immorally in order to achieve a desired goal that he or she feels good rather than bad afterwards?' Other children may have taken a moral or deontic stance: 'Is it not to be expected (e.g. morally right) that a protagonist behaving immorally feels bad rather than good because she violated a moral norm?' Thus, while children may conclude that a person who performs such a (morally) bad action will feel good, they may at the same time reject the immoral action of the hypothetical transgressor which they themselves might not want to perform. If this were the case, children's attribution of happy emotions to a hypothetical victimizer could not necessarily be taken as a lack of moral motivation.

The question of an is-ought distinction is addressed by a further aspect of our study which refers to the moral evaluation of the person of the victimizer. A negative evaluation of the person of the hypothetical transgressor indicates children's moral awareness even if they attribute positive feelings to the transgressor. In the study by Nunner-Winkler and Sodian (1988), children had judged a 'sad thief' as less bad than a 'happy thief.' In the study by Keller and Malti (1999), younger children evaluated the hypothetical victimizer as a 'bad person' even when they attributed positive feelings to him or her. Thus, young children differentiate between factual and moral aspects of the situation, and the attribution of positive feelings to the hypothetical transgressor—especially in older children—does not imply that these children have not built up a moral attitude.

The present study aims to disambiguate previous findings and to clarify further questions of moral knowledge and emotion attribution. With the comparison of German and Portuguese children, we studied two groups which in previous studies, including those of the main authors of this study, have revealed different attributional patterns. In order to be able to compare our findings with the previous literature, we studied children aged 5 to 6, and 8 to 9, the age groups studied most in comparable research. The two moral transgressions, i.e. stealing chocolate and breaking a promise, were also used in the studies mentioned above. While both these transgressions refer to the violation of moral duties, they may be of different psychological meaning. The consequences of a violation of property rights may be sanctioned more intensively and may therefore be easier to understand for younger children than the violation of promise-keeping. Both types of violation may therefore elicit different attributions of feelings and different reasons supporting them.

To sum up, we examined the incidence of the happy victimizer phenomenon from different perspectives: (a) a self-other perspective, e.g. children's attributions of emotions to a hypothetical victimizer and the emotions attributed to the self; (b) a

factual or descriptive versus a deontic or prescriptive perspective, e.g. how children morally judge the positive or negative emotions attributed to a victimizer, and (c) a person-evaluation perspective, e.g. how children morally evaluate the person of the transgressor.

Based on previous research on children's social-cognitive development (e.g. Shantz, 1983) on young children's moral awareness and their concerns for others' welfare (Eisenberg, 1982; Keller, 1996; Turiel, 1983), as well as on previous findings on children's attribution of emotions, we predicted that, regardless of culture, children would be more likely to use a happy victimizer attribution (1) on other- than on self-oriented questions and (2) on factual than on moral questions. For both types of questions, differences should be greater among the older than the younger children. Furthermore, we expected that children would morally evaluate the person of the victimizer negatively, independent of the emotion attribution (e.g. positive or negative feelings). It is an open question whether cultural differences are obtained in the attributional split between self and other. Concerning the type of violation, we expected that the violation of the property norm compared to the promise norm might elicit negative feelings more frequently in the younger children, while no such differences might be obtained in the older children. Concerning the reasons for emotions, we expected that the younger children might use external sanctions more frequently in the property violation compared to the promise violation, while no such differences might exist in the older children.

Method

Participants

Sixty-four Portuguese children and 59 German children participated in this study ($N = 146$). The Portuguese sample consisted of 32 children aged 5 to 6 (5;0 to 6;0, $M = 5;4$ years) and 32 children aged 8 to 9 (8;6 to 9;2, $M = 8;8$ years) from Lisbon, with an equal number of boys and girls in each age group. The German sample consisted of 27 children aged 5 to 6 (4;7 to 6;6, $M = 5;6$ years) and 32 children aged 8 to 9 (8;0 to 9;8, $M = 8;9$ years) from Berlin, with approximately equal numbers of boys and girls in each age group. The younger children from both samples were enrolled in Kindergarten. The 8- to 9-year-olds were third graders and attended primary (public) school. All children belonged to middle- or upper-middle-class families.

Materials

Two moral transgressions were used which refer to physical and to psychological consequences: 'stealing' has been used frequently (e.g. Arsenio & Kramer, 1992; Keller *et al.*, 1996, 2002; Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988). Breaking a promise has been used with a different content by Keller *et al.* (1996). Each transgression was illustrated by a three-frame sequence of cartoons with an accompanying story. The cartoons depicted male or female characters matching the gender of each participant.

In the stealing story, a child arrives at school and leaves a jacket with a chocolate bar in the hall (cartoon 1). Cartoon 2 shows the protagonist (victimizer) taking the chocolate. Cartoon 3 shows the first child (victim) noting that the chocolate has been stolen. In the promise story, a protagonist promises to play table tennis with another

child at a certain time of the day (cartoon 1). The second cartoon shows the protagonist (victimizer) watching TV. Cartoon 3 shows the other child (victim) waiting in the table tennis room.

Procedure and scoring

Children were individually interviewed about the following questions:

- (1) *Moral judgment*: Is this right, what X (victimizer) did? Why/why not?
- (2) *Emotion attribution to victimizer*: How does X (victimizer) feel at the end of the story? Why does s/he feel this way? (If the child said that the victimizer felt good and bad at the same time, s/he was further asked: What do you think s/he felt more: more good or more bad? Why?)
- (3) *Emotion attribution to self*: How would you feel, if you had done that? Why? (If the child said that s/he would feel good and bad at the same time, we proceeded as in question 2).
- (4) *Moral evaluation of emotions attributed to the victimizer*: You said before that the protagonist (victimizer) felt good/bad at the end of the story. Is it right or not right that s/he feels this way? Why?
- (5) *Moral evaluation of the victimizer*: Is the protagonist (victimizer) a good or a bad person? Why?

Stories were presented in a counterbalanced order. To avoid effects of order of presentation, the two alternatives in questions 2 and 3 (feelings of protagonist or self) were alternated in their order. Children's answers were transcribed verbatim for coding.

Question 1 aimed at assessing children's understanding of the transgressions as immoral actions. The content of the moral judgment was scored as 'right' or 'not right.'

Questions 2 and 3 assessed the attribution of emotions to victimizer and self in a descriptive perspective. Emotions were classified as positive (e.g. 'protagonist/self felt good and/or happy'), negative (e.g. 'protagonist/self felt bad and/or unhappy'), and mixed (e.g. 'protagonist/self felt a little good and a little bad'). Inter-rater agreement between two independent coders in each culture was 98%. Of the few mixed emotions attributed initially by some older children, most children had changed to either positive or negative when they were asked to choose between 'more good' or 'more bad.' Therefore we did not include mixed emotions in the further analyses.

Children's moral judgment of the emotions on question 4 was coded as moral or immoral, depending on the feeling attributed to the victimizer, positive or negative. A 'moral evaluation' was scored if the child judged positive emotions as not right or negative emotions as right. A 'non-moral evaluation' was scored if the child judged positive emotions as right or negative emotions as not right. Inter-rater agreement for this classification was 95%.

The last question assessed children's moral evaluation of the victimizer as a person. As nearly all children evaluated the victimizer's person to be either 'bad' or 'good', the middle category (mixed) was combined with the category 'bad'. Inter-rater agreement on this question was 99%.

Children's reasons for emotion attributions and moral evaluations were classified according to coding systems used in previous research (e.g. Lourenço, 1997; Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988). Three mutually exclusive categories were defined:

- (1) *Outcome oriented*: children justified the victimizer's emotion by reference to the desired goal (e.g. 's/he felt happy because now s/he has the chocolate'/ 'is watching TV').
- (2) *Morally oriented*: children reasoned that the victimizer felt bad because he or she had violated a moral norm or was concerned with the negative effects for the victim (e.g. 'felt bad because it is not all right/not nice to steal'; 'feels pity and remorse').
- (3) *External sanctions oriented*: children reasoned that the victimizer's emotions were due to an awareness of sanctions by the victim (e.g. 's/he felt bad because the other child was angry and will hit back in the future') or an authority (e.g. 's/he felt bad because parent or teacher will be angry').

In the very few cases where a composite justification would be appropriate, we coded only the reasons mentioned first. Inter-rater agreement was 96%.

Results

Statistical analyses

We used log-linear model procedures within SPSS-X/VMS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to test main and interaction effects between the variables. Hierarchical log-linear models were run in order to find the most parsimonious model. Log-linear analyses were computed in order to estimate single parameters for the final model of the hierarchical log-linear procedure. The reference category of each factor for the z values in the log-linear analyses is indicated by (r). Sex was included as control variable in all models. As no sex effects were obtained in any of the hierarchical log-linear models, we did not include this variable in the final analyses in order to increase the power of the models. Table 1 shows the significant effects (partial χ^2) of the hierarchical log-linear model procedures and parameter estimations (z values) of each of the corresponding log-linear models. Only statistically significant main and interaction effects that include the target variables are reported.

Children's moral understanding of rule violations

Children from both cultures and age levels answered in their moral judgment that the transgression of the protagonist was not right (97%). As nearly all children understood that the transgression involved a violation of a moral norm, this variable was not included in further analyses.

Concerning the reasons given for the emotion attributions and the different moral evaluations, it turned out that children used outcome-oriented reasons when they referred to positive feelings of the transgressor or self. They used moral reasons with almost no exception when they explained the attributed negative feelings of the transgressor or the self or the moral evaluation of the feelings. Similarly, they referred to moral reasons when they evaluated the protagonist negatively. In both cases, the category external sanctions did practically not occur. Therefore, we did not include the reasons in further analyses because they correspond to the positive and negative attribution of emotions and the positive and negative evaluations.

In the following, we will describe the results of the hierarchical log-linear analyses (see Table 1 for an overview).

Table 1 Results of log-linear analyses

Effect and interaction	d.f.	Partial χ^2	p	z-value
1. Emotion attribution to victimizer and self (EA)				
EA × culture	1	4.89	.03	2.09
EA × theme	1	11.32	.00	-3.17
EA × age	1	68.65	.00	7.64
EA × type of violator	1	48.41	.00	6.27
EA × theme × culture	1	4.88	.03	1.98
2. Consistency of emotion attribution (CEA)				
CEA × age	2	49.75	.00	-5.99
CEA × culture	2	8.26	.02	-3.83
				n.s.
CEA × type of violator	2	39.00	.00	-3.00
				-3.58
				-4.64
3. Moral evaluation of the victimizer as a person (PE)				
PE × age	1	18.11	.00	4.05
PE × theme	1	8.33	.00	-2.35
PE × culture × theme	1	4.89	.03	2.02

Children's emotion attributions to victimizer and self

The factors emotion (positive(*r*)/negative), culture (Portugal(*r*)/Germany), age (younger(*r*)/older), theme (promise(*r*)/stealing/) and type of violator (protagonist(*r*)/self) were included in the analyses. The final model of the hierarchical log-linear procedure included a four-way interaction of emotion × age × theme × type of violator, a three-way interaction of emotion × age × culture, and a three-way interaction of emotion × theme × culture ($\chi^2(10) = 6.08$ $p = .81$).

Log-linear analyses revealed no statistically significant z -value in the four-way interaction. In spite of this, we include the figure of this interaction because it illustrates the systematic effect that negative emotions are attributed consistently more frequently to the self than to the hypothetical transgressor, and consistently more frequently in the promise than in the property violation (Fig. 1).

Concerning the statistically significant effects, more negative emotions were attributed than positive emotions ($z = 5.73$). German children attributed more negative emotions than Portuguese children ($z = 2.09$), and older children attributed more negative emotions than younger children ($z = 7.64$). All children attributed more negative emotions to the self than to the protagonist ($z = 6.27$): while 48% of the children attributed negative emotions to the hypothetical victimizer, 76% ascribed negative emotions to the self. Additional χ^2 tests revealed a developmental effect for both, the hypothetical victimizer and self in both cultures (see Fig. 1): older children attributed significantly more frequently negative emotions both to the protagonist ($\chi^2(1) = 21.32$, $p < .001$) and to the self ($\chi^2(1) = 50.18$, $p < .001$). This effect is statistically significant for both violations.

Furthermore, children in general attributed more negative emotions in the case of promise violation than in the case of stealing ($z = -3.17$). The statistically significant interaction with culture revealed that this type of violation effect is due to the Portuguese children: they attributed significantly more negative feelings in the promise story compared to the stealing story, while the German children did not show this difference ($z = 1.98$, see Fig. 2).

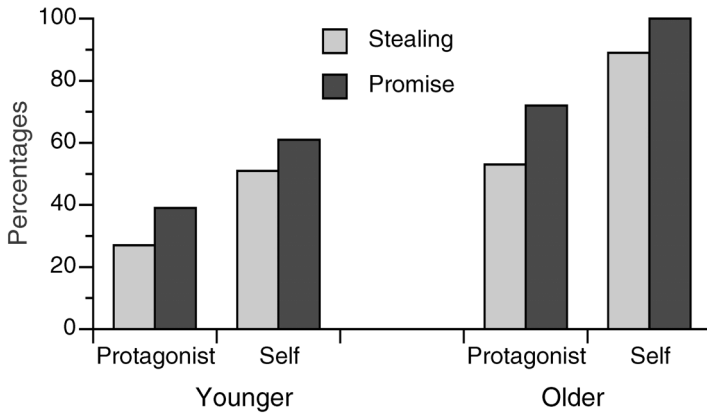


Figure 1. Frequencies (%) of negative emotions attributed to protagonist and self by younger and older children in the two simulations of rule violation.

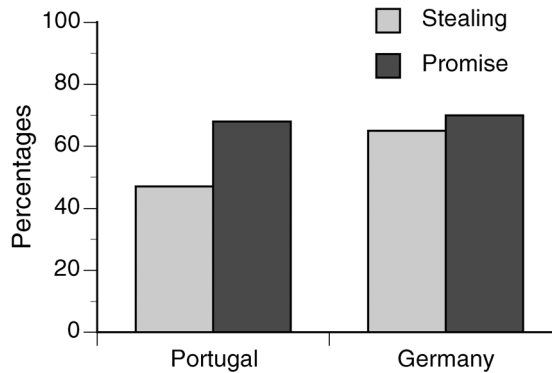


Figure 2. Cross-cultural comparison of frequencies (%) of negative emotions attributed in the two situations of rule violation.

Consistency of emotion attribution across the two violations. We analysed whether children in their attribution of emotion were consistent or inconsistent across both violation scenarios. Three patterns were defined: (1) consistent attribution of positive emotions in both stories (consistently positive); (2) consistent attribution of negative emotions in both stories (consistently negative); and (3) inconsistent emotion attributions (inconsistent). A hierarchical log-linear model was computed, including the variables consistency pattern (negative (r)/inconsistent/positive), culture (Portugal(r)/Germany), age (younger(r)/older) and type of violator (victimizer(r)/self). The final model consisted of the three-way interaction of consistency pattern \times age \times type of violator and the two-way interaction of consistency pattern \times culture ($\chi^2(9) = 7.90$, $p = .54$).

The log-linear analyses showed no statistically significant z -value for the three-way interaction. Independent of type of violator, older children more frequently attributed consistently negative feelings than inconsistent or consistently positive feelings, whereas the younger children used the three patterns equally frequently ($z = -5.99$; $z = -3.83$, see Fig. 3). Portuguese children attributed consistently positive emotions

more frequently than the German children, while the German children attributed consistently negative emotions more frequently than the Portuguese children ($z = -3.00$). Furthermore, significantly more children attributed consistently negative emotions to the self, while the three patterns were used equally frequently for the hypothetical victimizer ($z = -3.58$; $z = -4.64$, Fig. 4).

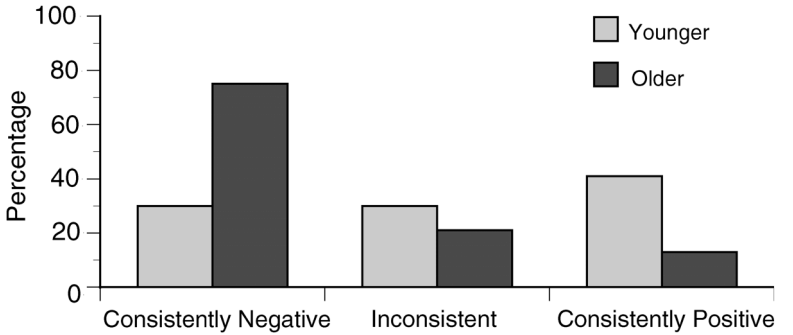


Figure 3. Frequencies (%) of consistency patterns in emotion attribution according to age.

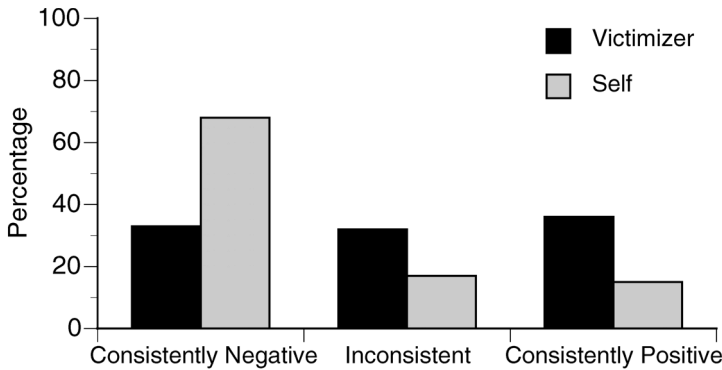


Figure 4. Frequencies (%) of consistency patterns of emotion attribution to victimizer and self.

Children’s moral evaluation of emotions attributed to victimizer

Four logically possible patterns of moral or non-moral evaluation of feelings were coded depending on whether children had judged the positive or negative emotions attributed to the hypothetical victimizer as morally right or not right: two moral patterns (judging happy feelings as not right or unhappy feelings as right) and two non-moral patterns (judging happy feelings as right or unhappy feelings as not right). Table 2 shows the frequencies of patterns in the two age groups and in the two cultures.

Comparing the frequencies of the patterns in the two cultures and age groups, only the Portuguese younger children used the non-moral pattern 1 ‘happy feelings are right’ with a rather high frequency, while this pattern is nearly non-existent in the other groups. Owing to the low frequencies, no statistical analysis was computed. Similarly,

the non-moral pattern 4 'unhappy feelings are not right' was used very infrequently. In contrast, both moral patterns were used rather frequently. Pattern 2 'happy feelings are not right' was most frequently used by the German younger children compared to all other groups, but this effect was not statistically significant. A significant age effect but no effect of culture obtained in the moral pattern 3 'unhappy feelings are right' which in both cultures was used more frequently by the older than by the younger children ($p < .001$).

Table 2. Frequencies (%) of the four patterns of emotion evaluation by age and culture

Pattern	Feeling attribution (descriptive)	Feeling evaluation (prescriptive)	5–6 years		8–9 years	
			P	G	P	G
1	Happy	Right	39	0	2	3
2	Happy	Not right	33	61	38	38
3	Unhappy	Right	23	26	59	54
4	Unhappy	Not right	5	13	2	5

P = Portugal; G = Germany.

Note. Percentages are based on children within age groups and cultures.

Children's moral evaluation of the victimizer as a person

All Portuguese children evaluated the victimizer as a bad person, while only 72% ($N = 39$) of the younger and 89% ($N = 56$) of the older German children gave this judgment. This difference between the two age groups in the German sample is statistically significant ($\chi^2(1) = 5.29, p < .05$). The age difference is not statistically significant if tested for the two violations separately.

In order to control for the effect of the emotion attribution (positive or negative) to the victimizer, we combined the variables of person evaluation and attribution of feelings according to four logically possible patterns: two patterns of positive person evaluation, (1) positive evaluation/positive feeling, (2) positive evaluation/negative feeling and two patterns of negative person evaluation, (3) negative evaluation/positive feeling, and (4) negative evaluation/negative feeling (see Table 3). As none of the Portuguese children had evaluated the victimizer as a good person, the frequencies of patterns 1 and 2 were zero for this culture. In comparison, 19% of the younger German children showed pattern 1 and evaluated the victimizer as a good person, even in the case of attribution of positive feelings. Only 3% of the older German children were evaluated this way. Even in the case of attribution of negative feelings, fewer than 10% of the German children in both age groups evaluated the victimizer as a good person (pattern 2).

For the comparison of the two frequently used patterns 3 and 4 of negative person evaluation in case of positive or negative feeling attribution, we computed a hierarchical log-linear model including the variables (negative) person evaluation pattern (negative evaluation–positive feeling(r)/negative evaluation–negative feeling), culture (Portugal(r)/Germany), age (younger(r)/older) and type of violation (promise(r)/stealing).

The final model of the hi-log-linear analysis included the interactions of person

evaluation pattern \times age, person evaluation pattern \times theme and the main effect for culture. The fit was $\chi^2(9) = 11.13, p = .27$.

The log-linear analysis showed that the older children significantly more often scored in the pattern of negative evaluation-negative feelings ($z = 4.05$). Children overall used this pattern more often in the promise than in the stealing violation ($z = -2.35$). However, Portuguese children used the pattern negative feelings-negative person evaluation more frequently in the promise violation while no such difference was observed for the German children ($z = 2.02$, Fig. 5).

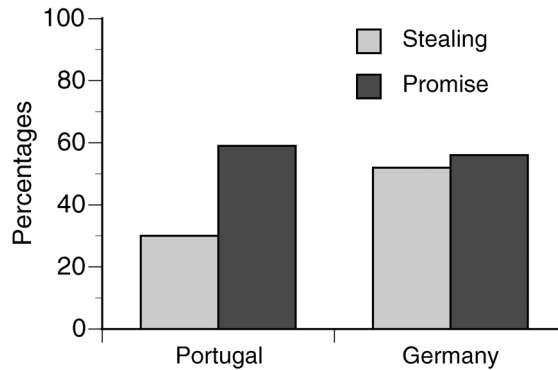


Figure 5. Frequencies (%) of patterns of negative person evaluation of the victimizer.

Table 3. Frequencies (%) of the four patterns of person evaluation by age and culture

Pattern	Feeling attribution (descriptive)	Person evaluation (prescriptive)	5–6 years		8–9 years	
			P	G	P	G
1	Positive	Positive	0	19	0	3
2	Negative	Positive	0	9	0	8
3	Positive	Negative	72	43	39	33
4	Negative	Negative	28	30	61	55

P = Portugal; G = Germany.

Note. Percentages are based on children within age groups and cultures.

Intra-individual comparisons of attribution of feelings and moral and person evaluation

An intra-individual comparison of emotion attributions to the hypothetical victimizer and self revealed a significant relationship of $\chi^2 = 49.48 (1), p < .000$. We were in particular interested in the 22% ($N = 54$) of children who attributed positive emotions to the hypothetical victimizer and to the self. For these children, we controlled how they morally evaluated the happy feelings of the hypothetical victimizer. Twenty-seven of the 54 children judged the happy feelings of the victimizer as right. Twenty-five of these children belong to the group of younger Portuguese children, and the two others

are older German children. Children using this pattern seem to be unaware of the moral implications of the violation, both for the victimizer and for the self. However, if we check how these 27 children evaluated the person of the hypothetical victimizer, we find that all of them evaluate the victimizer as a bad person.

Discussion

This study had three main goals. First, to compare Portuguese and German 5- to 6-, and 8- to 9-year-old children's attribution of emotions in two acts of victimization, second, to compare children's attributions of moral (negative) or immoral (positive) emotions to others and to the self, and third, to examine how children evaluate the emotions they attribute to victimizers and the victimizer's person from a moral point a view. The findings should help us to clarify inconsistencies in previous research and to gain a better understanding of the happy victimizer phenomenon.

We analysed only the content of the feelings and moral judgments of the children and not the reasons for these, which we had assessed as well. This was due to the fact that nearly all children judged the violations as morally not right and gave moral reasons for this judgment. External sanctions occurred only very infrequently. Similarly, children used exclusively outcome-related reasons when they attributed positive feelings to the victimizer or to the self and moral reasons when they attributed negative feelings or evaluated the person of the victimizer negatively. Again, external sanctions were mentioned only very infrequently.

The findings from this study support the happy victimizer phenomenon in particular in the younger children and a developmental shift in the attribution of emotions to a hypothetical victimizer. However, this shift is not as salient as in some of the previous research because only about 50% of the older compared to about 30% of the younger children attributed negative emotions to the victimizer. These results also support the self-other split in emotion attribution documented by Keller and her co-workers: positive (immoral) feelings were attributed more frequently to the protagonist in the story than to the self. This split is not as dramatic as these authors found it for the Chinese children (Keller *et al.*, 1996, 2002), but rather more moderate as found for younger German children (Keller & Malti, 1999). However, the emotions attributed to the self in the younger children are as high as the emotions attributed to the hypothetical victimizer in the older children. And while only about 50% of the older children attributed negative emotions to the victimizer, about 85% of the older children attributed negative emotions to the self. Thus, in spite of clear developmental differences (positive emotions almost disappeared among the older children on the self-oriented question) and some cultural differences (Portuguese children reported more often that they themselves would feel happy), the number of positive emotions, i.e. the happy victimizer phenomenon decreased substantively from victimizer to self. These effects were very stable for the two violations, but contrary to our expectations, negative feelings were elicited more frequently for the promise violation, compared to the property violation. This effect, however, was mostly due to the Portuguese children. Given that, compared to the promise violation, the stealing of a chocolate bar resulted in a more tangible outcome for the transgressor, one might think of this as a possible explanation for the appearance of fewer negative emotions on the stealing than the promise story. This fact may have been more salient in Portuguese than German children because the former, belonging to a poorer country, may desire more

to get certain material things. However, we admit that this is a speculation. As children's reasons were consistent with their attribution of emotions to victimizers and themselves, i.e. children tended to invoke moral reasons for negative emotions and outcome reasons for positive emotions, the self-other split in attribution can be taken as a fact, not an artefact.

Also in agreement with our expectations are the findings concerning consistency in attribution across the two violations. Older children more frequently attributed consistently negative feelings across both violations, while younger children somewhat more frequently attributed consistently positive feelings. However, in general, the younger children used the three patterns with a rather similar frequency. The consistency patterns in the attributions to victimizer and self reveal a similar picture. In this case, consistently negative emotion attribution in both violations occurred most frequently for the self, while consistently positive emotion attribution was evidenced somewhat more frequently in the emotion attribution to the hypothetical victimizer. But again, in the attribution to victimizer, there was no difference between the three consistency patterns. Overall, these findings show that, contrary to what has been postulated so far (Lourenço, 1997; Nunner-Winkler & Sodian, 1988), children's attributions of positive emotions to victimizers do not necessarily indicate children's emotional and moral immaturity or their moral motivation.

This interpretation is further supported by the findings with regard to the moral judgment of the feelings and of the person of the victimizer. The results of our study show clearly that, in spite of some developmental and cultural differences, children from both ages and cultures used a moral pattern (i.e. when doing something wrong it is right to feel bad and not right to feel good) more often than a non-moral pattern (i.e. when doing something wrong, it is right to feel good and not right to feel bad). Since children's justifications for their moral evaluations are consistent with this finding, it can also be taken as a fact, not an artefact.

The moral standpoint also becomes evident in the evaluation of the victimizer's person. Here the Portuguese children took a morally radical position compared to the German children. When they attributed positive feelings to the victimizer, they judged him or her without any exception as a bad person. In contrast, some German children—more younger than older children—evaluated the victimizer positively in this case. Taking into account the attribution of feelings to the victimizer, the results showed that the pattern of 'negative person evaluation and attribution of positive feelings' occurred most frequently in the younger Portuguese children, while the pattern of 'negative evaluation–negative feelings' was used more frequently by the older children from both cultures. Portuguese children also used this pattern more frequently in the promise violation, due to the effect that they attributed negative emotions more frequently in the promise violation. As mentioned in the introduction, Nunner-Winkler and Sodian (1988) had found that children judged a sad thief as less bad than a happy thief. In our findings the victimizer was evaluated negatively independent of the emotion attribution (good or bad). It seems that the person evaluation is a function of the fact of having committed the violation and not a function of the feelings over the violation.

If we analyse the intra-individual consistency across the different questions, we might say that some of the other children appeared as happy victimizers with regard to some criteria. Thus, it turned out that about 20% of the children attributed positive feelings to the hypothetical victimizer and the self, and about half of these children judged these feelings as (morally) right. While this last group of 25 children might be

called 'real happy victimizers', it turned out that all these children who belong to the Portuguese young group evaluated the victimizer as a bad person. Thus, even these children seem to have a certain moral awareness, which makes it implausible to see them as exclusively happy victimizers.

Overall, the results of this study support children's moral awareness of the situation, in spite of attributing positive feelings to a victimizer. The developmental difference in the other-self split found in the present study, with older children attributing almost only negative emotions to themselves and still many positive emotions to the victimizer, is in agreement with the developmental literature on social cognition, which shows that older children are more capable of distinguishing and coordinating self-other perspectives (Shantz, 1983). Concerning the cultural difference in the split, with Portuguese younger children attributing positive emotions, even to themselves, more frequently than their German counterparts, we may speculate about differences in moral socialization in the family or in the kindergarten that may influence the speed of socio-cognitive development.

Our findings also support the prediction that children are more likely to fall into the happy victimizer pattern in the descriptive-psychological than in the prescriptive-deontic question, both in the evaluation of feelings and in the evaluation of the person of the victimizer. This is consistent with Turiel's (1983) theory because it shows that even young children do make different judgments for the psychological domain and the moral domain (e.g. transgressors may be happy at hurting people, descriptive-psychological knowledge, but they should feel sad, prescriptive-moral knowledge).

Our findings suggest that younger children may have attributed positive (and not negative) emotions to the victimizer because they take a cognitive-predictive stance ('How does the victimizer feel after *getting* what she desired?'), while the older children more frequently take a moral stance ('How should the protagonist feel after *stealing* the desired good?'). This moral stance, however, seems to depend on the spontaneous identification with the victimizer. If this identification does not take place—as most clearly found for the Chinese children—the older children seem to maintain the cognitive-predictive stance, implying that a morally bad person will feel good about the violation. If this were the case, interpretation of the happy victimizer pattern—especially in older children—as a lack in moral motivation must be seen cautiously. The overall tendency for older children, compared to younger children, to make more use of the moral pattern and to attribute more negative emotions either to the victimizer or to themselves is consistent with most of the studies on children's understanding of emotions in acts of victimization (see also Lake, Lane, & Harris, 1995) and with the developmental literature in general which shows that older children are more advanced in their moral development (Piaget, 1965) and in their sensitivity to others' needs and plight (Eisenberg, 1982; Keller, 1996).

Compared to their German counterparts, the Portuguese younger children more frequently revealed a non-moral pattern of attributing positive emotions to the victimizer and themselves, and appealed to outcome reasons to justify these positive emotions. Again, this cultural effect may be due to differences in moral socialization, which may influence the speed of socio-cognitive development. True as these explanations may be, they cannot rule out the possible influence of the particularities of both languages in children's questioning. For example, question 4 (moral evaluation of the victimizer's emotions), was relatively difficult for the Portuguese younger children, and very often had to be rephrased. Taken together, the fact that, compared to their German counterparts, Portuguese younger children more often considered the

victimizer to be bad, and the fact that culture differences are minor among the older children, may be taken to suggest that the 'linguistic' explanation is more viable than the developmental or the social-context explanations.

Our findings are also consonant with previous findings in social psychology which show that, when making judgments about self or others, participants tend to present themselves in a positive manner (i.e. self-serving bias; see Miller & Ross, 1975). The attributional difference between other-self and the descriptive-prescriptive attributional difference indicate that children's attributions of positive emotions to victimizers cannot be taken simply as immoral behaviour or as a token of children's emotional and moral immaturity. They rather suggest that in previous studies when children attributed happy feelings to the victimizer 'apparent' and 'real' happy victimizers might not have been distinguished. The fact that the other-self split found in the present research was not demonstrated in one previous study tapping this distinction (e.g. Barden *et al.*, 1980) might be explained on the basis that a split occurs only when children do not spontaneously identify with the protagonist but evaluate him or her negatively.

All in all, in spite of some developmental and cultural differences, this cross-cultural study points to two clear results: (1) children were more likely to fall into the happy victimizer pattern when they attributed emotions to others than to themselves; and (2) children were more likely to fall prey to such a pattern when they made descriptive-psychological judgments than when they made prescriptive-moral judgments. The distinctions made in this study seem to be of value in reaching a better understanding of children's emotions in acts of victimization. Missing this distinction, we run the risk of assessing unfairly and incorrectly the emotions children feel and attribute in such settings and contexts. In particular in some applied contexts, in which the happy victimizer phenomenon is important, such as the cognitive and emotional representation of bullying, it seems necessary to explore fully the emotional sensitivity of children. As acts of victimization (and bullying in particular) are a serious problem in schools, any effort to lower their incidence is worthwhile. For these efforts to be relatively successful, however, we should understand the very nature of such acts (see Crick & Dodge, 1996). Our finding that children's attribution of emotions to victimizers depends on several aspects and is a subtle process may be of value for this purpose. We agree with the view of Arsenio and Lemerise (2001, p. 68) that what is largely missing in some fields of application (e.g. from explanations of aggression) is a systematic account of the role of emotions and emotion processes. The conceptual clarification of phenomena like the happy victimizer is an important step in this direction.

Acknowledgements

The study was supported by a grant of the CRUP (Board of Rectors of Portuguese Universities) and a grant of the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Program). The authors would like to thank all the German and Portuguese children who participated in the research reported here. Elliot Turiel in a common discussion encouraged us to explore some aspects pursued in this article. Furthermore, we want to thank Judith Glueck and Kurt Kreppner for methodological advice and one anonymous reviewer for thoughtful methodological comments.

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Received 12 December 2000; revised version received 2 May 2002

