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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates what children of various ages think about concealing or revealing the wrongdoing of a friend in a hypothetical conflict between honesty to parents and loyalty to a friend. The study also examines how children's reasoning was affected by the expectation of parental punishment. A total of 200 children (20 boys and 20 girls aged 5, 6, 8, 10, and 12; 100 German and 100 Australian) were asked in semistructured interviews what they thought about stories in which the protagonist confessed a misdeed to a friend who, in turn, revealed this to his mother. The analyses showed that the majority of 5- and 6-year-olds advocated obedience to parents, some of them because they thought the transgressor deserved punishment. Older children tended to favor secrecy, in order to spare their hypothetical friend parental chastisement. When older children advocated confession, it was generally for tactical reasons (diminution of punishment) or with "therapeutic" motives (relief of conscience by talking about the deed). Issues of the appropriateness of punishments, of making good for the wrongdoing and the role of friends as moral authorities, took on a greater importance with increasing age. The strategies of the children reflect developmental changes in the concept of punishment (from retaliation to explanation) and in the concept of friendship (older children emphasizing loyalty obligations). German children were more likely than Australian children to hide wrongdoing from parents. (Contains 3 tables of data and 18 references.) (RS)

Honesty versus Loyalty :

What Children Think about Dealing with their Friend's Wrongdoing

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Abstract

The present study investigates what children of various ages think about concealing or revealing the wrongdoing of a friend in a hypothetical conflict between honesty to parents and loyalty to a friend. We were especially interested in how children`s reasoning was affected by the expectation of parental punishment.

A total of 200 children (20 boys and 20 girls aged 5, 6, 8, 10 and 12 ; 100 German and 100 Australian) were asked in semistructured interviews what they thought about stories in which the protagonist confessed a misdeed to a friend who, in turn, revealed this to his mother. The analyses showed that the majority of five- and six-year-olds advocated obedience to parents, some of them because they thought the transgressor deserved punishment. Older children tended to favor secrecy, in order to spare their hypothetical friend parental chastisement. When older children advocated confession, it was generally for tactical reasons (diminution of punishment) or with "therapeutic" motives (relief of conscience by talking about the deed). Issues of the appropriateness of punishments, of making good for the wrongdoing and the role of friends as moral authorities took on a greater importance with increasing age.

The strategies of the children reflect developmental changes in the concept of punishment (from retaliation to explanation) and in the concept of friendship (older children emphasizing loyalty obligations). German children are more likely than Australian children to hide wrongdoing from parents.

Key words: children, moral reasoning, punishment, friendship,

Introduction

In every day life children often face conflicts in which they must decide between honesty/obedience to parents and loyalty to friends. Yet we know relatively little of what children think about such conflicts: If a friend tells them about a wrongdoing he or she has committed, will they disclose it to a parent or show discretion for the sake of a friend? Furthermore, what is the role of parental punishment and the expectation of it in shaping children`s reasoning about such conflict situations? The present study investigates what children of various ages think about concealing or revealing the wrongdoings of a friend. We were especially interested in determining the role played by an expectation of parental chastisement and by the functions of potential punishment.

Punishment can take an extreme variety of forms. In pedagogical and psychological terms, punishment implies the use of various training methods involving averse stimuli. These may be either direct in character - physical blows, verbal chastisement, (the famous "lecture") - or indirect, taking the form of a suspension of privileges - grounded", no TV, no play with friends, no dessert. Humiliation can also be employed as a punishment, although children do not tend to find it painful or frightening until they have reached a certain age (Droege, 1926). Physical punishment, of course, is still the most controversial form of all.

Though we have found no direct studies of our question at least three research domains are related to our aims.

1. The concepts of children about the the effectiveness and appropriateness of punishment and about amount of punishment a wrongdoer deserves.

We know that children with growing age have different views about the necessity and appropriateness of punishment (Droege, 1926, Karniol & Miller, 1981). Piaget (1965) described two views of punishment. Younger children (aged 6 and 7 years) advocated retaliation and retribution, that is, they tended to see punishment as just and

necessary, and also effective to the extent that the child was made obedient by means of some infliction of pain. Older children of nine years and above considered retaliation as morally unnecessary. Their conception of punishment was based on tit for tat, a punishment being seen as just when it demonstrated to the wrongdoer what he had done by doing something similar to him in turn. Such punishments, for instance, included putting things right, letting the culprit feel the consequences of his misdeed, helping him understand the significance of his misbehavior or feel its negative effect on his social relationships. In the children's opinion, explanations or disapproval were quite sufficient to these ends.

Selman (1980) in a more differentiated view, presented a five-stage-model of the conception of the essence and function of punishment. For the age-group comprised in the present study three levels are relevant. Children on level 0 viewed punishment as an automatic reaction of parents to a child's transgressions. On level 1 they viewed punishment as a teaching advice for informing children what is good or bad and a lesson from above, for the purpose of "setting things straight". On level 2 children began to view the parent-child relationship as a reciprocal emotional bond and punishment as a form of communication that appeals to the child`s own judgment. They may now come to the conclusion that physical punishment is not an adequate means to make the child obey. This corresponds to Piaget`s findings that older children considered physical punishment as morally unnecessary and pleaded for explanations or disapproval.

There is ample evidence indicating that in judgments about the amount of punishment a wrongdoer deserves, children consider a variety of factors, such as intentionality and amount of damage done (Hommers, 1990; Doil, Dettenborn & Boehnke, 1992; for an overview see Lickona, 1976), or type of transgression (Tisak, 1993). We have found no studies, however, which investigate whether the closeness of their friendship with the transgressor will influence children`s judgments about the nature and amount of punishment they consider is deserved.

2. The children`s concepts of friendship. There is a growing literature about children`s concepts of friendship and friendship norms. This reveals, for instance, that keeping the secret of a friend is an important developmental step in friendship concepts. Watson and Valtin (1997a) found that a mature sharing of secrets began to be shown by 8 to 10-year olds in relation to the emerging expression of trust in friendship. Damon (1977), Selman (1980), Hoppe-Graff & Keller (1988) and Valtin (1991) have shown that the concept of friendship develops in a sequence of patterns, from a momentary play relationship to a more intimate relationship connected with certain norms and obligations (e.g., to help, to keep a secret). Friendship is seen as an important agency for socialisation. The structure of this relation among equals is regarded as highly important for the socio-cognitive and moral development of children because it opens the way for types of egalitarian and symmetrical conflict that do not arise in the parent-child relationship which is more unilateral and characterized by authority and obedience (Youniss, 1980). With increasing age children begin to separate from their parents, and attach more importance to their peer friendships. Piaget, in an early study about tale-telling (1965), investigated children`s reasoning about a conflict between obedience to father and solidarity with the brother. He found that young children, on the request of the father, reported the disobedience of the brother while the older ones kept it secret because of solidarity among children.

So we might expect that with increasing age children prefer loyalty towards peers or friends than obedience to parents.

But will this solidarity and the protection of a friend who had commited a wrongdoing be so strong that it overrides children's deference to parents or sense of justice? This leads to another piece of relevant reseach.

3. The moral reactions to the friend`s transgression. Should the wrongdoer get off scot-free or should he or she be compelled to make good for damage done and/or be made to realize the impropriety of his or her behavior? Do children expect that the wrongdoer has feelings of guilt and remorse? Some of these reactions to misbehavior play a key role in research on moral awareness and are frequently mentioned as indicators of an "internalization" of norms and expression of an autonomous morality (see Hoffman, 1970) which are mainly to be expected in older children (10 years and above). Likewise in Piaget`s study about the nature of punishment, only children that age pleaded for letting the culprit feel the consequences of his misdeed, helping him to understand the significance of his misbehavior and perhaps to put things right.

The investigation

Research questions and approach

The purpose of our investigation was to determine what children think about and would do in a conflict situation where a friend tells them about a wrongdoing and their mother comes and asks about it. Here two norms are in conflict, honesty: you should tell the truth to parents, and loyalty: you should protect a friend. We presented children with stories in which a child confessed a misdeed to a friend (having stolen money from mother's purse to buy an ice cream, having set a fire in the garage), and noted the reactions of our interviewees to these hypothetical situations.

Our approach is intended to provide a detailed description of children's arguments with regard to the role of anticipated punishment in their decisions whether to conceal or reveal an infringement, with regard to their conceptions of the function of punishment, and finally with regard to their "moral" reactions to the misdeeds of a friend.

Our study is an exploratory one. From the existing literature we may only conclude that younger children (5- and 6-year-olds) opt for obedience to parents and

would think the wrongdoer should be punished rightaway. Compared to older children (10- and 12-year-olds) they don`t yet have a concept of friendship that includes a loyalty rule. Older children have the notion of friendship obligations (keep a secret of a friend to protect and care for the friend) such that obedience to parents might be disregarded. We also expect that children with increasing age will begin to show indications of interiorized moral standards so that a child hearing about a friend`s wrongdoing will begin to speak about the guilty feelings of the friend and about means of making good. In other words, they will show evidence of Piaget`s second type of punishment.

The topic of our research is a link between sociocognitive and moral development. The sociocognitive aspect is how children think about understanding the motives of the friend, and the consequences of telling in regard to expected punishment, and how they conceptualize, differentiate and combine the norms of truth and loyalty. The moral aspect is how to deal with the wrongdoer. We might expect that both aspects will be more integrated in older children and that they will express not only a greater variety but also more complex strategies. However, we are more interested in the content of the arguments and not their formal structural complexity. Our purpose is to gain insight into the variety of experiences with parents and same-age peers which is reflected in the relationship between children's anticipation of punishment and their preferred behavioral strategies.

Method. The investigation described here is part of a more comprehensive study on the development of the conceptions of "secret" and "tattling" among German and Australian children (Watson & Valtin 1997a; 1997b). In an individual interview the children were told stories in which the actors, visible in photographs, were of the same sex as the interviewee. The plot of the girls' version of dilemma A ran as follows: Marianne tells Eva that she has secretly stolen money from her mother's purse in order to buy an ice-cream cone (dilemma A), or that she has set a fire in the garage (dilemma B). Eva's

mother joins them. When her mother asks, "Have you been up to something?" Eva immediately tells what her friend has done.

After reading the story aloud, various questions were first asked to ensure that the children had understood the story (which as a rule was the case). The children then were asked how they evaluated the matter, what they themselves would have done in the situation and why, whether the story involved a secret, and whether a girlfriend (or boyfriend) who arrived later should be told or not. In an interval between the two dilemmas described the children were interviewed about a story concerning the keeping of a secret for mother's birthday. This served the purpose of avoiding a fixation on childhood disobedience.

The interviews were conducted by experienced interviewers, tape-recorded, and transcribed.

Sample. The sample of 200 was drawn from 5, 6, 8, 10 and 12 year old children. Twenty in each age group (ten boys and ten girls) were taken from schools in middle class suburbs of both Sydney, Australia and Berlin, Germany.

Data Analysis. To analyze the interviews we employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to mutually supplement one another. The following description of results refer to four themes from the analysis of responses of the children as they sought to cope with the dilemmas:

(1) Confessing or concealing the misdeed of the friend. How many children would tell (or hide) the wrongdoing of their friend to an authority figure (their own mother)?

(2) Kind and effect of punishment. How many children mentioned various kinds of parental punishment they expected in relation to the two stories? Does the expected punishment have an effect on telling or hiding?

(3) Strategies and arguments children use in relation to punishment.

Since the children were not asked directly about punishment (we did not want to influence children`s answer patterns), we looked in the transcribed interviews for all passages where punishment had a direct influence on children`s decisions and their reasoning about their action strategies.

(4) Moral reactions to a friend`s wrongdoing, and the methods children suggested for "clearing one's conscience" or putting things right.

In each of these evaluative steps we checked differences regarding age, sex and nationality .

The interview coding was done by one coder with a second coder independently coding 20% of the interview scripts. A satisfactory intercoder agreement of 87% was obtained.

Results

There was no significant difference in the children's reactions to the two stories which contained two different forms of transgressions: a moral rule violation (stealing from mother) and a personal rule violation (setting fire in a garage with potential physical damage). Neither were there sex differences.

(1) Confessing or concealing the friend's misdeed

Let us first look at the children's replies to the questions: What would you have done if your boyfriend (girlfriend) had told you that he (she) had stolen money (or set a fire)? Do you think parents should know about it?". About half of the children in the whole sample opted in both dilemmas for confessing. However, there was a significant age difference. Well over half of the younger children (5- and 6-year-olds) advocated a confession of both misdeeds to the parents, whereas a majority of the older children (8-, 10-, 12- year-old) said they would keep it secret (for dilemma A: 2 (1, N = 198) = 32.67, $p < .00$; for dilemma B 2 (1, N = 198) = 7.18, $p < .01$).

There was also a significant nation difference for dilemma A: More German children - mainly in the older age group (8-, 10-, 12-year olds) - would hide the transgression from parental authority, 2 (1, N= 198) = 13.65, P<.02.

(2) The kind and effect of punishment

In order to get an impression about the variety of punishments children refer to in their reasoning, we counted all kinds of punishments that children mentioned as possible parental reactions to the transgressions. These may be categorized as follows:

Unspecific: "Getting into trouble", "being punished", Mum will be "angry" or "mad";

Verbal chastisement: "Getting yelled at", "a good talking-to", being "lectured" (meckern" in German);

Physical punishment: "Spanking", "hitting", "to get smacked";

Exclusion: Getting sent to one's room or to bed;

Involvement of authorities: Ringing up the police, or getting into prison.

Table 1 demonstrates how often various kinds of punishments are mentioned by the children, summing their responses to both stories.

Table 1. Frequencies of various kinds of punishment mentioned

	whole sample	Australia	Germany
nonspecific ("trouble")	113	85	28
verbal	40	3	37
physical	27	10	17
exclusion	10	1	9
calling police/authorities	10	6	4
	200	105	95

Psychologically speaking, the majority of punishments mentioned belonged to the category of an "infliction of aversive stimuli". Punishments of the "withdrawal of privileges" type were very rarely mentioned. No differences due to age and sex were

found. The assumption that boys are more frequently subject to corporal punishment and therefore would mention this with greater frequency than girls, was not supported by our results.

There was a nation difference, however. Significantly more Australian than German children mentioned parental punishment in terms of "getting into trouble" under the category "unspecific", while German children were more specific. Furthermore, their answers under the categories verbal and physical punishment reveal that they expect more severe treatment. The three Australian children referring to verbal punishment said, "they would have a big talk", "her mother would scold her," and she could warn her". These seem to be moderate forms of verbal punishment. German children speak more often of drastic forms: "being yelled at" and "(severe) scolding" (meckern, brüllen). A similar impression is given by the responses in the category of physical punishment: The ten Australian children speak mainly about "getting a smack", or, less frequently, "getting a spanking". The 17 German children speak about "schlagen" (hitting) or severe forms of hitting and tanning: "Prügel", "eine Abreibung kriegen", "Dresche".

Altogether, though Australian children refer slightly, but not significantly more often to punishments, these do not seem to be as severe as those referred to by the German respondents.

In a further step we asked whether the responses revealed an effect of anticipated punishment. For example, do children who mention punishment, more often hide the wrongdoing from their parents? This is not true for the whole sample, nor for the Australian subsample: If children mention punishment they would as frequently hide as tell it. There is a significant nation difference, however: If they mention parental punishment, German children would hide more often in both dilemmas: dilemma A, 2 (1, $N = 97$) $= 8.66$, $p < .01$; for dilemma C, 2 (1, $N = 96$) $= 4.31$, $p < .05$.

(3) Strategies and arguments of children concerning punishment

In this section we looked at the reasons children give for their preference for telling or hiding a friend`s transgression in all cases where punishment played a role in their reasoning. In the overall interview 166 examples were found in which childrens` reasoning about preferred hypothetical strategies was explicitly related to punishment. Table 2 shows the number and age-dependency of punishment related strategies mentioned by the 200 children in the course of the interview.

Table 2: Age and punishment related strategies (n=166)

	5/6 years	8 years	10/12 years
Hiding out of fear of punishment	34	22	54
Deserved punishment	19	5	6
Tactical openness	7	8	11

Note. The age groups refer to different sample sizes (n = 80 for 5/6 year- olds, 40 for 8 year -olds and 80 for 10/12 year-olds).

The children's decisions to conceal or reveal the transgression of the friend under the expectation of punishment were based on considerations of a highly diverse nature. Three reasoning types could be identified.

a) Not telling to protect a friend from punishment

The children in this group believed that forbidden or dangerous acts should by no means be revealed. Although such reactions were observed on all age levels, they were more frequent among the older children. Florian (12 years) had formulated a rule for his own use: "You shouldn't tell if you have done something wrong - that's sort of a rule of mine. Because it would get you into trouble". Christian (10 years) was also against telling, "because it's unfair [!] and he would get a scolding".

In Florian's case it was not clear whether he was protecting himself more than his hypothetical friend, but the others in the group evidently were convinced that it is

permissible and justified to save a friend from imminent punishment or, as most of the Australian children put it, preventing the friend from getting into "trouble". Keeping a secret and maintaining solidarity among friends were at the crux of their arguments.

Some children also were expressly willing to lie to the mother in order to conceal the friend's misdeed. Mario (10 years), stated that "Lying to mother is better than telling a friend's secret." Martin (12 years) would have lied to his mother, too: "Because I know my mum would call up his mum, and he would get in trouble because of me [!], and I wouldn't want that."

Hiding the misdeed out of fear of punishment was the most frequent response. It was mentioned in two thirds of the examples of the punishment related strategies of the children. Here again a significant nation difference was found. Seventy examples came from German children, and only 40 from Australian children, $2\ (2, N = 166) = 6.52$, $p < .05$. Nearly all German children who expected physical or severe verbal punishment from parents opted for concealment from parental authority.

Let us now look at the arguments of children who - in view of parental punishment - pleaded for telling the wrongdoing. Two different arguments could be identified.

b) Telling to bring about a well-deserved punishment

Some of the children argued in favour of openness so that the wrongdoer could be punished. When the interviewer asked: Did you think it was right for Thomas to tell his mother (that Peter stole money)? - Dennis (6 years) answered: Yes ... So Thomas' mother could call Peter's mother. - I.: Why? - D.: Then his Mom would scold him ... Peter should get a scolding. - I.: Why? - D.: Because he did it. - I.: What would you say if you were his mother? - D.: I would say he would get sent to his room. - I.: What would you say as his mother? - D.: That he was going to get a good spanking.

While most of the younger children (5 and 6 years old) considered punishment a logical consequence of the misdeed and apparently felt everything would be all right

when punishment was accepted, a few advocates of well-deserved punishment explicitly associated an educational function with it - the prevention of subsequent rule-breaking. Susan (10 years) said: "I'd have told my mum. So my mum could tell Cathy's mum so Cathy would get punished and not do it again".

These children's statements indicate a conception of punishment as a means to prevent further misbehavior. Rico (8 years): "I would have told, too, so Peter wouldn't steal any more. I mean, so he remembers, he would get a lecture and then he would remember".

Punishment as a mnemonic aid is of course a well-known feature of some harsh traditional childraising methods. Here, the purpose of punishment is seen as intimidation and a prevention of further rule-infringements, not the improvement of the wrongdoer. In our study, the idea that the wrongdoer should be made to realize the impropriety of his act was mentioned mainly by children of higher age levels - but they did not consider punishment an adequate means to this end.

A further aspect of the concept of well-deserved punishment was interesting: The children quite unconcernedly listed the various punishments a wrongdoer could expect - being sent to his or her room, getting a spanking, being sent to bed, being lectured or scolded. In those cases in which the interviewer asked for details, the children were able to put themselves in the culprit's shoes and empathize with his or her worries and anxieties. For instance, Andrea (5 years) thought the mother in the story was right to scold the girl, and justified her opinion by saying that this would serve to prevent further misdeeds. To the interviewer's question, "And how would Marianne feel then?" Andrea replied, " Really sad, because she would get into trouble and probably get her bottom smacked, too." Patrick (6 years) was also in favor of the boy in his story "getting his bottom smacked". - I.: And how would Peter feel then? - P.: He would be sad.

These children applied a moral rule that implied unpleasant consequences for others, and yet they were also capable of feeling empathy for them. Still, since they

considered the wrongdoer at fault and the punishment justified, their empathy did not lead to an exoneration of the culprit. For them, retribution held first priority. It was only the older children in our sample who took a more balanced view.

c) Telling to avoid punishment - tactical frankness

Children whose argumentation fell into this category favoured frankness for pragmatic reasons. They argued that the truth is likely to come out sooner or later and trouble gets worse when parents realize that a misdeed has been suppressed. Their tactical conclusion was that frankness with respect to one's parents can spare or at least mitigate troubles insofar as an open confession would give them a bonus - honesty being the best policy. Ruth, (8 years) said: "If you tell the truth to your mother it would be better because if you don't tell the truth, then if your mother finds out that you've stolen you're into trouble more, if you know what I mean."

David (10 years): "The mother wouldn't scold him any more, because now she knows about it" (that Peter had stolen). Another twelve-year-old, Bill, who probably overestimated parents' willingness to understand, said with respect to the boy setting a fire in the garage, "If he tells himself, his parents would be happy."

A small group of older children also argued in favour of openness, but their motives were not tactical but more of a "ethical" nature: therapeutic frankness. Their arguments lead to the last part of our analysis.

(4) Children's "moral" reactions to a friend's misdeed

In order to find out about moral reactions of children we looked at the expressions and arguments that referred to the topics of guilt, reparation and retribution. Altogether we found 116 moral related statements, 21 referring to guilt feelings of the trangressor and 95 proposals for establishing justice with different methods. Table 3 gives a summary of those moral statements.

Table 3: Age related moral reactions of children

	5/6 years	8 years	10/12 years
expression of guilty feelings	0	0	21
making good	3	4	23
lecture by mother	5	6	16
lecture by friend	1	2	18
confession/therapeuti cal openness	0	0	17

Note. The age groups refer to different sample sizes (n = 80 with to 5/6 and 10/12 year old, and n = 40 with the 8 year olds).

Twenty one children (all in the older age group of 10 and 12-year-olds) referred to feelings related to guilt and pangs of conscience. They proposed as means of dealing with these feelings a frank talk or a confession in order to reach psychological relief. Austin, (10-year-old) stated, "Cause if you don't tell that you stole some money, you' re gonna feel guilty some other day". Norbert (12 years) explained: "If I were Peter, I would confess it (the fire) sometime. Because if you've done something that serious, you have to get it off your mind sooner or later ... talk about it with somebody. Like, if he tells, he can get the load off his mind, and not feel so guilty any more ..., otherwise you'll always have a guilty conscience". Norbert also had a fine sense of the fact that it is better to confess before the deed is discovered than after: "When it's too late, you just can't do it any more ... let it out in the open", and "actually he would be ashamed of himself because he had missed his chance to get it out when there was still time."

While only older children spoke explicitly about guilty feelings, many younger children seemed to have an implicit understanding of the notion of guilt and justice because not all of them would let the wrongdoer off free. Of those who favored concealing the misdeed, the majority nevertheless thought that the matter must somehow be made up for. Several possible ways of doing so were suggested by the children. Making good for the damage caused was mentioned most frequently in connection with Dilemma A (stealing money), probably because the damage involved in Dilemma B

(setting a fire) could not very well be reversed. As means of making good for the stealing of the money Alex, 8 years, proposed:" I would tell Peter's mother and she might take money from Peter's money for a few weeks to pay for the damage that might have been done".

Others said the miscreant should return the money to the mother, either openly or by secreting it back into her purse. Making good, accompanied by an apology, was advocated by other children.

Another method of dealing with a wrongdoer was direct instruction which consisted in telling him or her, "You must never do that again". The purpose was to prevent further misdeeds and to show blame or disapproval for his/her misbehavior. Mostly children in the age group 8 to 12 proposed the lecture. However, different persons were mentioned in connection with moral instruction, with the younger German children referring more frequently to the mother and the older to a friend. To quote from our interviewees: Christian (12 years): "Okay, let's keep it to ourselves, not tell anybody else. But we're (!) not going to do it from now on. We're (!) not going to do it any more."

In the Australian sample more often mother is regarded as the "teacher" as the statement of Amy (10 years), demonstrates: "I would have told my Mum. So my Mum could tell Susan's Mum and she could talk some sense to Susan so she won't do it again".

This statement also illustrates the results reported in section 1; that Australian more often than German children advocate frankness to parents - appararently they expect more often that parents will "talk some sense" into their children. German children more often expected severe punishment from their parents and pleaded more often to hide transgressions from parental authorities. In the German sample the friend is given the role of the moral "teacher" in order to establish justice while in the Australian sample that role is more often fulfilled by parents.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this study we dealt with the children`s reactions to two types of transgressions (petty stealing and lighting a fire in a garage) which a hypothetical friend has committed. The reactions of the children to the two transgressions did not differ significantly which - at first sight - seems to contradict several studies (Turiel, 1983, Tisak, 1993) who reported that children evaluated moral transgressions or harm to people as worse than conventional transgressions or damage to property (for a discussion s. Turiel & Smetana, 1998). However, a closer look at the answers of our children to the lighting of fire reveals that they did not focus on the property damage but on the potential harm to persons. So both transgressions in our study fall in the moral domain.

We essentially observed four basic argumentational patterns by which children dealt with anticipated parental punishment and which were clearly age related.

(a) Younger children typically proposed that the misdeed should be confessed to parents and the consequent punishment accepted. This concept of well-deserved punishment is grounded in two differing arguments which correspond to Selman's level concept 0 (punishment logically follows a disobedience) and level 1 concept (punishment serves the purpose of preventing a repetition of the act and teaches the child a lesson).

(b) Older children pleaded that punishment should be avoided, as an act of peer defense, and found that this avoidance is entirely justified. As a result, the misdemeanor is concealed from parents. It must be noted, however, that when the children in our sample advocated lying it was principally in order to protect a friend, and to observe the pact of secrecy. Although the children wished to spare their friend punishment, most of them still retained a sense of norm infringement and many of the older children advocated the the necessity of reparation or advising the friend in order to prevent a repetition. This parallels the findings of Thompson & Hoffman (1980), that older children when reasoning on guilt relied on internal justice principles while younger children focussed on detection and punishment. The next two strategies were also mentioned primarily by older subjects.

(c) Punishment should be avoided, but this time by means of the opposite strategy. Rather than using concealment, this line of argument asserted that one must be frank with one's parents for tactical reasons, since it spares or at least lessens trouble, and permits the child to claim the bonus of honesty for himself or herself.

(d) Revealing the misdeed to parents in order to relieve one's conscience. This pattern of argument was preferred by children who thought a confession would ease their conscience and free them of guilty feelings. They viewed a guilty conscience as a force that made them feel they had done wrong. If their knowledge of the misbehavior were shared with others, they felt, this would diminish the subjective pressure they were under as a result of their "lone" misdeed.

Besides the clear age difference, we found no sex differences and only very few nation differences. A most remarkable finding was that German children opt more for hiding wrongdoing from parents, especially with growing age and with the expectation of punishment. How may we explain these findings? We may only speculate about some factors that should be considered.

The age-dependency of the arguments of the children might well be explained in a sociocognitive framework. The 5 and 6 year old children in our sample characteristically argued from a single point of view, that of parents or of the wrongdoer. In the case of the ten and twelve-year-olds, a great variety of ways of dealing with the wrongdoer were found because children of this age are able to coordinate different perspectives and integrate various dimensions. They had developed altered norms of friendship - trust, discretion, but also mutual responsibility and control - and were able to coordinate the loyalty orientation to the friend (protecting the friend from punishment out of solidarity) with a responsibility orientation (to make the wrongdoer aware of the norm infringement involved). Making good (returning the stolen money) and instruction or disapproval were the two means they suggested of letting the wrongdoer feel the impropriety of his or her act.

Regarding the nation differences two factors should be taken into account.

First, the kinds of punishment mentioned by the German children seem to be more threatening for them. While most of the Australian children speak about "getting into trouble" a higher number of German children refer to severe forms of verbal and physical punishment - and more often they advocate hiding the wrongdoings from the parents. That makes it plausible to believe that German children have more fear of their parents. Another result of the study confirms this. The subjects were also asked, Would you tell another peer?" In the age group 8 to 12, significantly more German children (N=26) than Australian children (N=14) feared that this information, given to another peer, would reach the parents, the potential agents of punishment $2\ (1, N = 118) = 4.58, p < .05$.

Fear of punishment seems to play a more prominent role in German children. It must be asked whether this reflects actual parent-child disciplining techniques. There is a strong tradition of punative child rearing among German parents. For example, a survey published in the German Journal, "Eltern", (Parents) revealed that a majority of German parents pleaded for physical punishment in child rearing (Valtin 1991). Could this be interpreted as a more "authoritarian" relationship of parents to their children? Our data suggests that Australian parents are more tolerant of the rule-breaking of their children and less harsh in the punishment they mete out. This does not refer to the frequency of punishment (Australian kids referred slightly more often to punishment in the dangerous case of lightning the fire in the garage) but to its nature. From the greater openness and honesty demonstrated by the Australian subjects of our study towards their parents we might conclude that they have less fear and more trust in their parents.

Second, another factor might be the concept of friendship. The revealing or hiding of the wrongdoing concerns the wrongdoing of a friend who has to be protected - or not. If German children have a more demanding concept of friendship concerning loyalty and discretion (and this was also proposed by our study on secrets, s. Watson & Valtin 1993) we could expect that they would hide the wrongdoing of a friend to a higher degree.

With regard to the practical implications of our study we would like to make two points. The first relates to the influence of friends. The fear of many parents that friends are sworn accomplices who help their children conceal misdeeds is only one side of truth. In most of the cases we investigated, the children referred to their hypothetical friend's role of moral authority who would disapprove of the wrongdoing or advise the wrongdoer in the interest of preventing further infringements. Mainly older children showed such a sense of responsibilty for their friend`s welfare. Friends, in other words, helped promote conformity to norms and hence had a "socializing" effect on their misbehaving peers.

The second point relates to advice to parents and teachers about childraising methods. If we consider children as a source of valuable insight about how they think and respond, we may glean some useful suggestions from them. Jasmin, a 10 year old German girl, advocated: The mother in the story should "speak to Marianne and tell her she shouldn't be afraid and maybe what she stole could be deducted from her allowance ... Then Marianne would feel better." However, Jasmin did tend to fear that the mother would scold Marianne when she discovered the theft: "Because that's how parents are, they scold you about every little thing." Therefore Jasmin would tell the mother, "that she shouldn't scold her, but she should just talk it over with her."

Mario, a 10 year old German boy, understood that Peter, when his misbehavior came to light, would be "really afraid", because he himself would be "really afraid" to go home in this case, for fear of getting "a hitting" or "sent to his room". Still, Mario was in favor of the mother's "taking care" of the matter with Peter, saying that "if I were Thomas' mother I would call up and say, 'Peter set a fire in an empty garage. You better talk to him about it, but hitting him is useless!'".

Statements like these not only reflect a desire to avoid punishment but also include recommendations which parents might well take to heart in the interest of encouraging greater honesty and trust on the part of their children. Instead of scolding

them "about every little thing", parents should attempt as far as possible to avoid training methods that are likely to instill fear while ignoring the central importance of reasoning about behavior. The children quoted were implicitly in agreement with Hoffman (1970), who pointed out that punishment deflected children's attention from the intrinsic disadvantageous consequences of their act (e.g., for the victims) and thus tended to foster an external moral orientation. He advocated reasonable argument and "induction", a training method that makes the child aware of the consequences of his or her behavior for those affected and their mental suffering, and at the same time gives the wrongdoer a sense of responsibility for his or her acts with respect to fellow human beings.

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