

## When Victims Don't Cry: Children's Understandings of Victimization, Compliance, and Subversion

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How do children understand situations in which the targets of moral transgressions do not complain about the way they are treated? One hundred and twenty participants aged 5, 7, 10, 13, and 16 years were interviewed about hypothetical situations in which one child ("transgressor") made an apparently unfair demand of another child ("victim"), who then responded by either resisting, complying, or subverting. In general, 5-year-olds judged compliance positively and resistance negatively and 7- to 16-year-olds judged resistance positively and compliance negatively; all but 16-year-olds judged subversion negatively. Most participants judged the transgressor's actions negatively, regardless of how the victim had responded. The findings are discussed in terms of their implications for children's developing understandings of victimization.

A large body of moral development research has shown that, starting in their preschool years, children think that it is morally wrong to hurt others or to treat others unfairly. Children's concern for the targets of such acts (henceforth referred to as "victims") has been said to constitute the cornerstone of their moral judgments. Research has indeed shown that children's negative judgments of instances of unfair treatment and physical or psychological harm rest on their understanding that such behaviors target *unwilling victims* (for comprehensive research reviews, see Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1998). It has been furthermore suggested that children's attention to the victims' emotional response is central to the development of their moral understandings (e.g., Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004; Arsenio & Lover, 1995; Harris, 1989).

The purpose of this study was to examine a question that has thus far received scant attention, namely, how children understand and evaluate situations in which the targets of seemingly unfair or

hurtful acts do not respond in ways suggesting that they are unwilling victims (e.g., by resisting, protesting, or crying) but rather comply with the demands placed on them. Situations such as these are not uncommon, even among young children. Research investigating how children manage conflicts with their peers has shown that, in addition to using strategies such as physical resistance, protests, refusals, and claims to entitlement, children often respond to conflicts by submitting to unreasonable demands, yielding their personal possessions, or assuming responsibility for their peers (Collins & Laursen, 1992; Ross & Conant, 1992). The meaning of children's compliant behavior, however, is not transparent. Developmental researchers studying children's conflicts have typically focused on those situations in which "one person overtly opposes another person's actions or statements" (Shantz, 1987, p. 284; see also Ross & Conant, 1992; Shantz & Hartup, 1992), while implicitly assuming that situations in which children accede to or comply with the demands of others are not truly contentious. Others have noted that in some instances children yield to their peers' demands because they do not know how to respond more assertively or because they fear the consequences of noncompliance (Perry, Kusel, & Perry, 1988; Ross & Conant, 1992). Whereas from the former perspective compliance is assumed to reflect genuine consent, the latter perspective suggests that compliance is more akin to submission. In the present study, our concern was not with what children's compliance in those situations *truly* means, but

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rather with how children themselves understand and evaluate compliant responses. Of interest was also the related question of whether (and why), in the view of children, certain acts or behaviors can be said to be morally wrong even if the presumed victims go along without complaining.

The body of research dealing with victimized children suggests that children's views of those who comply with unfair demands may be fairly negative. Although the bulk of this research has dealt with the attributions that victimized children make concerning their own victimization (Graham & Juvonen, 2001), there are findings suggesting that victimized children are disliked and rejected by their peers (e.g., Graham & Juvonen, 1998b; Perry, Willard, & Perry, 1990). Furthermore, findings from an exploratory study in which 12- to 14-year-olds were asked to list reasons for why some of their peers are chronically victimized suggest that young adolescents believe that victimized children are "picked on" because they engage in annoying and provocative behavior (Graham & Juvonen, 1998a). And yet, it is possible that teenagers' tendency to "blame the victim" is restricted to the specific dynamics underlying *chronic* victimization and does not necessarily generalize to how they might think about situations in which children who are not repeatedly victimized appear to submit to or comply with seemingly unfair demands. Arguably, too, the finding that teens blame the victims for their victimization does not necessarily imply that they think that acts of victimization are acceptable. To fully understand how children think about situations such as these, their judgments about both the victims' and the transgressors' actions should be assessed.

In the present study, we assessed how children understand and evaluate the actions of victims and transgressors in situations in which the victims (or targets) of seemingly unfair demands resisted those demands ("resistance") or complied with them ("compliance"). A condition combining compliance and resistance, in which victims pretended to comply with the demands placed on them but covertly resisted them ("subversion"), was also examined, as the adult literature suggests that various forms of covert resistance are common among targets of aggression, especially those in positions of lesser power (Nussbaum, 1999; Okin, 1989; Turiel, 2002). Findings from research on the development of moral reasoning and social cognition frame our expectations for how children of different ages might understand and evaluate each condition.

Research on children's moral reasoning has dealt with prototypical instances of moral transgressions

in which one character harms or treats another character unfairly. Whereas in some instances the stimuli used in this research included an explicit depiction of the victim's displeasure or resistance ("he cried"; "she said 'stop it!'"), very often participants were left to assume such canonical responses to being hurt or mistreated. The evidence has indicated that regardless of whether the victim's response is made explicit or not, children of all ages judge it wrong for one person to hurt or mistreat another (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1998). Given the purpose of the present study, the victim's response had to be made explicit. Resistance, rather than crying, was selected as the canonical response, as crying is likely to lack ecological validity among older children and adolescents. On the basis of previous research it was expected that children of all ages would judge the victim's resistance to be acceptable and the transgressor's behavior to be wrong.

As compared with prototypical situations, non-prototypical situations in which victims comply, or pretend to comply, present two potential complexities. First, the different elements that make up such nonprototypical situations may be seen as being inconsistent or incongruent with one another (e.g., the transgressor's behavior seems unreasonable and unfair but the victim does not respond in ways that indicate that he/she feels hurt or put upon). Second, the victim's behavioral expression in nonprototypical situations may be seen as incongruent with his or her internal psychological experience (e.g., the victim surely does not like or want to give up his or her property, but does so anyway). Findings bearing on moral and socio-cognitive development suggest that nonprototypical situations will be more challenging for young children.

Moral development research (e.g., Helwig, 1995; Smetana, Killen, & Turiel, 1991) has shown that before the age of 7–8, children's understandings of multifaceted social situations are constrained. Because they find it difficult to integrate those aspects of situations that stand in conflict with one another, young children tend to focus on one or another aspect of the situation and make categorical moral judgments that overlook the complexity implied in the situation. Social cognitive research (e.g., Gnepp, 1983, 1991; Gnepp & Klayman, 1992; Harris, 1989; Harris & Gross, 1988; Thompson, 1989) has similarly shown that young children's understandings of the psychological experiences of others are relatively constrained in regard to complex situations or situations involving complex emotions. In situations in which a person exhibits expressive cues that seem

incongruent with the situational context, children younger than 6–7 years are unable to reconcile the conflicting cues and tend to make judgments primarily on the basis of the person's overt expression (e.g., a child who looks happy when about to get a shot is thought to really feel happy). Whereas 8-year-olds are more capable of reconciling conflicting cues and making judgments that account for the information implied in such conflicting cues, it is not until the age of 11–12 that children understand that the expression of emotion may be masked so that a person's observable behavior or emotional expression may not necessarily reflect the person's internal psychological states.

On the basis of these findings, it was expected that children younger than 7–8, who find it difficult to consider simultaneously the seemingly incongruous actions of the victim in light of the transgressor's actions, might construe a victim's compliance as consent and a victim's subterfuge as deceit. Because they are also unlikely to understand that compliance and subversion might conceal hurt or fear, they might not judge the transgressors' actions negatively. By contrast, in middle childhood children become more adept at integrating seemingly incongruent aspects of social situations and at making judgments that account for both a person's overt expression and the broader context (e.g., Gnepp, 1991; Helwig, 1995). Thus, children between the ages of 8 and 12 were generally expected to recognize that compliant victims mask their feelings because of fear or a desire to avoid confrontation, and that subverting victims use indirect ways to resist the unfairness and assert themselves. They were also expected to judge the transgressors' actions to be unfair even when victims complied or pretended to comply. Although less is known about how children's thinking in these regards might change beyond middle childhood, the more subtle forms of aggression, manipulation, and coercion characteristic of adolescence (Craig, Pepler, Connolly, & Henderson, 2001; McMaster, Connolly, Pepler, & Craig, 2002) suggest that, with age, children become more adept at recognizing or identifying the workings of power within interpersonal relationships.

Because compliance and subversion often arise in the context of unequal relationships in which the victim has less power than the transgressor (e.g., Nussbaum, 1999; Okin, 1989; Perry et al., 1988; Ross & Conant, 1992; Wainryb & Turiel, 1994), an important question is whether children are aware of the ways in which power differences might inform the behaviors of victims and transgressors. The difficulty in addressing this question lies in that the appro-

priate operationalization of power differences in the context of research with children is not straightforward. Power differences between adults and children may be easily confounded with differences in status, experience, knowledge, and legitimacy (Laupa, Turiel, & Cowan, 1995), and children rarely have formal power over other children. While not the same as contexts in which one person has formal or institutional power over another, relationships between older and younger children may be seen as an ecologically valid context for examining children's understandings of power differences in relationships. Little is known, however, about how children might view such situations. Developmental research examining children's thinking about authority (e.g., Damon, 1977; Laupa et al., 1995) has shown that, beginning around 4–6 years of age, children judge that it is wrong for someone in a position of authority to make commands that, if obeyed, lead to harmful or unjust consequences for others. Accordingly, we expected children of all ages to judge the transgressors' actions more negatively in unequal, as compared with equal, relationships. It is not until later, at around 10 years of age (Laupa et al., 1995), however, that children begin recognizing the pragmatics of power differences, such as that a person in a subordinate position may feel the need to comply for self-protective purposes (e.g., to avoid punishment or retaliation). Accordingly, it was expected that older participants, more than the younger ones, would understand that victims who comply or pretend to comply with more powerful transgressors may be motivated by fear or a desire to avoid confrontation.

For the purpose of ascertaining children's understandings and judgments of the actions of victims who resisted, complied with, or subverted the seemingly unfair demands imposed on them by transgressors, assessments were elicited of the emotions that children attributed to victims and of the judgments they made of victims' responses. In general, it was expected that a victim's resistance would be construed by children of all ages as the canonical response to unfair treatment. Accordingly, we expected that children of all ages would attribute to resisting victims emotions suggesting displeasure (e.g., hurt, anger) and would judge their actions positively. Age differences were expected in regard to the less prototypical conditions, in which victims responded with compliance or subversion. Younger children, likely to construe compliance as consent and subversion as deceit, were expected to attribute positive emotions (e.g., happiness, a desire to cooperate) to compliant victims and less positive emo-

tions (e.g., a desire to hurt or cheat) to subverting victims. Furthermore, they were expected to make positive judgments of the actions of compliant victims (which they are likely to view as helpful or cooperative) and negative judgments of those of subverting victims (which they are likely to view as not trustworthy). Conversely, older children, more likely to understand that compliance and subversion may mask a desire to avoid confrontation, were expected to attribute to compliant and subverting victims, especially those in positions of less power, emotions such as fear. Furthermore, they were expected to judge the responses of compliant victims more negatively (e.g., ineffectual, self-denigrating) and those of subverting victims more positively (e.g., as self-affirmative or preserving dignity). Finally, and in addition to assessing children's views of the victims, their judgments about the actions of the transgressors were also elicited. Children of all ages were expected to make negative judgments of the transgressors' actions in the resistance condition. Older children were also expected to make negative judgments of the actions of transgressors in the compliance and subversion condition, whereas younger children might view these transgressors' actions less negatively.

## Method

### Participants

Children attending preschools and public schools in a midsize Western city in the United States were recruited as participants. Demographic information obtained from the school district's annual report classifies the student population as being middle class and primarily Caucasian (92.4%), with few ethnic or racial minority group children (i.e., Hispanic/Latino, 4.8%; Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.9%; Black/African American, 0.5%; and Native American, 0.4%) like the community it serves. The study sample included 120 participants, 12 males and 12 females in each of five age levels: 5-year-olds (mean age 4-6, range 3-8 to 5-2), 7-year-olds (mean age 6-7, range 6-1 to 7-2), 10-year-olds (mean age 9-7, range 9-0 to 10-1), 13-year-olds (mean age 12-6, range 12-0 to 12-11), and 16-year-olds (mean age 15-9, range 15-5 to 16-2). Power analyses with a medium-effect size ( $f^2 = .15$ ) were used to determine the sample size (Cohen, 1977; Faul & Erdfelder, 1992). Parental consent (80% return rate) and child assent (the wording was slightly simplified for the 5-, 7-, and 10-year-olds) were obtained for all participants.

### Measures

Participants were presented with three hypothetical scenarios in which one child (*transgressor*) demanded that another child (*victim*) relinquish a possession (e.g., the victim's markers, the victim's seat in the cafeteria) or complete the transgressor's chores (e.g., clean the locker room). Scenarios varied in the victim's response (within-subjects) and the power differential between the victim and transgressor (between-subjects). Victims were depicted as responding with *resistance* (i.e., refused to go along), *compliance* (i.e., submitted to the demand), or *subversion* (i.e., promised to comply but covertly resisted the demand). To manipulate the power differential between victim and transgressor, half the participants in each age and gender group were told that the transgressor was a child older and bigger than the victim (*unequal relationship*), and the other half were told that the transgressor and the victim were of the same age (*equal relationship*) (see the Appendix for a complete set of stimuli, worded for the "unequal relationship"). Assessments were made of participants' judgments about the *victim's emotion* ("How do you think [victim] felt?"), the *victim's response* ("Do you think that [victim's response] was a good way to respond or was not such a good way to respond? Why?"), and the *transgressor's behavior* ("Do you think that [transgressor's behavior] was okay or not okay? Why?").

### Procedures

Participants were individually interviewed in their schools by the first author; interviews were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. No participants withdrew from the study. Before the main assessments and to ensure that participants did not mistake the transgressor's behavior as having been accidental, participants were asked "Why do you think [transgressor] did that?" In all cases, participants understood that the transgressor acted so as to get his or her way (e.g., "she was pushing the kid around"; "he was thinking of himself and what he wanted"; "she's a bully who tells other people what to do"). The order of presentation of the three response-types (resistance, compliance, and subversion) was counterbalanced within each age and gender group using a Latin-square design. In each situation, the transgressor and the victim were both either male or female; the characters' gender was counterbalanced within each age group, gender, and response type using a Latin-square design.

*Scoring and Reliability*

Judgments of the victim's emotions were scored using categories adapted from existing scoring systems (Harris, 1989; Harter & Whitesell, 1991) and further elaborated by scoring pilot data. Emotion categories included *sadness* (e.g., "he feels sad because that kid talked mean to him"), *anger* (e.g., "she's angry because she got the seat first and that girl just said 'move over'"), *fear* (e.g., "he's scared that he'll get beat up"), and *guilt* (e.g., "he feels bad about himself because he lied and got Derek in trouble"), as well as positive feelings of *accomplishment* for having stood up for themselves (e.g., "she feels good that she didn't let herself be bullied around") and positive feelings for having behaved *pro-socially* (e.g., "he feels good because he was so nice and helpful and he shared his markers with Rich"). Although multiple responses were allowed, in most cases (86%) participants attributed a single emotion; when multiple emotions were given, they were scored in terms of the proportional use of each emotion category.

Two aspects of the judgments made about the victim's response were scored. Evaluations of the victim's response were scored on a 3-point Likert scale. Negative responses (e.g., "I think the way she responded was bad") were scored as "1," mixed responses (e.g., "I think what she did was kind of okay but also kind of not okay") were scored as "2," and positive responses (e.g., "what she did was okay, I think") were scored as "3." Justifications were scored using categories derived from scoring pilot data and 20% of this study's protocols. Categories included references to the various positive or negative consequences of the behavior for the victims themselves, such as whether the response was *self-affirming* (e.g., "it's an excellent thing that he stood up for himself because if you don't stand up to people who bully you, you feel lousy about yourself"), *self-denigrating* (e.g., "it's not good because she's putting herself down when she doesn't stand up for herself"), *prudent* (e.g., "he did a good thing because if he had said 'no, I don't want to give you my markers,' he probably would've got beat up, so he just did what was safer for him"), *deceptive* (e.g., "it was wrong, she shouldn't have lied about the markers"), *unfair* (e.g., "that wasn't really fair because she didn't share her markers with the other girl"), or *pro-social* (e.g., "it's a really good thing to do because she was nice and a good friend and she helped the other girl"). Multiple justifications were allowed and were scored in terms of the proportional use of each category.

The judgments made about the transgressor's behavior were also scored in terms of evaluations and justifications. Evaluations of the transgressor's behavior were scored on a 3-point Likert scale. Negative responses (e.g., "it was wrong for him to do that") were scored as "1," mixed responses (e.g., "I think it was a little okay and also a little not okay") were scored as "2," and positive responses (e.g., "I think that was okay") were scored as "3." Justifications were scored using categories adapted from previous scoring systems (e.g., Davidson, Turiel, & Black, 1983), including *unfairness* (e.g., "it's not okay because it's her responsibility to clean the mess, it's not fair that she told someone else to do her work for her"), *harm to victim* (e.g., "he shouldn't do that because he'll make that kid feel really bad inside"), and *abuse of power* (e.g., "it's really mean for an older kid to take advantage of a little kid like that because little kids don't really know that they can say no"). Multiple justifications were allowed and were scored in terms of the proportional use of each category.

Scoring reliability was assessed through recoding of 20% of the protocols. Interjudge agreement was 100% for the scoring of the evaluations, 93.2% for the victim's emotions (Cohen's  $\kappa = .918$ ), 97.7% for justifications of the victim's response (Cohen's  $\kappa = .892$ ), and 93.3% for justifications of the transgressor's behavior (Cohen's  $\kappa = .870$ ).

## Results

Preliminary analyses indicated that fewer than 7% (2/32) of the effects or interactions involving gender were significant, with no discernible pattern; gender was therefore dropped from subsequent analyses. The emotion categories attributed to victims, scored as proportions, were analyzed by means of 3 (response-type)  $\times$  5 (age)  $\times$  2 (power) multiple analyses of variance (MANOVAs) and follow-up analyses of variance (ANOVAs), with response-type as a repeated measure. Two aspects of the judgments about the victim's response were analyzed. Mean evaluations of the victim's response were subjected to 3 (response-type)  $\times$  5 (age)  $\times$  2 (power) ANOVAs, with response-type as a repeated measure. The justifications, scored as proportions, were analyzed by means of 3 (response-type)  $\times$  5 (age)  $\times$  2 (power) MANOVAs and follow-up ANOVAs with response-type as a repeated measure. Similarly, two aspects of the judgments about the transgressor's behavior were analyzed. Mean evaluations of the transgressor's behavior were subjected to 3 (response-type)  $\times$  5 (age)  $\times$  2 (power) ANOVAs, with response-type as a repeated measure. The justifications, scored as

proportions, were analyzed by means of 3 (response-type)  $\times$  5 (age)  $\times$  2 (power) MANOVAs and follow-up ANOVAs with response-type as a repeated measure. For all analyses, significant interactions were analyzed using tests of simple effects: significant effects were further analyzed by pair-wise comparisons using the Bonferroni adjustment for multiple comparisons.

#### Emotions Attributed to Victims

The distribution of emotions attributed to victims is shown in Table 1. Across all conditions, the emotion most commonly attributed to victims was sadness (45%). However, the  $3 \times 5 \times 2$  MANOVA (Wilks's lambda) yielded significant effects for response-type ( $p < .001$ ), age ( $p < .001$ ), and power ( $p < .05$ ), and a significant Response-Type  $\times$  Age ( $p < .001$ ) interaction. Follow-up ANOVAs by response-type, age, and power were subsequently conducted on the proportional use of each emotion category. As indicated by a significant main effect of power,  $F(1, 110) = 11.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .054$ , participants attributed fear more often to victims in unequal (18%) than in equal (6%) relationships. Significant Response-Type  $\times$  Age interactions were found for each emotion category, as follows: sadness,  $F(8, 220) = 6.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .182$ ; pro-social,  $F(8, 220) = 4.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .108$ ; fear,  $F(8, 220) = 2.85$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .089$ ; accomplishment,  $F(8, 220) = 2.49$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $\eta^2 = .068$ ; anger,  $F(8, 220) = 3.31$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .092$ ; and guilt,  $F(8, 220) = 3.15$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .085$ . In general, these significant interactions indicated that, as expected, younger and older children attributed to victims different emotions in different conditions. Findings from the tests of the simple effects of these interactions, as well as the results of

post hoc pairwise comparisons of means when conducted, are presented for each emotion category in turn.

*Sadness.* The simple main effect of response-type within each age group was significant for the attribution of sadness to victims at all age levels except the 16-year-olds (who rarely attributed sadness to any victims). Five-year-olds attributed sadness to victims who subverted or resisted more often than to those who complied, 7-year-olds attributed sadness to victims who complied or resisted more often than to those who subverted, and 10- and 13-year-olds attributed sadness to victims who complied more often than to those who subverted. Also for sadness, the simple main effect of age within response-type was significant at each level of response-type. Sadness was attributed to complying victims by 7-year-olds more than 13- and 16-year-olds, and by 10-year-olds more than 16-year-olds; to subverting victims by 5-year-olds more than 7-year-olds, by 7-year-olds more than 10-year-olds, and by 10-year-olds more than 16-year-olds; and to resisting victims by 5- and 7-year-olds more than their older peers.

*Pro-social.* Because attributions of pro-social emotions (i.e., feeling good for having acted pro-socially) were made only in regard to complying victims, only the simple main effect of age within compliance was examined. As expected, 5-year-olds more than 7-, 10-, and 16-year-olds thought that victims who complied felt good for having acted pro-socially.

*Fear.* The simple main effect of age within response-type was significant only for compliance, indicating that 16-year-olds more than their younger peers thought that victims who complied felt afraid. Also for fear, the simple main effect of response-type within each age group was significant only for

Table 1  
Emotions Attributed to Victims, by Response-Type and Age (Percentages)

Emotion	Resistance					Compliance					Subversion				
	5	7	10	13	16	5	7	10	13	16	5	7	10	13	16
Sadness	83 <sub>a</sub>	75 <sub>a</sub>	40	21	10	50 <sub>b</sub>	81 <sub>a</sub>	73 <sub>a</sub>	42 <sub>a</sub>	19	96 <sub>a</sub>	52 <sub>b</sub>	23 <sub>b</sub>	6 <sub>b</sub>	2
Pro-social	0	0	0	0	0	46 <sub>a</sub>	13 <sub>b</sub>	15 <sub>b</sub>	31	11 <sub>b</sub>	0	0	0	0	0
Fear	0	8	19	6	21	0 <sub>b</sub>	6 <sub>b</sub>	13 <sub>b</sub>	15 <sub>b</sub>	54 <sub>a</sub>	0	4	13	8	17
Accomplishment	8 <sub>b</sub>	6 <sub>b</sub>	25	38 <sub>a</sub>	44 <sub>a</sub>	0	0	0	0	0	0 <sub>b</sub>	13	25	32 <sub>a</sub>	25
Anger	8	8	17	34 <sub>a</sub>	25 <sub>b</sub>	4	0	2	4 <sub>b</sub>	13 <sub>b</sub>	0	0	11	36 <sub>a</sub>	50 <sub>a</sub>
Guilt	0	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	8	4	4 <sub>b</sub>	32 <sub>a</sub>	30 <sub>a</sub>	19	6 <sub>b</sub>

Note. Percentages in each column may not add up to 100 due to rounding. Percentages in the same age group (for Sadness and Anger) or response-type (for fear, guilt, accomplishment, and pro-social) that do not share subscripts differ at  $p < .05$  in tests of simple effects (with Bonferroni adjustment).

16-year-olds, who attributed fear to complying victims more than subverting and resisting victims.

*Accomplishment.* The simple main effect of age within response-type was significant for resistance and subversion (feelings of accomplishment were never attributed to complying victims). Thirteen- and 16-year-olds, more than 5- and 7-year-olds, attributed a sense of accomplishment to victims who resisted, while 13-year-olds, more than 5-year-olds, attributed a sense of accomplishment to victims who subverted. Also for accomplishment, the simple main effect of response-type within age was significant for children aged 10, 13, and 16 (5- and 7-year-olds rarely attributed accomplishment to victims). At each age, children attributed a sense of accomplishment to victims who subverted or resisted more often than to those who complied.

*Anger.* The simple main effect of response-type within age was significant only for 13- and 16-year-olds. Anger was attributed by 13-year-olds to victims who subverted or resisted more often than to those who complied, and by 16-year-olds to victims who subverted more often than to those who resisted or complied. Also for anger, the simple main effect of age within response-type was significant only in the case of subversion, as 13- and 16-year-olds attributed anger to victims who subverted more than did their younger peers.

*Guilt.* The simple main effect of age within response-type was significant only in the case of subversion. Seven- and 10-year-olds thought that victims who subverted felt guilty more often than did both their younger and older peers. Also for guilt, the simple main effect of response-type within age was significant only for 7- and 10-year-olds. Guilt was attributed by 7- and 10-year-olds to victims who subverted more often than to those who complied or resisted.

### Judgments of the Victim's Response

The distribution of participants' mean evaluations of the victim's response is presented in Table 2. The 3

$\times 5 \times 2$  ANOVA yielded a significant main effect for response-type,  $F(2, 220) = 61.73$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .278$ . As expected, participants judged resistance more positively than compliance, and compliance more positively than subversion. The ANOVA also yielded a significant Response-Type  $\times$  Age interaction,  $F(8, 220) = 11.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .195$ . The simple main effect of response-type within age was significant at all age levels. Whereas 5-year-olds judged compliance more positively than resistance and subversion, 7-16-year-olds judged resistance more positively than compliance and subversion. The simple main effect of age within response-type was significant for resistance and subversion but not for compliance. Older participants (ages 7-16) judged resistance more positively than did 5-year-olds, and 16-year-olds judged subversion more positively than did all other participants.

### Justifications

Participants were also asked to justify their evaluations of the victim's response; the distribution of justifications is shown in Table 3. The  $3 \times 5 \times 2$  MANOVA (Wilks's lambda) yielded significant effects for response-type ( $p < .001$ ), age ( $p < .001$ ), and power ( $p < .05$ ), and significant Response-Type  $\times$  Age ( $p < .001$ ) and Response-Type  $\times$  Power ( $p = .05$ ) interactions. Follow-up ANOVAs by response-type, age, and power were subsequently conducted on the proportional use of each justification category. Findings from these analyses are presented for each justification category in turn.

*Self-affirming.* A significant Response-Type  $\times$  Age interaction,  $F(8, 220) = 16.40$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .122$ , was found for the proportional use of the self-affirming category. The simple main effect of age within response-type was significant only in the case of resistance, as older participants, more often than 5-year-olds, viewed resistance as self-affirming. The simple main effect of response-type within age was significant at all age levels. Five-year-olds depicted resistance, more than compliance, as self-affirming;

Table 2  
Mean Evaluation of Victim's Response, by Response-Type and Age

Evaluation	Resistance					Compliance					Subversion				
	5	7	10	13	16	5	7	10	13	16	5	7	10	13	16
Means	1.3 <sub>b</sub>	2.8 <sub>a</sub>	2.9 <sub>a</sub>	3.0 <sub>a</sub>	3.0 <sub>a</sub>	2.3 <sub>a</sub>	2.0 <sub>b</sub>	1.9 <sub>b</sub>	1.7 <sub>b</sub>	1.8 <sub>b</sub>	1.2 <sub>b</sub>	1.6 <sub>b</sub>	1.4 <sub>b</sub>	1.6 <sub>b</sub>	2.1 <sub>b</sub>
SD	0.8	0.7	0.4	0.0	0.0	1.0	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.6	0.9	0.7	0.7	0.9

Note. Means are based on a 3-point scale (1 = *negative*, 2 = *mixed*, 3 = *positive*). Means in the same age group that do not share subscripts differ at  $p < .05$  in tests of simple effects (with Bonferroni adjustment).

Table 3  
Justifications for Evaluation of Victim's Response, by Response-Type and Age (Percentages)

Justification	Resistance					Compliance					Subversion				
	5	7	10	13	16	5	7	10	13	16	5	7	10	13	16
Self-affirming	17 <sub>b</sub>	88 <sub>a</sub>	96 <sub>a</sub>	100 <sub>a</sub>	100 <sub>a</sub>	0	0	0	0	0	8	29	12	25	40
Self-denigrating	0	0	4	0	0	33	46	57	65	63	17	0	6	15	10
Pro-social	0	0	0	0	0	67 <sub>a</sub>	38	27 <sub>b</sub>	23 <sub>b</sub>	13 <sub>b</sub>	0	0	0	0	0
Prudential	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	17	13	25	0	0	8	4	17
Deceptive	0	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	54	67 <sub>a</sub>	75 <sub>a</sub>	57	34 <sub>b</sub>
Unfair	71 <sub>a</sub>	0	0	0	0	0 <sub>c</sub>	0	0	0	0	13 <sub>b</sub>	0	0	0	0
Unelaborated	13	4	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	8	4	0	0	0

Note. Percentages may not add up due to rounding. Percentages in the same age group (unfair) or response-type (self-affirming, pro-social, and deceptive) that do not share subscripts differ at  $p < .05$  in tests of simple effects (with Bonferroni adjustment).

7-, 13-, and 16-year-olds depicted resistance more than subversion, and subversion more than compliance as self-affirming; and 10-year-olds depicted resistance more than compliance and subversion as self-affirming.

*Self-denigrating.* According to a significant main effect of response-type,  $F(2, 220) = 84.46$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .415$ , references to a victim's response as self-denigrating were more common in regard to compliance.

*Pro-social.* As expected, a significant Response-Type  $\times$  Age interaction,  $F(8, 220) = 6.41$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .115$ , was found for the proportional use of the pro-social category. Because references to the pro-social nature of a victim's response were made only in regard to compliance, only the simple main effect of age within compliance was examined. As expected, 5-year-olds more than their older peers made references to the pro-social nature of compliance. A significant Response-Type  $\times$  Power interaction,  $F(2, 220) = 9.18$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .041$ , was also found for the proportional use of the pro-social category (in this case, too, only the simple main effect of power within compliance was examined). Regardless of age, references to the pro-social nature of a victim's response were more common in regard to victims who complied within equal, rather than unequal, relationships.

*Prudential.* According to a significant main effect of response-type,  $F(2, 220) = 11.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .085$ , and a significant main effect for age,  $F(4, 110) = 3.79$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $\eta^2 = .098$ , references to a victim's response as prudential or self-protective, although infrequent, were more common in regard to compliance and subversion than resistance, and more common among 16-year-olds than 5-year-olds.

*Deceptive.* As expected, a significant Response-Type  $\times$  Age interaction,  $F(8, 220) = 3.01$ ,  $p < .001$ ,

$\eta^2 = .041$ , was found for the proportional use of the deceptive category. Because references to the deceptive nature of a victim's response were made largely in regard to subversion, only the simple main effect of age in subversion was examined. As expected, references to the deceptive nature of subversion were made more often by participants between the ages of 5 and 13.

*Unfair.* A significant Response-Type  $\times$  Age interaction,  $F(8, 220) = 35.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .484$ , was also found for the proportional use of the unfair category. The simple main effect of response-type within age was significant only for 5-year-olds, who viewed the victim's response as unfair in resistance more than subversion, and subversion more than compliance (which, in turn, was never viewed as unfair). The simple main effect of age within response-type was significant only in resistance, as 5-year-olds were the only ones to depict a victim's response as unfair.

#### Judgments of the Transgressor's Behavior

Mean evaluations of the transgressor's behavior are presented in Table 4. The large majority of participants at all ages (88–100%) evaluated the transgressor's behavior negatively, regardless of how the victim had responded or of the power differential between victim and transgressor.

*Justifications.* Participants were also asked to justify their evaluations; the distribution of justifications is shown in Table 5. The  $3 \times 5 \times 2$  MANOVA (Wilks's lambda) yielded significant effects for age and power ( $ps < .001$ ). Follow-up ANOVAs were subsequently conducted on the proportional use of each justification category.

In general, participants justified their (largely negative) evaluations of the transgressor's behavior by referring to concerns with fairness and with the

Table 4  
Mean Evaluations of Transgressor's Behavior, by Response-Type and Age

Evaluation	Resistance					Compliance					Subversion				
	5	7	10	13	16	5	7	10	13	16	5	7	10	13	16
Means	1.1	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.3	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.2	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1
SD	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2

Note. Means are based on a 3-point scale (1 = negative, 2 = mixed, 3 = positive).

victim's welfare. According to a significant main effect of age,  $F(4, 110) = 7.81$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .148$ , references to the victim's welfare were more common among 5- and 7-year-olds than among 13- and 16-year-olds. A significant main effect of age,  $F(4, 110) = 8.49$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .132$ , was also found for the proportional use of the abuse of power category. Older participants (10-, 13-, and 16-year-olds) referred more commonly to the abusive nature of transgressors' behavior. Analyses also yielded significant main effects of power for two justification categories. References to unfairness were more commonly made in regard to equal (64%), rather than unequal (46%), relationships,  $F(1, 110) = 7.45$ ,  $p < .007$ ,  $\eta^2 = .017$ . Conversely, references to the abusive nature of the transgressor's behavior were more commonly made in regard to transgressors in unequal (32%), rather than equal (9%), relationships,  $F(1, 110) = 26.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta^2 = .102$ . There were no significant effects or interactions involving response-type.

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how children think about situations in which the victims (or targets) of seemingly unfair demands do not protest or resist such demands but rather comply, or pretend to comply, with them. The findings speak about two related questions, namely, whether children identify the victim's compliance as consent, and

whether their judgment that victimization had taken place depends on the victim's expression of pain or dissent. In general, it was found that children's understandings of the various ways in which victims responded to the demands placed on them varied greatly and systematically with age. Five-year-olds judged victims who complied more positively than those who resisted or pretended to comply, but participants between the ages of 7 and 16 made more positive judgments of victims' resistance than of victims' compliance and subversion; subversion was viewed positively only by 16-year-olds. By contrast, at all ages (5–16) children judged the transgressors' actions negatively regardless of how the victim had responded.

On the basis of the abundant evidence that children of all ages make negative judgments of actions that inflict harm on another (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1998), we had expected that children of all ages would make positive judgments of victims who resist the unfair demands placed on them. Our prediction was only partially right. As expected, children between the ages of 7 and 16 thought that a victim's resistance was self-affirming (e.g., "that's a good thing to do because she didn't let herself be bullied or bossed around, she said no and stood up for herself"). Five-year-olds, however, thought that the actions of resisting victims were unfair (e.g., "it's not fair for Susie [i.e., the victim] to just keep her markers and not share them with Ruth [i.e., the transgressor]")—an intriguing finding not only

Table 5  
Justifications for Evaluation of Transgressor's Behavior, by Response-Type and Age (Percentages)

Justification	Resistance					Compliance					Subversion				
	5	7	10	13	16	5	7	10	13	16	5	7	10	13	16
Unfairness	54	50	50	75	65	38	46	46	69	63	50	58	48	56	58
Harm to Victim	38	29	17	8	2	50	40	23	13	0	38	38	21	10	4
Abuse of Power	0	17	33	17	33	0	10	31	19	38	0	4	31	33	38
Other/Unelaborated	8	4	0	0	0	13	4	0	0	0	13	0	0	0	0

Note. Percentages may not add up to 100 because of rounding.

because it was unexpected but because 5-year-olds also judged that the transgressor's actions were harmful or unfair (e.g., "it's not fair that Ruth was gonna take Susie's markers because that will make Susie very sad"). As we show later, this disjunction in young children's understandings of the actions of victims and transgressors was not exclusive to their thinking about resistance, but also permeated their thinking about compliance and subversion.

As expected, compliance, unlike resistance, was judged positively by 5-year-olds but frowned upon by older participants. Five-year-olds focused on the pro-social nature of the response and thought that victims who complied felt "good" because they had acted pro-socially (e.g., "Jane felt good inside because she wanted to be nice and she wanted the other girl to have her seat"). Older children, by contrast, thought that acts of compliance were self-denigrating, leading to diminished feelings of self-worth and to further harassment and demands (e.g., "it's not good that Ellie gave in because that girl is just going to keep bullying Ellie around now, and Ellie is just going to keep getting less and less self-confident"). Whereas 7-, 10-, and 13-year-olds thought that complying victims felt sad—a feeling they associated with the consequences of compliance (e.g., "she feels sad because she liked her markers and she doesn't have them anymore")—a majority of 16-year-olds thought that complying victims (especially those in unequal relationships) felt afraid ("he's scared that he'll get beat up"). Thus, 16-year-olds, more than others, also acknowledged that compliance may at times be a self-protective behavior.

The judgment, increasingly more common among older participants, that compliant behavior has negative consequences for those who comply is reminiscent of the findings from an attributional approach to peer victimization indicating that young adolescents both believe that victimized children engage in behaviors that provoke victimization (Graham & Juvonen, 1998a) and are unsympathetic toward them (Perry et al., 1990; Rigby & Slee, 1991). Importantly, however, the data in the present study also show that in spite of their relatively negative views about complying victims, nearly all participants judged the transgressors' actions to be unfair, abusive, and intimidating, even when victims went along with their victimization. It appears that older children's and adolescents' views of compliance and victimization, not unlike their experiences with social exclusion (e.g., Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002) and peer harassment (e.g., Craig & Pepler, 2003), are complex in their simultaneous

consideration of the various elements that make up such multifaceted social interactions.

In general, these findings call into question the assumption that children, at least those older than 5, equate compliance with consent. Whereas no children in this study (not even 5-year-olds) viewed compliance as self-affirming, the judgment made by 5-year-olds, that compliance is a pro-social and helpful behavior, is not unambiguous in regard to whether they thought that complying victims were genuinely consenting. By the age of 7, however, children clearly thought that compliance was self-denigrating, a judgment unlikely to be consistent with genuine consent. Beyond preschool, then, children seem to recognize, at least implicitly, that compliance does not necessarily reflect genuine consent and free choice—a recognition that is not altogether surprising given that children, especially school-age children, are often forced to comply with demands and expectations against their will ("Clean your room!"; "Share with your brother!"). It is worthwhile noting, nevertheless, that children between the ages of 7 and 13 rarely made explicit references to coercion when discussing compliance; it was only 16-year-olds who recognized that complying victims may feel intimidated and may therefore comply in order to protect themselves. Further evidence of adolescents' more complex understanding of the pragmatics of coercion in interpersonal relationships was their view of "subversive" victims, who pretended to comply but covertly resisted the demands placed on them. Whereas nearly all 5-year-olds and the majority of 7- and 10-year-olds made negative judgments of subversion, the large majority of 16-year-olds (71%) made positive judgments of subversion. This is not to say that adolescents overlooked or glossed over the deceptive nature of subversion. Not unlike their younger peers, who pointed to the dishonesty and trickery of the victims' actions, adolescents also acknowledged that subverting victims had engaged in deception. But adolescents, more than their younger peers, also recognized that subverting victims were angry (50%), and many (40%) viewed subversion as self-affirming (e.g., "Hank was angry and didn't want to give Rich his markers so it was a good thing that he hid them because he stood up for himself and didn't give into Rich").

Altogether, the findings on children's thinking about victims who complied or pretended to comply suggest that by the age of 7, but not much earlier, children reject the idea that a person's compliance must necessarily reflect genuine consent and reason that even persons who do not resist or cry may resent

the way they are being treated and fear the consequences of noncompliance. By the time they reach their teenage years, children seem capable of appreciating more fully the dynamics of power and develop a more sympathetic view of subversion. Indeed, even though children of all ages judged the transgressors' behaviors to be intimidating and the victims to feel afraid more often in the context of unequal, than equal, relationships, the views of older children concerning compliance and subversion suggest that they, more than their younger peers, understand that victims who comply or pretend to comply are likely to be responding to coercion. Preschoolers, on the other hand, do not seem to be capable of recognizing the complex dynamics of such situations.

In fact, 5-year-olds exhibited a fairly narrow understanding of compliance and consent and, more generally, of the experiences of children who become targets of unfair demands. Even though 5-year-olds, like their older peers, judged that the demands placed on the victims were wrong, they also viewed those victims who acquiesced and, for example, handed over their possessions as having acted pro-socially, those who refused to acquiesce as having behaved unfairly, and those who, defensively, hid their possessions as having acted deceptively. A similar pattern of relatively fractured and incoherent judgments has recently been observed also in young children's narrative depictions of real interpersonal conflicts in which they had been directly involved (Wainryb, Brehl, & Matwin, 2006). This seeming fragmentation in their reasoning is consistent with findings from moral development research (e.g., Helwig, 1995; Smetana et al., 1991) and social cognitive research (Gnepp, 1983, 1991; Gnepp & Klayman, 1992; Harris, 1989; Harris & Gross, 1988; Thompson, 1989) concerning young children's categorical moral thinking (e.g., "it is right to share"; "it is wrong not to share") and limited ability to integrate seemingly conflicting aspects of multifaceted social situations. Young children's constrained views of resistance were more surprising. The expectation was that resistance would be assimilated to the sort of prototypical instance of moral conflict situations so widely studied in the moral development literature, but the findings called into question our assumption about the canonical nature of resistance. Whereas preschoolers understand that a victim who protests or cries is conveying displeasure at the transgressor's actions, their view of a victim who resists does not seem to account for the context in which such a behavior emerges (Gnepp, 1991). Given that young children surely engage in resistance, as

when they insist on getting their way or refuse to share with or to yield to others, the question of how they experience themselves while they do so merits further investigation.

In contrast to the diversity of judgments that children made about the victims' actions, their judgments of the transgressors' actions were uniformly negative. Indeed, nearly all children judged that the transgressors' actions were wrong regardless of how the victims responded. Does this finding imply, then, that in making moral judgments children merely disregard victims' responses? We think not. The present findings suggest that, at least by the age of 7, children attend to the victim's experience but do not take his or her behavioral response at face value. By showing that children attend to what *they* understand or interpret to be the beliefs, emotions, and goals (not just behaviors) of victims, the present findings extend, rather than contradict, findings from previous moral development research suggesting that children judge certain acts to be wrong because of the unfairness or harm inflicted on victims (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2004; Harris, 1989; Smetana, 2006). The judgments of 5-year-olds, however, require further attention.

Arguably, 5-year-olds' judgments that transgressors' actions were wrong are unlikely to rely on any deep understandings of the victims' experiences. On what basis, then, do 5-year-olds make negative judgments of the transgressors' behaviors, when the victims' behavioral responses do not suggest they were unwilling victims? Because the types of interactions depicted in this study (e.g., one child demands to have another child's possessions or seat) and their consequences are quite familiar to young children, it may be that young children relied on judgments they have made about these types of behaviors in more canonical contexts (e.g., when the victim cries or asks for help). Their justifications indeed suggest that they were aware of the harm ensuing from those actions (e.g., "it's bad for Ruth to say that because it hurts Susie's feelings"). It is difficult to predict, based on the present findings, how young children might have judged less familiar situations. It is, on the other hand, fairly clear that young children's understandings and judgments about the unfair nature of the transgressor's actions are not yet coordinated with their judgments about the victims' responses—as evidenced by their negative judgments of both the transgressor's and the resisting and subverting victim's actions.

In the context of the increasing concern with bullying and interpersonal aggression, even among young children, the findings of this study suggest

that children of all ages are likely to be critical of behaviors that target others' well-being. By contrast, their understandings of the victim's experience seem to be quite constrained at an early age, and even school-aged children are likely to require much explicit coaching to recognize the complex dynamics underlying coercion in interpersonal relationships. The findings of this study also underscore the relation between children's moral judgments and their psychological understandings (Wainryb, 2000, 2004; Wainryb & Brehl, 2006). Children's understandings of how and why people may mask their emotions or act in ways inconsistent with their goals, as well as their understandings of the less transparent dynamics of power that sometimes underlie relationships, all seem to have informed their judgments about the non-prototypical, more ambiguous, instances of victimization investigated in the present study. Further research is needed to better understand the nature of the relation between these two types of knowledge and how development in one informs development in the other (Wainryb & Brehl, 2006). Finally, the findings bearing on children's limited understandings of those instances in which victims opt to covertly subvert, rather than openly resist, the unfair demands placed on them underscore the need for more research into children's developing judgments of non-prosocial behaviors (e.g., lying, stealing) that are used as means for subverting injustice or right violations (Turiel & Perkins, 2004). The study of children's moral lives requires that we examine not only their judgments of right and wrong but also their understandings of the complexities of human behavior and the nuances of power.

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## Appendix

### Examples of Interview Stimuli (given in "Unequal Relationship")

**Resistance:** This is a story about some kids who are in the same swimming class. Ellie is a little kid in the beginner swimming group and Margo is bigger and taller, she's an older kid in the advanced swimming group. One day, Margo, the bigger, older kid, said to Ellie, "It's my turn today to clean up the mess in the locker room. I don't want to do it. You clean up the messy locker room for me." Ellie said she didn't want to clean the mess for Margo and she didn't do it; she did not clean the messy locker room for her.

**Compliance:** This is a story about some kids who are in the same after-school art program. Susie is a little kid in second grade and Ruth is bigger and taller, she's an older kid in middle school. One day, Ruth, the bigger, older kid, said to Susie, "I see that you have some cool new markers. Your markers are much nicer than mine. I want them for myself to keep. Give them to me." Susie said she'd give Ruth her markers and she did it; she picked up all of her markers and gave them to Ruth.

**Subversion:** This story is about Jane, a little first grader, and Becky, a bigger, taller, and older kid in middle school; they're in the same before-school breakfast program. One day, Jane was sitting in the cafeteria eating breakfast. Becky, the older, bigger kid, walked up to Jane and said "Hey, you got the best seat in the cafeteria next to the window. I want that seat. Move over, I want to eat here." Jane stood up to move and knocked her juice over on the seat on purpose, then said she was sorry that it was too sticky for Becky to sit there now.