## III. THE NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS OF VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS

Based on the widely held assumption (e.g., Bruner, 1986, 2002; Polkinghorne, 1988, 1996) that narrative accounts reflect children's own representations and interpretations of their experiences, as well as on the data to be described below, we will show in this chapter that moral conflicts are not experienced in the same ways by victims and perpetrators or, more precisely, that children's construals of conflict situations when they are the targets of aggressive or unfair acts are different from their construals of similar situations in which they are those perpetrating the aggression. To be able to appreciate these differences, however, it is important to begin with some nontrivial similarities found between children's accounts of their own experiences as victims and perpetrators.

To begin with, accounts given from both perspectives were generally not different in length or amount of elaboration and detail. Analyses performed on the mean word count as measured by LIWC ($M = 190$, $SD = 204$ and $M = 162$, $SD = 112$, respectively, for victim and perpetrator narratives) and on the mean number of references to narrative elements ($M = 11.2$, $SD = 10.9$ and $M = 10.6$, $SD = 6.4$, respectively) yielded no significant differences between narratives told from the victim's and the perpetrator's perspectives. Victim and perpetrator narratives also featured similar types of incidents, largely instances of offensive behavior (46–40%, in victim and perpetrator narratives, respectively) and, to a lesser extent, instances of social exclusion (16–17%) and physical harm (17–11%). Although participants were not asked to rate how severe those incidents were, a cursory examination of the data indicated that only a minority of the narratives from both perspectives depicted incidents in which the physical or psychological consequences seemed quite severe, such as when a preschooler pushed another child down with force and made him bleed, or when a fifth grader told another child whose father had recently committed suicide to stop talking about him because "he's dead, it doesn't matter anymore." For the most part, narratives given from both perspectives depicted incidents with less severe consequences, such as when a child comments that another

child's favorite movie was "a baby movie" (fifth grade), or someone is not allowed to shoot a hoop (first grade), or is ditched by a friend (tenth grade). It should also be noted that the types of incidents that children depicted as examples of their own interpersonal experiences as both victims and perpetrators tap into the same universe of moral experience typically studied using hypothetical stimuli. It is against this backdrop of similarities between the incidents depicted by victims and perpetrators, and between them and those routinely studied in moral development research, that the significant differences between victims' and perpetrators' views, to which we turn next, should be understood.

## WHAT DO VICTIMS AND PERPETRATORS TALK ABOUT?

In spite of their similarities, narratives told from the victim and the perpetrator perspectives focused on different behavioral and psychological aspects of the experience. As shown in Table 3, different types of narrative elements were present, $F(8, 101) = 20.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .62$, and salient, $F(7, 102) = 18.46$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .56$, in narratives told from the victim and

TABLE 3

Narrative Elements Present and Salient in Narratives, by Perspective

| Narrative elements | Proportion of narratives in which narrative element was present | | Proportional frequency of each narrative element (salience) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Victim | Perpetrator | Victim | Perpetrator |
| Harmful behaviors | 1.00 | 1.00 | .41$_a$ | .29$_b$ |
| (SD) | (.00) | (.00) | (.23) | (.19) |
| Victim's responses | .54 | .54 | .11 | .09 |
| (SD) | (.50) | (.50) | (.14) | (.11) |
| Resolutions | .36$_a$ | .48$_b$ | .06$_a$ | .09$_b$ |
| (SD) | (.48) | (.50) | (.10) | (.11) |
| Narrator's mental states | .60 | .56 | .11 | .10 |
| (SD) | (.49) | (.50) | (.11) | (.12) |
| Other child's mental states | .38$_a$ | .57$_b$ | .05$_a$ | .09$_b$ |
| (SD) | (.49) | (.50) | (.09) | (.11) |
| Narrator's emotions | .67$_a$ | .35$_b$ | .15$_a$ | .05$_b$ |
| (SD) | (.47) | (.48) | (.15) | (.09) |
| Other child's emotions | .16$_a$ | .71$_b$ | .03$_a$ | .15$_b$ |
| (SD) | (.38) | (.45) | (.08) | (.14) |
| Perpetrator's intentions | .50$_a$ | .73$_b$ | .08$_a$ | .14$_b$ |
| (SD) | (.50) | (.44) | (.11) | (.11) |

Note.—Mean proportions in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ in follow-up ANOVAs with perspective as a repeated measure. Mean proportions for salience may not add up to 1.00 due to rounding.

the perpetrator perspectives. As might be expected, given that participants were asked to provide narratives about situations in which interpersonal harm took place, all narratives given from both perspectives included at least one reference to the perpetrator's harmful behavior. Nevertheless, references to harmful behavior constituted 41% of all references provided in narratives told from the victim's perspective, as compared with only 29% of references provided in narratives told from the perpetrator's perspective, $F(1, 108) = 25.05$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .19$, giving the impression that the harm inflicted and suffered is more salient to children when they consider situations in which they were the ones being hurt. References to other behavioral elements, such as the victim's response and the conflict's resolution made up, together, another 17–18% of children's narratives from each perspective (perpetrator narratives featured references to conflict resolution slightly more often than did victim narratives, $F(1, 108) = 6.18$, $p = .014$, $\eta^2 = .05$).

The actual contents of the behavioral elements included in children's construals are listed in Table 4. Even though, as stated above, references to harmful behaviors were more salient in victim narratives, victims and perpetrators referred largely to similar types of behaviors. As shown in Table 4, both victims and perpetrators depicted instances of offensive behavior (e.g., ". . . then one of his friends told me how, that I was too guy-ish," "I said to her that I didn't like the way she dressed and that she smelled funny"). Although not as frequent, incidents of exclusion were also present in narratives from both perspectives (e.g., "I do remember a time when one of my friends ditched me . . .," "I think I remember that time when someone was, um, talking to me and they said, um, I said, um, 'Stephan, I just don't want to play with you'"), as were incidents involving physical harm (e.g., "Um, one time Max hit me," "I didn't want to play and so I pushed him down"). Although incidents involving trust violation (e.g., lying, breaking promises, spreading rumors) were more common in victim than perpetrator narratives, $F(1, 108) = 7.42$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2 = .06$, their overall frequency was very low. Similarly, although infrequent overall, incidents depicting harmless behaviors that were construed as hurtful by the victim (e.g., "Well, I said something nice but they, they didn't hear so they thought I said a bad word") were found only in the narratives of perpetrators, $F(1, 108) = 18.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .15$. The overall similarities in the types of behavioral elements depicted by victims and perpetrators extended also to their references to the victim's response and the conflict's resolution. Both victims and perpetrators depicted victims as responding by confronting the perpetrator, asking for help, or withdrawing. When victims or perpetrators referred to the outcome of the conflict, they spoke largely about positive resolutions. In all, then, it appears that victims and perpetrators view the "landscape of action" (Bruner, 1986) of

TABLE 4

BEHAVIORAL ELEMENTS: TYPES OF HARMFUL BEHAVIORS, VICTIM'S RESPONSES, AND
RESOLUTIONS, BY PERSPECTIVE (PROPORTIONS)

| Behavioral elements | Perspective | |
|---|---|---|
| | Victim | Perpetrator |
| Harmful behaviors | | |
| Physical harm | .17 | .11 |
| (*SD*) | (.34) | (.29) |
| Offensive behavior | .46 | .40 |
| (*SD*) | (.45) | (.44) |
| Exclusion | .16 | .17 |
| (*SD*) | (.35) | (.35) |
| Trust violation | .18$_a$ | .09$_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.34) | (.24) |
| Injustice | .02$_a$ | .08$_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.12) | (.26) |
| Harmless behavior | .00$_a$ | .12$_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.00) | (.30) |
| Unelaborated | .02 | .03 |
| (*SD*) | (.13) | (.16) |
| Victim's responses | | |
| Confronted perpetrator | .19 | .13 |
| (*SD*) | (.36) | (.30) |
| Withdrew | .13 | .19 |
| (*SD*) | (.30) | (.38) |
| Asked for help | .13 | .08 |
| (*SD*) | (.31) | (.25) |
| Retaliated | .04$_a$ | .11$_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.18) | (.30) |
| Attempted to reconcile | .02 | .00 |
| (*SD*) | (.11) | (.04) |
| No overt response | .04 | .03 |
| (*SD*) | (.18) | (.17) |
| No reference | .45 | .46 |
| (*SD*) | (.50) | (.50) |
| Resolutions | | |
| Circumstantial resolution | .07 | .03 |
| (*SD*) | (.25) | (.15) |
| Attempted reparation | .07$_a$ | .17$_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.23) | (.32) |
| Conflict resolved | .15 | .18 |
| (*SD*) | (.34) | (.34) |
| Damage to relationship | .06 | .11 |
| (*SD*) | (.22) | (.28) |
| No reference | .64$_a$ | .52$_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.48) | (.50) |

*Note*.—Mean proportions in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ in follow-up
ANOVAs with perspective as a repeated measure. Mean proportions within a narrative element may not
add up to 1.00 due to rounding.

TABLE 5

PSYCHOLOGICAL ELEMENTS: TYPES OF MENTAL STATES AND EMOTIONS ATTRIBUTED TO NARRATOR AND OTHER CHILD, BY PERSPECTIVE (PROPORTIONS)

| Psychological elements | Narrator | | Other child | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Victim | Perpetrator | Victim | Perpetrator |
| Mental states | | | | |
| Construal | $.05_a$ | $.13_b$ | .17 | .15 |
| (*SD*) | (.15) | (.29) | (.35) | (.32) |
| Prescriptive beliefs | .06 | .09 | .00 | .01 |
| (*SD*) | (.19) | (.24) | (.00) | (.07) |
| Disbelief | $.05_a$ | $.02_b$ | .01 | .01 |
| (*SD*) | (.15) | (.10) | (.01) | (.04) |
| Uncertainty | .06 | .02 | .02 | .00 |
| (*SD*) | (.22) | (.12) | (.13) | (.00) |
| Desires/preferences | .24 | .19 | $.18_a$ | $.33_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.39) | (.36) | (.37) | (.45) |
| Realizations | .14 | .11 | .02 | .04 |
| (*SD*) | (.31) | (.26) | (.11) | (.16) |
| No reference | .40 | .45 | $.62_a$ | $.45_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.49) | (.50) | (.49) | (.50) |
| Emotions | | | | |
| Sadness | $.36_a$ | $.06_b$ | $.04_a$ | $.46_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.45) | (.23) | (.19) | (.47) |
| Guilt | $.01_a$ | $.10_b$ | .03 | .00 |
| (*SD*) | (.05) | (.28) | (.16) | (.00) |
| Anger | .10 | .15 | $.09_a$ | $.17_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.28) | (.34) | (.29) | (.35) |
| Unelaborated negative | $.20_a$ | $.04_b$ | $.01_a$ | $.09_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.38) | (.19) | (.09) | (.25) |
| No reference | $.33_a$ | $.65_b$ | $.84_a$ | $.29_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.47) | (.48) | (.37) | (.46) |

*Note.*—Mean proportions in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ in follow-up ANOVAs with perspective as a repeated measure. Mean proportions within a narrative element may not add up to 1.00 due to rounding.

their interpersonal conflicts in very similar ways, with the exception that victims tend to refer more repeatedly to the harm fallen on them.

What about the "landscape of consciousness?" As can be seen in Table 3, about half the references in the construals from each perspective (42% and 53%, respectively, for victims and perpetrators) related, not to behavioral elements, but to psychological elements, such as intentions, thoughts, and emotions—both the narrator's own and those of the other child.

In general, about half of the narratives (55–60%) from each perspective included references to the narrator's own mental states. As shown in Table 5, regardless of the perspective from which they spoke, children most commonly described what they wanted and liked (e.g., "I still wanted to

fight," "I didn't like her very much") or talked about realizations that came about during the event (e.g., ". . . and just then I knew what I had to do," ". . . and then I figured out that he didn't have any friends"). In addition, when speaking from the perpetrator's perspective, children referred more often to their own understandings or construals of the situation (e.g., "I thought I'd never be able to find one just like that one"), $F(1, 108) = 7.16$, $p = .009$, $\eta^2 = .06$, and when speaking from the victim's perspective they described themselves as being in a state of disbelief (e.g., "So I broke up with him and then she went out with him, and I was like, 'Oh my God, how could you *do* that?'"), $F(1, 108) = 4.11$, $p = .045$, $\eta^2 = .04$.

Beyond the general similarities in how children depicted their own wants, thoughts, and beliefs, the landscape of consciousness they conjured as victims was significantly different from the one they conjured as perpetrators. When speaking as victims, children referred largely to their own emotions; when speaking as perpetrators, their intentions took center stage. As shown in Table 3, references to the narrator's own emotions were more frequent in narratives told from the victim's perspective, $F(1, 108) = 28.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .21$, and made up 15% of all references in the victim narratives, but only 5% of references in the perpetrator narratives, $F(1, 108) = 41.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .28$. Victims, more often than perpetrators, described themselves largely as feeling sad, $F(1, 108) = 35.44$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .25$, or generally unwell, $F(1, 108) = 19.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .15$, but rarely depicted themselves as having felt angry (see Table 5). Children's emotions as perpetrators, when present, referred largely to guilt (indeed, guilt appeared more often in the narratives of perpetrator than of victims, $F(1, 108) = 11.82$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .10$, and anger (although anger was slightly more frequent in the narratives of perpetrators than in those of victims, this difference was not statistically significant).

Whereas perpetrators referred to their own emotions infrequently, their own intentions were central to their construals. Indeed, references to intentions were more frequent, $F(1, 108) = 17.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$, and more salient, $F(1, 108) = 16.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$, in perpetrator than in victim narratives (see Table 3). Perpetrators often explained their own actions in terms of accidents or retribution. For example, perpetrators explained that "we were going and I tripped and I accidentally pushed him, and then he got mad at me . . . But I did it on accident," or that "I telled [sic] a joke on Cindy. . .cause she did something mean to me one day and so I played a bad joke on her." Not unexpectedly, both these types of reasons were invoked more frequently by perpetrators than by victims, $Fs(1, 108) = 21.00$ and $17.61$, $ps < .001$, $\eta^2 = .16$ and $.14$, respectively (see Table 6).

Whereas notions bearing on retribution and accidental injury have been a long-standing part of moral development research, the reason that

TABLE 6

PSYCHOLOGICAL ELEMENTS: TYPES OF INTENTIONS ATTRIBUTED TO PERPETRATOR, BY
PERSPECTIVE (PROPORTIONS)

| | Perspective | |
|---|---|---|
| Perpetrator's intentions | Victim | Perpetrator |
| Incidental to pursuit of goal/preference | $.15_a$ | $.26_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.35) | (.42) |
| Retribution | $.01_a$ | $.15_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.09) | (.34) |
| Mistaken assumption | $.09_a$ | $.03_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.09) | (.03) |
| Impulsive | .06 | .06 |
| (*SD*) | (.23) | (.20) |
| Intent to harm | $.08_a$ | $.02_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.26) | (.12) |
| Unintentional | $.04_a$ | $.20_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.19) | (.37) |
| Incomprehensible | $.07_a$ | $.01_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.25) | (.08) |
| No reference | $.50_a$ | $.27_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.50) | (.44) |

*Note.*—Mean proportions in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ in follow-up ANOVAs with perspective as a repeated measure. Mean proportions may not add up to 1.00 due to rounding.

perpetrators invoked most frequently was one that has not been considered in previous research. Consider the following two examples, one by a younger child and one by an older one:

> I didn't play with her because I kind of wanted to play with another friend because, well, I knew she would be sad, but I wanted to make new friends so I could have lots of friends.

> My friend and I were going to have a sleepover and it was about three hours before it started but then my other friend called me and he asked me if he if I wanted to go have a sleepover . . . I thought it would be a lot more fun if I went with my second friend, but I didn't want to really hurt my other friend's feelings too much, so I told my other friend that my parents said I couldn't go and I ended up going with my other friend.

Perpetrators, as illustrated by these examples, often depicted themselves as being engaged in pursuing their own goals or interests, rather than intending to hurt someone else, and explained the harm ensuing from their actions as being an incidental (although not unforeseen) consequence of actions that they had taken in pursuit of those goals. It is also noteworthy that whereas perpetrators invoked this type of explanation more often than

did victims, $F(1, 108) = 5.58$, $p = .020$, $\eta^2 = .05$, this was also the most common explanation offered by those victims who made references to the perpetrator's intentions. Many victims, it seems, also believed that their peers had caused them harm in the process of pursuing their own goals (e.g., "She wanted to watch her favorite show 'Arthur' and so she told the babysitter to put it on and so I didn't get to watch my show"). We shall have more to say about this sort of "not-quite-intentional but not-quite-unintentional" type of harm later in this *Monograph*.

Describing the prevalence of intentions, however, does not convey a full picture of perpetrators' mental landscape. For, unlike the victims' self-referential focus, the landscape of consciousness of perpetrators was broader. Indeed, 71% of perpetrator narratives included at least one reference to the other child's emotions, as compared with only 16% of victim narratives, $F(1, 108) = 136.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .56$ (see Table 3). As shown in Table 5, perpetrators, more often than victims, noted that the other child had felt sad, $F(1, 108) = 86.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .45$, and to a lesser extent angry, $F(1, 108) = 4.90$, $p = .029$, $\eta^2 = .04$ (attributions of mixed emotions were infrequent). The construals of perpetrators (more often than those of victims, $F(1, 108) = 8.23$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .07$) also included references to what the other child may have believed or may have been thinking (see Table 3). In fact, when children spoke as perpetrators they referred to the other child's mental states as often as they did to their own. References to the other child's desires and preferences (e.g., "he wanted to watch cartoons," "she would just rather hang out with her new friends"), especially, were more frequent in perpetrator than in victim narratives, $F(1, 108) = 8.23$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .07$.

When taken together, the findings bearing on victims' and perpetrators' construals of the psychological elements of conflict situations suggest two things. First, narratives told from the perpetrator perspective involved a dual focus, including elements relating both to the perpetrator's own experience and to the experience of the other child. Second, in their construals of interpersonal conflict situations, children always maintained at least a partial focus on the suffering of the person who was harmed (the victim) regardless of from which perspective the narrative was told. In fact, overall, references to the victim's emotions were more frequent than references to the perpetrator's emotions, $F(1, 108) = 117.55$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .52$, regardless of which role the narrator played. We shall return to both of these issues later.

Having described in great detail *what* victims and perpetrators talk about—that is, what elements of the conflict situation come into focus as children consider incidents in which they had been the targets of harm and incidents in which they had been the perpetrators—we turn next to see what can be learned from the structure and coherence of children's narratives. We turn, that is, to *how* victims and perpetrators talk about their experiences.

## AND HOW DO THEY TALK ABOUT IT?

As it is generally agreed that a narrative's organization and coherence reflects the integration (or lack thereof) of different aspects of an experience (McAdams, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1988), we expected that by listening to *how* victims and perpetrators talk about their experiences, we might learn more about children's construals of those experiences. To this end, narratives provided from the victim's and the perpetrator's perspectives were compared along a number of indices of coherence.

One such measure was the number of shifts featured, in a narrative, from an element bearing on the experience of the victim (e.g., victim's emotions, victim's mental states, victim's response) to one bearing on the experience of the perpetrator (e.g., perpetrator's emotions, perpetrator's mental states, perpetrator's intentions), and vice-versa. Unlike other coherence indices we adopted, which were based on existing measures (e.g., Bliss et al., 1998; Fiese et al., 1999), the idea of merely counting the number of shifts from one perspective to the other emerged from listening to children in our sample account for incidents from each perspective (we mean "listening" in a literal sense, as we actually listened to the digitized interviews). Almost as soon as we started listening to the recording of narratives it became apparent that some narratives followed what seemed to be a linear structure, as it were, and others seemed to "leapfrog" (Bliss et al., 1998). This difference was not only immediately evident but also quite compelling in its effect on us as listeners.

At first we thought that these two distinctive organizations, let's call them "linear" and "leapfrogging," could be captured in terms of typical measures of coherence such as fluency, sequencing, or topic maintenance. Further examination revealed that, whereas many of these leapfrogging narratives could be coded as suffering from inadequate fluency, they could not be reliably distinguished in terms of event sequencing or topic maintenance. Some of the "leapfrogging" narratives were not adequate in these regards, but many were. It appeared then that we were onto something that was not adequately captured by common coherence indices. For the leapfrogging in these narratives, it seemed, was not random. It was, rather, a going back and forth between considering something related to, say, the narrator, and something related to the other party in the conflict, and back again. Thus emerged the idea of counting the number of shifts between the two perspectives. When compared in this respect, narratives told from the perpetrator's perspective featured, on the average, more shifts ($M = 1.98$, $SD = 2.00$) than narratives told from the victim's perspective ($M = 1.53$, $SD = 1.85$), $F(1, 108) = 4.31$, $p = .040$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Furthermore, whereas the majority of narratives told from the perpetrator's perspective (71%) in-

TABLE 7

PROPORTION OF NARRATIVES RATED AS COHERENT ON SIX COHERENCE MARKERS, BY
PERSPECTIVE

| | Perspective | |
|---|---|---|
| Coherence markers | Victim | Perpetrator |
| Topic maintenance | .82 | .78 |
| (*SD*) | (.39) | (.42) |
| Event sequencing | .88 | .85 |
| (*SD*) | (.33) | (.36) |
| Completion | .54$_a$ | .41$_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.50) | (.49) |
| References to place | .80 | .75 |
| (*SD*) | (.41) | (.44) |
| References to time | .62$_a$ | .48$_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.49) | (.50) |
| False starts and fluency | .79$_a$ | .58$_b$ |
| (*SD*) | (.41) | (.50) |

*Note.*—Mean proportions in the same row that do not share subscripts differ at $p < .05$ in follow-up ANOVAs with perspective as a repeated measure.

cluded at least one shift in focus from their own experience to the experience of their victims, or vice-versa, with nearly 20% including between four and six shifts, 42% of narratives told from the victim perspective did not include even one such shift, and only 8% included four to six shifts.

Additional analyses were conducted comparing victim and perpetrator narratives along well-established markers of coherence. The MANOVA yielded a significant effect for perspective, $F(6, 103) = 5.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .24$. As shown in Table 7, the majority of narratives were judged to be adequate in terms of topic maintenance, event sequencing, and references to place. This is to say that, on the average, most children's utterances and references in each narrative were relevant to the incident depicted, rather than digressive or tangential, and that narratives from both perspectives were organized in such a way that it was possible to understand the setting of the incident and follow the chronology of events. Victim and perpetrator narratives, however, differed in regards to completion, $F(1, 108) = 4.96$, $p = .028$, $\eta^2 = .04$, references to time, $F(1, 108) = 5.77$, $p = .018$, $\eta^2 = .05$, and false starts, $F(1, 108) = 18.21$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$. Even as victim and perpetrator narratives did not differ in length or in the number of references they included, victim narratives, it was found, were more complete and elaborated, and more fluent, than perpetrator narratives.

Because narratives may be adequate along some coherence markers but inadequate along others, with certain patterns of incoherence being more

disruptive than others, narratives were also rated in their entirety (globally) as incoherent or coherent; this rating was done independently from the rating of each coherence marker. On this global measure of coherence, too, more victim narratives than perpetrator narratives (58% vs. 35%) were judged to be coherent, $F(1, 108) = 17.22$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$.


## TWO PERSPECTIVES ON THE MORAL WORLD

As we proposed at the outset, moral conflicts are not experienced in the same ways by the perpetrators of harm and by their targets. Whereas being the target of aggression or unfairness brings into sharp focus the child's own experience, being the one who inflicts pain or distress on another person appears to spotlight aspects of both the perpetrator's and the victim's experiences—a dual focus that seems to be associated with a lack of coherence. We suggest, based on the evidence concerning the multiple differences between children's victim and perpetrator narratives, that the experiences of victims and perpetrators exhibit two distinct gestalts. Let us consider some of this evidence.

Narratives told from the victim's perspective were largely construed around the victim's own experience. Victims made repeated references to the harm inflicted on them (e.g., "This kid in my class was picking on me . . . he kept calling me names . . . I told him I didn't like it but he just kept on picking on me") and depicted themselves as having felt sad. (Unexpectedly, victims rarely depicted themselves as having felt angry. It may be that anger, being a more action-oriented emotion than sadness, is experienced during the conflict but dissipates with time; perpetrators, in fact, often depicted victims as angry. It may, alternatively, be that children selected victim experiences which left them feeling sad rather than angry, although why that may be is hard to discern). Their narrow focus on their own thwarted wants and feelings was also evidenced in what victims did *not* include in their narratives. Most notably, only 16% of children included, in their victim narratives, references to the perpetrator's emotions. In light of research indicating that children do make judgments about the perpetrator's emotions (with children younger than 6–8 thinking that perpetrators feel happy, and older children judging that perpetrators are likely to experience conflicting emotions [Arsenio & Lover, 1995; Arsenio et al., 2006]), the finding that victim narratives systematically overlooked the perpetrator's emotions can be seen as a bias associated with the victim's perspective; children occupying the victim's perspective are systematically blinded to something to which they would attend in other contexts. This conclusion can also be extended to victims' scarce references to intentions. Although moral development research (e.g., Harris & Nunez, 1996; Jones & Nelson-

Le Gall, 1995; Nunez & Harris, 1998; Schult, 2002; Shultz et al.,1986; Siegel & Peterson, 1998) has amply documented that children, even very young children, take intentions into account in their moral thinking and judge acts of intentional harm as more wrong than acts in which the harm was depicted as unintentional, only about half of the children referred to intentions when speaking from the victim's perspective. Although it is unlikely that children do not care whether others hurt them on purpose or not, this oversight on their part may be seen as yet another bias associated with the victim's construal of interpersonal conflicts.

In contrast to victims' largely self-referential focus, narratives told from the perpetrator's perspective featured a dual focus on both the victim's *and* the perpetrator's experiences. The victim's perspective appears to blind children to the other child's emotions; the perpetrator's role does not. On the contrary, the large majority of children, when speaking from the perpetrator's perspective, referred to the victim's sadness and anger. Given that emotions contribute to how children remember moral conflicts (Arsenio & Lover, 1995; Dunn & Slomkowski, 1992), and in light of research indicating that aggressive and conduct-disordered children construe conflict situations in ways that minimize the experience of the victim (Astor, 1994; Nucci & Herman, 1982; Slaby & Guerra, 1988; Tisak et al., 2006), the reliable attention to the victim's experience exhibited by perpetrators in our study merits notice.

Perpetrators' simultaneous consideration of both their own and the victims' experiences, also evidenced in the multiple shifts back and forth between foci, suggests that experiences as perpetrators are more complex for children, and perhaps more confusing and disorganizing, than are their experiences as victims. We do not, by saying this, mean that being a victim is "easy" or simple. What our data suggest is that, as perpetrators, children attend more to the complexity of the situation. Further indication of this was the relative incoherence of narratives told from the perpetrator's perspective (only 35% were rated as coherent), which reflects children's difficulty in integrating different aspects of the experience.

Taken together, these multiple findings suggest that children's construals of interpersonal conflicts indeed vary systematically, and in substantial ways, with the perspective from which they experienced those conflicts. Why might the same children inhabit such different worlds when they are victims and perpetrators? And what might these differences mean as far as their moral judgments? Before we can consider such questions, we must turn to examine how children of different ages construe their victim and perpetrator experiences and, importantly, whether the differences between victim and perpetrator narratives remain constant across a broad age range, as age-related differences and their developmental implications shall have a direct bearing on how we answer them.