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SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH PROGRESS

**FRIENDSHIP IN CULTURAL
AND PERSONALITY PSYCHOLOGY
INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

**TOBIAS ALTMANN
EDITOR**



Chapter 6

CHILDREN'S AND ADOLESCENTS' DESCRIPTIVE AND PRESCRIPTIVE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT FRIENDSHIP: DEVELOPMENTAL, CULTURAL AND COHORT COMPARISONS

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ABSTRACT

Friendship is a curious social relationship. Unlike other major social relationships, such as parent-child or romantic and sexual relationships, it does not have obvious evolutionary benefits and survival advantages. Yet, friendships are adaptive in that people with close friends experience less stress, have better mental health, live longer, and even improve their reproductive success (Lewis et al., 2015; Seyfarth & Cheney, 2012). Forming and maintaining high-quality friendships is also important for well-being and happiness across the life-span. Particularly for children and adolescents, high-quality friendships are associated with positive developmental outcomes (Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Steinhoff & Keller, 2020). This chapter focuses on the important role of friendship for one such developmental outcome, namely children's and adolescents' morality. Specifically, we summarize how descriptive and prescriptive knowledge about friendship develops across childhood and adolescence and across cultures and compare these developments in different cohorts of children and adolescents.

Keywords: cross-cultural friendship, knowledge, morality, adolescents

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INTRODUCTION: FRIENDSHIP AND MORALITY

The important role that peers and friends play for children's and adolescents' moral decisions and reasoning has already been emphasized in one of the earliest works on the development of morality. Piaget (1932) suggested that different types of moral understanding are associated with different close relationships. Specifically, in parent-child relationships, which are characterized by inequality in (physical) power and intellectual and social knowledge, young children develop a "heteronomous" morality, following parental rules because they are ordered to do so, not because they understand and respect them. Because of parents' unilateral power of enforcing their perspective, children do not understand why moral rules are necessary for coordinating people's behavior. Thus, parental authority does not enable children to take the perspective of others' equal rights nor do they differentiate between the concerns, rights, and duties of different parties.

In contrast, peer and friendship relationships are based on equality. As a consequence, rule following cannot be coerced, but friends have to be convinced with reasons. These discussions and exchanges with friends enable children to take the perspectives of others and to learn the function and importance of moral rules. Children respect and follow moral rules, not because they are coerced to do so, but because they are based on the mutual respect that characterizes a society of equals (Piaget, 1932).

Piaget's thesis on the importance of peer-relationships for moral development has been widely supported in later research (Walker et al., 2000; Youniss, 1980). Further, empirical and theoretical research on the development of morality has acknowledged that close relationships present crucial contexts for moral development and moral growth. Keller (1996; Keller & Edelstein, 1990) argued that close relationships are not only contexts for moral development, but that the understanding of close social relationships is part of people's moral understanding itself. People's descriptions of how they behave towards close others have a simultaneous normative component of how one should act in order to maintain close relationships. These normative expectations about appropriate behavior in close relationships form the basis of an interpersonal morality (Keller, 1984; Keller & Edelstein, 1991).

Developing such an interpersonal morality is thus based on an understanding of complex social knowledge of people, relationships between people, and the normative rules that underpin these relationships. Keller and Edelstein (1993) argue that social knowledge contains both descriptive and prescriptive knowledge. Descriptive knowledge can be equated with people's social cognition, that is, knowledge about others' mental states, such as motivations, desires, and feelings, strategies to achieve one's goals, but also knowledge about specific relationships, such as friendship-, peer- or authority relationships. Prescriptive moral knowledge consists of norms in these relationships, that is, what one ought to do in terms of normative standards and responsibilities in relationships. Prescriptive moral

knowledge serves not only as a motivation for action, but can also be used to provide morally justified or defensive reasons post-hoc in case of violations of such expectations in order to (re)establish a moral balance in relationships. People use their prescriptive moral knowledge to reconstruct and evaluate the meaning of their own and others' actions.

As Keller and colleagues (Keller & Edelstein, 1993; Keller et al. 2004) have emphasized, the development of socio-moral knowledge (and hence the development of morality) is driven by perspective-taking, the ability to take and coordinate others' and one's own point of view, desires, and goals (Selman, 1980). Friendship, as a relationship between equals, serves as a particularly fruitful context for coordinating the perspectives of self and other. Furthermore, children's and adolescents' close and affective relationships with their friends motivate them to coordinate and regulate interests, desires, emotions, and actions with their close friends in order to maintain a satisfying relationship. Thus, children's and adolescents' development of interpersonal morality, their reasoning in interpersonal and morally-relevant situations, is closely intertwined with their developing understanding of intimate relationships, and especially friendships (Keller et al., 2004, Youniss, 1980).

Previous research has shown that reasoning about prescriptive moral and descriptive knowledge undergoes significant changes over the course of childhood and adolescence. Concerning prescriptive moral knowledge, numerous studies have supported Kohlberg's (1984) theory of the cognitive-structural development of stages of moral reasoning as the transformation of justice concepts. Gibbs (1991, 2003) integrated Kohlberg's paradigm with Hoffman's (2000) research on the development of empathic concern and supported the developmental sequence with more adequate scenarios for younger children. Similarly, Eisenberg and Shell (1986) showed that moral reasoning about prosocial moral dilemmas in children develops along a sequence of developmental levels based on the ability to differentiate and coordinate perspectives.

Corresponding to Kohlberg's theory, at the preconventional level, preschoolers and young elementary-school children focus on authority, hedonistic, and (primitive) needs-oriented reasons, and older elementary-school children on stereotypic reasons for being a good or bad person and pragmatic exchange rules. At the conventional level in early adolescence, affective reasons (e.g., guilt, sympathy) indicate internalized norms, whereas concerns with society, rights, and justice are topics in late adolescence. Finally, at the highest postconventional levels of moral reasoning, adults can achieve the competence to reason in terms of social contracts, universal rights, and principles that take priority over particular societal laws. Thus, with age, hedonistic and self-interested concerns decrease in people's moral reasoning and concerns for others' well-being in light of generalized moral principles increase. It should be noted, though, that in Kohlberg's theory the highest, postconventional level of moral reasoning is not reached by all adults; especially reasoning about conflicts in everyday interactions in close relationships does not necessarily stimulate this type of principle-oriented arguing (Shweder et al., 1990).

Table 1. Levels of social perspective-taking and stages friendship reasoning about closeness and intimacy (Selman, 1980)

Levels of social perspective-taking	Stages of friendship reasoning about closeness and intimacy
Level 0: Undifferentiated and egocentric	Stage 0: Close friendship as momentary physical interactions - <i>Polarization of friendship types</i> - <i>Close friendship equal to physical proximity</i> - <i>Superficial similarity</i>
Level 1: Differentiated and subjective	Stage 1: Close friendship as one-way assistance - <i>Rank ordering of friends</i> - <i>Longer relationships allow better knowledge of other's likes and dislikes</i> - <i>One-way desires</i>
Level 2: Self-reflective/Second-person and reciprocal	Stage 2: Close friendship as fair weather cooperation - <i>Good friends get along</i> - <i>Getting to know other's "true", real, or inner attitudes</i>
Level 3: Third-person and mutual	Stage 3: Close friendship as intimate and mutual sharing - <i>Close friendship based on sharing and intimacy</i> - <i>Length of friendship is important as friendships are built on common experiences</i> - <i>Close friends need not be similar but need to have things in common</i> - <i>Caring about self and other</i>
Level 4: In-depth and societal-symbolic	Stage 4: Close friendship as autonomous interdependence - <i>Qualitatively different types of friendship relationships are possible</i> - <i>Close friendship involved moral commitment and a respect for the other as an individual</i>

In line with cognitive-structural theories of morality, Selman (1980) proposed that age-related differences in friendship understanding can be attributed to developmental processes of perspective-differentiation and coordination. Selman (1980) interviewed children and adolescents about different aspects of friendship (e.g., formation of friendship, closeness and intimacy, conflict resolution) and coded participants' answers according to five developmental stages that corresponded with five levels of perspective-taking. Table 1 gives an overview of the levels of social perspective-taking and stages of friendship reasoning about the topic of closeness and intimacy. This model has been supported by Keller and Wood (1989) in their longitudinal research on the development of the friendship concept.

More general age-related changes have also been reported in children's and adolescents' descriptive knowledge of friendship. Research on people's expectations about what constitutes a "good" friend (e.g., Bigelow, 1977; Bigelow & La Gaipa, 1975; Furman & Bierman, 1984; Youniss, 1980) has shown that elementary-school children tend to concentrate on situational and concrete aspects of their interactions with friends (e.g., playing, common activities, propinquity), and friends are valued for utilitarian reasons. From preadolescence onward, normative expectations (e.g., helping, sharing, keeping secrets) become important in friendships, and the violation of these expectations leads to negative (emotional) sanctions (e.g., disapproval, guilt feelings). Adolescents and young adults regard interpersonal characteristics, such as intimacy, and moral characteristics, such as loyalty and trust, as vital for friendships (Keller & Edelstein, 1991; Keller & Reuss, 1984). Understanding and mutual self-disclosure are important means for establishing such intimate relationships.

FRIENDSHIP, INTERPERSONAL MORALITY, AND CULTURE

Is the development of interpersonal morality in friendship universal across cultures? While numerous studies in the cognitive-structural tradition of moral development (e.g., Kohlberg, 1984) have supported the developmental sequence of moral reasoning across cultures, differences in the speed of this development have also been documented (Snarey, 1985). In addition, differences in content aspects of the levels have been reported in western and Asian societies concerning the highest levels of moral development, but this research has not been systematically followed-up (Ma, 1988). Social domain theory (Smetana et al., 2014; Turiel, 2002) has focused exclusively on the content of children's and adolescents' social and moral reasoning and distinguished different types of rules. This theory proposes that, also across cultures, children differentiate between moral transgressions (i.e., those related to harming others or violating fairness rights, and justice) and social-conventional transgressions (i.e., that hamper the effective social functioning of groups and institutions). Social and cultural psychological research has revealed stark differences in how adults and children conceptualize and reason about moral conflicts across cultures (Haidt, 2007; Miller & Bland, 2014; Shweder et al., 1990). One of the main contributions of this research is the suggestion that cultures vary in how they conceptualize morality, moral transgressions and actions, and accompanying emotional reactions. While western views of morality focus on avoiding harm and on principles of upholding rights and justice, the moral domain is defined more widely in non-western societies, focusing on relationships and including concerns for ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect, or purity/sanctity (Graham et al., 2011; Rozin et al., 1999). According to cultural psychology approaches, morality is based less on universal moral principles than on community-specific ways to define what is right and wrong and grounded in actions that that try to make sense of and negotiate everyday social reality. As such, people's lived experiences with and

understanding of social relationships, such as friendships, form the basis of their moral understanding. This is in line with Keller's (1996; Keller & Edelstein, 1990) conceptualization of an interpersonal morality which includes both prescriptive moral knowledge and descriptive knowledge about relationships (Keller et al., 2005).

Compared to the multitude of studies investigating cultural differences and similarities in moral development, cross-cultural research on the development of friendship understanding is more limited (e.g., Chen, 2012; French et al., 2005; Krappmann, 1996; Rubin et al., 2011; Verkuyten & Mason, 1996). Most of this research has focused on the content aspects of children's and adolescents' reasoning about friendship and not the underlying cognitive competence of perspective-taking. In general, children and adolescents from non-western societies seem to conceptualize friendship as more strongly based on reciprocal (instrumental) help than their western peers. On the other hand, interpersonal aspects of friendships (e.g., loyalty, trust) tend to be more commonly mentioned by children and adolescents from collectivistic compared to individualistic societies.

INVESTIGATING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIO-MORAL REASONING ABOUT A DILEMMA IN CLOSE FRIENDSHIP

In the following, we will present the findings from a research program "Individual Development and Social Structure" (Director: Wolfgang Edelstein at the Max Planck Institute of Human Development, Germany, in cooperation with the University of Iceland and later the Chinese Academy of Sciences in China) that started at the beginning of the 1980s in the context of a longitudinal study in Iceland. Over time, it included various cross-cultural comparison studies focusing on the development of socio-moral reasoning.

Overall, these studies included (1) a longitudinal study with participants from different ecologies: Iceland (city of Reykjavik [$n = 120$] and three rural ecologies [$n = 60$], Björnsson & Edelstein, 1977) starting at the age of 7 years and including follow-ups at 9, 12, 15 and 18 years (Edelstein et al., 1990; Keller, 1996) and an assessment of the "life and relationship outcomes" in a sub-sample of the Reykjavik participants at ages 21 and 38 years (Steinhoff & Keller, 2020), (2) a cross-sectional/longitudinal study of children and adolescents of the same ages in Beijing/China and a rural area close to Beijing (Keller et al. 2005), and (3) various cross-sectional studies in different western societies of children and adolescents of the same ages (e.g., East Germany, Russia, Spain; Gummerum & Keller, 2008; López-Pérez et al., 2015). All samples contained about equal numbers of males and females. The findings presented here focus on the age span between 7 and 15 years.

Participants were presented with a hypothetical friendship dilemma scenario: The main protagonist of the story (matched in gender to participants' gender) has promised to visit their best friend. Later, the protagonist receives an attractive

invitation from another child (going to the cinema and having pizza afterwards for younger participants; going to a pop concert for older participants). Several issues complicate the situation: The two friends have known each other for a very long time, they always meet at the same day, and the friend doesn't like the new child. The friend wants to show a new toy or CD to the protagonist, but also wants to talk about a something important. However, the new child just moved to the area and does not have friends yet.

Thus, different non-normative interests and interpersonal and normative expectations conflict in this scenario which may be picked up by participants in a semi-structured interview: hedonistic self-interests (the attractive offer by the new child; playing with and being interested in the friend); the promise given to the friend; the responsibility towards the friend (the friends always meet at the same day, the friend wants to talk about something important - perhaps a problem); altruistic responsibilities towards the other child (the new child just moved and doesn't have any friends).

The interview was conceived following an action-theoretical framework (Keller, 1996; Keller & Edelstein, 1991; Keller & Reuss, 1984) modelling the sequence of steps (issues) of action/reflection in a hypothetical dilemma. Participants had to reason about the action choices of the protagonist/self and the consequences resulting from this choice from the perspectives of the persons involved, mainly the protagonist and the friend: (1) practical decision, that is how the protagonist would decide (descriptive); (2) moral judgment, that is what would be the right thing to do in this situation (prescriptive); (3) reasons given for the practical decision and moral judgment and the non-chosen alternatives; (4) consequences of the decision, in particular feelings concerning their own choice from the perspective of the protagonist and the friend; and (5) strategies of conflict resolution, in particular if the decision was seen to violate the friend's feelings. Furthermore, participants were asked about the meaning of friendship (e.g., what is most important in close friendship) and the meaning of promise-keeping (e.g., must a promise always be kept).

Developmental Levels of Socio-Moral Reasoning

Participants' choices and their descriptive and prescriptive reasoning about the different issues were coded according to the different levels of perspective-coordination (see Keller, 1996; Keller & Edelstein, 1990). The results revealed a clear age-related developmental sequence of perspective differentiation and coordination in the way children and adolescents argued about the different issues in this scenario. However, they also showed that different content aspects were characteristic for the developmental levels, such as liking each other and having fun at levels 1 and 2 versus trust and intimacy at level 3. This sequence supports and elaborates the findings of various studies in the cognitive-structural tradition on socio-moral reasoning about close friendship (Keller & Wood, 1989; Selman, 1980) and

moral judgment (Gibbs, 1991; Kohlberg, 1984), and allows following-up on previous conceptual cross-cultural findings and research (Ma, 1988; Snarey, 1985). The developmental sequence of levels was supported in the longitudinal Icelandic findings and the cross-cultural studies with Chinese participants (Keller et al., 2005). But our research also showed that Chinese participants were overall advanced in their socio-moral reasoning. Already the youngest Chinese children focused on the normative aspects of the (friendship) situation in terms of relationship obligations and empathy for the feelings of others compared to the more selfish interests of their western peers. As the empathic understanding of relationship responsibilities is the marker of level 3 moral and interpersonal reasoning, Chinese participants reached this level more frequently and at an earlier age. In the following, we will focus on some of these specific content aspects of reasoning.

Content Aspects of Socio-Moral Reasoning

The specific content aspects of socio-moral reasoning had not been followed up systematically in the cognitive-structural tradition. Our analyses on the structure and content of socio-moral reasoning revealed, for example, that concerns with the general rule of promise-keeping were predominantly coded at the pre-conventional level, whereas concerns about keeping promises in a friendship relationship as a sign of trust and trustworthiness emerged at the conventional level in adolescence (Keller, 1996). In the following, we will analyse such content categories without the theoretical assumption that they form developmental levels and show how these content aspects of socio-moral reasoning emerge across ages and cultures. This analysis serves the purpose to follow up on inter-individual differences at a more molecular or micro level. However, if we look at certain concepts like “promise-keeping”, “trust”, or “relationship obligations”, it is clear from the cognitive-developmental analyses that children and adolescents have a different understanding of what these concepts mean. Thus, when directly asked what trust means or how one trusts a close friend (Keller & Wood, 1989; Selman, 1980), younger children refer to concrete actions (e.g., trust that the friend will give an object back), while adolescents refer to the psychological qualities of a person. However, when investigating children’s and adolescents’ reasoning in the friendship dilemma, it is also important, if a participant mentions a concept spontaneously. For example, if a participant argues that they would visit the old friend, it is not important how cognitively differentiated this concept is, but rather that this participant gives precedent to the friendship relationship rather than any other issues contained in the dilemma (e.g., promise-keeping). This analysis allows assessing content differences in socio-moral reasoning in a systematic and quantitative way across ages, cultures, and cohorts. Table 2 shows the main content aspects that were spontaneously considered in participants’ practical decisions (i.e., how the protagonist would decide in the dilemma and why) and moral judgment (i.e., what would be the right thing to do in this situation and why) that we focus on in the subsequent sections.

Table 2. Content aspects considered in children's and adolescents' reasoning about practical decision and moral judgment

Content aspects	Description and Examples
<i>Decision for old friend</i>	
Relationship quality	Participants emphasize the consequences for the quality of the relationship between the old friends (e.g., "they know each other and trust each other") and empathy with the old friend (e.g., "she does not want to let her friend down")
Promise obligations	Participants' statements which deal with promise obligations to the old friend (e.g., "Because I promised him, and you have to keep promises").
<i>Decision for new child</i>	
Altruistic obligations	Participants' statements refer to altruistic motives to help the new child ("she is new in class and one should give her a chance") and anticipating potential negative consequences for the new child (e.g., "so he will feel better, soon")
Self-interest/Hedonism	Participants refer to hedonistic consequences of going to the new child (e.g., "he wants to see the last showing of the movie").

Socio-Moral Reasoning in Friendship across Age in a Western (Icelandic) and an Asian (Chinese) Culture

This study focused on the socio-moral reasoning in friendship of 7-, 9-, 12-, and 15-year-old Icelandic children and adolescents (described above) and a sample of 350 same-aged Chinese participants in a mixed longitudinal/cross-sectional design who were interviewed from the beginning of the 1990s (Keller et al., 1998). The results of these analyses showed distinctive developmental and cultural differences in the content aspects of socio-moral reasoning about friendship. Concerning practical decision and moral judgment, the option to visit the old friend rather than meeting with the new child increased with age in both Chinese and Icelandic participants (see Figure 1, left panel). However, the majority of participants from Iceland chose to visit the old friend already at 9 years of age, whereas Chinese participants favoured the old friend over the new child only at age 15. Furthermore, in all age groups, Chinese participants were consistent in their practical decisions and moral judgments, whereas in Icelandic 7- and 9-year-olds practical decisions and moral judgment diverged. They frequently judged it a morally right to choose the old friend, but argued that the protagonist would accept the offer of the new child.

Culture effects were also found in the content of the reasons used to justify practical decisions and moral judgments. Concerning reasons justifying visiting the old friend, across ages a majority of Icelandic participants referenced the promise the protagonist had given to the old friend, whereas a majority of Chinese children and adolescents referred to characteristics of the relationship between the friends (empathy with the feelings of the friend and trustworthiness, e.g., that otherwise the

friend would be sad or would not trust anymore). Thus, Icelandic children and adolescents exhibited a contractual orientation, while their Chinese peers showed a relationship orientation (see Figures 2 and 3, left panels). Concerning reasons for visiting the new child, across ages, Icelandic participants mentioned hedonistic-selfish reasons (particularly in their practical decision), while Chinese participants justified this choice with altruistic concerns, such as helping the new child (Figures 4 and 5, left panels). Overall, the findings indicate that Icelandic children and adolescents view the dilemma as a choice between self-interest and friendship, Chinese participants as a conflict between altruism and friendship. Interestingly, cultural differences in practical decision, moral judgment, and friendship reasoning strongly decrease for 15-year-olds (the oldest age group studied). Thus, the 15-year-old Chinese participants decide and argue like their Icelandic counterparts. This highlights the fact that friendship becomes a major relationship for adolescents in cultures as diverse as Iceland and China. It also supports the cross-cultural validity of the importance of close friendship in adolescence that has been documented in many developmental studies both in the cognitive-structural and in the content-related tradition (Bukowski et al., 1998; Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Rubin et al., 2008). Furthermore, these results indicate that interpersonal morality in a friendship context may be based on similar descriptive and prescriptive knowledge in both China and Iceland, at least in adolescence.

Concerning moral judgment, a majority of participants judged visiting the old friend as the right choice and mostly justified this choice with the promise given. For older children and particularly adolescents, trust and the closeness of the friendship became prominent reasons. Comparing practical choice and moral judgment, especially among Icelandic children, there was a split between their practical choice and what they evaluated as the right choice. Among Chinese participants, such a split did not emerge – they judged the protagonist's choice also as the morally right thing to do. Thus, 15-year-old Chinese participants, who had reversed their practical choice from going to the new child to visiting the old friend, also judged this choice as the right thing to do. The inconsistency between Icelandic children's practical choice and moral judgment has been interpreted as a further indication of a more individualistic orientation in western cultures (Keller, 1996; Shweder, 1990).

Due to this split between "judgment and action", the analysis of the consequences of the choice for the feelings of the protagonist/self revealed that most participants across ages mentioned negative or guilt feelings when they either opted for or imagined meeting with the new child, and they felt good when they decided to meet the old friend. However, a substantive number of younger Icelandic children and even some of the older Icelandic children and adolescents stated that they would feel good being at the movie with the new child because of hedonistic self-interest (the pleasure) – even when stating that the friend would feel bad, sad, left out (empathy) or angry, or would stop the friendship (punishment). This finding mirrors, on the one hand, the development of conscience (Keller et al., 2010) and on the other hand the phenomenon of the "happy victimizer": that one can feel good even if one knows that it is not right what one does (Keller et al., 2003; Malti & Keller, 2010;

Nunner & Winkler & Sodian, 1988). Our findings in this study extend this research as they document the stability of the happy-victimizer phenomenon even in a situation of close friendship and even when the protagonist is aware of the negative effects of their choices for the friend and anticipates the guilt feelings they might experience because of their selfish-hedonistic choices.

The Chinese participants in our study reveal a completely different pattern. As mentioned above, nearly all Chinese participants of the three younger age groups opted to accept the invitation of the new child and their reasons were nearly always altruistic and relationship-oriented. They also judged going with the new child as the morally right choice for the same reasons and thus revealed no split between practical and moral choice. Concerning the feelings of the protagonist as consequence of the practical choice, nearly all Chinese participants across all four age groups reported negative (guilt) feelings. Thus, the Chinese participants did not show the happy-victimizer phenomenon. Since they constructed the dilemma as a conflict of interpersonal obligations and not as a conflict between obligations and selfish interests, they always felt bad/guilty when they violated one of these obligation.

The Development of Friendship Understanding across Cultures

In addition to investigating the development of prescriptive moral knowledge in friendship relationships, our research program also examined cross-cultural differences in the development of friendship understanding (descriptive knowledge). Gummerum and Keller (2008) compared how 7- and 9-year-old children and 12- and 15-year-old adolescents from Iceland, China, Russia, and former East Germany (interviewed in the early 1990s) conceptualized friendship closeness and intimacy. Comparing the development of friendship understanding in these societies is particularly interesting as they differ on two dimensions. China, Russia, and East Germany were similar (at least at the time of data collection in 1990) in that they all prescribed to a socialist political economic ideology, whereas Iceland was a western Scandinavian-capitalist country. On the other hand, based on their traditional cultural values Iceland and East Germany would be regarded as western individualistic, China as a collectivistic society, and Russia as a society with both individualistic and collectivistic values (Schwartz, 1992).

The analyses focused both on cognitive-structural aspects of friendship reasoning, that is processes related to perspective taking and coordination (Selman, 1980, see Table 1), and the content categories of children's and adolescents' understanding of close friendship. Results concerning cognitive-structural levels of development showed similar developmental patterns across cultures. However, in the youngest age group, Russian children were more advanced than their peers from the other three cultures, and from 9 years of age both Chinese and Russian participants showed advanced development compared to their East German and Icelandic peers. Particularly the Russian educational tradition focuses on learning

from one's peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1970). The effect for Chinese participants might be explained by the cultural concept of a "heart-to-heart friendship", a particularly emotional and intimate form of friendship, which contrasts with western children's concepts of friendship as "liking to play" (Stage 1) or "being with the friend" (Stage 2). In fact, such an emotional and intimate understanding of friendship only emerges in western children at Stage 3 (see Table 1). Overall, cultural differences decreased among adolescents, which again points to the universal importance of friendship for this age group (Berndt & Savin-Williams, 1993; Rubin et al., 2011).

Concerning content aspects of friendship understanding, both Chinese and Russian children and adolescents focused more on normative characteristics of friendship (i.e., supporting and helping one's friend) as well as the importance of trust and shared feelings and less on the importance of communication and talking than their Icelandic counterparts. Shared activities and the duration of friendship were important features of friendship in all cultures studied. Furthermore, adolescents in all cultures focused on the importance of intimacy and emotional connection between friends. Thus, this research suggests that the development of friendship understanding is characterized by both differences across cultures, but also similarities, especially in adolescence.

THE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE: COHORT DIFFERENCES

A final focus of our research program is the effect of social change on the development of socio-moral reasoning in friendship in different cultures. The research reviewed above indicates that the development of morality in friendship relations and the understanding of friendship show similarities and differences across cultures. Cultural norms on what is right and wrong and how to behave within relationship as well as people's lived experiences of morality and social relationships affect their interpersonal morality. Yet, cultures are not static entities, but shared understanding of social and moral norms and what constitutes "good friendships" change over time with more macro-level social and economic transformations (Miller & Bland, 2014). Very little research has attempted to capture whether such social changes are reflected in the friendship and moral reasoning of different cohorts of children and adolescents.

Abrupt Social Change in East Germany

Gummerum and Keller (2012) investigated how two cohorts of East German children and adolescents conceptualized close friendship and decided and reasoned in Keller et al.'s (1998) friendship dilemma. The first cohort of 7-, 9-, 12-, and 15-year-olds were interviewed in cross-sectionally in 1990, shortly after the fall of the Wall. The 2005 cross-sectional cohort contained same-aged children and

adolescents from the same town close to Berlin. Compared to the 1990 cohort, those interviewed in 2005 showed a more individualistic (and “westernized”) orientation in their moral reasoning and were more likely to reason in terms of a normative-contractual rather than a friendship orientation. Interestingly, and contrary to expectations, reasons referring to hedonism were less frequently used in 2005 than 1990. This might be due to the fact that because of more scarce material resources, playing with an old friend’s toy or going to the cinema with the new child were more attractive to participants in 1990 than 2005. Similar cohort differences were found for children’s and adolescents’ descriptive knowledge, that is, their understanding of friendship: Both normative and interpersonal aspects of friendship were mentioned more frequently by the 2005 than the 1990 cohort. As pointed out by Valtin and Fatke (1997), while in the East German education system, friends tended to stay in stable (peer) groups throughout their school career, after German reunification, year groups (and friendships groups) were more likely to be broken up, especially in the transition from primary to secondary school. This might have led to children and adolescents valuing close friendship as an intimate and personalized relationship. Overall, children and adolescents in the 2005 cohort might have become more “westernized” in their socio-moral reasoning about friendship.

Gradual Social Change in Iceland and China

Gummerum and Keller’s (2012) study examined abrupt social change (Silbereisen, 2005), namely the social, economic, and political transformations in East Germany following the fall of the Wall in 1989 and intended to explore whether such a change also influences informal social norms, such as the development of morality in friendship. However, most societies experience less rapid social change but rather “a gradual change in the typical characteristics of a society, such as social structures and institutions, norms, values, cultural products, and symbols” (Silbereisen, 2005, p. 2). In the remainder of this chapter, we compare the interpersonal morality in friendship relationships of a cohort of Chinese and Icelandic children and adolescents interviewed in 2007/2008 with the cohort interviewed in 1990 by Keller et al. (1998). Both countries underwent economic and social changes between 1990 and 2008, but these changes might have been more gradual in Iceland than China. According to Ólafsson (2011), Iceland’s post-war society was characterized by a mixed economy, high growth rates and an egalitarian society. Beginning in the 1990s, Iceland’s economy increasingly embraced neoliberal policies, which were accompanied by high consumerism and debt accumulation in society. This culminated in the crash of Iceland’s financial system in 2008. China became one of the world’s major economic powers from 1990 to 2008 which was associated with major increase in living standards especially among its coastal and urban population. These economic changes have also affected social relations and attitudes to morality. As shown by Qi and Tang (2004), personal interests, not sacrifices for the greater good, became increasingly important for China’s middle-

class, and the values and lifestyles of Chinese people have been greatly influenced by globalization and digital information exchange. Overall, comparing different Icelandic and Chinese cohorts will give an insight into how social changes in Chinese and Icelandic societies from 1990 to 2008 might affect the friendship and moral development of young people.

Two samples of children and adolescents from China and Iceland were recruited. The Icelandic sample contained 143 participants recruited from public schools in Reykjavik (31 7-year-olds, 44 9-year-olds, 33 12-year-olds, 35 15-year-olds) who were interviewed in late 2007. The Chinese sample contained children and adolescents from public schools in Beijing (40 7-year-olds, 79 9-year-olds, 88 12-year-olds, 93 15-year-olds) who were interviewed in 2008. Participants were presented with Keller et al.'s (1998) friendship dilemma. Both their practical decisions (How did the protagonist decide? Why?) and their moral judgments (What is the right thing to do in this situation? Why?) were assessed. Participants' answers were coded according to the category system by Keller et al. (1998; see Table 2).

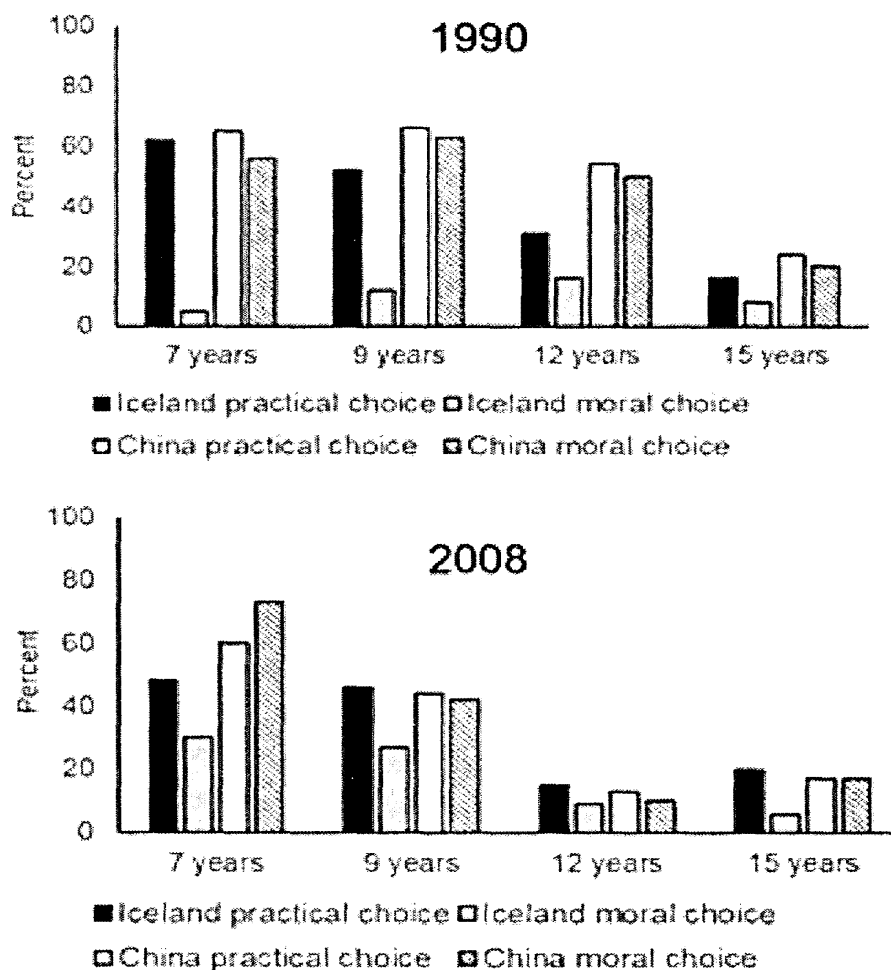


Figure 1. Percentage of participants deciding to visit the new child (versus the old friend) in practical and moral choice by age (7, 9, 12, 15 years), culture (Iceland, China), and cohort (1990, 2008).

Figure 1 shows the percentage of participants who decided to visit the new child (versus the old friend) in practical choice and moral judgment by age, culture, and

cohort. In the 1990 cohort, with growing age participants from both cultures were less likely to choose the new child and more frequently opted to visit the old friend. However, this trend occurred earlier in the Icelandic than in the Chinese participants: At 12 years of age, the majority of Icelanders opted to visit the old friend, while only among the 15-year-old Chinese students a majority of participants chose the old friend. In the 2008 cohort, this orientation towards the old friend occurred even earlier in both cultures. From 9 years onwards the majority of both Chinese and Icelandic participants chose the old friend over the new child, and a consistently strong orientation towards the old friend was by 12 years of age. Thus, in the 2008 cohort, there was little difference in friendship decisions in the Chinese and Icelandic participants.

In both cohorts, Icelandic children showed a strong divergence in their practical and moral decisions: 7- and 9-year-old Icelanders were more likely to pick the new child in their practical choice than their moral judgment. In contrast, there was generally a consistency between Chinese children's and adolescents' practical and moral decisions. Thus, Chinese participants actually decided in favor of what they regard as the right thing to do in this situation.

Participants justified going to the old friend either by referring to relationship quality or promise obligations. Figure 2a shows that in the 1990 cohort, relationship quality was the most frequently-used reason for the Chinese participants across all ages, and even more so in the practical decision than in moral judgment. However, use of relationship quality arguments increased with age in Icelandic participants. At the age of 15 years, there were no cultural differences anymore: Both Chinese and Icelandic adolescents referred to relationship quality reasons with high frequency. However, in all ages and both cultures, reasons relating to relationship quality were used more frequently in practical choice than moral judgment where reasons referred to promise. In the 2008 cohort, neither the age effect for the Icelandic participants nor the cultural differences in use of relationship quality arguments in children was found anymore. In terms of age effects, an increase of the use of relationship quality reasons from 7 to 9 years of age was found in both cultures. Similar to the 1990 cohort, participants from both cultures referred to relationship quality reasons more often in practical than moral choices. Overall, Chinese and Icelandic participants are remarkably similar in the use of relationship quality reasons in 2008.

Concerning references to promise (Figure 2b), the 1990 cohort revealed a kind of reverse picture, with Icelandic participants using this category about equally frequently across ages, while there was an increase with age in the use of promise reasons in Chinese participants. Cultural differences were least apparent among the 15-year-olds. In both cultures, there was a tendency to refer to promise reasons more in the context of moral judgment than practical choice. In the 2008 cohort, there was still an age effect for the Chinese participants. Similarly, Icelandic participants tended to refer to promise reasons equally across ages, albeit with a lower frequency than in 1990. Interestingly, Chinese 12- and 15-year-olds referred to promise reasons more frequently than their Icelandic peers, a reversal of the 1990 trend. No significant effects of context emerged in either cultural group.

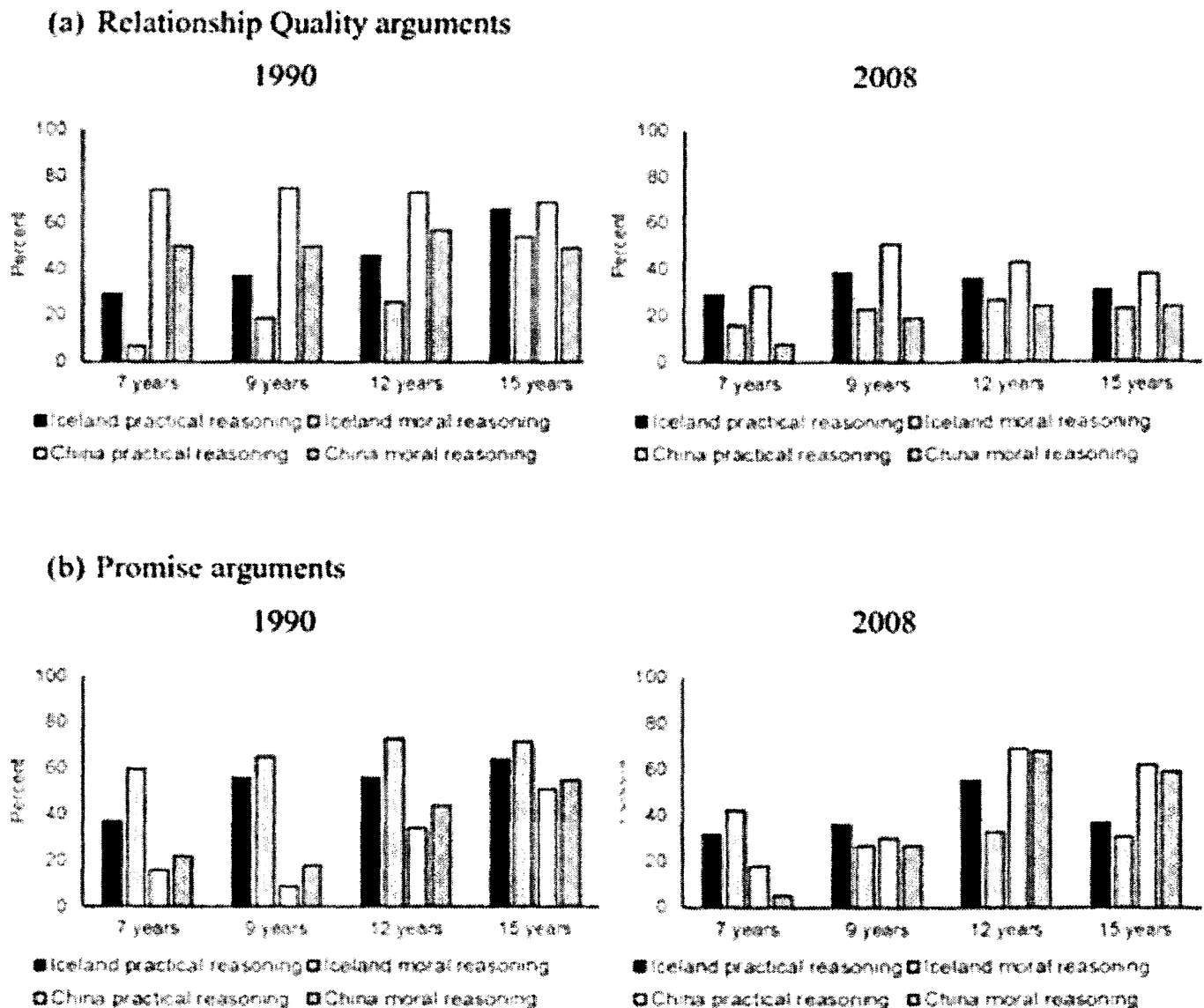
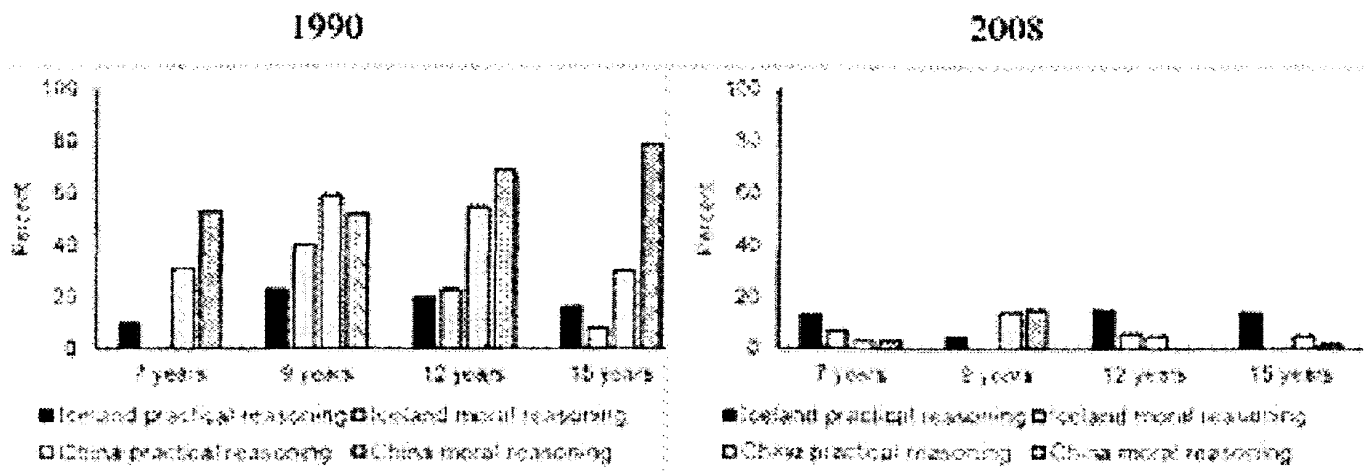


Figure 2. Percentage of participants referring to (a) Relationship Quality arguments and (b) Promise arguments as reasons for visiting the old friend in practical and moral choice by age (7, 9, 12, 15 years), culture (Iceland, China), and cohort (1990, 2008).

Participants referred to either altruism or hedonism to justifying the choice to visit the new child. Concerning altruism (Figure 3a), in the 1990 cohort Keller et al. (1998) found an increase in the use of altruistic obligation arguments as reasons for going to the new child in both cultures. However, Chinese participants referred more often to altruistic obligations than Icelandic participants in all ages. In contrast to reasons used to justifying going to old friend, these cultural differences were maintained also for the oldest age group studied, the 15-year-olds. Furthermore, Chinese participants tended to refer to altruistic obligations more in the context of moral judgment than practical choice. In 2008, very few participants referred to altruistic obligations as reasons to go to the new child and effects are rather unsystematic. Interestingly, Icelandic participants referred to altruistic obligations more than their Chinese peers (albeit with very low frequency), a reversal of the cultural effects in 1990. However, even in the 2008 sample the Chinese participants mentioned guilt feelings as a consequence of their decision, independent of the direction of their choice.

(a) Altruistic Obligation arguments



(b) Hedonism arguments

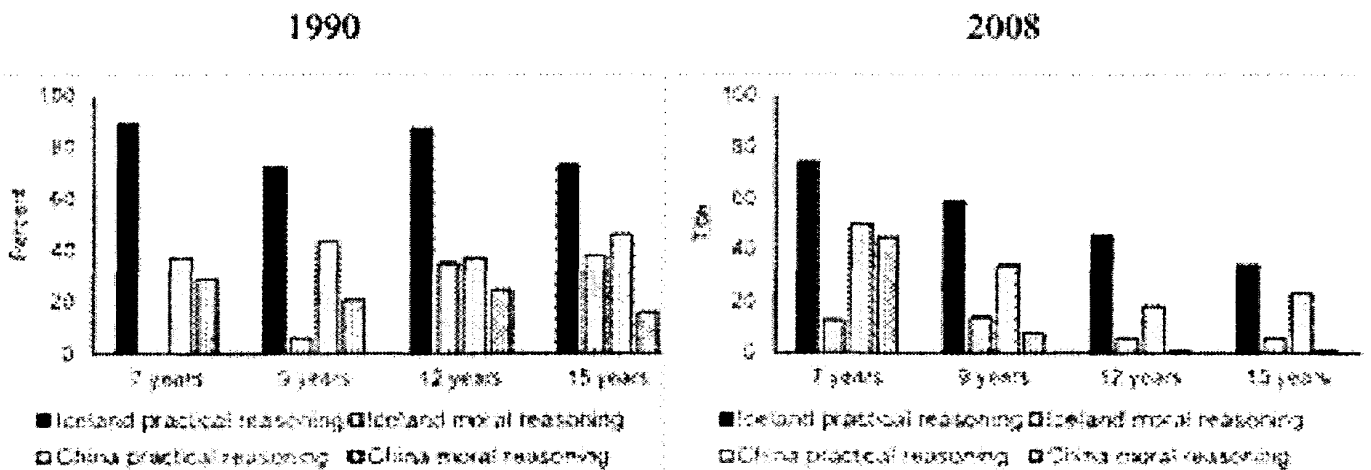


Figure 3. Percentage of participants referring to (a) Altruistic Obligation arguments and (b) Hedonism arguments as reasons for going to the new child in practical and moral choice by age (7, 9, 12, 15 years), culture (Iceland, China), and cohort (1990, 2008).

Concerning hedonism reasons (Figure 3b), the 1990 cohort revealed a clear cultural difference. Across ages, the majority of Icelandic participants used hedonism to justify going to the new child, but a much smaller proportion of Chinese participants did so. Again, the cultural differences remained in the oldest age group. In both cultures, participants were more likely to use hedonism as a reason for their practical rather than their moral choice, but this context difference was particularly pronounced in Icelandic participants. A somewhat similar picture emerged in the 2008 cohort: There was a pronounced culture difference, with Icelandic participants referring to hedonism significantly more often than their Chinese peers across ages. Furthermore, participants (but particularly Icelandic children and adolescents) used hedonism more often as a reason in practical than moral choice.

CONCLUSION

Over 2000 years ago, the Greek philosopher Aristotle regarded having good friends as one of the key characteristics to leading a virtuous and thus happy life. Indeed, empirical research has shown that friendship is one of the major social relationships that contributes significantly to people's well-being, happiness, and positive developmental outcomes across the life-span. The goal of this chapter was to summarize research on the development of descriptive knowledge about friendship, namely children's and adolescents' understanding of close friendship, and prescriptive moral knowledge, namely children's and adolescents' understanding of normative standards and responsibilities in friendships. We also examined the development of descriptive and prescriptive knowledge about friendship across cultures and different cohorts. This makes it possible to investigate whether social, economic, and historical circumstances affect children's and adolescents' conceptualization of this basic human relationship. Overall, we found that how children and adolescents think about friendship and the normative standards governing friendship varies across development, cultures, and historical times. However, our studies indicate that by mid-adolescence friendship and the normative standards in friendship are conceptualized quite similarly across cultures and historical times. Thus, friendship gains similar significance in the lives of adolescents, a developmental period where people form meaningful and intimate relationships beyond their family for the first time. It would be fascinating to explore whether the descriptive and normative aspects of friendship hold an equally important place across the life-span (Hartup & Stevens, 1997) and in different cultures and historical periods, a task that future research will hopefully continue to address.

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