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Evaluating Claims People Make About Themselves:

The Development of Skepticism

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Abstract

The way in which children evaluate people's claims about their own psychological characteristics was examined. Among children ages 6 – 11 from the United States and China (total *N*=243), there was an age-related increase in skepticism about self-report concerning the highly value-laden characteristics *honest*, *smart*, and *nice*, but not concerning less value-laden characteristics. There were also differences between the countries: children from China showed greater skepticism about value-laden characteristics, and were more likely to assume that others might lie about characteristics that lack strong evaluative implications. Older children from China were especially likely to expect individuals to act in ways that are consistent with modesty norms when communicating about themselves.

Although the human capacity to learn from others can be of great value, it is limited by the accuracy of the source (Harris, Pasquini, Duke, Asscher, & Pons, 2006; Koenig & Harris, 2005). One type of inaccuracy occurs when people deliberately present misleading information. There is evidence that the cognitive skills to understand this possibility are firmly in place by age 6. By age 3, children sometimes show self-serving biases in the way they present information about themselves (Ross, Smith, Spielmacher, & Recchia, 2002; Stipek, Recchia, & McClintic, 1992). For example, 2-year-olds share their successes with others more frequently than they share their failures (Stipek et al., 1992). Three-year-olds are capable of engaging in a range of deceptive practices in the service of self-interest or to protect the feelings of others (Cole, 1986; Hala, Chandler, & Fritz, 1991; Talwar & Lee, 2002). By age 3 – 4, children are able to make systematic distinctions between appearance and reality (Flavell, Green, & Flavell, 1986; Sapp, Lee, & Muir, 2000), and can apply this distinction when reasoning about people's real and expressed emotions at around age 6 (Harris, Donnelly, Guz, & Pitt-Watson, 1986; Joshi & MacLean, 1994).

Once children gain the cognitive capacity to understand the distinction between appearance and reality when reasoning about people, they undergo substantial developmental change in their reasoning about self-presentational processes (Aloise-Young, 1993; Banerjee & Yuill, 1999a). For example, it is not until around age 11 that children tend to interpret self-presentational strategies with reference to interpersonal processes (Bennett & Yeeles, 1990).

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There is evidence that early elementary school-age children sometimes have difficulty taking a speaker's self-interest into account when evaluating the speaker's statements. Mills and Keil (2005) asked children between the ages of 5 and 10 to reason about a running race in which it was not clear who had won, and one competitor claimed that he either had won or that an opponent had won. Children younger than age 7 failed to discount statements that were aligned with the speaker's self-interest, and it was not until children reached about age 9 that they tended to identify speaker bias as a potential source of incorrect reports.

Heyman and Legare (2005) also found evidence of a relatively late age-related shift in the way children evaluate the statements of individuals who might be motivated to provide distorted information. Children ages 6 – 7 and 10 – 11 were asked to reason about several psychological characteristics, which were described in simple terms. The characteristics were either highly value-laden *evaluative characteristics* such as honesty, or less value-laden *comparison characteristics* such as outgoingness (a distinction that was found to be psychologically meaningful by a separate group of children). Participants in the older group were significantly more skeptical about the value of self-report information for evaluative characteristics, but there were no such age-related changes for the comparison characteristics. For example, younger children were more likely than older children to identify self-report as a good way to learn about a speaker's level of honesty.

The present research was designed to examine the development of children's skepticism about self-report information by building upon the findings of Heyman and Legare (2005). One goal was to investigate the extent to which children expect that people will distort or conceal information when they are communicating about their own psychological characteristics. For example, do children generally expect that individuals who are mean will lie and claim to be nice?

A second goal of the present research was to examine the role of social experience in the development of skepticism about self-report information. This goal follows-up on the suggestion of Heyman and Legare (2005) that once children become aware that others might present misleading information, they still require further social experience to be able to predict the contexts in which this type of distortion is likely to occur (see also Banerjee & Yuill, 1999b, for related arguments). As a first step toward addressing this issue, we compared the responses of children who had grown up in the United States with those of children who had grown up in China, thus using nationality as a proxy for differences in children's social experiences. The choice of this particular comparison was motivated by a divergence in values and norms concerning the types of information that are seen as socially appropriate to express. One such difference is that in the United States, the goal of viewing oneself positively tends to be highly valued by the Euro-American culture, and individuals tend to emphasize positive information about themselves and others (Heine, 2001; Miller, Wang, Sandel, & Cho, 2002). In contrast, in China, the goal of maintaining group harmony tends to be highly valued, and individuals tend to avoid emphasizing positive information about themselves to avoid causing discord among group members (Lee, Cameron, Xu, Fu, & Board, 1997; Lee, Xu, Fu, Cameron, & Chen, 2001). The importance of modesty is deeply rooted in Chinese culture: it is emphasized in Chinese Confucian and Taoist traditions and in Chinese Communist ideology, and it is an important part of the Chinese school curriculum (see Lee et al., 1997, 2001).

There are also norms and practices in China that may make the possibility that others will distort information about themselves more salient than it is in the United States. In particular, children in China are likely to be exposed to overt and implicit messages about the importance of managing how information about the self is expressed. This is evident in the emphasis on *guanxi*, which literally means connection, but without implications for emotional bonds (Sun, 2004; Yang, 1995). To cultivate guanxi, adults must engage in various impression management

strategies, such as ingratiation and self-presentation. Children in China are often taught to manipulate the way they present themselves to others. This is evident in a book known as *The Good Book of Wisdom Expansion* (described in Sun, 2004), which has been used across Chinese society to teach social skills and morality to children for about a 1000 years. One of its central messages is that one should only reveal 30% of the truth about oneself to others, and should avoid revealing one's "true heart."

In sum, there appear to be important differences in the social experiences of children in China and in the United States that relate to individuals' statements and actions regarding self-presentation. It seems plausible to assume that these differences in children's social experiences could lead to differences in their reasoning. Although, the present research is not designed to establish a direct link between differences in the social experiences of children from the United States and China and differences in their reasoning, if such evidence were found, it would be an important step toward establishing the significance of social experience in this domain.

In each of two studies, participants were asked about *evaluative characteristics*, and in the first study they were also asked about less evaluative *comparison characteristics*. The research was designed to address two key questions. The first concerns whether children from China would show skepticism about what people say about themselves at a younger age than would children from the United States in contexts in which individuals are likely to care a great deal about how they are judged (i.e., concerning evaluative characteristics). The second question concerns whether children growing up in China versus the United States. would differ in their expectations about whether individuals would be likely to report accurately on their own psychological characteristics. One possibility is that children from China would be aware at a younger age than children from the United States that individuals sometimes lie when they are motivated to create a positive impression. It is also possible that children who grow up in China, as a result of their exposure to widespread norms concerning modesty, would be more likely to expect that individuals will distort or conceal positive information about their own psychological characteristics.

Study 1

Children from the United States and China were asked whether they would accept speakers' self-reports concerning the evaluative and comparison characteristics, and whether speakers might lie about either having or not having each of the characteristics.

Method

Participants—Participants were 123 children from the United States and China, representing children 6 – 7 and 10 – 11 years old. Participants from the United States were recruited from elementary schools in a large southwestern city, yielding a younger group of 14 boys and 16 girls (M = 7 years 1 month range 6 years 3 months to 8 years 0 months) and an older group of 17 boys and 13 girls (M = 11 years 2 months, range 10 years 2 months to 12 years 1 month). The sample from the United States was approximately 67% Caucasian, 7% Asian American, 12% Hispanic American, 12% African American, and 3% Native American or Pacific Islander, collectively representing diverse economic backgrounds. Participants from China were recruited from elementary schools in an eastern coastal city in China, yielding a younger group of 17 boys and 13 girls (M = 7 years 1 month, range 6 years 6 months to 7 years 10 months, 17 boys and 13 girls), and an older group of 15 boys and 17 girls (M = 10 years 6 months, range 10 years 0 months to 11 years 5 months). The sample from China was 100% Han Chinese, also from diverse economic backgrounds. In both countries, information about students' ethnicity was determined in consultation with teachers or other school officials; informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians, and assents were obtained from participating children.

Stimuli—The stimuli consisted of a series of scenarios based on the evaluative characteristics *honest*, *smart*, and *nice*, and the comparison characteristics *outgoing*, *likes salty food*, and *likes the color red*. These six characteristics are a subset of those used by Heyman and Legare (2005). The evaluative characteristics were selected to have strong evaluative implications. Food and color preferences were included as comparison characteristics under the assumption that they would have minimal evaluative implications. We selected the characteristic *outgoing* because we assumed that it would have more limited evaluative implications than would the three evaluative characteristics, and also for the purpose of including a psychological trait, rather than a simple preference, as a basis for comparison. The characteristics were intended to be familiar to children in each age group in each country, and easy to explain in simple terms, as determined by pilot testing.

A number of steps were taken to ensure that the stimuli would be appropriate for use in each country. All stimulus materials and measures were originally written in English, and then translated into Chinese. The materials were then translated back into English by a translator who had not seen the original English version. Only the materials for which there were no changes in meaning between the original and back-translated versions were considered for use in the studies. As an additional step, we conducted a preliminary study to validate the stimuli in China that was similar to the validation procedure developed by Heyman and Legare (2005, Study 1) for use with children from the United States. The preliminary study involved 49 children from China (twenty-five 6- to 7-year-olds and twenty-four 10- to 11-year-olds) who were recruited from the same school as the Chinese participants in Studies 1 and 2, but did not participate in either study. Children were asked to predict the emotional response, on a scale from 1 (*really unhappy*)to 5 (*really happy*), that hypothetical individuals would have to being described as possessing, and as lacking, each of a set of candidate characteristics. For each characteristic, an *emotion difference score* was computed based on the absolute value of the difference in responses to the two questions (the one that involved possessing the characteristic, and the one that involved lacking the characteristic), with higher scores indicting that the character cares a great deal about how he or she is judged with reference to the characteristic. For the set of evaluative characteristics that were ultimately used in Studies 1 and 2, the mean emotion difference score was 3.28 (*SD* = .61) for younger children and 3.33 (*SD* = .70) for older children, and for the set of comparison characteristics that were used in Studies 1 and 2, the mean emotion difference score was 1.72 (*SD* = .61) for younger children and 0.94 (*SD* = .54) for older children. These results suggest that the distinction between evaluative and comparison characteristics is valid for children from China, as it is for children from the United States according to Heyman and Legare (2005).

Procedure—Children were interviewed individually in a quiet area of their school. They were first asked a set of *self-report endorsement* questions concerning each of the evaluative and comparison characteristics. The self-report endorsement measure was designed to determine the extent to which children viewed self-report as a good source of information about the characteristic. The measures for the six characteristics were presented in a random order that was determined separately for each participant. The following example is for the characteristic *smart*.

> Is asking someone if they are good at learning new things a good way to find out if they are good at learning new things?

For each question, the response options were *yes* and *no*, which were scored as 1 and 0, respectively, to create a *self-report endorsement score* for each item.

Next, children were asked a set of *expectations of distortion* measures for the six characteristics, which again appeared in random order. Each characteristic was introduced with a brief description, such as the following, for the characteristic *nice*.

> Let's say I was thinking about asking someone if they do a lot of nice things for other people.

They were then asked two questions in a random order. One question concerned lying about having the characteristic, and another concerned lying about not having it. The following examples are for the characteristic *nice*.

> Do you think they might tell me that they do a lot of nice things for other people even if they know that it's not true?
>
> Do you think they might tell me that they hardly ever do nice things for other people even if they know that it's not true?

The response options *yes* and *no* were scored as 1 and 0, to create an *expectation of distortion* score for each item.

Results

Overview—Analyses are first presented concerning the self-report endorsement scores for evaluative and comparison characteristics. Next, analyses are presented concerning expectation of distortion scores for evaluative characteristics. Finally, analyses are presented for comparison characteristics. Gender was not included as a factor in any of the analyses because preliminary analyses indicated that responses did not differ systematically as a function of gender.

Self-Report Endorsement—The mean self-report endorsement scores for the evaluative and comparison characteristics are shown in Table 1. These scores were analyzed using an analysis of covariance (ANOVA) with age group (young, old) and country (United States, China) as between-subjects factors, and characteristic type (evaluative, comparison) as a within-subjects factor. The dependent variable was the mean level of endorsement of self-report for each characteristic type.

There were main effects of age group, with older children showing greater skepticism, $F(1, 119) = 28.25$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2 = .19$; country, with children from China showing greater skepticism, $F(1, 119) = 31.44$, $p<.001$, $\eta;^2 = .21$; and characteristic type, with children less accepting of self-report for evaluative characteristics than for comparison characteristics, $F(1, 119) = 34.37$, $p<.001$, $\eta;^2 = .22$. There was also an interaction between age group and characteristic type, $F(1, 119) = 15.88$, $p<.001$, $\eta;^2 = .12$, and an interaction between country and characteristic type, $F(1, 119) = 15.88$, $p<.001$, $\eta;^2 = .12$. Simple-effects tests examining age group and characteristic type indicated that older children were more skeptical about evaluative characteristics than were younger children ($p<.001$), but that there was no effect of age group when reasoning about comparison characteristics. Simple-effects tests examining country and characteristic type indicated that children from China were more skeptical than children from the United States when reasoning about evaluative characteristics ($p<.001$), but not when reasoning about comparison characteristics.

Expectations of Distortion—Mean expectations of distortion scores concerning false claims to have positive evaluative characteristics, negative evaluative characteristics, and comparison characteristics are shown in Table 2.

Evaluative characteristics: The expectations of distortion scores for the evaluative characteristics were analyzed using an ANOVA, with age group (young, old) and country (United States, China) as between-subjects factors, and valence of claim (falsely claiming a positive characteristic, falsely claiming a negative characteristic) as a within-subjects factor. The dependent variable was the average of the three items for each valence. There were main

effects of country, with children in the United States more likely to expect that others will lie, $F(1, 119) = 4.84$, $p<.05$, $\eta;^2 = .04$, and valence of claim, with children more likely to expect that others will falsely claim to possess positive characteristics $F(1, 119) = 89.68$, $p<.001$, $\eta;^2 = .43$. There was also a two-way interaction between age group and country, reflecting the fact that older children from China were less likely than the other groups to expect individuals to lie about evaluative characteristics, $F(1, 119) = 11.90$, $p<.01$, $\eta;^2 = .09$, and a two-way interaction between country and valence of claim, reflecting a tendency for participants from China to differentiate in their responses based on valence to a greater extent than did participants from the United States, $F(1, 119) = 4.54$, $p<.05$, $\eta;^2 = .04$. Finally, there was a three-way interaction between age group, country, and valence of claim, $F(1, 119) = 19.88$, $p<.001$, $\eta;^2 = .14$. Simple-effects tests indicated that for the children from both countries, there was no effect of age group for false-negative claims (e.g., that a person who is smart would claim to be not smart). However, there was a significant effect of age group for false-positive claims (e.g., that a person who is not smart would claim to be smart): among children from the United States, older children were more likely to expect such claims ($p<.01$), whereas among children from China, older children were less likely to expect such claims ($p<.001$).

Comparison characteristics: Mean expectations of distortion scores for the comparison characteristics were analyzed using an ANOVA, with age group (young, old) and country (United States, China) as between-subjects factors. The dependent variable was the average of all six items that involved comparison characteristics (two questions for each of the three comparison characteristics). There was only a main effect of country, $F(1, 119) = 26.33$, $p<.001$, $\eta;^2 = .18$), with children from China expecting that others might falsely claim to possess comparison characteristics more often than did children from the United States.

Discussion

The results replicate the findings by Heyman and Legare (2005) of an age-related increase in skepticism about self-report as a means to learn about highly value-laden characteristics among children from the United States, and show a corresponding age-related increase among children from China. The results also reveal differences between the two countries, with children from China showing a higher level of skepticism than their counterparts from the United States when reasoning about evaluative characteristics.

In addition, there were differences in children's expectations about the contexts in which people might present false claims about themselves. One such difference was that participants from China were more likely than participants from the United States to report that others might lie when there is no salient motivation to do so (i.e., concerning the comparison characteristics). Another difference is that among participants from China, there was an age-related decrease in the expectation that individuals would falsely claim to possess positive characteristics, which was the reverse of the pattern seen among children from the United States. This pattern of results may be related to the presence of strong modesty norms in China, which prescribe the concealment of one's positive characteristics (Lee et al., 1997). If so, one might predict that older children from China would expect individuals to conceal positive information about themselves, even if, as suggested by the present results, they would not expect them to falsely claim to possess negative characteristics. This question is explored in Study 2.

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to follow-up on the findings from the expectations of distortion measure of Study 1, by examining expectations about people's willingness to reveal information about their own characteristics. The primary goal was to determine whether there would be an age-related decrease, among participants from China, in the expectation that individuals will disclose information about their positive characteristics. Other goals of Study 2 were to

determine whether children from China and from the United States would differ in their expectations about the disclosure of value-laden characteristics, and whether the younger children from the United States would show an appreciation of social desirability in this context. A final goal was to measure how children's expectations regarding concealing information about personal characteristics would compare with the results of the expectations of distortion measure from Study 1.

Method

Participants—Participants were 120 children from the United States and China, representing the same age groups as in Study 1. Participants were recruited from elementary schools in the same cities as in Study 1, and again were from diverse economic backgrounds. The U.S. sample consisted of a younger group of 14 boys and 16 girls (M = 6 years 9 months, range 6 years 1 month to 7 years 9 months) and an older group of 12 boys and 18 girls (M = 10 years 9 months, range 10 years 0 months to 12 years 5 months). The sample was approximately 57% Caucasian, 3% Asian American, 37% Hispanic American, and 3% African American. The Chinese sample consisted of 15 boys and 15 girls in the younger group (N = 30, M = 7 years 1 month, range 6 years 6 months to 8 years 1 month) and 15 boys and 15 girls in the older group (N = 30, M = 11 years 7 months, range 10 years 6 months to 12 years 2 months), and was 100% Han Chinese. As in Study 1, information about students' ethnicity was determined in consultation with teachers or other school officials, informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians, and assents were obtained from participating children.

Stimuli—The stimuli were based on the three evaluative characteristics that were used in Study 1: *honest*, *smart*, and *nice*. Translation and back-translation of measures were performed in the same manner as in Study 1.

Procedure—For each of the three evaluative characteristics, participants were presented with a pair of *self-disclosure* measures, with one question concerning the presence of the characteristic, and the other concerning its absence. These six questions appeared in an order that was randomly determined for each participant. For example, for the characteristic *nice*, participants were asked the following two questions.

> If someone does a lot of nice things for people will they tell people they do a lot of nice things for people?
>
> If someone doesn't do nice things for people will they tell people they don't do a lot of nice things for people?

For each question, the response options were *yes* and *no*, which were scored as 1 and 0, respectively, to create a *self-disclosure* score for each item.

Results

Results are summarized in Table 3. As in Study 1, preliminary analyses indicated that responses did not differ systematically as a function of gender, and consequently gender was not included in subsequent analyses.

Self-disclosure scores were analyzed using an ANOVA, with age group (young, old) and country (United States, China) as between-subject factors, and valence of information (positive, negative) as a within-subjects factor. The dependent variable was the mean self-disclosure score for the three items of each valence. There were main effects of age group, $F(1, 116) = 7.07$, $p<.01$, $\eta;^2 = .06$), with younger children expecting a higher rate of disclosure, country, $F(1, 116) = 16.79$, $p<.001$, $\eta;^2 = .13$, with children in the United States expecting a higher rate of disclosure, and valence of information, $F(1, 116) = 175.94$, $p<.001$, $\eta;^2 = .60$,

with children expecting individuals to disclose positive information at a higher rate than negative information. There was also a significant country by valence interaction, which reflected a tendency for children from China to show less differentiation in their responses to positively and negatively valenced information than did children in the United States, $F(1, 116) = 30.04$, $p<.001$, $\eta;^2 = .21$. Finally, there was a three-way interaction among age group, country, and valence of information, $F(1, 116) = 15.15$, $p<.001$, $\eta;^2 = .12$. Simple-effects tests indicated that for children in the United States, there was no effect of age group concerning the self-disclosure of positive or negative information. As can be seen from Table 3, both age groups tended to predict that positive information would be disclosed and negative information would not. For children from China, there was no effect of age group concerning negative information, but older children were significantly less likely than younger children to expect self-disclosure of positive information ($p<.001$). The younger children from China, like the children from the United States, tended to predict that positive information would be disclosed and negative information would not, but older children from China generally predicted that neither positive nor negative information would be disclosed.

Discussion

The younger children from both countries and the older children from the United States expected that individuals would disclose information about positive characteristics, but the older children from China did not. This pattern of results is consistent with what one would expect if children who grow up in China internalize modesty norms between the ages of 6 and 11, and make use of these norms when they predict what types of information individuals will disclose. The age-related shift corresponds to a pattern found by Banerjee (2000) among children in the United Kingdom, in which modesty was seen as linked to social approval starting at around age 8.

Younger children from the United States made a distinction between concealing positive versus negative information about the self, which stands in contrast to a result from Study 1, in which younger children from the United States showed no such valence-based distinction concerning falsely claiming to have such characteristics. These results highlight the possibility that children's expectations about false claims sometimes diverge from their expectations about concealing information. These results also suggest that young children in the United States have some appreciation that people sometimes manipulate information about their psychological characteristics, and that measures involving self-disclosure may be especially sensitive tests of this type of understanding.

General Discussion

The present research investigated the way children from the United States and China reason about self-report as a source of information about the psychological characteristics of others. The results of the self-report endorsement measure of Study 1 extended the findings of Heyman and Legare (2005) by demonstrating an age-related increase in skepticism about self-report as a means to learn about evaluative characteristics among children from both the United States and China. However, the absolute level of skepticism was much higher among children from China. For example, 10- to 11-year-old children from the United States showed a degree of skepticism about self-report for evaluative characteristics that was comparable with that of the 6- to 7-year-old children from China. One possible explanation for this difference is that children in China are more likely to encounter implicit and explicit messages about the importance of concealing information about themselves that might cause them to stand out or become vulnerable to being hurt by others (Sun, 2004; Yang, 1995).

The present research also investigated the extent to which children from the United States and China would expect individuals to accurately reveal information about their own evaluative

characteristics. The results of the expectations of distortion measure in Study 1 indicate that participants from the United States showed an age-related increase in their expectations that individuals will falsely claim to have positive characteristics (e.g., that a person who is mean will claim to be nice). In contrast, participants from China showed a very different pattern: younger children tended to expect such distortions, but older children did not. We interpret the results seen among the younger children from China as an early awareness that others might distort what they say to appear socially desirable, and the results seen among older children from China in terms of a growing awareness of modesty norms. As is consistent with this modesty norms explanation, we found that participants from China showed a strong age-related decrease in the expectation that others will conceal information about their positive characteristics on the self-disclosure measures of Study 2, but no such pattern among participants from the United States.

A comparison of the results of Study 2 with the results of the expectations of distortion measure of Study 1 suggests that participants made a clear distinction between the act of making false claims, and the act of concealing information about one's characteristics. For example, young children in the United States showed little sensitivity to valence on the expectations of distortion measure of Study 1, but were highly sensitive to valence in their responses to the self-disclosure measure of Study 2. The distinction between false claims and failures to disclose information was also evident when examining reasoning patterns of older children from China. These children generally rejected the idea that others with positive characteristics might falsely claim to have negative characteristics (Study 1), but endorsed the idea that others would hide information about their positive characteristics (Study 2).

There were also differences between the children from each country with regard to their reasoning about comparison characteristics. On the expectations of distortion measure in Study 1, participants from China were more likely than participants from the United States to expect that others would distort information about these characteristics, for which a speaker has no obvious motive to lie. Given this result, it is reasonable to ask why participants from China were generally accepting of self-report as a means to learn about the comparison characteristics. One possibility is that children from China are more likely than their counterparts in the United States to observe individuals lying about such characteristics in certain limited contexts (e.g., if a child falsely claimed to like a certain color so as to be consistent with the stated color preferences of his or her peers), but will assume that people would report on such characteristics truthfully when asked directly about them.

There are some limitations to the present findings. First, we did not attempt to measure children's history of socialization directly. Such measures could help to identify possible links between social experience and reasoning in this domain. A second limitation is that because the results were obtained from relatively small samples, further research will be needed to determine how the findings generalize across broader populations, and whether there are any systematic within-group differences, such as between Caucasian and ethnic minority children who are growing up in the United States.

A related limitation was that it was not possible to determine whether children's reasoning would have been affected by assumptions that children might have that relate to the gender of the speakers or the audiences in the scenarios, because the gender of the characters was not specified. These types of gender effects have been seen in previous research (Gee & Heyman, in press) and need to be explored systematically. Similarly, although male and female participants in the present research showed comparable patterns of reasoning, previous research suggests that males and females sometimes differ in their tendencies toward self-disclosure (e.g., Cole, 1986), which points to a need to further investigate this issue.

Conclusions

Previous research suggests that by age 6, children have the cognitive capacity to understand that individuals sometimes present themselves in misleading ways (Harris et al., 1986). The present study suggests that the way children apply this understanding when reasoning about the accuracy of individuals' statements about themselves is related to their social context. Specifically, participants from China appeared to be more skeptical about self-report as a source of information about evaluative characteristics than were participants from the United States, and there was evidence of a different developmental trajectory in their expectations about how individuals are likely to present themselves. Thus, the present results suggest that once children have the capacity to understand that individuals do not always reveal what they believe to be true, their social experiences shape the way they reason about others as sources of information.

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Table 1

Mean Self-Report Endorsement Scores From Study 1

Characteristic	Age group				Total	
	Younger		Older			
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*
Evaluative						
United States	.83	.24	.51	.35	.67	.34
China	.50	.39	.11	.20	.30	.36
Total	.67	.36	.30	.34	.48	.40
Comparison						
United States	.76	.25	.73	.25	.74	.25
China	.72	.32	.65	.35	.68	.34
Total	.74	.28	.69	.31	.71	.30

Note. Larger values reflect a greater acceptance of self-report as a source of information.

Table 2

Mean Expectations of Distortion Scores from Study 1

Characteristic	Age group					
	Younger		Older		Total	
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*
Positive						
United States	.44	.38	.71	.37	.58	.39
China	.74	.37	.37	.33	.55	.39
Total	.59	.40	.53	.40	.56	.39
Negative						
United States	.36	.30	.26	.32	.31	.31
China	.17	.27	.09	.19	.13	.23
Total	.26	.30	.17	.27	.21	.29
Comparison						
United States	.40	.31	.41	.28	.40	.30
China	.64	.36	.72	.24	.68	.30
Total	.52	.36	.57	.30	.55	.33

Note. Larger values reflect greater expectations that others might lie to claim the characteristic.

Table 3

Mean Self-Disclosure Scores from Study 2

Characteristic	Age group				Total	
	Younger		Older			
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*
Positive						
United States	.81	.24	.83	.23	.82	.23
China	.64	.37	.30	.36	.47	.40
Total	.73	.32	.57	.40	.65	.37
Negative						
United States	.23	.28	.10	.29	.17	.25
China	.18	.29	.22	.27	.20	.28
Total	.21	.28	.16	.24	.18	.26

Note. Larger values reflect greater expectations that others will disclose the characteristic in question.