doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9507.2010.00578.x

Japanese and American Children's Reasoning about Accepting Credit for Prosocial Behavior

Gail D. Heyman, *University of California, San Diego*, Shoji Itakura, *Kyoto University* and Kang Lee, *University of Toronto*

Abstract

Children's reasoning about the appropriateness of accepting credit for one's own prosocial behavior was examined. Participants aged 7–11 years old in Japan and the USA (total N = 206) were presented with a series of stories in which a protagonist performs a good deed and is asked about it by another character. Across stories, the protagonist either truthfully acknowledges the deed or falsely denies it, in a statement that is made either in public or in private, and is addressed to either a teacher or to a peer. As predicted, Japanese children judged protagonists less favorably when they acknowledged the good deed in public rather than in private. Further, Japanese children tended to view modest lies more favorably overall than did children in the USA. These results point to the importance of modesty in Japan and to the ways in which Japanese children take into account the social context of communication when deciding whether it is appropriate for individuals to convey information about themselves.

Keywords: childhood development; social values; reasoning; cross-cultural differences

Introduction

Learning how to talk about oneself in a socially appropriate way presents a difficult challenge for children, especially as it pertains to highly value-laden information (Heyman, Fu, & Lee, 2007). The present research focuses on this challenge in one particular context: deciding whether to take credit for, or to falsely deny, prosocial behavior. By accepting credit for such actions individuals may enhance the way they are evaluated by others, but they also risk being perceived as lacking humility and trying to gain positive attention, which can lead to diminished social evaluation (Banerjee, 2000). The goal of the present research was to examine elementary school children's reasoning about the appropriateness of accepting credit for one's own accomplishments, or falsely denying them to be modest. This question is considered in relation to the social context in which the communication takes place. A better understanding of children's reasoning about the contexts in which modest behavior is

Correspondence should be addressed to Gail D. Heyman, Department of Psychology, University of California, San Diego, 9500 Gilman Dr, La Jolla, CA 92093-0109, USA. Email: *gheyman@ucsd.edu*

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010. Published by Blackwell Publishing, 9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA.

appropriate should help to provide a more complete understanding of the development of social norms that may influence identity development (see Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995).

Previous research on the development of modesty suggests that there are cross-cultural variations in expectations about modesty, with greater expectations for modesty in East Asia than in North America. In one such study, Lee, Cameron, Xu, Fu, and Board (1997) presented children aged 7–11 from China and from Canada with scenarios in which a protagonist does a good deed and is asked about it by a teacher. The protagonist either truthfully acknowledges the deed or falsely denies it. Children from China rated the denials more favorably and the acknowledgements less favorably as compared with Canadian children, and this cross-cultural difference was strongest among older participants. Lee et al. (1997) interpreted these findings in terms of differences in sociocultural practices associated with a greater emphasis on collectivism in China vs. individualism in Canada. Cultures that emphasize individualism tend to place substantial emphasis on individual rights and autonomy, whereas cultures that emphasize collectivism tend to emphasize group harmony and duty to the community (Hofstede, 1980). Although previous research has documented that children's social and moral judgments are more complex and multifaceted than is often implied by descriptions of individualist vs. collectivist orientations (Helwig, Arnold, Tan, & Boyd, 2003), a meta-analysis by Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier (2002) indicates that these constructs capture important differences between Eastern and Western cultures.

Modesty often leads to a focus on the group as a whole rather than the individual members, and it can play a role in promoting and maintaining group harmony (Miller & Schlenker, 1985). Consequently, it may take on particular importance in collectivist cultures in which harmony is emphasized (Kanagawa, Cross, & Markus, 2001; Lee et al., 1997). Lee et al. (1997) noted that in China, modesty and humility are seen as essential for maintaining interpersonal relationships and that children are explicitly taught to be self-effacing 'unsung heroes' who do good deeds without accepting credit for them. Lee et al. (1997) also pointed out that acknowledging a good deed is seen as conflicting with Communist doctrine as well as traditional Chinese cultural norms. This is in contrast to Western social norms that do not encourage concealing one's good deeds and that portray self-enhancement as holding positive psychological consequences (see Bond, Leung, & Wan, 1982).

There is evidence that a strong emphasis on the socialization of modesty extends to societies outside Mainland China. Lee, Xu, Fu, Cameron, and Chen (2001) looked at this question among 7- to 11-year-old Taiwanese children in a study that also included children of the same age from Mainland China and Canada. In Taiwan, cultural values place as strong an emphasis on collectivism as they do in mainland China, but the traditional Confucian values have not been modified to fit Communist ideology. In addition, Taiwan has been more strongly influenced by Western cultural values than has Mainland China. Lee et al. (2001) found that children from Taiwan showed an age-related increase in the approval of falsely denying prosocial deeds and an age-related decrease in the disapproval of truthfully acknowledging them. This pattern matched findings seen among participants in Mainland China, but not participants in Canada. Lee et al. (2001) interpreted these results as suggesting that modesty is deeply entrenched in Chinese culture and may be a component of what theorists have referred to as the 'deep structure in Chinese culture,' which is seen as highly resistant to change (Sun, 1993). Whether such modesty norms are deeply entrenched in Japan as well is a question that we begin to explore in the current research.

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010

Beyond the question of cross-cultural differences in modesty norms, researchers have also been interested in the extent to which expectations about modesty might differ as a function of the social context (Baumeister & Ilko, 1995; Miller & Schlenker, 1985; Schlenker, 1986; Sedikides, Gregg, & Hart, 2007; Sedikides, Herbst, Hardin, & Dardis, 2002; Tice et al., 1995). Much of this work has involved adults from Western cultures, and a key question has been whether communication takes place privately or in public. Findings suggest that people are generally more modest in public than in private. For example, Baumeister and Ilko (1995) asked college students to describe some recent successes in public or in private. They found that participants were much more likely to express gratitude for help they received from others when they were describing their successes in a public setting.

There is reason to believe that expectations of modesty are particularly strong in public settings in East Asian cultures (Kanagawa et al., 2001; Muramoto & Yamaguchi, 1997; Rosenberger, 1989; see also Sedikides et al., 2007). If modesty plays an important role in maintaining group harmony, then immodest behavior may be seen as particularly problematic in group contexts. Consistent with this possibility is evidence that Japanese adults generated more modest descriptions of themselves when they wrote the descriptions in public settings rather than in private (Kanagawa et al., 2001), but American adults showed no such difference.

It is possible that individuals in East Asian cultures tend to differentiate more strongly between public and private settings due to differences in views of self (Kanagawa et al., 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In East Asian cultures there is less emphasis on maintaining behavioral consistency across situations (Heine, 2001) and greater emphasis on social roles and relationships (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). According to Heine (2001, p. 6) 'It is important for the East Asian self to be able to determine what the role requirements are for a given situation and to adjust itself accordingly,' and this ability to adapt to situations, called *kejime*, is emphasized in Japanese schools (see also Rosenberger, 1989).

The most direct support for the importance of the public-private distinction in East Asian children's reasoning about modesty comes from Yoshida, Kojo, and Kaku (1982). They presented children ages 7–11 with a series of self-enhancement statements, such as 'I am good at drawing pictures,' as well as a series of self-critical statements such as 'I am not good at running.' Participants were asked to select the statements that described them best. They chose more self-enhancement statements when they made their selections in private via questionnaire than when they responded aloud in front of ten classmates. This suggests that Japanese elementary school children believe that showing modesty is more important in public than in private.

There may be other aspects of the social context of communication that influence children's reasoning about modesty. One likely candidate is whether the target of the communication is a peer or an adult (Juvonen & Murdock, 1995; Watling & Banerjee, 2007). Watling and Banerjee (2007) asked 8- to 11-year-old British participants to reason about scenarios in which a protagonist offers a modest or an immodest response to praise from a peer or an adult. For example, participants heard either a teammate or a coach praise the protagonist for scoring a goal, and the protagonist responds, 'Well, I only got it because my team helped set it up' or 'Of course, I'm the best.' Participants judged the modest responses to be more socially appropriate when they were addressed to a peer than to an adult. Watling and Banerjee (2007) suggested that this might be because appropriate self-presentation to one's peer group is a critical determinant of social acceptance.

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010

The Present Study

The present research asked participants to reason about communication concerning prosocial deeds to directly build upon prior research examining this issue. We also focused on prosocial behavior because talking about such behavior has clear implications for modesty. This is not necessarily the case for other domains, such as academic performance, where claims about one's own success are sometimes interpreted as implicit offers of help to others (Heyman, Fu, & Lee, 2008).

Participants were children between the ages of 7 and 11. There is evidence that children in this age range have the capacity to take the social context of communication into account when reasoning about what is appropriate for people to say about themselves (Banerjee, 2002). Additionally, there are important age-related changes in self-presentation across this age span (Aloise-Young, 1993), and most other developmental research on this topic has involved children at or near this age range (Lee et al., 1997, 2001; Watling & Banerjee, 2007; Yoshida et al., 1982), which allows for a clear comparison to the earlier findings.

The primary goal was to examine whether Japanese children's willingness to present themselves more modestly in public than in private, as observed by Yoshida et al. (1982), represents a general tendency to judge immodest responses more negatively if they are made in public rather than in private. We expected that this would be the case because of the strong emphasis on a distinction between private beliefs and feeling and public expressions in Japanese culture, a distinction that is lexicalized in the Japanese language (*honne* vs. *tatemae*; see Kitayama & Uchida, 2003). We examined this issue by making use of stories developed by an international research team for use across a range of Eastern and Western cultures (Lee et al., 1997). In these stories, characters are depicted as either accepting or denying credit for prosocial actions. In the present study, we also included a within-subjects manipulation in which the communication took place in public or in private.

In addition to the primary goal of the research, we were interested in exploring whether Japanese children's reasoning about modesty would differ from the reasoning that has been seen among children in Western cultures. We also sought to discover whether Japanese children might judge modesty-related statements differently if they were directed to peers rather than teachers.

Method

Participants

Japanese participants were 109 children (52 girls) from a city in southern Japan. These included a 7-year-old group (N = 40, *M* = 7.23 years, *SD* = .37, 20 girls), a 9-year-old group (N = 32, *M* = 9.07 years, *SD* = .26, 13 girls), and an 11-year-old group (*N* = 37, *M* = 11.12, *SD* = .30, 19 girls). Participants from the USA were recruited as a comparison group from a city in the south-western USA. These included 97 Euro-American children (55 girls) in a 7-year-old group (N = 32, *M* = 7.45 years, *SD* = .39, 20 girls), a 9-year-old group (N = 34, *M* = 9.48 years, *SD* = .42, 18 girls), and an 11-year-old group (N = 31, *M* = 11.22, *SD* = .36, 17 girls). Children from each country were recruited from elementary schools attended by children from diverse economic backgrounds. Within each country and age group, children were randomly assigned to either a *teacher* condition or a *peer* condition.

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010

Procedure

Participants were tested by a trained experimenter in individual sessions at their schools, using their native language. For each participant, the experimenter read four experimental stories, with story content counterbalanced across all conditions between participants. The stories were originally developed by a team of East Asian and North American researchers and were translated into Japanese for the present study. A back-translation procedure in which the Japanese versions of the stories were translated into English insured that the translation process did not introduce substantive changes in the meaning of the stories.

All stories were accompanied by colorful illustrations and were presented on a laptop computer controlled by the experimenter. Each experimental story described a *protagonist* who does a good deed and is asked about it. The protagonist either truthfully acknowledges the good deed, or falsely denies it, to a *target audience* of either a peer or a teacher. The communication takes place in one of two possible *bystander audience* conditions: either in public (in front of the class) or in private (in the presence of the target audience only). Participants were presented with an additional control story in which they were asked to evaluate characters who intentionally committed transgressions, and then either lied about it (Lee et al., 1997, 2001).

Before hearing the stories participants were told, 'Today, I'm going to tell you about some kids who do some things and say some things. I want you to listen carefully because I'm going to ask you some questions about what they say. The questions are only about what the kids say, not what they do, okay? So, for instance, sometimes people do things like eating or drawing and sometimes people say things just like I am saying things to you right now. So the questions I am going to ask you are only about what they say. Is that okay with you?'

For each participant, the stories were presented in one of four randomly determined orders. After hearing each story, participants were first asked a forced-choice *lie categorization* question. On this question participants were asked to classify the protagonist's response to the questioner as 'a lie,' 'the truth,' or 'something else.' This measure was included to examine the possibility that children might not always consider intentionally providing inaccurate information to be a lie if the lie reflects a culturally accepted response (see Sweetser, 1987).

Next, participants were asked to make an *evaluative judgment* of the protagonist's response: 'Is what [the protagonist] said good or bad?' Participants responded using seven-point Likert-type scale that has been used by children of the same ages in previous cross-cultural studies (Lee et al., 1997, 2001). The scale consists of the response options *very*, *very good* (represented by three stars, scored as 3), very good (represented by two stars, scored as 2), good (represented by one star, scored as 1), *neither good nor bad* (represented by a blank circle, scored as 0), *bad* (represented by one X, scored as -1), *very bad* (represented by two Xs, scored as −2), and *very very bad* (represented by three Xs, scored as −3). This type of scale is frequently and successfully used with children as young as 4 (Bussey, 1999; Peterson, Peterson, & Seeto, 1983). Participants were taught how to interpret and make use of the scale prior to the study. For example, they were asked, 'if you thought that something someone said was very bad which choice would you point to?'

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010

Materials and Design

Four stories were created for participants in each condition, with the *target audience* described as a teacher for participants in the teacher condition, and as a peer for participants in the peer condition. The four stories within each condition were based on a combination of two between-subjects factors: the *truth value* of the protagonist's response (the protagonist truthfully acknowledges the good deed, or falsely denies it) and the *bystander audience* (whether the communication takes place in private with only the protagonist and target of communication present, or in public in front of a group of peers). The overall design was 2 (country: USA, Japan) by 3 (age group: 7, 9, or 11) by 2 (target audience: peer, teacher) by 2 (truth value: truth, lie) by 2 (bystander audience: public, private), with the first three factors serving as between-subjects factors, and the last two serving as within-subjects factors.

The following is an example of a story in which the bystander audience is public, for participants in the condition in which the target audience is a teacher and the truth value is a lie. A sample set of these stories is presented in the Appendix.

> Mark knew that his friend, Timmy, had lost his lunch money and now had no money to buy his lunch. When Timmy left his desk, Mark secretly put some of his own money in Timmy's desk so Timmy could buy some lunch. So Mark left some money for Timmy. When Timmy found the money and told his teacher, the teacher said to the class, 'Timmy just told me that someone has given him money so he can now buy his lunch.' The teacher then asked Mark in front of the class, 'Do you know who left the money for Timmy?' Even though Mark had left the money for Timmy, Mark said to his teacher, 'No, I didn't do it.'

Results

Lie Categorization

Within every country and between-subjects condition, at least 90 percent of responses were consistent with categorizing truthful acknowledgement of one's prosocial deed as 'the truth', or false denials as 'a lie'.

Evaluative Judgments

To ensure that participants from the two countries would use the response scales in a comparable way, each was read a control story in which a character intentionally damages public property and then lies about it. A univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) with children's evaluations as the dependent variable and age and country as independent variables revealed no significant effects ($p > .1$), which suggests that Japanese ($M = -2.33$, $SD = 1.13$ for 7-year-olds, $M = -2.43$, $SD = .68$ for 9-year-olds, $M = -2.76$, $SD = .43$ for 11-year-olds) and American ($M = -2.55$, $SD = .60$ for 7-year olds, $M = -2.46$, $SD = .61$ for 9-year olds, $M = -2.47$, $SD = .66$ for 11-year olds) children used the rating scale comparably. This is consistent with evidence (e.g., Lee et al., 1997, 2001) that East Asian and North American children view such lies very negatively and that their ratings do not differ by country.

Children's evaluations of the truth-telling stories were analyzed using a repeated measures ANOVA with country (USA, Japan), age group (7, 9, or 11), and target audience (peer, teacher) as between-subjects factors, and bystander audience (public, private) as a within-subjects factor. Preliminary analyses included gender, but there were

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010

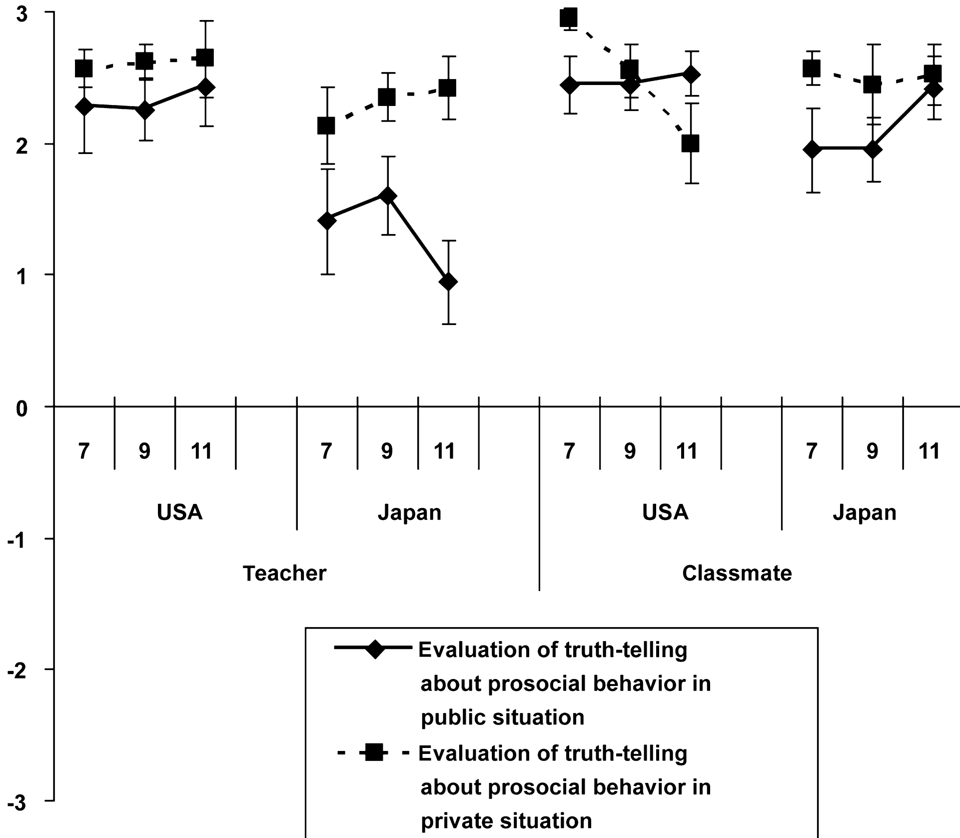

Figure 1. Evaluations of Truth-telling about Prosocial Behavior among 7-, 9-, and 11-year-olds in the USA and Japan when Communicating with Teachers and Classmates, in Public and in Private.

no significant effects and it was omitted for subsequent analyses. Responses for each setting and target audience type for each age group and country are summarized in Figure 1.

There was a main effect of country, with children in Japan making less positive evaluations of truth telling about good deeds ($M = 2.06$, $SD = .88$) than children in the USA ($M = 2.48$, $SD = .85$, $F(1, 206) = 12.10$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .05$). There was also a main effect of Setting, reflecting less positive evaluations of such statements in public ($M = 2.06$, $SD = 1.24$) as compared with in private ($M = 2.48$, $SD = .97$, $F(1, 206) = 20.97$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .09$). These effects were qualified by two two-way interactions and one three-way interaction. One two-way interaction was between country and setting ($F(1, 206) = 8.25$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .04$). Analyses for each country showed no significant effects of setting in the USA ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.24$ in public, $M = 2.56$, $SD = .96$ in private), but significantly less positive evaluations of truth telling in public from children in Japan ($M = 1.71$, $SD = 1.23$ in public, $M = 2.41$, $SD = .97$ in private, $t(108) = -4.62$, $p < .01$). A second two-way interaction was between country and target audience ($F(1, 206) = 4.07$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .02$). For participants from the USA, there was no significant effect of target audience (teacher: $M = 2.47$, $SD = 1.30$, classmate: $M =$

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010

2.49, *SD* = 1.18). The evaluations of participants from Japan were significantly less positive when the target audience was a teacher ($M = 1.81$, $SD = 1.23$) than when it was a peer ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 1.24$, $t(119) = -2.84$, $p < .01$).

The three-way interaction was between country, age group, and target audience ($F(2, 206) = 3.06$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$). Follow-up analyses revealed that this interaction was due to the fact that only the ratings of the 11-year-old participants from Japan were affected by target audience. Specifically, these participants gave significantly less positive ratings to truth telling directed toward teachers ($M = 1.68$, $SD = .93$) rather than peers ($M = 2.44$, $SD = .90$, $t(39) = -2.49$, $p < .05$). This result contrasts with that seen among younger Japanese children (7-year-olds: $M = 1.77$, $SD = 1.42$ for teachers and $M = 2.26$, $SD = .78$ for peers; 9-year-olds: $M = 1.97$, $SD = .80$ for teachers and $M = 2.20$, $SD = .77$ for peers), and children from all age groups in the USA (7-year-olds: $M = 2.43$, $SD = .81$ for teachers and $M = 2.69$, $SD = .49$ for peers; 9-year-olds: $M = 2.44$ $SD = .54$ for teachers and $M = 2.50$, $SD = .75$ for peers; 11-year-olds: $M = 2.54$, $SD = .80$ for teachers and $M = 2.26$, $SD = .94$ for peers), who were unaffected by the target audience manipulation.

Children's evaluations of the lie-telling stories were analyzed using a repeated measures ANOVA with country (USA, Japan), age group (7, 9, or 11), and target audience (peer, teacher) as between-subjects factors, and setting (public, private) as a within-subjects factor. Responses for each setting and audience type for each age group and country are summarized in Figure 2. The ANOVA showed a main effect of age group was also significant ($F(2, 203) = 13.80$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .12$. Overall, with

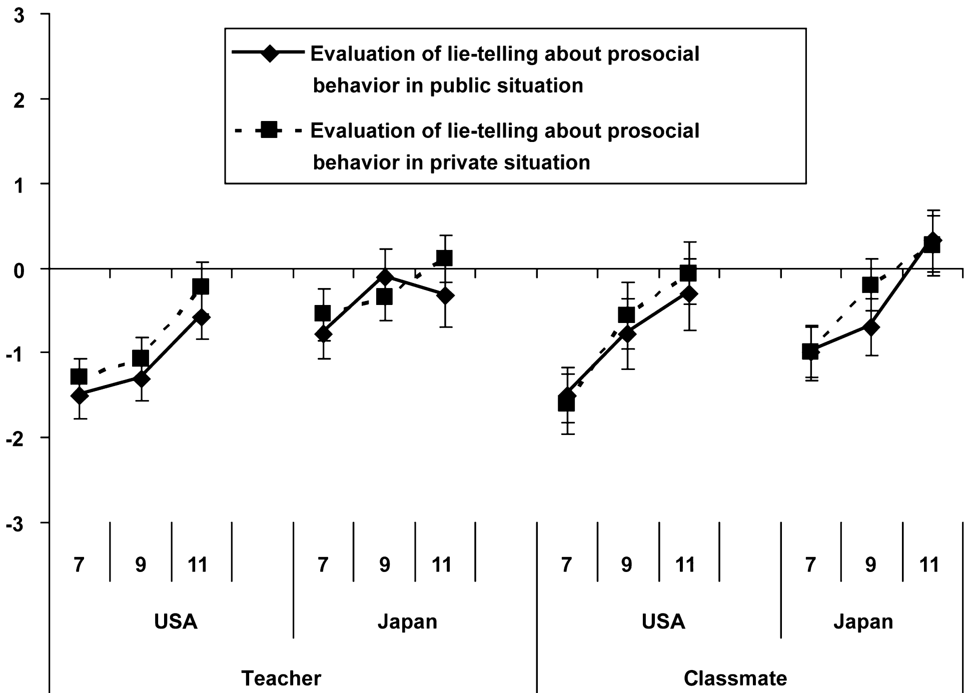

Figure 2. Evaluations of Lie-telling about Prosocial Behavior among 7-, 9-, and 11-year-olds in the USA and Japan when Communicating with Teachers and Classmates, in Public and in Private.

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010

increased age, children's evaluations became less strongly negative, $M = -1.15$, $SD = 1.20$ for 7-year-olds, −.63, $SD = 1.19$ for 9-year-olds, and −.09, $SD = 1.19$ for 11-year-olds). More crucially, the effect of country was significant (USA $M = -.89$, $SD = 1.19$, Japan: $M = -.36$, $SD = 1.18$, $F(1, 203) = 10.53$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .05$). Japanese children gave significantly less negative evaluations of lying about good deeds than did children from the USA.

Discussion

Children in Japan and in the USA were asked to judge the appropriateness of truthfully acknowledging a good deed vs. falsely denying it. Japanese children judged accepting credit for one's good deeds less positively, and falsely denying credit less negatively, than did children in the USA. This finding is consistent with previous research comparing the judgments of children in Canada to those of children in Mainland China or Taiwan (Lee et al., 1997, 2001), and provides further evidence of the importance of modesty in East Asia.

Consistent with our primary hypothesis, we found that children in Japan were more critical of immodest statements when they were made in public rather than in private. This effect increased with age, perhaps reflecting increased exposure to Japanese norms about modesty. These results suggest that, as predicted, the Japanese children's more modest self-presentation in public than in private (Yoshida et al., 1982) reflects a general tendency to evaluate immodest responses made in public more negatively than those made in private.

It is notable that Japanese children differentiated between public and private contexts when the protagonist's claim was truthful but immodest, but made no such distinction when the claim was false but modest. If it is true that a key function of modesty is to maintain group harmony, one would expect to see this pattern of results. This is because immodest statements are more likely to be disruptive when made in the presence of a group, but modest statements are unlikely to pose any such threat regardless of the context in which they are expressed.

Another reason why immodest truth ratings were not simply the reverse of the modest lie ratings relates to the fact that there are several potential responses that characters could have made to inquiries about the prosocial deed in question. Such potential responses include saying nothing, or admitting the truth while also giving credit to others. It may be that participants' evaluative ratings were affected by an awareness of such alternative responses, or by a focus on differing aspects of the situation. Such a possibility is consistent with the results of Heyman, Sweet, and Lee (2009), who asked 7- to 11-year-olds in the USA to reason about a protagonist who receives an undesirable gift and makes either a truthful but impolite response, or a dishonest but polite response. In the stories in which the protagonist lies, more than 75 percent of participants mentioned the protagonist's consideration of the feelings of the gift-giver, but less than 5 percent did so when the protagonist told the truth.

Japanese children judged a protagonist's disclosure of a good deed more negatively when the statement was directed toward a teacher rather than a peer. This contrasts with Watling and Banerjee's (2007) finding that children in the UK consider modest responses to be more appropriate when they are directed toward peers rather than teachers. It is possible that these differences reflect cultural differences when modesty is expected, and that in Japan, like in Mainland China and Taiwan, during the formative years of understanding of the modesty norms of their society, teachers rather than peers

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010

may play a more significant role by teaching and reinforcing the norm explicitly. However, it is possible that the findings reflect methodological differences rather than cultural differences. Our specific methodology also leaves open the possibility that the differences in reasoning about peers vs. teachers among Japanese children in the present research reflects a tendency to consider immodest behavior to a teacher in the presence of one's peers to be particularly problematic, rather than a more general tendency to consider modesty as more appropriate with teachers than with peers. This possibility is supported by the fact that Japanese participants appeared to make a stronger distinction based on target audience when the communication took place in public. Notably, in our peer condition, communication takes place with only peers present, but in our teacher condition, a teacher is present in addition to peers.

In contrast to the responses from the Japanese children, the children from the USA did not show any systematic tendency to differentiate based on the social context of the communication. These results are consistent with the those of Kanagawa et al. (2001), who found that adults in the USA showed less situational variability in their self-descriptions than did adults in Japan, and that only the Japanese adults showed a greater concern with modesty in a group setting than in private, and in the presence of a professor than with peers. These between-country differences may relate to the stronger modesty norms in Japan, which could result in greater consideration of how immodest responses are likely to be perceived by different audiences. These differences in children's responses may also be based upon a relatively greater emphasis on the importance of social roles among people in East Asia as compared with the USA (Heine, 2001; Kanagawa et al., 2001).

Although we have focused on the ways in which participants from Japan and the USA differed in their evaluations of communication about prosocial deeds, there are also important similarities. Notably, participants in both countries rated truth telling more favorably than lie telling. Additionally, participants in the oldest group in each country consistently viewed lying to deny credit for a good deed as more acceptable than did participants in the youngest age group.

In considering how modesty develops, there are some differences between the present research and previous studies that are worth considering. Lee et al. (1997, 2001) found age-related decreases in the approval of acknowledging good deeds in both Mainland China and Taiwan, but no such age-related change was seen among Japanese participants in the present research. This finding makes the point that cross-cultural differences often increase with age across elementary school years (e.g., Miller, 1984), but not always.

Another point of contrast is that a preference for modest to immodest responses has been seen among children age 8 years and older in some studies (Banerjee, 2000; Watling & Banerjee, 2007; Yoshida et al., 1982), but not in others, including the present research and Lee et al. (1997, 2001). The specific nature of the modest and immodest responses may play a role in explaining this difference. In studies in which immodest statements have been rated most negatively, they have been made by characters who overtly call attention to their own positive traits. For example, a scenario used by Banerjee (2000) describes a child who is praised for making a good catch in a physical education class and responds by saying, 'Well, that's because I'm really good at basketball.' It is likely that making a positive appraisal of one's personal qualities is seen as a more obvious case of self-promotion than acknowledging a good deed.

Another potential factor that could help account for differences in findings across studies concerns the extent to which characters' responses are understood to be

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010

truthful. In the Banerjee (2000), Yoshida et al. (1982), and Watling and Banerjee (2007) studies, participants were not directly informed of the truth or falsity of the modest and immodest statements. In contrast, in the present study, as well as in the Lee et al. (1997, 2001) studies, the value of truth telling was pitted against the value of modesty. The differences in results among the studies suggest that even when children appreciate the positive aspects of presenting oneself modestly, they may remain somewhat wary of providing false information in response to a direct question.

Although children's understanding of modesty norms is likely to play a role in their reasoning about whether it is appropriate for people to say positive things about themselves, it is important to note that it is possible to express disapproval of immodest responses without having an understanding of modesty as a self-presentation strategy. For example, a child might receive criticism for saying positive things about herself, and learn that such comments are inappropriate without understanding why. This possibility is consistent with evidence that children sometimes engage in display rules merely to avoid overt negative consequences, as opposed to engaging in self-presentational strategies in which they attempt to shape how they are viewed by others (Bennett & Yeeles, 1990).

It may also be that even when children have a good understanding of modesty as a self-presentational strategy they disagree about how it should be applied to specific situations, and whether it should override other considerations. For example, Heyman et al. (2008) found that children from China were more likely to respond that students who perform well should disclose their performance to poorly performing peers than were children from the USA. These results seem to conflict with the notion that societies in which there is a greater emphasis on collectivist values have stronger modesty norms. However, participants from China, but not those from the USA, often interpreted the disclosure of academic success as an implicit offer of help from the successful student to the poorly-performing peer.

Limitations and Future Directions

An important limitation of the present research is that one cannot be certain that the observed differences between the Japanese and US samples reflect true cultural differences. It is possible that despite our best efforts, the stories were not completely equivalent to children in the two countries. In addition, the samples may differ along other dimensions that could be associated with differences in reasoning about modesty. Although it is not possible to match samples along every conceivable dimension other than culture, it would be possible to look more closely at the impact of culture in future research. This could be done by including direct measures of theoretically meaningful cultural constructs such as beliefs about collectivism, or by examining whether reasoning differs when culture is made more or less salient (Matsumoto & Yoo, 2006).

Further research will also be needed to identify how to best account for differences in findings across studies that have examined the development of modesty. For example, it will be useful to investigate children's judgments of individuals who make modest and immodest statements in comparable situations that do and do not involve lying. It will also be important to directly compare how children's reasoning about the expression of prosocial behavior generalizes to other modesty-related contexts, such as communicating about positive performance outcomes (Heyman et al., 2008).

There are important aspects of the social context of communicating about modesty that were not examined in the present research. One factor concerns whether the

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010

communication takes place within the context of friends or among strangers (Schlenker, 1986; Tice et al., 1995), given that people who say positive things about themselves risk being discredited if their statements are judged as implausible, and strangers have less of a basis for disputing an individual's false claims (Schlenker, 1986; Tice et al., 1995). It may be that the distinction between friends and strangers is relatively less important in collectivist societies in which people may be able to obtain positive judgments from strangers by downplaying their positive qualities.

It will also be important to examine other aspects of the public/private distinction. In the present research we operationalized this distinction by manipulating whether the communication took place in front of a class of students, and it is not clear whether results will generalize to other ways of defining it. It will be important to further examine private communication in a manner that better taps into beliefs about expressing private thoughts and feelings. Additionally, the composition of audiences in public situations needs to be explored. For example, children may believe that different responses are appropriate in front of a group of teachers than in front of a group of classmates.

Conclusion

The present research provides evidence that 7- to 11-year-old children who are growing up in Japan place a relatively high value on modesty, and that they are sensitive to the context of the communication when judging individuals who make immodest statements. Of particular interest is the fact that Japanese children judged immodest statements more negatively if they were made in public rather than in private. Although such findings can pose challenges to researchers who are interested in determining the true beliefs of individuals, apart from any self-presentational effects that may be present (Heine, Takata, & Lehman, 2000), we believe they also shed light on the development of children's reasoning about the social world.

References

Aloise-Young, P. A. (1993). The development of self-presentation: Self-promotion in 6- to 10-year-old children. *Social Cognition*, *11*, 201–222.

Banerjee, R. (2000). The development of an understanding of modesty. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, *18*, 499–517.

Banerjee, R. (2002). Audience effects on self-presentation in childhood. *Social Development*, *11*, 487–507.

Baumeister, R. F., & Ilko, S. A. (1995). Shallow gratitude: Public and private acknowledgement of external help in accounts of success. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*, *16*, 191–209.

Bennett, M., & Yeeles, C. (1990). Children's understanding of showing off. *Journal of Social Psychology*, *130*, 591–596.

Bond, M. H., Leung, K., & Wan, K.-C. (1982). The social impact of self-effacing attributions: The Chinese case. *Journal of Social Psychology*, *118*, 157–166.

Bussey, K. (1999). Children's categorization and evaluation of different types of lies and truths. *Child Development*, *70*, 1338–1347.

Heine, S. J. (2001). Self as cultural product: An examination of East Asian and North American selves. *Journal of Personality*, *69*, 881–906.

Heine, S. J., Takata, T., & Lehman, D. R. (2000). Beyond self-presentation: Evidence for self-criticism among Japanese. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *26*, 71–78.

Helwig, C. C., Arnold, M. L., Tan, D., & Boyd, D. (2003). Chinese adolescents' reasoning about democratic and authority-based decision making in peer, family, and school contexts. *Child Development*, *74*, 783–800.

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010

Heyman, G. D., Fu, G., & Lee, K. (2007). Evaluating claims people make about themselves: The development of skepticism. *Child Development*, *78*, 367–375.
Heyman, G. D., Fu, G., & Lee, K. (2008). Reasoning about the disclosure of success and failure to friends among children in the U.S. and China. *Developmental Psychology*, *44*, 908–918.
Heyman, G. D., Sweet, M. A., & Lee, K. (2009). Children's reasoning about lie-telling and truth-telling in politeness contexts. *Social Development*, *18*, 728–746.
Hofstede, G. (1980). *Culture's consequences*. London: Sage.
Juvonen, J., & Murdock, T. B. (1995). Grade-level differences in the social value of effort: Implications for self-presentation tactics of early adolescents. *Child Development*, *66*, 1694–1705.
Kanagawa, C., Cross, S. E., & Markus, H. R. (2001). 'Who am I?': The cultural psychology of the conceptual self. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *27*, 90–103.
Kitayama, S., & Uchida, Y. (2003). Explicit self-criticism and implicit self-regard: Evaluating self and friend in two cultures. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *39*, 476–482.
Lee, K., Cameron, C. A., Xu, F., Fu, G., & Board, J. (1997). Chinese and Canadian children's evaluations of lying and truth telling: Similarities and differences in the context of pro- and antisocial behaviors. *Child Development*, *68*, 924–934.
Lee, K., Xu, F., Fu, G., Cameron, C. A., & Chen, S. (2001). Taiwan and Mainland Chinese and Canadian children's categorization and evaluation of lie- and truth-telling: A modesty effect. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, *19*, 525–542.
Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1991). Culture and the self: Implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation. *Psychological Review*, *98*, 224–253.
Matsumoto, D., & Yoo, S. H. (2006). Toward a new generation of cross-cultural research. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *1*, 234–250.
Miller, J. G. (1984). Culture and the development of everyday social explanation. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, *46*, 961–978.
Miller, R. S., & Schlenker, B. R. (1985). Egotism in group members: Public and private attributions of responsibility for group performance. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *48*, 85–89.
Muramoto, Y., & Yamaguchi, S. (1997). Another type of self-serving bias: Coexistence of self-effacing and group-serving tendencies in attribution in the Japanese culture. *Japanese Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *37*, 65–75.
Oyserman, D., Coon, H. M., & Kemmelmeier, M. (2002). Rethinking individualism and collectivism: Evaluation of theoretical assumptions and meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, *128*, 3–72.
Peterson, C. C., Peterson, J. L., & Seeto, D. (1983). Developmental changes in ideas about lying. *Child Development*, *54*, 1529–1535.
Rosenberger, N. R. (1989). Dialectic balance in the polar model of self: The Japan case. *Ethos*, *17*, 88–113.
Schlenker, B. R. (1986). Self-identification: Toward an integration of the private and public self. In R. Baumeister (Ed.), *Public self and private self* (pp. 21–62). New York: Springer-Verlag.
Sedikides, C., Gregg, A. P., & Hart, C. M. (2007). The importance of being modest. In C. Sedikides, & S. Spencer (Eds.), *The self: Frontiers in social psychology* (pp. 285–324). New York: Psychology Press.
Sedikides, C., Herbst, K. C., Hardin, D. P., & Dardis, G. J. (2002). Accountability as a deterrent to self-enhancement: The search for mechanisms. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *83*, 592–605.
Sun, J. W. (1993). *The deep structure of the Chinese culture*. Hong Kong: Taishang Publishing.
Sweetser, E. E. (1987). The definition of lie: An examination of the folk models underlying a semantic prototype. In D. Holland, & N. Quinn (Eds.), *Cultural models in language and thought* (pp. 43–66). New York: Cambridge University Press.
Tice, D. M., Butler, J. L., Muraven, M. B., & Stillwell, A. M. (1995). When modesty prevails: Differential favorability of self-presentation to friends and strangers. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *69*, 1120–1136.
Watling, D., & Banerjee, R. (2007). Children's understanding of modesty in front of peer and adult audiences. *Infant and Child Development*, *16*, 227–236.
Yoshida, T., Kojo, K., & Kaku, H. (1982). A study on the development of self-presentation in children. *Japanese Journal of Educational Psychology*, *30*, 120–127.

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by NICHD grant R01 HD048962. We thank Brian Compton and Shaji Haq for comments on earlier versions of the manuscript.

Appendix

The following is the text of a sample set of stories that were presented to participants in the Teacher condition.

Truth Value: Truth; Setting: Public

Kelly knew that her friend, Anne, had lost her money for the class trip. Now she couldn't go on the trip with the rest of her class. Kelly secretly put some of her own money in Anne's pocket so Anne could go on the trip. So Kelly left the money for Anne, and when Anne found the money and told her teacher, the teacher said to the class, 'Anne just told me that someone has given her money so she can go on the trip.' The teacher then asked Kelly in front of the class, 'Do you know who left the money for Anne?' Kelly had left the money for Anne, so Kelly said to her teacher, 'Yes, I did it.'

Truth Value: Truth; Setting: Private

When Jenny was out at recess, she saw that the school yard was littered with garbage, so she picked up all the pieces she could find and threw them in the trash can. So Jenny cleaned the schoolyard. At the end of recess, Jenny's teacher said to her class, 'I notice that the school yard is now nice and clean.' When nobody was around, the teacher asked Jenny, 'Do you know who cleaned the yard?' Jenny had cleaned the schoolyard, so Jenny said to her teacher, 'Yes, I did it.'

Truth Value: Lie; Setting: Public

Mark knew that his friend, Timmy, had lost his lunch money and now had no money to buy his lunch. When Timmy left his desk, Mark secretly put some of his own money in Timmy's desk so Timmy could buy some lunch. So Mark left some money for Timmy. When Timmy found the money and told his teacher, the teacher said to the class, 'Timmy just told me that someone has given him money so he can now buy his lunch.' The teacher then asked Mark in front of the class, 'Do you know who left the money for Timmy?' Even though Mark had left the money for Timmy, Mark said to his teacher, 'No, I didn't do it.'

Truth Value: Lie; Setting: Private

Alex had to stay inside at recess time because he was getting over a cold. Alex decided to clean up the classroom for his class. So Alex cleaned the classroom. When his teacher returned after recess, he said to his class, 'Oh, I see that someone has cleaned the classroom.' When nobody was around, the teacher asked Alex, 'Do you know who cleaned the classroom?' Even though Alex had cleaned the classroom, he said to his teacher, 'No, I didn't do it.'

© Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 2010