

Published in final edited form as:

Cogn Dev. 2010 ; 25(3): 290–301. doi:10.1016/j.cogdev.2009.10.004.

When is peer rejection justifiable?: Children's understanding across two cultures

Yoonjung Park and

Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

Melanie Killen

University of Maryland

Abstract

This study investigated how Korean ($N = 397$) and U.S. ($N = 333$) children and adolescents (10 and 13 years of age) evaluated personality (aggression, shyness) and group (gender, nationality) characteristics as a basis for peer rejection in three contexts (friendship rejection, group exclusion, victimization). Overall, peer rejection based on *group membership* was viewed as more unfair than peer rejection based on *personality traits*. Children viewed friendship rejection as more legitimate than group exclusion or victimization and used more personal choice reasoning for friendship rejection than for rejection in any other context. Although there were a few cultural differences, overall, the findings provided support for the cultural generalizability of social reasoning about peer rejection.

Researchers have long been interested in peer relationships and specifically rejection from peers (Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006). Much of the literature has focused on individual differences and personality traits, such as hostile attributions of intentions of others (Crick & Dodge, 1994), misreading of social cues, and misguided social goals in peer encounters (Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001) that contribute to patterns of peer rejection in childhood. The two most frequent personality traits examined are aggression and shyness; children who are extremely aggressive or shy are at risk for friendship rejection, exclusion, and victimization (Bierman, 2004; Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995; Coie, Dodge, & Kupersmidt, 1990, Parker & Asher, 1987; Rubin et al., 2006). These two characteristics reflect qualitatively different deficits, which are connected to two pathways of social problems in childhood -- internalizing problems stemming from shyness, and externalizing problems derived from aggression

Although personal traits such as aggression or shyness contribute to why children are rejected by others, recent research has suggested other factors that account for peer rejection. These include children's intergroup attitudes, group identity, and social judgments about group dynamics (Abrams & Rutland, 2008; Nesdale & Flessner, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For example, research based on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) has shown how identification with the ingroup can lead to negative attitudes about the outgroup, specifically in peer rejection situations (Abrams & Rutland, 2008; Nesdale, 2004). What

Corresponding Author, Yoonjung Park, Ph.D., Section on Child and Family Research, NICHD/NIH, 6705 Rockledge Drive, Suite 8030, Bethesda, MD 20892, Phone: 301. 496. 6864, parkyoon@mail.nih.gov.

Publisher's Disclaimer: This is a PDF file of an unedited manuscript that has been accepted for publication. As a service to our customers we are providing this early version of the manuscript. The manuscript will undergo copyediting, typesetting, and review of the resulting proof before it is published in its final citable form. Please note that during the production process errors may be discovered which could affect the content, and all legal disclaimers that apply to the journal pertain.

makes this approach different is that the focus is on normative processes stemming from group identity that contribute to patterns of peer rejection and exclusion, rather than processes that reflect developmental psychopathology.

Recently, Killen and colleagues have drawn on both social identity theory and social domain theory (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1998) to examine social reasoning about peer exclusion when exclusion is based on group membership, such as gender, race, or ethnicity (Killen, 2007). It has been shown that children and adolescents reason about gender and racial exclusion using multiple domains of reasoning, such as moral ("It's not fair"), social-conventional ("It makes the group comfortable"), and psychological ("It's up to each person to decide what to do") justifications (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002; Killen, Margie, & Sinno, 2006). Children's social reasoning in evaluating exclusion varies as a function of age, the target of exclusion, the social contact opportunities with the outgroup and other factors, and has reflected normative age-related changes across a wide spectrum of children (for review, see Killen, Sinno, & Margie, 2007).

What has not been shown is whether social reasoning about peer rejection differs when peer rejection is based on personality traits, such as shyness or aggression, which has been the focus of the peer relations literature (Rubin, et al. 2006) in contrast to peer rejection based on group membership, such as gender and nationality, which has been studied by developmental intergroup researchers (see Levy & Killen, 2008). Children may view personality traits as a legitimate basis on which to reject someone due to disruption in social group functioning and the salient dimension of personal choice in choosing friends. Or children may view peer rejection based on personality traits as wrong based on the general view that peer rejection of any kind is wrong and reflects psychological harm (Crick, Ostrov, & Werner, 2006). Thus, one goal of the present study was to determine children's reasons for various forms of peer rejection based on personality traits (e.g., shyness and aggression) or group membership (e.g., gender and nationality). In line with this goal, we focused on nationality as a category that has "ingroup/outgroup" qualities (Bennett & Sani, 2006).

Social domain theory (Turiel, 1983, 1998, 2006) has demonstrated that children use different forms of reasoning in contexts that vary by quality of social relationships and goals of interactions (e.g., to be friends, to form an activity club; Killen, 2007). Children use more personal choice reasoning for friendship rejection (Nucci, 2001) and more group functioning reasoning for group exclusion (e.g., a baseball team excluding a girl; Killen & Stangor, 2001). Social domain theory predicts that children use moral reasoning to evaluate victimization given the concrete physical harm associated with victimization, an extreme form of peer exclusion (Astor & Behre, 1997). However, no prior research has examined in one study children's reasoning about all three forms of peer rejection (friendship rejection, group exclusion, and victimization), which are arguably key to recent concerns about bullying behavior in school settings (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Thus, another goal of this study was to test whether individuals use different forms of reasoning for evaluating peer rejection in three contexts --friendship rejection, group exclusion, and victimization.

A further goal of the present study was to investigate the generalizability of these judgments across two cultures, the USA and Korea. Most studies of children's reasoning about peer rejection or social behaviors in general have been conducted in North America or Europe. Surprisingly, no research studies, to date, have examined how Korean children evaluate peer rejection, , peer group exclusion, or victimization. Yet, physical and emotional harassment by peers has become a serious social issue in Korea (Kim et al., 2000), and an epidemiological study reported that 54.7 % of elementary school children experienced some types of harassment by their peers (Kim & Song, 1994). The negative consequences of peer

rejection also reported in Korea (dislike of school, low self esteem, and suicidal thoughts) have become central concerns for Korean educators (Kim, Koh, & Leventhal, 2005; Kim, Leventhal, Koh, Hubbard, & Boyce, 2006).

Several previous studies have shown some differences across cultures. Aggressiveness and shyness have different outcomes in Chinese and Western populations (Chen & Rubin, 1992). Research on exclusion based on group membership has demonstrated the ways that group membership categories vary in salience (e.g., gender; Turiel, 2002) and which category memberships are meaningful (Rutland, Abrams, & Levy, 2007). Research on Korean children's peer relationships has produced findings similar to those from U.S. studies (Schwartz, Farver, Chang & Lee-Shin, 2002). Children characterized by submissive behavior or aggression are likely to emerge as frequent victims by their peers in Korea. However, further study is warranted regarding variability and generalizability. (Park, Killen, Crystal, & Watanabe, 2003). of children's social evaluations across cultures.

Cultural assumptions become relevant in investigating evaluations of peer rejection across cultures. Regarding personality traits, cultural psychologists would predict that Korean and American children would show significant differences. For example, shy behaviors are generally evaluated negatively in Western children's peer groups (Boivin et al., 1995; Boulton, 1999; Olweus, 1978) but positively in Eastern cultures. Confucianism, a very influential ideology in Korea, focuses on self-restraint and promotes acceptance of a more passive or restrained interactive style (Chen & Rubin, 1992). This ideology could be related to differential evaluations of peer rejection by Korean and U.S. children, with shyness being a more legitimate basis to exclude in the USA than in Korea. Because the overt levels of aggressive behavior in childhood are reported to be higher in the USA (Orlick, Zhou, & Partington, 1990; Park, et al., 2003; Shantz, 1993; Smith, Morita, et al., 1999), we expected that Korean children would view rejection based on aggression as less acceptable than would American children. Concerning group membership, Korea is a more traditional culture in terms of gender-segregated activities and roles than is the USA (Lee & Sugawara, 1994). Korean children may be more willing to reject a peer based on gender than would American children. In addition, Korea is more homogeneous in population than the USA.; Korean children may be less sensitive to peer rejection based on different nationality than would U. S. children, due to their lack of experience with diversity (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Regarding age differences, research by Nucci and Turiel (2000) has demonstrated that adolescents value the personal domain, which includes choice of friendships and autonomy. At the same time, Horn (2003) has shown that young adolescents are highly focused on group functioning and often reject peers who deviate from the group, and they do so more than younger children. By 8th grade, group functioning becomes highly salient and friendship issues become highly identified as a personal choice; thus we expected that with increasing age, children would become more likely to view friendship rejection and group exclusion as legitimate. However, based on previous findings (Smetana, 2006), we expected that children of all ages would view exclusion in the form of victimization as wrong. Although peer rejection based on group membership appears in children as young as preschoolers (Killen, Pisacane, Lee-Kim, & Ardila-Rey, 2001), we recruited older children in order to detect evaluation of peer rejection based on both personality traits and group membership.

In sum, the present study aimed to investigate how U.S. and Korean children evaluate peer rejection based on personality (e.g., aggression, shyness) and group (e.g., gender, nationality) characteristics and whether their judgments vary as a function of the social

context of rejection (i.e., friendship rejection, group exclusion, victimization). How gender, grade, and cultural background contributed to children's evaluations was also investigated.

Method

Participants

Participants were 397 Korean and 333 U.S. children from 5th grade and 8th grade.. Korean participants consisted of 199 5th graders (99 boys; mean age = 10.41) and 198 8th graders (100 boys; mean age = 13.63). U.S. participants consisted of 189 5th graders (88 boys; mean age = 10.82), and 144 8th graders (50 boys; mean age = 13.67). Korean children were recruited from 2 elementary and 2 middle schools in a suburban area of Seoul, South Korea, and U. S. children were recruited from 3 elementary and 4 middle schools in a suburban area of Washington, D.C. The ethnic composition of the American sample was representative of the U.S. population (66% European-American, 10% African-American, 8 % Hispanic, 12 % Asian, and 4% other). The Korean sample was 100% Korean. All children in both cultures were from middle income backgrounds. Only children receiving parental consent participated, with an 80% return rate.

Instrument: Social Reasoning of Peer Rejection

The questionnaire administered to participants included 12 stories, four in each of 3 contexts: (a) *Friendship rejection* (e.g., Peter doesn't want to be friends with Joe because he pushes others around – aggressive trait); (b) *Group exclusion* (e.g., Arthur watches a group of kids preparing group projects in school and wants to join, but they do not let him join because he is quiet – shy trait); and (c) *Victimization* (e.g., Minsu is from Korea. Minsu's other classmates pick on him and call him mean names. It happens everyday – nationality). The gender of the children in the stories matched the participants' gender (except for the story in which one child excludes another child based on gender, and in this case the target was the opposite gender from the participant). Similarly, the nationality of the children in the stories matched the nationality of the participants (except for the target who was excluded for nationality and, in this case, the name reflected the nationality that was not the participant's nationality, Korean or American).

Each story context had one of four *target characteristics*, two *personality traits* and two *group memberships*: (a) *aggression* (e.g., Joe is bossy and pushes around his classmates and often gets into fights); (b) *shyness* (e.g., Adam is quiet and plays by himself. Most of his classmates do not pay attention to him); (c) *opposite gender* (e.g., Susan is a girl, for male participants; Michael is a boy, for female participants); and (d) *nationality* (e.g., Inchul is from Korea, for American participants; David is from the U. S., for Korean participants). For example, for the *Friendship/aggression* story, a male participant was asked to evaluate "Joe is bossy and pushes around his classmates and often gets into fights. Peter doesn't want to be friends with Joe because he pushes others around." For the *Friendship/shyness* story, a male participant was asked to evaluate: "Adam is quiet and plays by himself. Most of his classmates do not pay attention to him. But Daniel doesn't want to be friends with John because he is quiet." For the *Friendship/opposite gender* story, a male participant was asked to evaluate: "Susan is a girl. Susan wants to be friends with David. But David doesn't want to be friends with Susan because she is a girl." For the *Friendship/nationality* story, a male participant from the USA was asked to evaluate: "Inchul is from Korea. Inchul wants to be friends with Mark. But Mark doesn't want to be friends with Inchul because he is Korean."

Presentation of the target characteristics (aggression, shyness, gender, nationality) was counterbalanced to minimize story order effects. However, the order of the contexts was fixed as friendship rejection, group exclusion, and victimization. Research has shown that

rejection in the context of friendship choice is the least severe moral transgression while victimization is the most severe (Astor & Behre, 1997; Nucci & Turiel (2000)). Thus, the order of contexts was designed to minimize the potential effect of judgments of more severe transactions on judgments of lesser ones.

After the participant read each of the 12 stories, judgments and justifications were elicited. The participant first gave an evaluation of the legitimacy of rejection for the story (e.g., Do you think it is okay for the kids to not let Arthur join the softball game?) by responding to a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very much not okay) to 6 (very much okay). A justification was then assessed by asking the participant to give reasons for the evaluation.

The first author supervised translation of all materials into Korean. The instrument took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Coding

Justifications were coded using a system based on previous research (Killen et al., 2002; Smetana, 2006; Tisak, 1995; Turiel, 2006) and on the results of pilot data (Park, 2005). Within three overarching categories (moral, social-conventional, and psychological), 5 specific codes were used: (a) prosocial/empathy (moral); (b) fairness/discrimination (moral); (c) group functioning/stereotypes (social-conventional); (d) external influences (social-conventional); and (e) personal choice (psychological). (See Table 1.) The social-conventional categories (group functioning/stereotypes and external influences) were combined due to the common focus on “the group.”

For each justification question, the participant’s response was coded into one, or more than one, category, if appropriate. For example, if the participant gave two responses, one moral and one social-conventional, “.5” was entered for moral and .5 for social-conventional. These proportions were then subjected to repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA),

Reliability was calculated based on two coders who independently coded responses of 40 participants.. Inter-rater percent agreement was 92% and Cohen’s kappa statistic was .89.

Results

For main analyses, we conducted multivariate ANOVA with repeated measures. Follow-up analyses included univariate ANOVAs for between-subject interaction effects and Tukey post-hoc test for within-subjects interaction effects. When conducting follow-up analyses on main effects for context and target characteristic, responses were collapsed across characteristics in order to examine context effects, and responses were collapsed across contexts in order to examine characteristic effects. In cases where sphericity was not met, corrections were made using the Huynh-Feldt method. When effect sizes were smaller than .01, the results were not reported even though p values were significant at $\alpha = .05$.

Judgments of Peer Rejection

A 2 (nationality: American, Korean) \times 2 (grade: 5th and 8th) \times 2 (gender: boy, girl) \times 3 (context: friendship, group exclusion, victimization) \times 4 (characteristics: aggression, shyness, gender, nationality) ANOVA with repeated measures indicated that girls (mean = 2.15, $SD = .77$) were more likely than boys (mean = 2.33, $SD = .77$) to evaluate rejection of a child as unacceptable, $F(1, 636) = 10.97$, $p < .001$, . There were no other gender effects. Interaction effects of more than 3-way were rare with very small effect sizes (less than .01).

Judgment by Context—A significant effect of context was found, $F(2, 1282) = 370.23$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .37$. Participants judged rejection in the victimization context ($M = 1.66$, SD

= .77) more negatively than in the peer group exclusion context ($M = 2.36$, $SD = .92$), $t(725) = 19.13$, $p < .0001$, or the friendship rejection context ($M = 2.59$, $SD = .89$), $t(725) = 23.95$, $p < .0001$, contexts. Children also judged group exclusion significantly more wrong than the friendship rejection context, $t(725) = 6.31$, $p < .001$. No interaction effect (more than effect size .01) with nationality or grade emerged.

Judgment by characteristics—The hypothesis that children would evaluate rejection on the basis of personality traits as less wrong than rejection on the basis of group membership was confirmed, $F(3, 1923) = 728.47$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .53$. Follow-up analyses revealed that it was judged most legitimate to reject an aggressive child ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 1.25$) ($ps < .001$). Rejecting peers based on their shyness ($M = 1.88$, $SD = .92$) was considered less permissible than rejecting an aggressive child, $t = 30.30$, $p < .001$, and more permissible than rejecting a different nationality child, $t = 8.45$, $p < .001$. Participants were more likely to view rejection of a child from a different gender ($M = 2.00$, $SD = .96$) or nationality ($M = 1.58$, $SD = .91$) not to be legitimate. (Tukey post-hoc tests were used to examine within-subjects interaction effects. Responses were collapsed across characteristics to examine context effects and collapsed across contexts to examine characteristic effects. In cases where sphericity was not met, corrections were made using the Huynh-Feldt method. When effect sizes were smaller than .01, results were not reported.)

A significant Characteristic X Nationality interaction, $F(3, 1923) = 53.62$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, revealed that Korean and American participants evaluated target traits differently. As hypothesized, American children ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.23$) were more willing than Korean children ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 1.20$) to reject an aggressive child, $F(1, 716) = 43.11$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, and less willing to reject a child who was a different nationality (Korean, $M = 1.80$, $SD = .97$; American, $M = 1.37$, $SD = .74$), $F(1, 716) = 62.34$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$. However, the hypothesis that Korean participants might be more generous to a shy child was not supported; Korean and American participants' evaluations of shyness did not differ.

A significant Characteristic X Grade interaction, $F(3, 1923) = 19.90$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, indicated that 5th and 8th grade students evaluated target traits differently. Eighth-graders ($M = 3.61$, $SD = 1.16$) viewed rejecting an aggressive child as more acceptable than did 5th graders ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 1.31$), $F(1, 716) = 14.52$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. Older children ($M = 1.68$, $SD = .97$), however, were more likely than younger children ($M = 1.47$, $SD = .82$) to view rejecting a child of a different nationality as unacceptable.

As hypothesized, a Context X Characteristic interaction, $F(6, 3846) = 48.86$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .07$, revealed that evaluations of peer rejection based on target characteristics (aggression, shyness, nationality, gender) differed by contexts (friendship rejection, group exclusion, and victimization). Follow-up analyses indicated that judgments on the basis of personality traits (aggression and shyness) differed in all three contexts; friendship rejection was more acceptable than group exclusion ($p < .001$) and victimization ($p < .001$). Group exclusion was more acceptable than victimization ($p < .001$). In contrast, judgments about peer rejection based on group membership (gender, nationality) did not differ in friendship rejection and exclusion but differed between exclusion and victimization ($p = .001$).

Justifications of Peer Rejection

Justifications by context—As hypothesized, proportions of use of each category varied by context, $F(8, 5152) = 68.35$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, with no interactions. As seen in Figure 1, participants used prosocial/empathy (*moral*) justifications predominately across all contexts; however, these were used most often for the victimization context, the context in which the most direct harm occurs. In line with our hypotheses, children used more group functioning/stereotypes (*social-l conventional*) reasons in the contexts of group exclusion.

For example, responding to the group exclusion/aggression scenario (e.g., Yoosun is bossy and pushes around her classmates and gets into fights often. She watches a group of kids preparing group projects in school and wants to join. But they do not let her join because she pushes others around.), an 8th grade Korean girl used both group functioning and prosocial reasoning in her response: “This is somewhat okay because maybe the kids are afraid that Yoosun may beat them up or push them around, but it is also not okay because they should try to make friends with Yoosun even though she can be bossy or rude.”

In contrast, children and adolescents viewed it as permissible to choose a friend for personal (psychological) reasons (Figure 1). For example, an 8th grade American girl appealed to personal choice reasons in response to the friendship/shyness scenario: “If she doesn't feel comfortable around her because she's quiet, she shouldn't have to be her friend.”

Justifications by characteristics—The hypothesis was confirmed that justifications would vary by target characteristics, $F(12, 7728) = 362.10, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .36$, but disconfirmed regarding culture (no cultural differences appeared). Participants differed in their reasoning about rejection based on personality traits (shyness, aggression) in contrast to group membership (nationality, gender). As seen in Figure 2, all participants were most likely to use group functioning (*social-conventional*) justifications when evaluating rejection based on personality traits -- aggression $M = .51, SD = .46$, and shyness $M = .10, SD = .28$. For example, an 8th grade Korean boy appealed to group functioning reasons in response to the group exclusion/aggression scenario: “This is okay because the group might not want someone to disrupt their peace.”

In contrast, participants utilized fairness/discrimination (*moral*) reasons for group membership characteristics -- nationality $M = .36 (SD = .46)$ and gender $M = .24 (SD = .19)$ (see Figure 2). For example, for the group exclusion/nationality scenario, a 5th grade American boy rejected group exclusion of a child based on nationality using fairness/discrimination reasoning: “You don't know what he's really like. This is the same reason that all those Jews were killed in Concentration Camps, because of where they come from and what they believe. He should try being his friend and if it doesn't work out, then he can say it was not because of his background it was just because it didn't work.” An 8th grade Korean girl said: “Choice for a project or other work should be based on aptitude and ability. Just because she's American you shouldn't discriminate her.” Thus, across both cultures, children's reasons for exclusion based on personality traits were qualitatively different from reasons for exclusion based on group membership.

Discussion

This study investigated the generalizability of children's and adolescents' evaluations of peer rejection in two cultures, Korea and the USA. Drawing on social identity theory (Abrams & Rutland, 2008; Nesdale, 2004) and social domain theory (Killen, 2007; Turiel, 1998), the study provides a new window on how children evaluate friendship rejection, group exclusion, and victimization. Overall, children used different forms of reasoning for peer rejection in three contexts (friendship, group exclusion, or victimization) as well as different forms of reasoning for rejection based on personal traits (shyness, aggression) versus group membership (nationality, gender). This is important given that various forms of peer rejection are often combined in studies on children's social development. Our findings suggest researchers who have focused solely on personality (shyness, aggression) or group membership (gender, nationality, race) should expand their focus. Whereas rejection based on group membership, such as nationality or gender, was viewed as unfair (moral reasons), rejection based on personality traits, such as aggressiveness or shyness, was viewed, in some cases, as less wrong, due to concerns about group functioning (social-conventional) or

personal reasons (personal choice). Also, previous studies have shown that individuals view personality traits as more “changeable” than group membership categories (Levy & Dweck, 1999), a fact that might also contribute to children’s views about when it is legitimate to exclude a peer (A child can be encouraged to be less aggressive or less shy; gender and nationality are less malleable.) In sum, the finding that different forms of reasoning across contextual and target variation and generalized across two cultures thus suggests that social domain theory provides a fruitful model for demonstrating children’s social reasoning about rejection (Helwig, 2006; Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006; Wainryb, 2006).

Many studies, including non-U.S. based studies, have found positive correlations between aggressiveness and being rejected (Hanish & Guerra, 2004; Hodges, Malone, & Perry, 1997; Rubin, et al., 2006; Pitner, Astor, Benbenishty, Haj-Yahia, & Zeira, 2003; Schwartz, et al., 2002). The present findings demonstrated that children and adolescents not only disapproved of aggression in others but also used it as a criterion for rejection. Aggression as a personality trait involves negative consequences to others. Thus, exclusion based on aggression can be legitimized due to the perceived changeability of traits, or the desire to refrain from being a victim. One of the novel findings of this study, however, was that participants’ judgments were not monolithic but depended on the situation. Participants believed that it was not legitimate to victimize a peer even though he or she was aggressive. In future research, these conflated aspects of aggression need to be distinguished. Aggressiveness, as an attribute, often reflects stereotypic expectations of others. For example, stereotypes about groups often involve attributions about personality traits (e.g., girls are shy; boys are aggressive). There may be times when children justify rejection due personality traits (“reject him because he is disruptive”) that are, in fact, based on stereotypic assumptions about the group (“reject him because he is a boy and boys are disruptive”), resulting in prejudicial behavior.

The hypothesis regarding shyness as a reason for rejecting a peer was not supported. Shyness has been nominated as a common characteristic of victims -- “whipping boys” (Olweus, 1993), “physically weak” and “withdrawn” (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999; Hodges, et al., 1997), “submissive”, or “less sociable” (Perren & Alsaker, 2006). There are different ways to characterize “shyness” and further study is indicated. The descriptors listed above, for example, are more pejorative than the description used in the present study.

Being a different nationality or a different gender was considered to be the least legitimate reason for rejection, with participants using moral reasoning most often to justify their responses. This supports previous research by Helwig (2006) on civic engagement which has shown that, with age, children become increasingly aware of other nationalities and of the wrongfulness of intolerant attitudes towards individuals from different cultures. Yet, no studies have directly tested whether nationality is viewed as a legitimate basis for peer rejection. The present findings indicate that both American and Korean children view it as wrong to reject others based on nationality or gender.

Children’s and adolescents’ reasons for rejecting peers included concerns about group functioning. Group functioning is a complex construct which includes group dynamics (Abrams & Rutland, 2008) as well as conformity with cultural traditions (Turiel, 2006). The ways in which children’s and adolescents’ use group functioning in their reasoning also warrant further investigation.

Age-related differences

Older children evaluated peer rejection as more acceptable, supporting past research (Horn, 2003; Nucci, 2001), but this did not hold up across all contexts or target characteristics.

Specifically, 8th graders evaluated peer rejection based on group membership (nationality) as less acceptable than did 5th graders. This has implications for interventions because it signals that a sensitivity to the potential prejudicial implications of rejection based on group membership increases during the adolescent years, despite findings that point to exclusionary practices in adolescence (Bierman, 2004).

Adolescent interpersonal conflicts may result, at times, from different interpretations of the same exchange. The excluder may view rejection as based on personality traits while the recipient may view it in terms of group membership. Thus, confusions between group membership and personality traits may contribute to peer conflict in adolescence. In our study, 5th graders were less aware of the potential for prejudicial judgments from exclusion based on nationality than were 8th graders. Thus, while group functioning and group norms increase with age, concerns for fairness increase as well during the adolescent years.

Cultural generalizability

Our findings generalized across two cultures with a few exceptions. Cultural specificity was demonstrated regarding the acceptability of exclusion based on aggression and nationality, with Americans more willing than Koreans to exclude a peer based on aggression and less willing to exclude based on nationality. As discussed earlier, the aggression finding may result from more overt societal displays of aggression in the media and culture in the USA than in Korea. Regarding the nationality finding, intergroup contact theory (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) holds that contact with the outgroup under certain conditions reduces prejudice. Thus the ethnic homogeneity of Korea may contribute to Koreans being more willing to reject on the basis of nationality than Americans.

Korean participants' greater willingness to condone rejection based on nationality raises an important issue for Korean educators. Although Korea has been a homogeneous nation for a very long time, the number of foreigners has recently increased rapidly because of foreign workers and international marriages. In 2007, for example, 110,362 (0.2% of total population) foreigners stayed in Korea and 13.6 % of marriages were international marriages (*Seoul Shinmun*, Jan. 14, 2008). This suggests that Korean educators need to address issues of cultural tolerance and inclusiveness based on nationality and country of origin.

Contrary to cultural theorists' assumptions, Korean children were no more willing to reject a peer based on gender and shyness than were American children. These findings provide some evidence for the view that culturally derived attitudes are contingent on context (Wainryb, 2006). They provide Korean educators new data on children's social evaluations of peer rejection, and point to the contexts and targets of rejection that need to be better understood in the framework of school and classroom interactions.

Future directions

The present results involve only two respective samples from two cultures.. Future research needs to be conducted with other samples within each culture, as well as other cultures, to gain a fuller understanding of how culture influences social judgments of the kind examined here. Also, although there is an extensive history of using hypothetical scenarios to measure moral and social reasoning (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 2006; Wellman & Liu, 2007; Crick & Dodge, 1994). including behavioral data in a follow-up study would be fruitful.

It would also be useful to examine multiple personality traits (in addition to aggression and shyness) as well as other group membership categories (aside from gender and nationality). Moreover, other dimensions of the categories that we employed could be important to examine. For example, shyness has a positive (modest) to negative (withdrawn) valence as

does aggression (assertiveness or bullying behavior). Group membership categories involve hierarchies and status that vary by culture and require further inquiry.

It would also be beneficial to differentiate reasoning that stemmed from the use of stereotypes with reasoning that stemmed solely from a concern about group functioning and conventions. Doing so would help provide more information about when stereotypes are used to justify exclusion under the guise of group functioning (for a fuller discussion of this issue, see Killen, et al., 2002).

In conclusion, no study has and directly and systematically examined children's evaluations of two types of peer rejection encounters, those based on personality traits and those based on group membership, in varying relationship contexts. We found that children across two cultures viewed peer rejection based on group membership as more wrong than peer rejection based on personality traits, and that different forms of reasoning were used for these types of rejection. Whereas predominantly moral reasoning was applied to rejection based on group membership, other forms of reasoning (in addition to moral) were applied to peer rejection based on personality traits, such as social-conventional and personal reasoning.

This study contributes to peer rejection research conducted from an intergroup perspective (Abrams, Hogg, & Marques, 2005; Killen, et al., 2007) by demonstrating the unique aspects of intergroup rejection from a developmental viewpoint. Further, we have shown that there are contexts within which children also use individual deficits (shyness, aggressiveness) to legitimize friendship rejection and group exclusion. In this study, few cultural differences were found; in fact, cultural generalizability was the predominant finding. The study thus provides support for the cultural generalizability of social reasoning about peer rejection, although, again, research in additional cultures will be important. Finally, the negative consequences of rejection can have long-term lasting effects on children's healthy social and cognitive development (Rubin et al., 2006). Drawing on findings regarding children's social understanding, evaluation, and reasoning about peer rejection to design programs to ameliorate the negative long-term consequences of peer rejection will go a long way towards reducing social deviance and facilitating social tolerance and inclusion in multiple contexts and across cultures.

References

- Abrams, D.; Hogg, MA.; Marques, JM. The social psychology of inclusion and exclusion. New York: Psychology Press; 2005.
- Abrams, D.; Rutland, A. The development of subjective group dynamics. In: Levy, S.; Killen, M., editors. Intergroup attitudes in childhood through adulthood. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press; 2008.
- Arsenio W, Lemerise E. Varieties of childhood bullying: Values, emotion processes, and social competence. *Social Development* 2001;10:59–73.
- Astor R, Behre W. Violent and nonviolent children's and parents' reasoning about family and peer violence. *Behavioral Disorders* 1997;22:231–245.
- Bennett M, Sani F. Contextual variation in stereotype content: An investigation of children's central tendency and group variability judgments. *Social Development* 2006;15:693–708.
- Bierman, KL. Peer rejection: Developmental processes and intervention strategies. New York: NY: Guilford Press; 2004.
- Boivin M, Hymel S, Bukowski WM. The roles of social withdrawal, peer rejection, and victimization by peers in predicting loneliness and depressed mood in children. *Development and Psychopathology* 1995;7:765–786.

- Boulton MJ. Concurrent and longitudinal relations between children's playground behavior and social preference, victimization, and bullying. *Child Development* 1999;70:944–954. [PubMed: 10446727]
- Chen X, Rubin KH. Correlates of peer acceptance in a Chinese sample of six-year-olds. *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 1992;15:259–273.
- Coie, J.; Dodge, K.; Kupersmidt, J. Peer group behavior and social status. In: Asher, S.; Coie, J., editors. *Peer rejection in childhood*. NY: Cambridge University; 1990. p. 17-59.
- Crick NR, Dodge KA. A review and reformulation of social information-processing mechanisms in children's social adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin* 1994;115:74–101.
- Crick NR, Ostrov JM, Werner NE. A longitudinal study of relational aggression, physical aggression, and children's social-psychological adjustment. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 2006;34:131–142. [PubMed: 16741683]
- Espelage DL, Swearer SM. Research on school bullying and victimization: What have we learned and where do we go from now? *School Psychology Review* 2003;32:365–383.
- Hanish LD, Guerra NG. Aggressive victims, passive victims, and bullies: Developmental continuity or developmental change. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 2004;50:17–38.
- Helwig, C. Rights, civil liberties, and democracy across cultures. In: Killen, M.; Smetana, J., editors. *Handbook of moral development*. NJ: LEA; 2006. p. 185-210.
- Hodges EVE, Boivin M, Vitaro F, Bukowski WM. The power of friendship: Protection against an escalating cycle of peer victimization. *Developmental Psychology* 1999;35:94–101. [PubMed: 9923467]
- Hodges EVE, Malone MJ, Perry DG. Individual risk and social risk as interacting determinants of victimization in the peer group. *Developmental Psychology* 1997;33:1032–1039. [PubMed: 9383625]
- Horn S. Adolescents' reasoning about exclusion from social groups. *Developmental Psychology* 2003;39:11–84.
- Killen M. Children's social and moral reasoning about exclusion. *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 2007;16:32–36.
- Killen, M.; Lee-Kim, J.; McGlothlin, H.; Stangor, C. Monographs for the Society for Research in Child Development. Serial No. 271, Vol. 67, No. 4. Oxford England: Blackwell Publishers; 2002. How children and adolescents evaluate gender and racial exclusion.
- Killen, M.; Margie, NG.; Sinno, S. Morality in the context of intergroup relationships. In: Killen, M.; Smetana, J., editors. *Handbook of moral development*. Mahwah, NJ: LEA; 2006. p. 155-183.
- Killen M, Pisacane K, Lee-Kim J, Ardila-Rey A. Fairness or stereotypes?: Young children's priorities when evaluating group inclusion and exclusion. *Developmental Psychology* 2001;37:587–596. [PubMed: 11552755]
- Killen, M.; Sinno, S.; Margie, NG. Children's experiences and judgments about group exclusion and inclusion. In: Kail, RV., editor. *Advances in child development and behavior*. Vol. Vol. 35. New York: Academic Press; 2007. p. 173-218.
- Killen M, Stangor C. Children's reasoning about social inclusion and exclusion in gender and race peer group contexts. *Child Development* 2001;72:174–186. [PubMed: 11280477]
- Kim D-H, Kim K-I, Park Y-C, Zhang LD, Lu MK, Li D. Children's experience of violence in China and Korea: A transcultural study. *Child Abuse and Neglect* 2000;24:1163–1173. [PubMed: 11057703]
- Kim, HS.; Song, IH. *The battered children*. Seoul: Adolescent Counseling Center; 1994.
- Kim YS, Koh Y-J, Leventhal BL. School bullying and suicidal risk in Korean middle school students. *Pediatrics* 2005;115:357–363. [PubMed: 15687445]
- Kim YS, Leventhal BL, Koh Y-J, Hubbard A, Boyce T. School bullying and youth violence causes or consequences of psychopathologic behavior? *Archives of General Psychiatry* 2006;63:1035–1041. [PubMed: 16953006]
- Lee J, Sugawara A. Development of sex-trait stereotype awareness among Korean children. *Early Child Development and Care* 1994;104:95–104.

- Levy SR, Dweck CS. The impact of children's static versus dynamic conceptions of people on stereotype formation. *Child Development* 1999;70:1163–1180.
- Levy, SR.; Killen, M. Intergroup attitudes and relations in childhood through adulthood. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press; 2008.
- Nesdale, D. Social identity processes and children's ethnic prejudice. In: Bennett, M.; Sani, F., editors. *The development of the social self*. New York: Psychology Press; 2004. p. 219-246.
- Nesdale D, Flessner D. Social identity and the development of children's group attitudes. *Child Development* 2001;72(2):506–517. [PubMed: 11333081]
- Nucci, LP. *Education in the moral domain*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press; 2001.
- Nucci, L.; Turiel, E. The moral and personal: Sources of conflicts. In: Nucci, L.; Saxe, G.; Turiel, E., editors. *Culture, thought, and development*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum; 2000.
- Olweus, D. *Aggression in the school: Bullies and whipping boys*. Oxford, England: Hemisphere; 1978.
- Olweus, D. Victimization by peers: Antecedents and long-term outcomes. In: Rubin, KH.; Asendorpf, JB., editors. *Social withdrawal, inhibition, and shyness in childhood*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 1993. p. 315-341.
- Orlick T, Zhou Q, Partington J. Co-operation and conflict within Chinese and Canadian kindergarten settings. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science* 1990;22:20–25.
- Park, Y. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. College Park: University of Maryland; 2005. Korean and American children's evaluations about peer relationships: Friendship, group exclusion, and victimization.
- Park Y, Killen M, Crystal D, Watanabe H. Korean, Japanese, and U. S. students' judgments about peer exclusion: Evidence for diversity. *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 2003;27:555–565.
- Parker JG, Asher SR. Peer relations and later personal adjustment: Are low-accepted children at risk? *Psychological Bulletin* 1987;102:352–389.
- Perren S, Alsaker FD. Social behavior and peer relationships of victims, bully-victims, and bullies in kindergarten. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 2006;47:45–57. [PubMed: 16405640]
- Pettigrew TF, Tropp LR. A meta-analytic test of intergroup contact theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 2006;90:751–783. [PubMed: 16737372]
- Pitner RO, Astor RA, Benbenishty R, Haj-Yahia M, &Zeira A. Adolescents' approval of peer and spousal retribution in their culture vs. other cultures: The role of group stereotypes. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology* 2003;21:221–242.
- Rubin, KH.; Bukowski, WM.; Parker, JG. Peer Interactions, Relationships, and Groups. In: Eisenberg, N.; Damon, W.; Lerner, RM., editors. *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3, Social, emotional, and personality development*. 6th ed. NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc.; 2006. p. 571-645.
- Rutland A, Abrams D, Levy S. Extending the conversation: Transdisciplinary approaches to social identity and intergroup attitudes in children and adolescents. *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 2007;31(5):417–418.
- Schwartz D, Farver J, Chang L, Lee-Shin Y. Victimization in South Korean children's peer groups. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 2002;30:113–125. [PubMed: 12002393]
- Shantz, CU. Children's conflicts: Representations and lessons learned. In: Cocking, RR.; Renninger, KA., editors. *The Development and Meaning of Psychological Distance*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; 1993. p. 185-202.
- Smetana, JG. Adolescent-parent conflict: Resistance and subversion as developmental process. In: Nucci, L., editor. *Resistance, subversion, and subordination in moral development*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum; 2003.
- Smetana, JG. Social-cognitive domain theory: Consistencies and variations in children's moral and social judgments. In: Killen, M.; Smetana, J., editors. *Handbook of moral development*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers; 2006. p. 119-153.
- Smith, PK.; Morita, Y.; Junger-Tas, J.; Olweus, D.; Catalano, R.; Slee, P., editors. *The nature of school bullying: A cross-national perspective*. London: Routledge; 1999.

- Tajfel, H.; Turner, J. An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In: Austin, WG.; Worchel, S., editors. *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole; 1979. p. 94-109.
- Tisak, M. Domains of social reasoning and beyond. In: Vasta, R., editor. *Annals of child development*. Vol. Vol. 11. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers; 1995. p. 95-130.
- Turiel, E. *The development of social knowledge: Morality and convention*. New York: Cambridge University Press; 1983.
- Turiel, E. The development of morality. In: Damon, W., editor. *Handbook of child psychology, Socialization, 5th Ed., Vol.3* (N. Eisenberg, Ed.). New York: Wiley; 1998. p. 863-932.
- Turiel, E. *The culture of morality: Social development, context, and conflict*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press; 2002.
- Turiel, E. The development of morality. In: Eisenberg, N.; Damon, W.; Lerner, RM., editors. *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 3, Social, emotional, and personality development*. 6th ed. NJ: John Wiley & Sons Inc.; 2006. p. 789-857.
- Turiel E. Thought about actions in social domains: Moral, social conventions, and social interactions. *Cognitive Development* 2008;23:136–154.
- Wellman, H.; Liu, D. Causal reasoning as informed by the early development of explanations. In: Gopnik, A.; Schulz, LE., editors. *Causal learning: Psychology, philosophy, computation*. New York: Oxford University Press; 2007. p. 261-279.
- Wainryb C. Understanding differences in moral judgments: The role of informational assumptions. *Child Development* 1991;62:840–851. [PubMed: 1935346]
- Wainryb, C. Moral development in culture: Diversity, tolerance, and justice. In: Killen, M.; Smetana, JG., editors. *Handbook of moral development*. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers; 2006. p. 211-240.
- Wainryb C, Shaw L, Laupa M, Smith KR. Children's, adolescents', and young adults' thinking about different types of disagreements. *Developmental Psychology* 2001;37:373–386. [PubMed: 11370913]

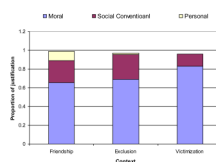


Figure 1.
Proportions of Justifications by Peer Rejection Contexts.

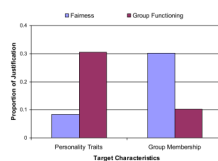


Figure 2.
Proportions of Justifications: Fairness and Group Functioning by Target Characteristics.

Table 1***Justification Coding Categories*****A. MORAL Justifications**

Prosocial/Empathy: Appeals to helping and caring for others by including them; to the feelings of the individual being excluded; to the wrongfulness of rejecting individual; or to reciprocity.

Examples: "If we play with him, he can change his behavior and be more active."

: "It is always wrong to reject friends"

"He may get hurt in his mind." "You can learn English from him when you play with an American."

Fairness/Discrimination: References to wrongfulness of discrimination just based on the person's character, sex or ethnicity or to the rights of the individual.

Examples: "We are all equal human beings."

"It's not fair."

"You don't exclude a girl from America. It is discrimination".

B. SOCIAL CONVENTIONAL Justifications

Group functioning/Stereotypes: Appeals to social expectations and traditions, as well as labels attributed to an individual based on group membership. References to making the group function well.

Examples: "If we play with them we may behave like them."

"Boys play with boys, girls play with girls."

"Americans are not good at speaking Korean."

"Shy girls are not good at doing presentations."

External influences: Appeals to other classmates' opinions on whether or not reject the individual, or afraid of being teased. Appeals to authority figures' (parents, teacher) opinions.

Examples: "If I play with the kid, I may also be excluded from my friends."

"If I make friends with a girl, other boys will think that I am in love with her."

"My parents say that it is not alright to exclude a child."

C. Psychological Justifications

Personal choice: Appeals to individual preferences.

Example: "If he doesn't want to be friends with the kid, it's okay. It's his choice."