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The Acculturation of Parenting Cognitions: A Comparison of South Korean, Korean Immigrant, and European American Mothers

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Abstract

A three-culture comparison – native South Korean, Korean immigrants to the United States, and native European American mothers – of two types of parenting cognitions – attributions and self-perceptions – was undertaken to explore cultural contributions to parenting cognitions and their adaptability among immigrant mothers. Attributions and self-perceptions of parenting were chosen because they influence parenting behavior and children's development and vary cross-culturally. One hundred seventy-nine mothers of 20-month-old children participated: 73 South Korean, 50 Korean immigrant, and 56 European American. Korean mothers differed from European American mothers on four of the five types of attributions studied and on all four self-perceptions of parenting, and these differences were largely consistent with the distinct cultural values of South Korea and the United States. Generally, Korean immigrant mothers' attributions for parenting more closely resembled those of mothers in the United States, whereas their self-perceptions of parenting more closely resembled those of mothers in South Korea. This study provides insight into similarities and differences in cultural models of parenting, and information about the acculturation of parenting cognitions among immigrants from South Korea.

Keywords

Acculturation; Cultural psychology; Family/childrearing; Values; attitudes; beliefs; Social cognition

Ideas about parenting are multifaceted and doubtlessly influenced by many factors, including (at least) parents' personality, experiences in parenting, social comparison, and cultural dictates (Bornstein, 2015a,b). Parenting cognitions include attributions, perceptions, goals, expectations, attitudes, and knowledge of child development and childrearing (Goodnow, 2002; Holden & Buck, 2002; Sigel & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2002). Parenting cognitions generally and parents' attributions and self-perceptions specifically are important to study because they influence parenting practices and children's development (see Bornstein, 2015a; Goodnow, 2002; Holden & Buck, 2002; Sigel & McGillicuddy-De Lisi, 2002), but parenting cognitions are meritorious of study in their own right (Goodnow, 1988; Harkness & Super, 1996). Two salient parental cognitions that have been shown to differ across cultures (Bornstein et al., 1998) were the focus of this study: attributions for the causes of parenting successes and failures and self-perceptions of parenting. Attributions are causal inferences people make to explain why events happen in a particular way. Self-perceptions of parenting include parents' sense of investment in their children, satisfaction gained from caregiving, feelings of competence in the caregiving role, and their perceived ability to balance caregiving with their other social roles. Insofar as parental attributions and self-perceptions derive in part from culture (Bornstein, 2015b), they also contribute to the "continuity of culture" by helping to define cultural patterns and by transmitting cultural information across generations (Bornstein & Lansford, 2010; Goodnow, 2010). Cultural ideas constitute lenses through which reality is not only seen but interpreted and perhaps constructed (Bornstein 1995). Thus, parenting cognitions can vary with culture in both connotation and consequence, which can present a particular challenge for acculturating families. The cross-cultural and acculturative investigation of ideas about parenting is, therefore, requisite to a comprehensive understanding of variations in parenting (Bornstein & Lansford, 2010).

Theoretical and Methodological Approach to Acculturation

The theoretical orientation to the acculturation of parenting ideas herein is similar to Ward's (2001) culture learning approach, because we examined maternal cognitions (attributions and self-perceptions) that were expected to vary between the culture of origin (South Korea) and the culture of destination (the United States), as outlined below. We wanted to learn more about the acculturation of parenting cognitions for immigrant mothers whose cultures of origin and destination differ in striking ways. Methodologically, we adopted a comparative approach to acculturation as recommended by Berry, Kim, and Boski (1987) in which (South Korean) immigrant mothers' attributions for parenting outcomes and self-perceptions of parenting were compared to comparable mothers in a culture-of-origin (South Korea) and in the culture-of-destination (United States). The comparison group in the culture of destination was European American mothers because, as the majority cultural group in the United States, the vast majority of research on parenting and children's

development has employed European American samples (e.g., Parke, 2000), and they therefore offer a familiar reference point. We emphasize that European Americanism is neither the desired nor probable endpoint of acculturation for immigrant families to the United States (e.g., Ferguson & Bornstein, 2012; Ward, 2001).

Rationale for Selection of Cultures

South Korea and the United States were chosen for study specifically because they differ with respect to interpersonal relationships generally and orientations toward parenting specifically, which we believed would lead to differences in their attributions and self-perceptions of parenting. Namely, South Korean culture is generally hierarchical, patriarchal, and nearly homogenous, and the parenting role is strictly proscribed. Although traditional family values and modern family values coexist in South Korea, historically *Hyo* ideology and Confucianism have exerted strong influences on childrearing values, and they are still in evidence (Chung, Chung, Kim, & Park, 2007; Ryu, 2007). *Hyo* ideology posits that there are twelve virtues that govern parental responsibilities toward children and children's reciprocal responsibilities toward parents (Kim, 2006). In contrast, relationships are more unilateral than hierarchical in the United States; moreover, the United States is culturally diverse and ideals of individualism prevail, which means that social roles, including parenting, are determined and negotiated by and among individuals rather than culturally proscribed (Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010).

Cultural Differences in Parental Attributions

The (Western) attribution theorist Weiner (1985) hypothesized that people tend to ascribe their successes to internal factors (e.g., ability and effort), because such explanations are ego-enhancing (the individual is responsible for his/her own success), and ascribe their failures to external factors (e.g., child behavior or the task), because such explanations are ego-defensive (they are beyond the individual's control; therefore, the individual is not responsible). However, ego-enhancing and ego-defensive attribution styles are likely to be characteristic of individualistic cultures. In the United States, where individualism and self-actualization are highly valued (e.g., Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010), ego-enhancing and ego-defensive attribution styles preserve a positive sense of self. Unlike Western societies that promote individualism, in collectivist cultures, such as Korea, where group harmony is of paramount importance, self-effacement (downplaying one's own importance) is more crucial than self-enhancement (Cho, 1996) and self-serving biases are smaller than they are for Westerners (Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004). One might also expect relatively less self-enhancement among South Korean mothers because of the concept of *gyeum-son*, which is respecting others by lowering yourself and not being assertive. Although in the English language, this virtue is comparable to the definitions of "modesty" or "humility", the subtle difference that exists between the concepts of "modesty" and "*gyeum-son*" lie in the fact that the latter emphasizes self-effacement to some degree. Moreover, *gyeum-son* focuses on how individuals can better themselves by engaging in self-reflective practice, perhaps emphasizing the importance of internal factors in unsuccessful situations rather than the ego-defensiveness more characteristic of the West.

Previous research is mostly consistent with the notion that ego-enhancing and ego-defensive biases are characteristic of Western individualist but not Eastern collectivist cultures. For example, a previous cross-cultural comparison of mothers' attributions in seven cultures (i.e., European American mothers in the United States, and mothers in Japan, Argentina, Belgium, France, Israel, and Italy; Bornstein et al., 1998) found that European American mothers in the United States rated an internal attribution (ability) as a reason for successful parenting and an external attribution (child behavior) as a reason for unsuccessful parenting more than mothers in other countries. In contrast, Japanese mothers, who share a Confucian heritage with Korean mothers, rated an external attribution (child behavior) as a cause of parenting successes and an internal attribution (effort) as a cause of parenting failures more than mothers in all other countries. In one of the few studies of South Korean mothers' attributions, Park and Cheah (2005) investigated South Korean mothers' causal attributions about their 2-to 6-year-old children's development of three social skills (sharing toys, controlling negative emotions, helping other children), and found that mothers provided more external than internal attributions for their children's positive (sharing and helping) behaviors. Cho and Kim (2007) later investigated Korean mothers' explanations for their 3- and 5-year-old children's misbehavior and found that Korean parents regarded the "home environment factor" (meaning an internal attribution to the parents themselves) along with factors internal to the child (child's age) and the situation (task) as explanations for their children's negative (i.e., aggressive and dispirited) behavior, suggesting that parents feel responsibility (*chek-im*) for their children's problematic behaviors. Neither [DP1] of these studies was comparative, however, so it is difficult to determine how South Korean mothers' attributions compare to those of European American mothers. Given known differences in cultural belief systems and the results of previous research, we hypothesized that European American mothers would be relatively more likely to make ego-enhancing attributions in successful situations than South Korean mothers (i.e., European American mothers would rate internal attributions, such as ability and effort, higher and external attributions, such as child behavior and task, lower than South Korean mothers as causes of their parenting successes). Furthermore, we hypothesized that European American mothers would be relatively more likely than South Korean mothers to engage in ego-defensive attributions in unsuccessful parenting situations, specifically, by endorsing internal attributions (ability and effort) less and external attributions (child behavior and task) more than South Korean mothers. Although we were unable to find published research on Korean immigrant mothers' attributions for parenting, we expected that Korean immigrant mothers' attributional style would be consistent with the core values of *gyeum-son* because Kim, Atkinson, and Yang (1999) found that deeply held cultural values acculturated slowly among Asian Americans.

Cultural Differences in Self-Perceptions of Parenting

The Korean virtue of parental attentiveness to children (*guan-sim*) and its associated virtues of parental devotion to children and their care, beginning while the baby is in utero (*jung-sung*) and responsibility for teaching children all they will need to know to succeed in life (*chek-im*) suggest that Korean parents would be highly invested in parenting (Kim, 2006). Although European American parents have also been found to be highly invested in

parenting (Bornstein et al., 1998), as all parents of very young children must be to insure infant survival, the individualist nature of American culture suggests that European American mothers would be relatively less likely to invest time and energy in infants to the exclusion of all else. Thus, we hypothesized that South Korean parents would be even more invested in parenting young children than European American mothers. Because deeply held ideas about parenting tend to resist acculturative change (e.g., LeVine, 1982), we expected that the Korean immigrant mothers would be more invested in parenting than European American mothers.

Han (2007) reported that Korean parents of preschool-aged children obtain pleasure from socioemotional investment in their children (indicated by high scores on a “delight” dimension, which included questions such as “holding my child and cuddling my child is more fun than most other things I do”) and do not feel burdened by the parental role (indicated by low scores on “acceptance of the parental role” which included items such as “raising a child is so demanding, I look forward to a time later in life when I can have time by myself”). This pattern of responding indicates that Korean mothers gain a strong sense of satisfaction and perhaps responsibility from their parenting. Previous cross-cultural research found that European American mothers rated themselves as more satisfied with parenting (and felt more confident) compared to mothers in several other cultures, including Japan (Bornstein et al., 1998). Moreover, a comparative study of native Korean mothers and ethnically Korean mothers living in the *Yan Bian* region of China indicated that native Korean mothers were less satisfied with their roles as parents than Korean Chinese mothers (Ren & Hyun, 2002). Because Korean and European American mothers’ sense of satisfaction with parenting has not been directly compared previously, it was unclear whether Korean and European American mothers’ feelings of satisfaction would differ and, if so, who would profess the greater sense of satisfaction. Although Korean mothers report a high degree of satisfaction (with their investment) in parenting (Han, 2007), satisfaction with investment in parenting may differ from satisfaction with parenting per se. Comparatively, Korean mothers’ satisfaction with parenting has been found to be less than other cultural groups (Ren & Hyun, 2002), and this comparative difference may be especially true for a cultural group that has a very high sense of satisfaction with their parenting, such as European American mothers (nearly 5 on a 5-point Likert-type scale; Bornstein et al., 1998). Thus, we hypothesized that European American mothers would report feeling relatively more satisfied with parenting than either South Korean or Korean immigrant mothers.

Because motherhood has been reported to be the most important social role for Korean women (Kim & Choi, 1994), Korean mothers might feel especially pressured to perform well as parents, affecting their feelings of competence. Research that has investigated Korean mothers’ self-perceptions of their competence in parenting revealed that Korean mothers’ self-perceptions of parenting competence were not high (Han & Hong, 2000), perhaps because of this considerable cultural pressure. In contrast, in the United States personal competence is emphasized (Kim & Choi, 1994; Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010); and European American mothers may possess an unusually high sense of competence as parents. Research shows that European American mothers rated themselves as more

confident in their parenting compared to mothers in five other cultures (i.e., Argentina, Belgium, France, Italy, and Japan; Bornstein et al., 1998). In accord with this literature, we hypothesized that European American mothers would report feeling relatively more competent in their parenting than South Korean mothers. Because Goodnow and Collins (1990) suggested that conflicting ideas about parenting from the cultures of origin and destination may undermine immigrant mothers' feelings of competence; we expected Korean immigrant mothers to report feeling less competent than European American mothers.

Finally, *jung-sung*, the Korean notion of total parental devotion to children, suggests that Korean mothers might have a difficult time achieving balance among their several social roles (as parents, spouses, coworkers, and friends). Traditional gender roles in Korea dictate that mothers do not work outside the home but spend their time caring for children and the household and supporting their spouse's career (Yang & Shin, 2011). Han (2007) found that, compared to fathers, Korean mothers considered children as their first priority rather than their personal life. However, in contemporary South Korea many mothers are employed outside the home (according to Statistics Korea, 2015, which is comparable to the U.S. Census Bureau, each year only 20% of women in Korean society discontinue their employment to focus on their role as a mother at home). Yang and Shin (2011) reported that Korean working mothers have difficulty balancing their work and family lives (i.e., determining how much time to spend at work and at home) due to several social and cultural issues, such as lack of childcare facilities and gender inequality (which reflect cultural values about where mothers should spend their time). In contrast, the individualist nature of American culture, where the needs and goals of the individual take precedence over the group (e.g., Greenfield & Suzuki, 1998; Kim & Choi, 1994; Tamis-LeMonda & McFadden, 2010), suggests that European American parents would be unlikely to focus on parenting to the exclusion of their other roles. Thus, we hypothesized that European American mothers would profess relatively greater role balance than South Korean mothers. Because Korean immigrant mothers are living in a culture where the mothering role is less structured, we expected them to have greater role balance than mothers in South Korea.

Method

Participants

All mothers ($N = 179$) were married and cohabiting at the time of the baby's birth, primiparous, and had a healthy, full term, 20-month-old child. All participants lived in major urban areas (CIA World Factbook, 2015): 73 were from Seoul, South Korea, and the remainders were from the Washington, DC, area (50 Korean immigrants, 56 European Americans). European American participants were chosen from a larger sample to be similar to the South Korean and Korean immigrant samples on key sociodemographic variables (maternal age and education). Although emotional extendedness is still prevalent in the Korean society and traditional households in South Korea were comprised of extended family members, today in urban areas family structure is primarily nuclear (Choi, 1995; Statistics Korea, 2015) and our sampling reflects this circumstance. See Table 1 for sociodemographic information. Families were recruited using several methods common to

research with toddler-aged children including mass mailings, hospital birth notifications, medical group patient lists, and newspaper birth announcements and advertisements.

Our sample of immigrant mothers is demographically representative of Korean immigrants in the United States who are typically well-educated, from the urban middle-class, and immigrate primarily for economic reasons (Gryn & Gambino, 2012; Pew, 2013). Korean immigrant mothers were born in South Korea and moved to the United States during their lifetimes; they had lived in the United States for $M = 17.36$ ($SD = 11.67$) years at the time they were recruited into the study. Korean immigrant mothers were bicultural, scoring midway on both the Korean, $M = 3.46$, $SD = .76$, and American subscales, $M = 3.61$, $SD = .82$, of the Korean American Acculturation Scale, Revised (KAAS2; described below) with no difference between these subscale scores, $t(48) = 0.74$, *ns*.

Procedures

When their children were 20 months old, all mothers completed a sociodemographic questionnaire about their family, two measures of parental cognitions that were used as dependent variables, and a social desirability scale. Immigrant mothers completed the *Korean American Acculturation Scale, Revised*.

Measures

The **Parental Attributions Questionnaire** (PAQ; MacPhee, Seybold, & Fritz, nd; Sirignano & Lachman, 1985) is based on Weiner's (1985) attribution theory and examines the extent to which mothers rate five causal attributions (ability, effort, mood, child behavior, task) as reasons for their success and failure in seven parenting activities (i.e., dressing, playing, teaching, disciplining, bathing, comforting, and communicating) on a Likert-type scale from 1 (*not at all a reason*) to 5 (*very much a reason*). Subscale scores were the mean for each attribution type (ability, effort, mood, child behavior, task) within each outcome situation (i.e., success, failure), yielding 10 subscale scores. Subscale scores were prorated if only one item was missing data (this was 1.56% of data). The PAQ subscales have good internal reliability (Bornstein et al., 1998; MacPhee et al., nd; Sirignano & Lachman, 1985), and the same was true for our samples (DeVellis, 1991): All but one Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$ (computed separately for the 3 samples and 10 subscales). One item was dropped from the task subscale in unsuccessful situations to increase reliability.

The 22-item **Self-Perceptions of the Parental Role** (SPPR; MacPhee, Benson, & Bullock, 1986) assessed mothers' feelings about four aspects of the parenting role: Investment, Satisfaction, Competence, and Role Balance. Each item contains a pair of statements that describe contrasting responses; participants choose the statement that describes them best and then check *Sort of True for Me* or *Really True for Me*. The four response choices were weighted 1, 2, 4, and 5. Subscale scores were participants' mean scores on each subscale and ranged from 1 (e.g., *low perceived investment*) to 5 (e.g., *high perceived investment*). The competence subscale was prorated for one participant (0.56% of data), and the satisfaction subscale was prorated for four participants (2.23% of data) because of a single missing item on these subscales. The SPPR subscales have good construct validity (Bornstein et al., 1998), internal reliability (Bornstein et al., 1998; MacPhee et al., 1986), and test-retest

reliability (Seybold, Fritz, & MacPhee, 1991); with our samples all but one Cronbach's α $\geq$.60. One item was omitted from the Role Balance subscale to improve reliability.

The 33-item **Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale** (SDS; Crowne & Marlowe, 1960) was administered to assess mothers' tendency to answer questions in a socially desirable way (i.e., to provide responses that cast them in a positive light or provide responses that they think the researcher wants to hear). The SDS has been used to assess adults' socially desirable responding in many cultures and languages (e.g., Bornstein et al., 2015) and was used as a covariate in this study. The SDS has good construct validity, $r = .35$ (with a personality measure), test-retest reliability, $r = .89$, and internal consistency, $\alpha = .88$ (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960; Robinette, 1991); in our samples Cronbach's α s = .64 to .85.

The **Korean American Acculturation Scale, Revised (KAAS2; BLIND)** was modeled on Cuéllar, Arnold, and Maldonado's (1995) *Acculturation Ratings Scale for Mexican Americans II* (ARSMII). Immigrant mothers rated each of 17 items on a 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*extremely often or almost always*) point scale to assess their Korean identification and independently rated 13 items to assess their American identification. The KAAS2 subscales have good reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$ and .90), good test-retest reliability (r s = .88 and .90), and good construct validity (Korean identification correlated positively with age at immigration, $r = .59$, $p < .001$, and negatively with number of years in the United States, $r = -.65$, $p < .001$; American identification correlated negatively with age at immigration, $r = -.79$, $p < .001$, and positively with number of years in the United States, $r = .79$, $p < .001$).

Measurement equivalence—All measures were originally written in English by American researchers. Conceptual equivalence of measures was achieved in the following ways: bilingual bicultural natives of South Korea translated the measures using standard forward-and-back translation (Brislin, 1986; Peña, 2007), next the translated instruments were checked for preservation of meaning and cultural appropriateness by professional research teams in each country, and finally pilot testing was conducted. Functional equivalence was assessed by examining cultural differences in the pattern of correlations among subscales (Table 2; see Harachi, Choi, Abbott, Catalano, & Bliesner, 2006); results indicated that functional equivalence was obtained for the SPPR and for the majority of the PAQ (Table 2). Item equivalence was assessed with Cronbach's alphas (reported below; Harachi et al., 2006) and indicated good item equivalence.

Conceptual, item, and scalar equivalence of the dependent variables were also assessed using a 3-stage confirmatory factor analysis (using SEM) (Vandenberg & Lance, 2000). (Due to small sample size, the Korean American group included 2nd generation mothers who are not part of the current study.) Measurement invariance tests were performed on the 14 subscales separately. At least partial configural, metric, and scalar invariance were achieved for every subscale, except task difficulty in unsuccessful situations, which would not converge for the South Korean sample. Using the partially invariant models, we tested for mean differences between South Korean and European Americans in the latent variables representing the 14 subscales and replicated the findings presented below for all but two subscales (PAQ ability and task in successful situations). However, we did not use the latent variables in this report for several reasons: (1) preliminary tests suggested that there are

important differences between 1st and 2nd generation Korean Americans which precluded us from combining the two groups, (2) the sample size of the measurement invariance tests was still small, with some models estimating more parameters than cases, and (3) although we were able to demonstrate at least partial measurement invariance for 13 of the 14 subscales, we were unable to test the SPPR and PAQ scales in a single model because of the small sample size.

Taken together, these analyses suggest that the results we report reflect cultural differences and not measurement differences.

Results

Acculturation effects were assessed at the group level using three mixed-design multivariate analyses of (co)variance. Multivariate Culture $\times$ Parenting Cognition interactions were the *a priori* focus of this study; therefore, only the Culture $\times$ Parenting Cognition multivariate interactions (Pillai's trace) and simple effects (Huynh-Feldt) that decompose those interactions are reported (Keppel, 1991). Simple effects were decomposed using *t*-tests with Bonferroni's correction.

Mothers' age, education, hours worked per week, and social desirability scores and child's age were screened as candidate covariates. The candidate covariate had to correlate ($p < .05$) with the DV and have a significant effect in the analysis to be used as a covariate. When simple effects were significant, additional covariates were applied when those covariates correlated ($p < .05$) with the DV because we wished to rule out alternative explanations for cultural differences. When covariates were used, they are mentioned below. Gender was investigated as a factor in all analyses; however, consistent with previous research (Bornstein & Cote, 2004; Bornstein et al., 1998; Park & Cheah, 2005) none of the Culture $\times$ Parenting Cognition $\times$ Gender interactions was significant; therefore, gender was not used in the analyses below.

Attributions for Successful Parenting

A mixed-design MANOVA with one between-subjects factor (culture) and one within factor (attributions for success) with 5 levels (ability, effort, mood, child behavior, task) was performed. There was a multivariate interaction of Culture $\times$ Attribution, $F(8, 246) = 11.17$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .27$, and analysis of simple effects showed that mothers differed with respect to ability, effort, and child behavior attributions: $F(2, 125) = 7.48$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .11$; $F(2, 125) = 16.31$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .21$; and $F(2, 125) = 58.12$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .48$, respectively. Specifically, Korean immigrant and European American mothers agreed with ability, effort, and child behavior attributions as explanations for parenting success significantly more than South Korean mothers did (Table 2). The cultural differences for effort attributions attenuated to nonsignificance when child age was controlled, $F(2, 122) = 2.04$, *ns*, $\eta^2_p = .03$, but the difference for child behavior remained significant after controlling maternal education, $F(2, 121) = 51.36$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .46$ (South Korean, *EMM* = 2.72, *SEM* = .11, Korean immigrant, *EMM* = 4.06, *SEM* = .09; European American, *EMM* = 3.97, *SEM* = .08).

Attributions for Unsuccessful Parenting

A mixed-design MANCOVA with one between-subjects factor (culture), one within factor (attributions in unsuccessful situations), and one covariate (mother's social desirability score) was performed. The multivariate Culture $\times$ Attribution interaction for unsuccessful parenting, $F(8, 240) = 19.04, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .39$, and analysis of simple effects showed that mothers differed with respect to ability, effort, child behavior, and task attributions: $F(2, 122) = 83.18, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .58$; $F(2, 122) = 13.21, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .18$; $F(2, 122) = 5.91, p = .004, \eta^2_p = .09$; and $F(2, 122) = 14.40, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .19$, respectively. Specifically, South Korean mothers agreed with ability and effort attributions significantly more than either Korean immigrant or European American mothers did, and Korean immigrant mothers agreed with ability attributions more than European American mothers did (Table 2). Just as with attributions in successful situations, Korean immigrant and European American mothers agreed with child behavior attributions for unsuccessful parenting more than South Korean mothers. Korean immigrant mothers agreed with task attributions more than South Korean or European American mothers, and this result did not change when mothers' social desirability score, education level, and child age were controlled simultaneously.

Self-Perceptions of Parenting

A mixed-design MANCOVA with one between-subjects factor (culture), one within factor (self-perceptions of parenting) with 4 levels (investment, competence, satisfaction, role balance), and one covariate (mother's social desirability score) was performed. There was a multivariate interaction of Culture $\times$ Self-perceptions, $F(6, 344) = 13.05, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .19$, and analysis of simple effects showed that mothers differed with respect to investment, satisfaction, competence, and role balance: $F(2, 173) = 21.86, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .20$; $F(2, 173) = 24.59, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .22$; $F(2, 173) = 32.33, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .27$; and $F(2, 173) = 15.89, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .16$, respectively. Specifically, South Korean mothers reported being significantly more invested in parenting than either Korean immigrant or European American mothers; this result remained when both mothers' social desirability and the number of hours they worked per week were controlled, $F(2, 161) = 19.76, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .20$, South Korean, $EMM = 3.83, SEM = .08$, Korean immigrant, $EMM = 3.03, SEM = .11$, European American, $EMM = 3.21, SEM = .10$. European American mothers reported feeling significantly more satisfied with and competent in their parenting and having better role balance than either South Korean or Korean immigrant mothers (Table 2); this last difference remained when mothers' social desirability score and education were controlled.

Discussion

This study provides much needed insight into the parenting cognitions of South Korean mothers, and the acculturation of parenting cognitions among Korean immigrant mothers, which will ultimately help us to better understand variations in child-rearing practices and children's developmental outcomes. Nearly all attributions and self-perceptions of parenting differed across cultural groups, even after controlling for potentially confounding variables, such as mother's desire to present herself in a positive light, and demographic factors including mothers' age, education level, and socioeconomic status. Moreover, the cultural

differences in parenting cognitions were largely consistent with the contrasting value systems of South Koreans and European Americans. Thus, we can conclude that the variations that emerged are the result of adherence to different cultural belief systems.

Attributions in Successful Situations

Consistent with our hypotheses, European American mothers agreed with ability attributions as explanations for their parenting success more than mothers in South Korea did. This result is consistent with previous findings that European Americans tend to endorse ability attributions in success situations (Bornstein & Cote, 2004). Korean immigrant mothers too agreed with ability attributions as explanations for their parenting successes more than mothers in South Korea. Thus, it seems that Korean immigrant mothers might share the ego-enhancing bias of European American mothers (by giving themselves credit for their positive outcomes) rather than the self-effacement favored by Korean mothers (Cho, 1996; Weiner, 1985). These results also may point to the role of *gyeum-son* in Korean mothers' parenting. More specifically, instead of attributing parenting success to themselves, mothers may have taken the spotlight off of themselves and instead engaged in self-effacement by attributing parenting successes to external environmental factors. Contrary to our hypotheses, Korean immigrant and European American mothers agreed that child behavior was a likely explanation for their success at parenting tasks more than South Korean mothers. American culture conceptualizes toddlerhood as a period of increasing independence and autonomy in the child, two cultural values that American mothers actively promote; thus, the attributions to child behavior can be seen as a reflection of this independence (i.e., mother cannot feed, bathe, dress the child without the child's active cooperation).

Attributions in Unsuccessful Situations

In support of our hypotheses, South Korean mothers agreed with ability and effort (internal) attributions as explanations for lack of success at parenting tasks more than either Korean immigrant or European American mothers did. Additionally, Korean immigrant mothers agreed with ability attributions more than European American mothers did. Also in support of our hypotheses, European American and Korean immigrant mothers agreed that external attributions (child behavior) explain their lack of successes at parenting tasks more than South Korean mothers. Moreover, Korean immigrant mothers agreed with task attributions as explanations for parenting failures more than either South Korean or European American mothers. On the whole, these findings are consistent with the cultural emphasis on *gyeum-son* in Korea and the importance of the ego-defensive bias for those rearing their children in the West (Cho, 1996). Finally, results of the current study accord with previous cross-cultural research (in success situations, Bornstein et al., 1998) and research with immigrant mothers (Bornstein & Cote, 2004), that has failed to find cultural differences in attributions to mothers' mood (for successful or unsuccessful situations).

Self-Perceptions of Parenting

Consistent with the Korean virtues of *guan-sim* (parental attentiveness to children), South Korean mothers reported being more invested in parenting than either Korean immigrant or

European American mothers. Consistent with previous research, in which mothers in Korea reported lower levels of satisfaction with parenting than Korean mothers in China (Ren & Hyun, 2002), and European American mothers reported higher levels of satisfaction with parenting and a greater sense of competence than mothers in other cultures (Bornstein et al., 1998), in this study European American mothers reported feeling more satisfied with, and a greater sense of competence in, parenting than either South Korean or Korean immigrant mothers. Because motherhood is the most important social role for Korean women (Kim & Choi, 1994) and mothers are responsible for teaching children all that they need to know (*chek-im*), Korean mothers might feel especially pressured to perform well, and such pressure might undermine their sense of competence in the parenting role. European American mothers reported greater role balance than either South Korean or Korean immigrant mothers, and Korean immigrant mothers' role balance was greater than that of South Korean mothers. This result is consistent with our hypothesis (and other research) that, as immigrant mothers become more acculturated to U.S. society, they gain greater role balance (Bornstein & Cote, 2004), and it also is consistent with *jung-sung* (total parental devotion to children; Kim, 2006) in Korea and the emphasis on fulfillment of individual needs and goals in the United States (Hofstede, 1991; Kim & Choi, 1994).

Caveats

Before we conclude about parenting cognitions and acculturation, it is important to point out that our results generalize only to middle-class Korean immigrants in the United States, and not necessarily to immigrant mothers from other (Asian) countries, Korean immigrants in other countries, or mothers from different socioeconomic statuses (Bornstein, 2015c). Because most of the literature on acculturating groups concentrates on dysfunction and often confounds immigration with poverty, our focus on middle-class mothers avoids these serious confounds. Moreover, groups were matched sociodemographically, and maternal response biases were statistically controlled in this study.

Parenting Cognitions across Cultures and in Acculturating Mothers

We found overall that South Korean and European American mothers' parenting cognitions reflected their different cultural belief systems. When we look across parenting cognitions, we have a picture of South Korean mothers in which they do not take personal credit for their successful parenting outcomes, yet bear responsibility for unsuccessful parenting outcomes. They are highly invested in parenting, yet the importance of this social role in South Korea leaves them doubting their competence and the all-encompassing nature of the mothering role in Korea leaves them feeling less satisfied with parenting than European American mothers. In contrast, European American mothers engaged in self-serving bias in the parenting domain. Specifically European American mothers give themselves credit for their children's successful outcomes but do not blame themselves for unsuccessful outcomes, and, perhaps as a result, they feel more competent and satisfied with their parenting and are more able to balance their role as mothers with other social roles. The greater satisfaction and role balance among European American mothers in this study (compared to South Korean and Korean immigrant mothers) may also reflect the fact that the European American mothers were raised in a culture in which the maternal role is not as

culturally proscribed as it is in South Korea, which accords mothers more flexibility in organizing their mothering in ways that satisfy their own needs as well as their infants’.

In accord with the specificity principle in acculturation (Bornstein, 2015c), Korean immigrant mothers appear to be adopting the attributional style of mothers in the culture of destination but maintaining the self-perceptions of parenting of mothers in the culture of origin. Specifically, Korean immigrant mothers tend to take credit for their parenting successes but do not blame themselves for their parenting failures, and seem to have adopted the ego-enhancing and ego-defensive attributional biases characteristic of European American mothers. Additionally Korean immigrant mothers show relatively less investment in parenting than mothers in South Korea, have achieved a relatively greater role balance than mothers in South Korea but not as much as European American mothers, and report feeling less satisfied and competent than European American mothers. It is likely that deeply held cultural beliefs about mothering and women’s social roles, specifically *chek-im* and *jung-sung*, lead Korean immigrant mothers to feel that they are not doing enough for their children, even when they are rearing those children in a different cultural context. The differential pattern of results for attributions and self-perceptions, coupled with the finding that these immigrant mothers were bicultural, may indicate that the acculturation strategy for these Korean immigrant mothers is integration. (Although the word “strategy” implies a conscious, intentional process, it may not be so for the acculturation of *beliefs*.)

Conclusions

Overall, our results and those of others studies substantiate the specificity principle in acculturation (Bornstein, 2015c), which suggests that different parenting cognitions may acculturate at different rates for different cultures. Although one might expect the immigrant mothers in this study to be open to the culture of destination given their higher education level and number of years in the United States, previous research on the acculturation of parenting cognitions among mothers living in the same region and with similar sociodemographic backgrounds to those in this study has found that, generally, Japanese immigrant mothers’ attributions and self-perceptions were more like those of mothers in the country-of-origin (Japan) or intermediate to those of mothers in the countries of origin (Japan) and destination (the United States), suggesting an acculturation strategy characterized by cultural maintenance (with respect to *these* parenting cognitions); in contrast those of South American immigrant mothers in the United States were more like those in the country of destination, suggesting an acculturation strategy of assimilation (Bornstein & Cote, 2004). Those results, coupled with the ones reported herein highlight the inadequacy of considering only generation level when attempting to understand the psychology of immigrant parents from different lands. A universal model of acculturation that dictates uniform patterns of acculturation for all cognitions appears inappropriate (Berry et al., 1987). Instead, the acculturation process for parenting cognitions appears to be influenced by which cultural groups are being compared and which cognitions are being evaluated, supporting a specificity and modular view of parenting (Bornstein, 2015b).

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Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants

	South Korean (<i>n</i> = 73)	Korean immigrant (<i>n</i> = 50)	European American (<i>n</i> = 56)
<i>Mother</i>			
Age ^a	30.86 _a (2.63)	33.08 _a (3.51)	31.95 (5.34)
Education ^b	5.72 _a (.81)	6.20 _a (1.19)	5.77 (1.13)
% Employed ^c	48%	61%	73%
Hours worked per week ^d	18.84 (22.62)	23.38 (19.36)	26.49 (20.05)
Social Desirability ^e	15.52 _a (4.31)	17.90 _a (6.64)	17.34 (5.27)
<i>Infant</i>			
Age (months) ^f	20.13 _a (.43)	20.38 _{ab} (.33)	20.08 _b (.24)
Gender (girls:boys) ^g	36:37	25:25	24:32
Birthweight (g) ^h	3369.93 _a (412.81)	3432.71 (486.00)	3617.00 _a (488.82)
<i>Family characteristics</i>			
SES ⁱ	50.93 _a (7.41)	58.95 _{ab} (5.88)	49.71 _b (14.06)
Nuclear family unit (%) ^j	73%	84%	86%

Notes. *M* (*SD*) unless otherwise specified. ANOVAs were followed by *t*-tests with Bonferroni's correction; means with the same subscript within a row were significantly different at $p < .05$.

^a $F(2, 176) = 4.87, p = .009, \eta^2_p = .05$.

^b $F(2, 174) = 3.60, p = .029, \eta^2_p = .04$. Hollingshead (1975) 7-point scale where 4 = *high school graduate or GED*, 5 = *some college or completed specialized training*, 6 = *standard college or university graduate*, 7 = *completed graduate degree*. Across samples all but one mother had at least a high school degree or its equivalent and the majority (88%) had postsecondary education.

^c $\chi^2(2, N = 172) = 8.42, p = .015$.

^d Includes homemaker mothers, $F(2, 167) = 2.15, ns, \eta^2_p = .03$.

^e $F(2, 176) = 3.43, p = .035, \eta^2_p = .04$.

^f $F(2, 176) = 11.51, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .12$.

^g $\chi^2(2, N = 179) = .71, ns$.

^h $F(2, 175) = 4.77, p = .01, \eta^2_p = .05$.

ⁱ $F(2, 171) = 13.41, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .14$. Hollingshead's (1975) Four Factor Index of Social Status scores range from 0 to 66. Means (> 40) for all groups indicated that families were upper middle-class (i.e., professionals, management level in business, or technical fields).

^j $\chi^2(2, N = 179) = 4.12, ns$.

Table 2

Means, SDs, and Correlations among Parenting Cognition Subscales

	South Korean (<i>n</i> = 73)	Korean Immigrant (<i>n</i> = 50)	European American (<i>n</i> = 56)	Pearson Correlations			
Maternal Attributions for Successful Parenting							
	<i>EMM (SE)</i>	<i>EMM (SE)</i>	<i>EMM (SE)</i>				
Ability	2.91 (.14)	3.61 (.11)	3.33 (.10)				
Effort	2.69 (.13)	3.65 (.11)	3.37 (.09)	.27 .20 .52***			
Mood	3.08 (.18)	2.59 (.14)	2.64 (.13)	-.26 _a -.08 _b .34* _{ab}	-.00 _a .11 .47*** _a		
Child	2.69 (.11)	4.09 (.09)	3.98 (.08)	.47* .15 .12	-.03 .07 .08	.22 -.24 .14	
Task	3.32 (.14)	3.01 (.11)	3.09 (.10)	.40* .62*** .45***	.51** _a .03 _a .09	-.12 .12 .10	.17 .09 .38**
Maternal Attributions for Unsuccessful Parenting							
	<i>EMM (SE)</i>	<i>EMM (SE)</i>	<i>EMM (SE)</i>				
Ability	3.58 (.12)	2.51 (.10)	1.69 (.08)				
Effort	3.58 (.15)	2.96 (.12)	2.64 (.10)	-.19 _{ab} .62*** _a .33* _b			
Mood	2.62 (.18)	2.28 (.14)	2.41 (.13)	.18 .34* .34*	.08 .48** .57***		
Child	2.96 (.16)	3.59 (.12)	3.57 (.11)	.28 .38* .02	.21 .13 .16	.72*** _{ab} -.01 _a .27* _b	
Task	2.62 (.14)	3.14 (.11)	2.39 (.09)	.36 .68*** .57***	-.08 .37* .14	-.18 .15 .08	-.05 _a .61*** _{ab} .20 _b
Maternal Self-Perceptions of Parenting							

	South Korean (<i>n</i> = 73)	Korean Immigrant (<i>n</i> = 50)	European American (<i>n</i> = 56)	Pearson Correlations		
	<i>EMM</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>EMM</i> (<i>SE</i>)	<i>EMM</i> (<i>SE</i>)	Investment	Satisfaction	Competence
Investment	3.85 (.08)	3.07 (.10)	3.19 (.09)			
Satisfaction	4.06 (.07)	4.05 (.09)	4.74 (.08)	.04 /.33 [*] /-.01		
Competence	3.17 (.07)	3.32 (.09)	4.02 (.08)	.08 /.12/- .23	.35 ^{***} /.57 ^{***} /.40 ^{***}	
Role Balance	3.06 (.08)	3.34 (.10)	3.77 (.09)	-.14 /.00/.16	.33 ^{***} /.36 [*] /.24	.19 /.51 ^{***} /.38 ^{***}

Notes. Due to missing data, *Ns* for the PAQ are smaller for South Korean (*n* = 28) and Korean immigrants (*n* = 44). Attributions for unsuccessful parenting and self-perceptions of parenting control for mothers' social desirability score. Correlation coefficients for South Korean mothers are in **bold** font, Korean immigrants are in **bold** font, and European Americans are in *italics*;

* *p* .05,

** *p* .01,

*** *p* .001. Correlations with the same subscript within a cell were significantly different at *p* < .05 in *z*-tests comparing correlations among cultural groups.