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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of child behavioral ratings on the Behavioral Assessment System for Children (BASC) assessed for elementary-age students residing in Oklahoma, Los Angeles, and Seoul, Korea. The students completed the BASC Self Report of Personality (SRP) to examine the differences in the self-report ratings of behavioral adjustment. Significant group effects on the PRS scale generally indicated that Korean and Korean American children tend to be perceived as behaving in a more controlled manner than Caucasian American children. These results are discussed in relation to the notion of the Korean family collectivism versus Western individualism and the conflicts they produce. The results also suggest that the elevated BASC SRP scores may reflect cultural factors rather than psychopathology. (Contains 13 references and 5 tables.) (JDM)

Cultural Influences on Ratings of Behavioral and Emotional Problems, and School Adjustment for Korean, Korean American, and Caucasian American Children

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Cultural Influences on Ratings of Behavioral and Emotional Problems, and School Adjustment For Korean, Korean American, and Caucasian American Children

Abstract

Ratings of Korean, Korean American, and Caucasian American children as measured by the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC). Self Report of Personality (SRP) was examined to study the effects of cultural background and environmental factors on judgments of behavioral and emotional adjustment. One hundred twenty Korean, Korean American, and Caucasian American children, ages 8 to 11 participated. Children completed the Self-Report of Personality (SRP) of BASC. There were significant group effects on PRS scale that generally indicated Korean and Korean American children tend to be perceived as behaving in more controlled and internalizing manner than Caucasian American children were. The notion of Korean family collectivism and versus western individualism and the inherent conflict in these cultural values was used to discuss the results. Results also suggested that the elevated BASC SRP scores might reflect cultural factors rather than psychopathology.

This study investigated the effects on child behavioral ratings on the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC) of cultural background and environmental factors. One hundred twenty elementary-aged students who were currently residing in Oklahoma, Los Angeles, or Seoul, Korea participated. The

participants were 40 Korean children, 40 Korean American children, and 40 Caucasian American children. The age range for children was from 8 to 11. The children completed the BASC Self Report of Personality (SRP) (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992). The researchers translated the BASC SRP to the Korean language and transcribed it and the Korean participants were administered the translated forms.

The study examined the differences in the self-report ratings of behavioral adjustment as measured by the BASC among Korean, Korean American, and Caucasian American children. The data were analyzed with SPSS 9.0 for Windows (SPSS INC, 1998) with subprograms: Descriptives and General Linear Model-Multivariate. An alpha level of $p < .05$ was adhered to for determining significant statistical results.

The literature on psychopathology has often linked cultural factors patterns of disturbed behaviors. Culturally mediated values and expectations and the associated behavior of parents and other adults toward children, may influence the types of behavior problems children show when distressed (Weisz, Suwanlert, Chaiyasit, & Walter, 1987). Weisz et al. (1987) suggested two

relevant challenges. The first is to identify patterns of children's problem behavior that are both clinically significant and relatively prevalent across cultures, e.g., externalizing versus internalizing problems, and second to identify cultures that differ in ways that are relevant to the behavior problem patterns of interest. In 1980 there were 290,000 Korean Americans residing in the United States and an average of 33,000 have been immigrating to America each year since. Currently, more than 837,000 Korean Americans reside in the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990). Given this population trend, it seems important to address the unique cultural characteristics and psychosocial needs of Korean American children (Kim, Omizo, & Salvador, 1996).

Results

The demographic characteristics of the participants in the sample are presented in Tables 1 and 2. The 120 participants were equally divided into Korean, Korean American, and Caucasian American groups. Forty-nine percent were Koreans, and 51% were Americans.

The participants were also fairly evenly distributed by residence: 35% rural, 25.8% suburban, and 39.2% urban locations. The Korean and Korean American children were living in suburban and urban areas, while about 75.0% of Caucasian American children were living in rural areas.

The primary language of the participants was 51.7% Korean and 48.3% English. Korean American children (55.0%) were speaking Korean, while about 45.0% of Korean American children were using English as the primary language at home. Korean children (100%) were speaking Korean and Caucasian American (100%) were speaking English at home.

Participants were represented from the four different religions as shown in Table 1. Eighty-eight percent were Christian, 5.0% Buddhist, 0.8% Muslim, and 5.8% of the children were reported by parents to be Atheist.

Table 2 delineates the child demographics by group for gender, age, and grade. Fifty percent of the children were boys and fifty percent were girls. The children were close to distributed by age: 23.3% (age 8), 16.7% (age 9), 28.3% (age 10), and 31.7% (age 11). Forty-three percent of the Korean children were 11 years of

age, thirty-three percent of children were age 10, while thirty-three percent of the children were age 11.

The children also were enrolled in various grades: 0.8% (1st grade), 7.5% (2nd grade), 26.7% (3rd grade), 23.3% (4th grade), 25.0% (5th grade), and 16.7% (6th grade). Twenty-eight percent of the Korean children were 3rd grade, thirty-eight percent of the Korean American children were 5th grade, while thirty percent of Caucasian American children were 4th grade.

Table 3 presents the means and standard deviations by group. A significant multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) indicated there was a multivariate effect for group for the BASC SRP scales [$F = 8.69$; Wilks' lambda = .25; $p < .001$; $eta^2 = .50$]. Following the significant MANOVA, univariate F tests were performed on the BASC variables (see table 4). Statistically significant Fs were obtained on the following scales: Anxiety [$F(2,117) = 3.17$; $p < .05$], Depression [$F(2, 117) = 11.96$; $p < .001$], Sense of Inadequacy [$F(2,117) = 16.73$; $p < .001$], Relation with Parents [$F(2,117) = 8.08$; $p = .001$], Interpersonal Relations [$F(2,117) = 7.19$; $p = .001$], Self-Esteem [$F(2,117) = 7.72$; $p = .001$], and Self-Reliance [$F(2,117) = 47.32$; $p < .001$].

Following the significant univariate Fs, where appropriate, Least Significant Difference post hoc comparisons were conducted to further examine the group differences (see table 5). On SRP Anxiety the Korean American (M = 52.3; SD = 8.9) children rated themselves significantly more anxious than both the Korean (M = 48.0; SD = 9.4) and American (M= 47.7; SD = 9.3) children. Korean children (M = 54.7; SD = 8.5) rated themselves significantly higher than Korean-American (M = 48.6; SD = 7.4) and Caucasian-American children (M = 46.3; SD = 7.9) on the SRP Depression scale. The Korean (M = 58.5; SD = 10.2) children also rated themselves significantly higher on the SRP Sense of Inadequacy scale than did the Korean American (M = 47.7; SD = 6.7) and American (M = 48.8; SD = 10.4) children. In addition, Korean children (M = 45.1; SD = 10.0) were significantly lower than the Korean-American (M = 50.1; SD = 9.1) and American children (M = 52.6; SD = 6.2) on the SRP Relation with Parents scale. The Korean (M = 47.9; SD = 10.6) children also rated themselves significantly lower on SRP Interpersonal Relations than both the Korean-American children (M = 53.1; SD = 6.6) and American children (M = 54.5; SD = 7.0). The Korean children (M

= 45.3; SD = 8.9) rated themselves significantly lower on SRP Self-Esteem than did American children (M = 53.7; SD = 7.9). Korean children (M = 37.4; SD = 7.9) were also significantly lower than Korean-American (M = 50.6; SD = 8.2) and American children (M = 53.7; SD = 7.9) on SRP Self-Reliance.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Korean children rated themselves to be significantly more impaired on 6 of the 7 significant BASC scales than either of the other groups (Depression, Sense of Inadequacy, Relations with Parents, Interpersonal Relations, Self Esteem, and Self Reliance). These reflect problems that are considered internalizing rather than externalizing. Korean families place utmost value on the family unit and live together as a joint family. Strong regard of mutual respect, obedience to elders, and denunciation of personal fulfillment binds family members. This Korean collectivism (family interest comes before the individual interest) is in contrast to American individualism (self-interest comes before family interest) and likely contributes to a strong sense of dependence (Azuma, 1986). Parents expend inordinate time and sacrifice

personal needs to foster the interests of their children and family at large, they demand unquestioning obedience from their children. Exceptional courtesy and deference must be shown to the elders (Loridas, 1988). Children are expected to listen when parents speak without questioning their views. Public display of affection among parents or between parents and children is embarrassing and discouraged.

The Korean American children rated themselves higher on Anxiety than either of the other groups. This may be because there are demands for rapid Americanization which can result in the loss of Korean cultural heritage and ethnic identity ultimately resulting in anxiety and a perception of a marginal self-identity for oneself (Hurh, 1994). Korean American children are taught to speak to elders in a respectful language style and to avoid questioning their authority, which leads to the children obeying the wishes of parents and older siblings. When learning and practicing these customs, the Korean American children may find themselves caught in a cultural "double bind" because they are expected to retain these practices and the related values while trying to assimilate into the United States' culture, which promotes equality and independence

(Kim et al., 1996). The Korean culture's emphasis on group affiliation and group cooperation may conflict with the Western values of independence and individualism. Korean American parents may view these Western values as inappropriate because they may see the focus on the individual as being detrimental to the Korean belief of striving for the benefit of the group. Consequently, a student who is urged to make independent decisions may be caught in a cultural bind that causes conflicts with his or her parents and with other Korean American elders.

Cross-cultural studies of child development and childhood psychopathology can provide an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the impact of culture on mental health of children and their families. Although the general distribution of mental disorders and associated risk factors are often similar across countries, prevalence figures for specific mental disorders tend to vary significantly, even if comparable diagnostic criteria and evaluation methods are applied (Costello, 1989). However, it remains difficult to make direct comparisons of reports of childhood behavior problems across cultures. In particular, it is difficult when the locations under comparison have widely

different cultural histories, such as Korean and Western cultures (Mueller et al., 1995).

Childhood disorders cannot be fully understood on the basis of observations in only one environment or culture. Environmental contexts such as home versus school, the different interaction partners present in these contexts, and differences between informants' perspectives are all apt to contribute to the variations found between different sources of data on children's behavior (Achenbach, McConaughy, & Howell, 1987). Within a particular culture, comprehensive assessment of a child therefore requires multiple sources of data, each of which may contribute different pictures of the child's functioning (Achenbach, Hensley, Phares, & Grayson, 1990). Children's functioning is apt to vary considerably from one context and interaction partner to another. As a consequence, no single procedure or source of data can provide comprehensive assessment of children's behavioral and emotional problems. Furthermore, assessment of children's behavioral/emotional problems always involves human judgment since there are no objective measures of such problems

independent of people's judgments (McConaughy, Achenbach, & Gent, 1988).

To ascertain the typical level of agreement among reports by different informants, meta-analyses of correlations have been performed among ratings of children's problems by key informants, including parents, teachers, mental health workers, peers, and the children themselves (Achenbach et al., 1987). This study focused on children themselves.

The results of this study indicate that caution should be exercised when using self-reports with Korean and Korean American children. Compared to a representative American standardization sample, these children were indicated to be significantly deviant. However, it appears that cultural factor, rather than psychopathology could account for the elevated estimates on the BASC scales. Korean norms should be developed to assist in behavioral and emotional assessment of those children. Furthermore, for the Korean and Korean American children a consistent internalizing pattern of functioning emerged. Educators should be cognizant of these cultural tendencies and may want to adjust their expectations for performance and behavior

accordingly. Korean American children in particular might benefit from social skill intervention and groups that highlight cultural differences and the effects of being between conflicting value systems.

There were several limitations of the present study. First, the sample was geographically restricted. For example, Most Korean samples were drawn from around Seoul; Korean American samples were from Oklahoma areas and LA: and Caucasian American samples were mostly from rural areas in Oklahoma. Therefore, the generalizability of the present findings was limited. Second, the extent to which linguistic differences, reading disability, or lack of education in the parent group may have invalidated responses and affects of correlations are unknown. Third, the Behavior Assessment System for Children (BASC) has not been translated into Korean. Therefore, the Korean translated BASC form was used because of the likelihood that language difficulties would affect completeness and accuracy. We obtained permission to translated BASC form into Korean. The translation was done by the first author and was verified for accuracy by three other persons with college-level Korean education. However, the

accuracy of the Korean translated form may not be accurate due to the translator's qualification. Fourth, this study did not attempt to use representative samples from each group. Instead, a convenient sample of children and parents with some connection to the friends in each area were used. Finally, the items of the Self-Report Personality (SRP) were 152. The number of items was too many for younger children.

Overall, the current study suggests that sociocultural variations in the contexts in which children develop and interact are associated with children's behavior, their self-expression, and how they experience and coordinate with their groups and partners. Moreover, these differences may result in part form cultural differences in values, traditions, child-rearing patterns, and socialization practices, and they may have different effects at different developmental periods. We are only beginning to study how culture and development may influence child behavior and emotional problems, and how these factors may interact in their influence. The complexity of culture and of development insures that such research will not be easy. The present findings, though,

suggest that there may be value in the effort and that these factors and their interplay may be too influential to ignore.

There are several goals for future research on behavioral and emotional problems among different ethnic groups. First, there is a need for additional studies on the Korean-American minority population in the elementary levels including research on issues surrounding second generation Korean-American students and children from mixed marriages (i.e., Korean-Caucasian, Korean-Hispanic, Korean-Black). Second, future research might profitably include children younger or older than children ranging in age from 8 to 11, to round out the picture of development across cultures, we will need to add evidence on early childhood and adolescence. Certainly, the evidence presented here, and elsewhere to date, must be regarded as only part of an expanding picture of the interplay of culture, sex, and maturation in the development of child psychopathology. Third, further research is needed to compare and contrast the behavior and emotional problems among different ethnic groups (i.e., African-American, Hispanic American, Native-American, and participants from other countries). It will be fruitful to investigate the relationship between behavior and emotional

problems and sociocultural factors of ethnic-group children other than those discussed in this study.

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Table 1

Parental Citizenship, Residence, Language, and Religion by Groups

	Groups			
	Korean Children n = 40 (33.3%)	Korean American Children N = 40 (33.3%)	Caucasian American Children n = 40 (33.3%)	Total N = 120 (100%)
Parental Citizenship				
Korean	40 (100%)	19 (47.5%)	0 (0%)	59(49.2%)
American	0 (0%)	21 (52.5%)	40 (100%)	61(50.8%)
Residence				
Rural	7 (17.5%)	5 (12.5%)	30 (75.0%)	42(35.0%)
Suburban	12 (30.0%)	16 (40.0%)	3 (7.5%)	31(25.8%)
Urban	21(52.5%)	19 (47.5%)	7 (17.5%)	47(39.2%)
Home Language				
Korean	40 (100%)	22 (55.0%)	0 (0%)	62 (51.7%)
American	0 (0%)	18 (45.0%)	40 (100%)	58 (48.3%)
Religion				
Christian	29 (72.5%)	38 (95.0%)	39 (97.5%)	106 (88.3%)
Buddhism	5 (12.5%)	1(2.5%)	0 (0%)	6(5.0%)
Muslim	0 (0%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0%)	1(.8%)
Atheist	6 (15.0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.5%)	7 (5.8%)

Table 2

Gender, Age, and Grade of Children by Groups

	Groups			
	Korean Children	Korean American Children	Caucasian American Children	Total
	n = 40 (33.3%)	n = 40 (33.3%)	n = 40 (33.3%)	N = 120 (100%)
Gender:				
Male	15 (37.5%)	22 (55.0%)	23 (57.5%)	60 (50.0%)
Female	25 (62.5%)	18 (45.0%)	17 (42.5%)	60 (50.0%)
Age:				
8	6 (15.0%)	12 (30.0%)	10 (25.0%)	28 (23.3%)
9	4 (10.0%)	7 (17.5%)	9 (22.5%)	20 (16.7%)
10	13 (32.5%)	13 (32.5%)	8 (20.0%)	34 (28.3%)
11	17 (42.5%)	8 (20.0%)	13 (32.5%)	38 (31.7%)
Grade:				
1st	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2.5%)	1 (.8%)
2nd	6 (15.0%)	1 (2.5%)	2 (5.0%)	9 (7.5%)
3rd	11 (27.5%)	13 (32.5%)	8 (20.0%)	32 (26.7%)
4th	9 (22.5%)	7 (17.5%)	12 (30.0%)	28 (23.3%)
5th	9 (22.5%)	15 (37.5%)	6 (15.0%)	30 (25.0%)
6th	5 (12.5%)	4 (10.0%)	11 (27.5%)	20 (16.7%)

Table 3.

Means and Standard Deviations of Self-Report Personality for Korean, Korean American, and Caucasian American Children

Variables	Korean		Korean-American		Caucasian American	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
ATTITUDE TO SCHOOL	46.3	6.5	48.1	9.5	47.9	9.6
ATTITUDE TO TEACHERS	47.1	6.9	46.8	7.2	46.6	8.3
ATYPICALITY	50.1	7.5	51.1	8.9	46.8	10.1
LOCUS OF CONTROL	46.4	4.7	48.6	6.9	48.1	9.7
SOCIAL STRESS	45.0	7.8	49.6	8.9	46.5	9.9
ANXIETY	48.0	9.4	52.3	8.9	47.7	9.3
DEPRESSION	54.7	8.5	48.6	7.4	46.3	7.9
SENSE OF INADEQUACY	58.5	10.2	47.7	6.7	48.8	10.4
RELATIONS W/ PARENTS	45.1	10.0	50.1	9.1	52.6	6.2
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS	47.9	10.6	53.1	6.6	54.5	7.0
SELF ESTEEM	45.3	8.9	49.2	10.1	53.0	7.3
SELF RELIANCE	37.4	7.9	50.6	8.2	53.7	7.9

Table 4.

Univariate Fs, Significance Levels, and R^2 for Self-Report of Personality by Group

VARIABLES	F	*p*	R^2
ATTITUDE TO SCHOOL	.532	.589	.009
ATTITUDE TO TEACHERS	.050	.951	.001
ATYPICALITY	2.590	.079	.042
LOCUS OF CONTROL	1.028	.361	.017
SOCIAL STRESS	2.835	.063	.046
ANXIETY	3.170	.046*	.051
DEPRESSION	11.964	.000*	.170
SENSE OF INADEQUACY	16.734	.000*	.222
RELATION W/ PARENTS	8.078	.001*	.121
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS	7.188	.001*	.109
SELF ESTEEM	7.717	.001*	.117
SELF RELIANCE	47.309	.000*	.447

Note: df for all univariate analyses were (2,117)

Table 5.
Fisher's LSD Multiple Comparisons for BASC SRP Scales by Groups

VARIABLES		Mean Difference		
		K	K-A	A
ATTITUDE TO SCHOOL	K			
	KA	1.80		
	CA	1.65	.15	
ATTITUDE TO TEACHERS	K			
	KA	.325		
	CA	.525	.20	
ATYPICALITY	K			
	KA	1.00		
	CA	3.33	4.33*	
LOCUS OF CONTROL	K			
	KA	2.25		
	CA	1.75	.50	
SOCIAL STRESS	K			
	KA	4.65*		
	CA	1.55	3.10	
ANXIETY	K			
	KA	4.30*		
	CA	.35	4.65*	
DEPRESSION	K			
	KA	6.10*		
	CA	8.43*	2.33	
SENSE OF INADEQUACY	K			
	KA	10.88*		
	CA	9.78*	1.10	
RELATION W/ PARENTS	K			
	KA	5.00*		
	CA	7.58*	2.58	
INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS	K			
	KA	5.25*		
	CA	6.63*	1.38	
SELF ESTEEM	K			
	KA	3.90		
	CA	7.75*	3.85	
SELF RELIANCE	K			
	KA	13.28*		
	CA	16.35*	3.08	

Note: * p<.05

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