Korean Children’s Evaluation of Parental Restrictions Regarding Gender-stereotypic Peer Activities

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Abstract

Korean children’s evaluations of parental restrictions of children’s activities based on gender stereotypic expectations were investigated. Third and sixth grade Korean (N = 128) children evaluated scenarios in which a boy or girl desired to play ballet or soccer. Participants used stereotypes to support children’s desires to play gender-consistent activities and adhered to parental authority for choice of gender-consistent social activities. Yet, they also rejected parental decisions to treat sons and daughters differently based on the view that it would be unfair. Stereotypic expectations decreased with age and were used more by boys than by girls when evaluating exclusion. The results are discussed in terms of exclusion, development, and culture.

Keywords: gender stereotypes; peer relationships; fairness; culture

Introduction

Recent research has shown that children believe that it is unfair for peers to deny membership to clubs based solely on gender stereotypic expectations (see Killen, Sinno, & Margie, 2007). Few studies, however, have examined how children evaluate parental decisions to restrict children’s peer activities based on gender stereotypic expectations, which is surprising given that parents play a significant role in monitoring and facilitating children’s social behaviors and interactions (Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Previous research has shown that adolescents consistently reject parents’ authority jurisdiction regarding personal issues, which pertain to control over one’s body, privacy, and recreational peer activities (Fuligni, 1998; Smetana, 1988; Smetana, Metzger, Gettman, & Campione-Barr, 2006; Tisak, 1986). In contrast, children may view parental restrictions of children’s active participation in activities that cross gender boundaries as legitimate given that children’s gender schemas are often related to their parents’ views (Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2002).
Moreover, whereas much research has examined children’s exclusion based on gender with US samples, very few studies have evaluated how non-US samples, particularly children from Asian cultures, evaluate this form of exclusion (for reviews, see Hitti, Mulvey, & Killen, 2011; Killen et al., 2007). In one study that we know of, Park and Killen (2010) measured how Korean and US adolescents evaluate gender exclusion in peer contexts, but this study did not measure the role of parental restriction of peer activities, only whether it was all right for a same-gender club to exclude someone of the opposite gender (without any reference to types of activities); in this study, Korean adolescents were less willing to exclude on the basis of gender than were American adolescents.

The novel dimension of the present study was to investigate Korean children’s evaluations of parental decisions in which a parent allows a son but not a daughter (or a daughter but not a son) to engage in a peer activity associated with gender expectations (such as ballet and soccer). What is interesting about this issue is that the restrictions bear on both stereotypes (conventional) and autonomy (personal choice) considerations. While Nucci (2001) has extensively investigated when children assert personal choice regarding choice of friends and activities, little research has examined how children evaluate restrictions about activities from parents that reflect gender-stereotypic expectations. Thus, this type of research approach will shed light on the extent to which children’s conceptions about parental restrictions of peer activities generalize across cultural contexts as well as reflect different types of orientations, a concern for conventionality (stereotypes), personal choice (autonomy), and/or morality (fairness).

Korean children were included in this study given that Korea has long been considered a society that supports traditional gender norms as well as strong parental jurisdiction over children’s lives (Lee & Sugawara, 1994; Park & Cho, 1995; Park & Johnson, 1984). More recently, traditional gender norms in Korea have been challenged by increased women’s access to higher education and employment. According to the Ministry of Education & Science and Technology (http://www.mest.go.kr), only 25.3 percent of women went to college in 1970, with a significant increase up to 81.1 percent in 2006. The percentage of employed women also rose, by much less dramatically, from 42.3 percent in 1980 to 48.8 percent in 2001 (including 51.7 percent of married women).

Yet, research shows mixed results in terms of expectations for paternal (father) involvement with children and domestic tasks in Korea (Jeung & Park, 1996; Ko & Ok, 1994; Yoon & Chung, 1999). Because it is common for an employed mother to rely on a grandparent or a female nanny for childcare, paternal involvement does not increase when mothers begin employment. Moreover, fathers remain the breadwinners in social contexts (Shwalb, Nakazawa, Yamamoto, & Hyun, 2010). Thus, despite the positive index of gender equality in Korea, gender-stereotypic expectations continue to exist within family context, similar to the US (Sinno & Killen, 2009), indicating that children receive mixed messages about gender roles and expectations. The implications for these cultural changes are that although Korea has become a less traditional society over the past century regarding gender roles, the change has been more dramatic outside the home (in the work force), and much less so at home regarding gender socialization of children. This makes the question of how children interpret gender roles warranted given the state of flux in Korean culture (as well as other cultures such as the US), which has produced mixed messages regarding gender roles and expectations.
No studies that we know about have investigated how Korean children evaluate parental restrictions on peer activities that cross gender-stereotypic expectations or whether children perceive differential treatment for sons and daughters. It might be expected that Korean children view parental restrictions to be fair given that gender-related expectations are pervasive in the culture, and that boys are treated differently from girls. For example, Kim (1995) found that daughters perceived that their mothers treated them differently from their brothers; whether they viewed it as fair or unfair was not examined. Park, Killen, Crystal, and Watanabe (2003) surveyed children and adolescents about different forms of peer exclusion and found no differences between Korea, Japan, and the USA regarding exclusion of a peer who displays cross-gender behavior; all groups viewed it as wrong. These findings suggest that Korean children might view parental restrictions as unfair. Yet, cross-gender behavior (boy acts like a girl or a girl acts like a boy) is different from engaging in cross-gender peer activities (boy taking ballet or girl playing football), which might bring in salient social-conventional considerations about traditions and gender-specific expectations.

Thus, it was of interest to investigate whether children view gender-stereotypic constraints by parents to be legitimate, and if so, what reasons children provide for this type of evaluation. The basic design was to administer interviews with nine- and 12-year-old children (boys and girls) in which we measured participants’ judgments and social reasoning about scenarios in which a girl or a boy wants to take ballet, and scenarios in which a girl or boy wants to play soccer. The social reasoning assessments (responses to ‘Why?’ probes) were drawn from social domain theory (Nucci, 2001; Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1998), which has provided a framework for investigating social reasoning about exclusion (Killen, 2007; Killen & Rutland, 2011). Prior research has revealed that children’s evaluations of exclusion reflect the use of moral (‘It’s not fair to exclude him/her for that reason’), social-conventional (‘It’s okay to exclude him/her because it’s the way it’s always been done’), and personal (‘She can decide who to be friends with even if the reason isn’t very good’) reasons (Horn, 2006; Killen, 2007).

First, we assessed children’s judgments (okay or not okay?) about participation in the activities (gender-consistent and gender-inconsistent) (referred to as Participation Evaluation), and reasoning assessments (responses to ‘Why?’). We expected that children would support gender-consistent activities more than gender-inconsistent ones given the influence of traditional gender norms. Compared to younger children, older children would become more flexible with gender norms, and would be more likely to support gender-inconsistent activities given that prior research with US children has demonstrated such findings (McHale, Crouter, & Whiteman, 2003; Ruble, Martin, & Berenbaum, 2006). We also expected that children would rely on stereotypic (social-conventional) reasons for evaluating gender-consistent activities (‘Girls, not boys, like ballet’; ‘Boys are better at soccer than girls’). For gender-inconsistent activities, it was an open question. Children might refer to fairness (moral) reasons (‘It would be fair to let her play soccer’; ‘It would not be fair to tell him he can’t try ballet’) and personal choice reasons (‘It’s up to her whether she wants to play soccer’) to support gender-inconsistent peer activity participation based on prior studies on gender exclusion. Yet, it could also be that stereotypic expectations for engagement in gender-inconsistent activities would be used to support parental decisions to restrict children’s engagement for traditional and conventional reasons (‘It’s okay because ballet is for girls; boys would look silly doing it’) (Crouter, Whiteman, McHale, & Osgood, 2007).
The central hypotheses of the study pertained to children’s evaluations of parental decisions to restrict children’s engagement in gender-stereotypic activities. Drawing on Nucci’s (1996) research in which he has shown that children and adolescents view decisions about mode of dress and friendship as in the personal domain through assessments of locus of control questions, we asked children about locus of decision over the peer activities. Thus, participants were asked who they thought should decide, parents or children, whether the target child could engage in that activity. This question assessed the extent to which children would support parental authority regarding children’s engagement in peer activities. Based on previous findings (Kim & Turiel, 1996; Laupa, 1995; Tisak, 1995), overall, we expected that younger participants would appeal to parental authority (e.g., ‘It’s up to the parent’), more so than older participants, and that older children would be more likely to view the locus of control as residing in the child (e.g., ‘Children can decide for themselves what activity to do’).

Lastly, we investigated children’s evaluations of parental preferences for allowing a son but not a daughter (or vice versa) to participate in a stereotypic activity because of a child’s gender (referred to as Parental Gender Exclusion). Regarding parental restriction for children’s active participation in peer activities, different hypotheses stemmed from the literature. Given that parental authority is important in Korea, participants might be willing to accept parental restrictions involving children’s engagement in gender-inconsistent activities, and view this issue from a social-conventional perspective. In a related study with Korean American adults in the USA, in which the same instrument was used as in the present study, parents were found to view children’s desires to engage in gender-inconsistent activities as up to parents to decide (Killen, Park, Lee-Kim, & Shin, 2005). On the other hand, children could view it as unfair, and support children’s autonomy as did children in previous studies in the USA (Cumsille, Darling, Flaherty, & Martinez, 2009; Goldstein & Tisak, 2006; Laursen, Wilder, Noack, & Williams, 2000). Whether Korean children would demonstrate a view similar to Korean adults or US children was an open question and measured in this study.

We targeted middle childhood and early adolescence for the samples for the present study because nine years of age is about when children begin express their desire to make autonomous choices of peer activities (Nucci, 2001). We expected that older children would support children’s desires to pursue their own activities more than younger children. At the same time, research has shown that older children become more aware of social-conventional expectations of groups than younger children (Horn, 2003, 2006), and thus, this could lead older children to be more critical and restrictive of a child who desires to engage in a cross-gendered activity. It has been shown, that with increasing age, children’s conceptions regarding parental authority become more differentiated, and issues of autonomy become more salient in early adolescence (for USA: Smetana, 1988, 1995; for Korea: Kim, 1998; Kim & Turiel, 1996).

Boys and girls in the present study were expected to differ in their reasoning about gender expectations. Research has shown that girls are more likely to view gender exclusion as wrong (for boys or girls) than do boys (Park & Killen, 2010). Overall, girls were expected to evaluate contexts in which females were denied access to gender-stereotypic activities more negatively than boys based on previous findings. In sum, the present study aimed to investigate how Korean children evaluate participating in gender-associated activities and differential parenting treatment for sons and daughters. How gender and grade contributed to children’s evaluations was also investigated.
Method

Participants

Participants were 128 Korean children from third and sixth grades. Third graders ($M = 9.95$ years, $SD = .37$) consisted of 40 boys and 27 girls. Sixth graders ($M = 12.83$ years, $SD = .29$) consisted of 33 boys and 28 girls. Participants were recruited from a public elementary school in a suburb of Seoul (Shinchon), Korea, with consents from the principal and homeroom teachers and in agreement with parents per the established procedure of the school. The interview was conducted as an in-class school activity during the homeroom hour. All information was confidential and anonymous, with no identifying information recorded for any participant. Participating schools were representative of middle socio-economic status. Extensive pilot testing in Korea regarding the gender norms related to the scenarios confirmed that ballet was associated with girls (a girl’s activity) and soccer for boys (a boy’s activity).

Procedure

All participants were individually interviewed in 30-minute sessions that took place in a quiet setting in the homeroom class at school. Participants were interviewed in Korea by native Korean research assistants. All interviews were audiotaped for transcription and translation purposes by research assistants who were fluent in both languages. Participants were told that their responses were anonymous, that there were no right or wrong answers, and that their participation was strictly voluntary. The demographic information was accessed through public school records.

Measures

Gender-related Activities Interview. All children evaluated four scenarios (two activities by two gender consistency). These four scenarios were; (1) boy wants to play soccer, (2) girl wants to play soccer, (3) boy wants to do ballet, and (4) girl wants to do ballet. The interview consisted of two activities: soccer and ballet. Soccer was chosen to represent a male-stereotyped activity whereas ballet was chosen to represent a female-stereotyped activity. Similar activities have been used in prior studies examining children’s evaluation of stereotypic activities (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002; Killen & Stangor, 2001). In pilot studies for cultural validity of the measures used in this project, native Korean children were asked whether exclusion based on gender occurred in peer activities such as soccer or ballet (Lee-Kim, 2004; Shin, 2002). Korean children’s gender expectations for soccer and ballet were equivalent to American children’s gender expectation for football and ballet.

The order of activities was counterbalanced; half of the participants evaluated the soccer story first, and the other half evaluated the ballet story first. No story order effect was found. For all participants, however, the interview always started with the gender-inconsistent scenario. Therefore, as an example, for the soccer activity, children were presented first with, ‘Minju, who is a 12-year old girl, wants to join a soccer team’ followed by the gender-consistent scenario, ‘Minju’s brother, Inchul, who is about the same age, also wants to join a soccer team’. In this report, the term ‘gender-consistent’ is an abbreviation for ‘consistent with gender-based expectations’, and the term ‘gender-inconsistent’ is an abbreviation for ‘inconsistent with gender-based expectations’.
Dependent Measures. Each activity (soccer, ballet) had five assessments: (1) evaluation of gender-inconsistent participation (‘Is it okay or not okay for the girl to play soccer?’) and justification (‘Why?’); (2) locus of decision-making for gender-inconsistent participation (‘Who should decide, parents or child?’); (3) gender-consistent participation (‘Is it okay or not okay for the boy to play soccer?’) and justification (‘Why?’); (4) locus of decision-making for gender-consistent participation (‘Who should decide, parents or child?’); (5) parental restriction (‘Is it okay if the brother gets to play soccer but not the sister?’) and justification (‘Why?’).

Coding

Evaluation of participation responses were coded dichotomously for all assessments. ‘Okay’ or ‘yes’ responses were coded as 0, and ‘not okay’ or ‘no’ responses were coded as 1. Justification responses (reasons for why) were coded using a coding category system based on previous social-cognitive developmental research used to analyze social reasoning (Killen, Lee-Kim, McGlothlin, & Stangor, 2002; Smetana, 1995; Tisak, 1995; Turiel, 1998) and on the result of pilot data (Lee-Kim, 2004). Derived from social-cognitive domain theory (Smetana, 2006; Turiel, 1998), which has documented the forms of reasoning used by individuals to evaluate social events, three categories, moral (‘It’s not fair because girls and boys should be equal’), social-conventional (‘Ballet is a girl activity’), and personal (‘He should get to choose what he wants to do’), with multiple subcategories, were used to code the justifications. For a complete description of the coding categories and for examples of each category, see Table 1.

Justification responses were proportions of responses for each coding category. When a participant gave more than one justification, a weighted system was invoked such that responses which reflected two justifications were scored as .50 (50 percent); responses which reflected one justification was given a full score of 1.0 (100 percent). Less than 7 percent of the participants used two codes, however. Thus, an ordinal scale was created which ranged from 0 = no use of the category, .5 = partial use of the category, to 1.0 = full use of the category. Two raters independently coded 25 percent of the reasoning data for the gender-related activities interview. Inter-rater reliability using Cohen’s kappa coefficient was .88 with 90 percent agreement between coders.

Analytic Plan

Analyses of variance (MANOVAs) with repeated measures were used to test research questions pertaining to judgment and justification responses to participation evaluation, locus of decision, and parental gender exclusion assessments. In cases where sphericity was not met, corrections were made using the Huynh–Feldt method when reporting statistical results. Justifications and judgments were analyzed with gender and grade of participant. The repeated-measures factors were activity (soccer, ballet) and gender consistency (gender-inconsistent, gender-consistent).

ANOVA-based statistical tests to analyze proportions were used due to our repeated measures designs (which are not easily analyzed using other approaches such as log-linear). A recent review of analytic procedures for these types of data (covering 10 years in APA psychology journals) indicated that linear models with repeated procedures (particularly ANOVA) are appropriate compared to log-linear analysis for this type of within-subjects design (see Wainryb, Shaw, Laupa, & Smith, 2001, footnote 4).
Among the eight justification categories, only categories with a proportion of usage higher than .10 (10 percent) were included for each analysis.

### Results

#### Evaluation of Participation

A 2 (gender of participant: male, female) X 2 (grade: third, sixth grades) X 2 (activity: soccer, ballet) X 2 (gender expectations: gender consistent, gender inconsistent) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last two factors was conducted, and the results revealed a within-subjects effect for gender expectations, \( F(1, 124) = 47.26, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .28 \). As expected, gender-inconsistent participation was evaluated less positively than gender-consistent participation. As shown in Table 2, children were less likely to condone gender-inconsistent activities (a girl than a boy playing soccer and a boy than

### Table 1. Justification Coding Categories and the Overall Proportions of Usage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Justification coding categories</th>
<th>Proportions of usage</th>
<th>Participation evaluation</th>
<th>Parental gender exclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Moral justifications</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Fairness: ‘It’s not fair if the brother gets to go and not the sister’</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Gender equity: ‘Boys and girls are the same’; ‘Girls have rights to choose what they want’</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Non-moral social justifications</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Authority jurisdiction &amp; expectations: ‘Parents have the final authority’; ‘Parents would dislike it’</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Gender stereotypes &amp; expectations: ‘Boys don’t do ballet, it’s a girls’ activity’</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Personal justifications</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Personal choice: ‘Sandy can choose her own sport’</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Friendship: ‘Friendship is important for girls and boys during this time’</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Self-development: ‘It’s good for her self-esteem’; ‘He can be a professional ballerina’</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D. Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Undifferentiated, uncodable</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Data reflect justifications that were used in the analyses of participation evaluation and parental gender exclusion. Overall proportions across all four scenarios (boy learning ballet, boy playing soccer, girl learning ballet, and girl playing soccer) are reported.*

Among the eight justification categories, only categories with a proportion of usage higher than .10 (10 percent) were included for each analysis.
a girl taking ballet) whereas virtually all children were supportive of gender-consistent participation in soccer and ballet.

The findings from gender expectations X grade interaction effect, $F(1, 124) = 12.66, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .09$, showed significant differences between third and sixth graders. Further analyses indicated that third graders were less supportive of gender-inconsistent activities than were sixth graders for soccer and ballet (girl playing soccer and boy taking ballet) (soccer: $M_s = .27, .05, SD_s = .44, .21$; ballet: $M_s = .39, .13, SD_s = .49, .34$, third graders and sixth graders, respectively). Older children were more flexible in their evaluations of the choice of activity than were younger children.

As can be determined in Table 2, there were both age differences (older children were more tolerant of gender-inconsistent activities) and gender differences (girls were more tolerant).

### Table 2. Proportion of Judgments for Evaluation of Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>3rd graders</th>
<th>6th graders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-inconsistent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>.19 (.39)</td>
<td>.33 (.47)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballet</td>
<td>.22 (.42)</td>
<td>.50 (.50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender-consistent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.07 (.26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballet</td>
<td>.00 (.00)</td>
<td>.07 (.26)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: $N = 128$, $0 = \text{okay to participate}, 1 = \text{not okay to participate}$.

Justification for Participation Evaluations

Overall, children used personal choice ($M = .46, SD = .35$) most often to support children’s desires to participate in both gender inconsistent and gender consistent activities (moral; $M = .17, SD = .22$; social-conventional; $M = .29, SD = .31$). As an example, a sixth grade boy responded that ‘he should be able to learn ballet because he wants to learn ballet. It is his activity’. Yet, a 2 (gender) X 2 (grade) X 2 (activity) X 2 (gender expectations) X 3 (justification) repeated measures ANOVA analysis revealed that participants used different forms of reasoning for their evaluations of gender-consistent and gender-inconsistent participation.

A significant gender expectations X justification effect, $F(2, 248) = 43.44, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .26$, showed that children used moral reasoning (specifically, gender equity) more often to support children’s desires to participate in gender-inconsistent than in gender-consistent activities, $t(229) = 11.48, p < .001$ (Figure 1). As an example, a third-grade girl, in support of why a boy can participate in ballet stated that ‘boys and girls should have the same chance to learn ballet’. In contrast, children used social...
conventional reasoning, specifically, gender stereotypes, significantly more to support participation in gender-consistent activities than in gender-inconsistent activities, \( t(229) = 11.33, p < .001 \) (Figure 1). For example, when asked to evaluate a boy desiring to play soccer, a third-grade boy responded that ‘Boys like to play soccer and girls don’t know how to play’. No interaction effects of participants’ gender and grade were found.

**Locus of Decision-making**

It was hypothesized that, overall, children would be more likely to choose the parents over the child to decide across all activities. Supporting expectations, the majority of children \( (M = .60, SD = .41) \) gave authority to the parents to decide participants of social activities. A 2 (gender) X 2 (grade) X 2 (activity) X 2 (gender expectations) ANOVA with repeated measures showed that no main within-subject effects of activity and gender expectations. A between-subject effect, grade, emerged, \( F(1, 226) = 85.45, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .27 \). Most of third graders \( (M = .81, SD = .31) \) gave parents jurisdiction over deciding participation in activities whereas fewer sixth graders \( (M = .38, SD = .38) \) gave parents jurisdiction. No gender differences emerged.

**Evaluations of Parental Gender Exclusion**

In order to test hypotheses regarding children’s evaluation of parents’ differential treatment based on the gender of the child, participants were asked to consider a parent’s decision to allow a son but not a daughter (or vice versa) to engage in ballet and soccer. For this assessment, a 2 (gender of participant) X 2 (grade) X 2 (activity) ANOVA with repeated measures on the last factor was conducted on participants’ judgments. As expected, no within-subject effects were found. Results indicated that overall, a majority of children disapproved of parental restrictions across all

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**Figure 1.** Proportion of Using Justifications for Participation Evaluation.

*Note:* Error bars represent the standard error.
activities (M = .75, SD = .36). Importantly, significant between-subject effects of grade and gender were found for judgments regarding parental restrictions on gender-inconsistent activities. Older children (M = .88, SD = .24) were more likely to judge parents’ differential treatment of a child based on gender as wrong than were younger children (M = .63, SD = .41), F(1, 124) = 22.46, p < .001, ηp² = .15, suggesting that older children were more likely to critically evaluate parental decisions about restricting gender-inconsistent activities. Along similar lines, female (M = .83, SD = .34) participants were more likely to reject parental decisions to exclude a child for gender reasons than were male (M = .68, SD = .37) participants, F(1, 124) = 6.51, p = .012, ηp² = .05, confirming our expectations that when evaluating this type of gender bias, girls viewed exclusion based on gender as more wrong than did boys (see Figure 2).

**Parental Gender Exclusion Justifications**

For analyses of justifications, a 2 (gender of participant) X 2 (grade) X 2 (activity) X 2 (justification) ANOVA with repeated measures was conducted, and a within-subjects effect for justification was found, F(2, 248) = 10.73, p < .001, ηp² = .08. As expected, a majority of children (M = .72, SD = .37) used moral reasoning (fairness and gender equity) to reject differential treatment based on gender across all activities. A significant justification X grade interaction effect showed differences between third and sixth grade children when using justification categories for parental gender exclusion, F(2, 248) = 11.90, p < .001, ηp² = .09. Younger children (M = .36, SD = .41) used social conventional reasoning (gender stereotypes) more than did older children (M = .11, SD = .24). There were no significant interaction effects of activity and participants’ gender.

*Figure 2. Proportion of Disapproval of Parental Gender Exclusion.*

*Note:* 0 = okay, 1 = not okay. Error bars represent standard error.
The overall finding that a majority of children used moral reasoning to support their judgments for this evaluation suggests that treatment of gender bias by parents for these types of activities were viewed predominantly as a moral issue.

Discussion

The findings of this study were that Korean nine- and 12-year-old children did not support unconditional parental restrictions on children’s peer activities that were associated with gender norms. On the contrary, children viewed parental restrictions as unfair and referred to children’s autonomy as a central justification for their decision as has been shown with US samples (Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Thus, traditional cultural ideology about gender and parental authority were not the overriding determination for children’s evaluations of their participation in peer activities. Current research on evaluations of parental support of autonomy with US samples can be extended to a new sample: Korean children.

One might assert that children were conforming to a new cultural norm given that Korean culture is in flux with new expectations about gender roles. Yet, even the changes that have come about in the past decade reflect a mixed set of expectations and a conflicting ideology, to a large extent. This is the case in the USA as well (Sinno & Killen, 2009), as exemplified by gender inequities in salaries, political representation, and the arena of sports. Thus, our theoretical approach is social cognitive development in that we are proposing that children use a range of orientations, which coexist, regarding evaluation of social interactions in a range of cultural contexts. This approach differs from a cultural psychology viewpoint which proposes that parents socialize children to adopt a cultural template or ideology.

Although cultural theorists often posit that as children get older, they become more socialized into the cultural expectations of their community (see Shweder et al., 1998), a limitation of this theory is the assumption that cultures are homogeneous with one set of expectations or an ideology guiding decisions by individuals in their daily lives. Yet, cultural ideologies are often inconsistent, reflecting diversity and inconsistencies within cultures (Turiel, 2002; Wainryb, 2006). Whereas research on gender stereotyping has shown that, with US samples, gender flexibility increases with age (Ruble et al., 2006; Schuette & Killen, 2009; Serbin & Sprafkin, 1986), little is known about this age-related change in Korea. Here, too, we found that younger Korean children’s gender stereotypes were less flexible than those of older Korean children. Moreover, children used a mixture of reasoning to reject parental restrictions, the importance of fairness (morality) and the need for autonomy (personal choice). Conventional reasons and stereotyping were used when children conformed to gender expectations.

Thus, our new findings were that although children recognized gender norms about peer activities and were more willing to support gender-consistent than gender-inconsistent activities, children were also critical of parental decisions to treat sons and daughters differently, with a view that equality and equity should be applied to these decisions. When evaluating parents’ gender exclusion to favor one gender’s participation in an activity while denying the same opportunity to another, a majority of children disapproved of unconditional parental authority across all activities using predominantly moral reasoning (e.g., ‘It’s not fair’, ‘That’s gender discrimination’).

Moreover, a majority of children viewed differential treatment by parents based on gender as a moral issue (‘unfair’), and older children were more likely to judge
differential treatment based on gender as wrong. This supports previous findings that indicate that US children, with age, judge that parents do not have legitimate control over personal activities (Nucci, 2001; Smetana & Daddis, 2002). Although older children often conform to social expectations in terms of choosing peer activities (Horn, 2003), they also reject social expectations which challenge their own perceived autonomy or sense of fairness. Given that previous research with Korean parents found that they were supportive of parents restricting their children’s engagement in activities that crossed gender-stereotypic expectations (Killen et al., 2005), and that Korean societal traditions continue to reflect a preference by parents for boys over girls (Kim, 1995), it is somewhat surprising that children’s judgments reflect such a consistent view about differential treatment being unfair. Interestingly, the vast majority of girls viewed unequal treatment of sons and daughters as unfair (and more so than did boys), but the majority of boys also viewed it as wrong, even though they are often the beneficiaries of these societal expectations. These findings contribute to the complexity regarding the question of congruence between children’s and parents’ gender schemas (Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2002).

One avenue for future research would be to interview both children and their parents regarding the restriction of gender non-stereotypic activities to determine directly whether the congruence (or lack of) holds within families. Older children used more reasons based on fairness and equity to support children’s choices for peer-related activities than did younger children, who may be more susceptible to gender expectations when evaluating parental gender bias in stereotypic contexts. An interesting contrast to studies with US samples is that when parents are not involved in the decision-making, US adolescents use less, not more, moral reasoning to justify exclusion, citing concerns about group functioning (conventional). In the present study, young adolescents used more moral reasoning indicating that exclusion decisions stemming from parental mandates reflect a different set of decisions than those from exclusion that stems solely from peer expectations. Thus, interviewing both children and their parents in both cultures would shed new light on family dynamics regarding the role of parents in scaffolding their children’s engagement in peer activities.

As expected, girls were less likely than boys to evaluate participation in activities that went against stereotypic gender expectations as wrong. The findings confirmed our expectations that when evaluating gender bias in this type of context, girls are more likely than boys to view gender discrimination as wrong, particularly when the bias involves female exclusion (see Killen et al., 2002). These findings extend previous findings with US samples by documenting similar patterns of judgments for girls in a Korean sample. Girls growing up in a culture with traditional gender expectations may be more aware of the restrictions imposed on their activities and thus respond to such expectations with a strong sense of fairness. Changes in societal expectations may also allow girls to more freely express their sense of unfairness about gender roles, and this may reflect a change over the past few decades of reform in Korea.

A new direction for this research would be to employ a greater range of peer activities, and to assess how children evaluate different degrees of social consequences for engagement in different types of activities. In this study, two types of ‘peer’ activities were investigated. In future research, determining how children evaluate parental views about exclusion from other domains, such as academic, professional, and social ones would be fruitful. Would children support parental decisions to exclude a girl from joining a science club, or a boy from learning how to care for children? Further, do children consider the social consequences? Do children take into
consideration issues of social isolation and social rejection when a child engages in a ‘non-conforming’ activity? Another new avenue could be to examine adolescents’ viewpoints about disclosure to parents (Daddis & Randolph, 2010) for activities that are viewed as gender non-stereotypic. How do children and adolescents view the obligation to disclose activities to their parents that might cross gender-stereotypic expectations?

In summary, Korean children evaluated parental constraints on children’s choice of peer activities as wrong, even in the context of gender-inconsistent expectations, which were evaluated by children as less legitimate than engagement in activities that reflected gender-consistent expectations. We did not find that children were as ‘authority oriented’ as typically characterized, particularly in Asian cultures (Kim, 1998; Sagara & Kang, 1998). In this study, Korean children had strong views about the unfairness of parental restrictions on children’s choice of activities; they rejected parental decision-making for children’s peer activities (especially for older children). This information has important implications for how Western researchers characterize Asian cultures as well as for how Korean educators address gender inequity issues in the classroom. Children as young as 9 years of age view differential treatment based on gender as unfair. Thus, exploring issues of unfair treatment based on group membership, such as gender, nationality, and other categories, could be included in school curricula to foster discussion and address perceived inequities in adult–child interactions and relationships.

Documenting age-related and gender-related patterns of children’s social reasoning about gender exclusion and parental restrictions on peer activities in different cultures provides evidence for understanding the role of culture in development and sources of variation and commonality between children living in different social cultural contexts.

References


