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# Children's emotional expressivity and teacher perceptions of social competence: A cross-cultural comparison

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## Abstract

Previous research suggests that adult perceptions of children's social competence may vary depending on the socialization goals in a given cultural context. There is also ample evidence of cultural differences in values concerning emotional display, with East Asian collectivistic contexts favoring restraint and Western individualistic contexts favoring open expression of internal states. The present study examined an individualistic versus collectivistic comparison in the links between children's emotional expressivity and teacher evaluations of their social competence. A sample of 127 Korean, Asian American (AA) and European American (EA) preschoolers participated in emotion eliciting tasks and were rated by their teachers on three dimensions of social competence (peer acceptance, prosocial behavior, and antisocial behavior). Moderation analyses revealed that for Korean children, sadness and happiness expressivity were associated with higher antisocial behavior scores, but these associations were reversed or not significant for EAs. For AA children, anger display was associated with lower ratings of peer acceptance and prosocial behavior, but this link did not hold for their EA counterparts. Overall, there was some support for the hypotheses that expressivity was related to lower teacher perceptions of child social competence for a collectivistic group (AA and Korean) but not for an individualistic group (EA). Thus, these findings indicate cultural group differences in teacher perceptions and values of children's emotion expressivity.

## Keywords

culture as moderator, emotion, social adjustment

Social competence refers to the ability to attain personal or group success in social contexts (Waters & Sroufe, 1983; Zigler, 1973), with most definitions emphasizing peer acceptance, working well with others, and engaging in appropriate social behaviors (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1992; Kochanska & Aksan, 1995; Rothbart & Bates, 2006; Rubin & Rose-Krasnor, 1992). Yet, evaluations of social competence among children varies by cultural context (e.g., X. Chen & French, 2008; X. Chen, French, & Schneider, 2006; X. Chen, Wang, & DeSouza, 2006; Greenfield, Suzuki, & Rothstein-Fisch, 2006). In individualistic cultural contexts (e.g., North America), socialization agents aim to help children learn to express themselves effectively in order to get their needs met within their social groups (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). In contrast, collectivistic contexts (e.g., East Asia) prioritize self-control and accommodating the needs of others before personal desires to facilitate the promotion of harmony (Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008; Triandis, 1995).

A form of self-control, emotional restraint, is considered desirable in collectivistic contexts because an individual's feelings and their free expression are relatively less important compared to the interpersonal implications of displaying emotions (Butler, Lee, & Gross, 2007; Matsumoto, Yoo, Fontaine, et al., 2008; Matsumoto, Yoo, Nakagawa, et al., 2008). Research in adults has shown that the suppression of emotion expression is linked with negative effects on mood, life satisfaction (Soto, Perez, Kim, Lee, & Minnick, 2011), and social interactions (Butler et al., 2007), but only for individualistic, not collectivistic, groups. These findings may be explained by the notion that, within collectivistic cultures, the public display of one's internal desires, goals, and emotions (e.g., pride, excitement, anger) may be in conflict with the maintenance of

cooperative social interaction, and when unregulated can lead to confrontation, conflict, and even aggression (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010). Even young children are expected to conform to norms around modulating the expression of intense affect that can disrupt harmony and draw attention to the self (X. Chen, 2000; Lin & Fu, 1990; Wu, 1996). The current study examined whether the links between teacher perceptions of social competence and children's emotional expressivity differ depending on cultural context and the child's cultural background. In the current study, we used cultural groups as a proxy for cultural contexts; we do not imply that any differences between cultural groups suggest differences that are fixed or due to individual differences. Prior to describing the study, we briefly review the literature on the socialization of specific emotions in young children.

## Socialization of emotion in young children

Although signs of emotional understanding are observed during infancy (Saarni, Campos, Camras, & Witherington, 2006), most

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children show significant emotional understanding by 3 years of age, when they have extended contact with peers in preschool (e.g., Denham et al., 2002; Ridgeway, Waters, & Kuczaj, 1985). At this age, most children can distinguish among different affective states (Ridgeway et al., 1985; Ridgeway & Waters, 1987), and know that some states are more situationally appropriate than others (e.g., Cole, 1986; Josephs, 1994). The current study focuses on preschoolers because while socialization begins during the first days of life (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003), this is the age at which cultural differences in the regulation of emotional expressivity emerge due to children's increased understanding of their own and others' emotions and their ability to recognize and internalize standards and norms.

Cross-cultural differences in children's peer interactions can be understood through the differential emphasis on behavioral approach and emotion expression versus self-control and emotion restraint. For example, X. Chen, DeSouza, et al. (2006) found that Canadian preschoolers were more actively engaged in peer interactions than Chinese children; in contrast, Chinese children displayed more passive solitary and parallel play. In another study, social approach did not predict social acceptance or sociometric status among Chinese children as expected in Western samples (X. Chen, Li, Li, Li, & Liu, 2000). Socialization practices in East Asian contexts tend to cultivate inhibition and restraint rather than initiative and approach. For instance, Chinese mothers tend to encourage children to down-regulate strong emotional states and inhibit impulses more than European American mothers (X. Chen, 2000; Lin & Fu, 1990; Wu, 1996). Like parents, teachers are also standard bearers for cultural norms. According to ethnographic research on preschools across cultures, East Asian teachers tend to encourage appropriate restraint in expressing one's own feelings and a reserved self-presentation (Peak, 2001; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989). Accordingly, reliable differences in patterns of emotional expressivity have been observed, with East Asian children displaying less overt emotion than European American children according to both temperament surveys (Ahadi, Rothbart, & Ye, 1993; Porter et al., 2005) and observational studies in early childhood (Louie, Oh, & Lau, 2013; Lewis, 1989). Yet, research has not examined whether *emotional expressivity* is differentially related to perceptions of children's social competence depending on the cultural group.

Furthermore, it is unclear whether there are differential implications of expressing *specific types* of emotions, namely emotions of positive and negative valence, for perceptions of social competence. While there is some variability in the findings, research using predominantly European American samples suggests an inverse relationship between negative affect expressivity and social competence. Young children who display intense negative affect during parent-child or peer interactions have higher teacher-rated antisocial behavior (Eisenberg et al., 1993; Fabes & Eisenberg, 1992), lower teacher-rated peer acceptance (Carson & Parke, 1996), and show fewer prosocial behaviors (Carlo, Fabes, Laible, & Kupanoff, 1999). Yet null associations have also been reported. Denham and colleagues (2003) found that children's sadness and anger displays were unrelated to teacher-rated social competence. In a meta-analytic review of 54 independent samples, Dougherty (2006) reported the overall effect size for the relation between children's negative affect and sociometric status was in the moderate-to-small range, with no differences across types of negative affect (i.e., anger, fear, and sadness).

It is also possible that the strength of this association may vary across cultural contexts. Theorists have posited that the display of

negative emotions, particularly anger, is considered to be especially threatening in collectivistic cultural contexts, having the most potential for damaging relations (Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 2010). In individualistic contexts, anger display may be tolerated when it serves the interests of protecting one's individual rights and freedom, as long as it does not violate norms limiting aggression (Eid & Diener, 2001). However, anger expression is unacceptable in collectivistic contexts because it threatens authority and disrupts group harmony (Miyake & Yamazaki, 1995; Novin, Rieffe, & Mo, 2010). For example, Japanese children show less anger than European American children in their responses to conflict and distress; this has been attributed to a greater maternal emphasis on control of negative emotions (Zahn-Waxler, Friedman, Cole, & Mizuta, 1996).

However, the implications of expressing other negative emotions across cultures are less clear. Sadness is considered a relatively powerless emotion that leads to withdrawal from, rather than disturbance of, the group (Timmers, Fischer, & Manstead, 1998). Thus, it is possible that expression of sadness may be more acceptable than anger in collectivistic contexts as there is less potential for breeding conflict (Matsumoto, Takeuchi, Andayani, Kouznetsova, & Krupp, 1998) and thus may not be as detrimental to perceived social competence. On the other hand, expressions of sadness may be as likely as anger expression to draw attention to the self in ways that contravene group orientation (Lewis, Takai-Kawakami, Kawakami, & Sullivan, 2010). Further study is needed on the implications of sadness expression on social functioning in collectivistic contexts.

Positive emotional expression, on the other hand, may be thought to facilitate positive interactions and prosocial exchanges. In predominantly European American samples, displays of positive emotion are positively linked to children's observed and reported social competence (Denham, McKinley, Couchoud, & Holt, 1990; Lengua, 2003; McDowell & Parke, 2005; Sroufe, Schork, Motti, Lawroski, & LaFreniere, 1984). However, meta-analytic findings suggest a small effect size for the relation between children's positive emotionality and social status (Dougherty, 2006). In fact, intense positive affectivity in some situations requiring modulation is related to poor social competence (Feshbach, 1983). Intense positive affectivity or exuberance may sometimes reflect a lack of regulation (Kochanska, Murray, & Harlan, 2000), which has been negatively related to social competence (Eisenberg, Vaughan, & Hofer, 2009).

With regard to cultural differences, Affect Valuation Theory asserts that the acceptability of displaying positive emotions will also vary according to context (Tsai, Miao, Seppala, Fung, & Yeung, 2007). Tsai and colleagues suggest that the primary social goal in Western cultures is to *influence* others (i.e., assert personal needs and change others' behaviors to meet those needs), which requires action and arousal. In contrast, in Eastern cultures, the central goal is to *adjust* to others (i.e., suppress personal needs and change their own behaviors to meet others' needs), which requires observation and low levels of arousal (e.g., Kim & Markus, 1999; Weisz, Rothbaum, & Blackburn, 1984). Accordingly then, the display of high arousal positive affect (i.e., excitement, exuberance) should be more valued in Western contexts than in East Asian contexts. Indeed, cultural differences in young children's preferences for high arousal positive affective experiences have been found between American and East Asian contexts, and have been linked to exposure to cultural socialization media (Tsai, Louie, Chen, & Uchida, 2007).

Thus, prior work supports the contention that social competence may be defined differently in Eastern versus Western contexts. However, studies have yet to directly examine whether there are cultural differences in the associations between evaluations of social competence and children's emotionally expressive behavior. It is plausible that in the European American context, adults view children with high levels of emotion expression as competent in ways consistent with prevailing socialization goals of individual autonomy and self-actualization. Yet, such expressiveness may be incongruent with East Asian socialization goals of restraint and accommodation to the social context; consequently, expressive children may be viewed by adults as less competent. Further still, in a multicultural context, it is unclear how the social competence of bicultural children (e.g., Asian-American) would be evaluated as a function of emotional expressivity. It is possible that children from East Asian backgrounds may be held to Western standards of expressivity when evaluated in a Western context. Alternately, adults may hold different expectations of children's expressivity based on the child's familial cultural heritage.

## The present research

Thus, in the current study, we examined whether there is variability in the associations between teacher perceptions of social competence and children's emotional expressivity depending on the cultural context and the child's cultural background. Specifically, we aimed to compare individualistic (European American) and collectivistic (Asian American and Korean) cultural backgrounds because of their differences in values surrounding emotional display (Matsumoto et al., 1998, 2008), which likely influence adult perceptions of social competence. We studied whether teacher ratings of peer acceptance, prosocial behavior, and antisocial behavior were differentially related to children's observed anger, sadness, and happiness in structured elicitation tasks in a sample of Korean, Asian American (AA) and European American (EA) children. Based on prior work, we expected to find group differences in expressivity, such that Korean and AA children display less overt emotion than EA children during emotion eliciting tasks. Our central research question, however, concerned whether cultural group would moderate the association between teacher-rated social competence and observed expressivity in children.

In general, we predicted that emotional expressivity would be related to more positive assessments of social competence for European American preschool aged children, whereas emotional restraint would be related to appraised social competence among Korean preschoolers. In addition, we differentiated more specific hypotheses based on the types of expressivity and social competence measured. First, we hypothesized that for EA children, child happiness (i.e., high arousal positive affect, exuberance) would be associated with higher social competence (particularly in the realm of peer acceptance and prosocial behavior); in contrast, we predicted that positive expressivity would be related to lower appraisals of social competence for Korean children. Second, we predicted that negative emotionality would have greater negative implications for social competence (particularly ratings of antisocial behavior) for Korean than for EA children. Finally, we explored whether the associations between emotional expressivity and teacher evaluations of social competence of AA children differed from that of EA children. However, directional hypotheses were not posed, as alternative predictions are plausible. AA

children may be held to the same standards of evaluation as EA children by teachers in a Western setting, or their emotionality may be perceived in the context of expectancies formed on the basis of their membership to a cultural minority group. Thus, EA children served as the reference group and were compared to both Korean and AA children, consistent with our aim to compare individualistic and collectivistic cultural backgrounds.

## Methods

### Participants

The sample included 39 EA (48.7% female), 46 AA (50% female), and 42 Korean (47.6% female) children attending university preschools in the United States and Korea, and their 24 teachers (100% female). The teachers in Korea were all ethnic Korean, while the teachers in the United States were ethnically diverse (41.67% Hispanic, 33.33% European American, 12.50% Asian American, 8.33% African American, 4.17% multiracial). The 127 children were divided among 10 American classrooms and four Korean classrooms. A total of 20 American teachers and four Korean teachers completed the questionnaires. While some classrooms had more EAs than AAs and vice versa, on average, it was about half and half. There was no statistical difference in child age across groups ( $M = 45.79$  months old,  $SD = 5.92$ ). EA children and their parents were born and raised in the United States, and their ancestors were from Northern and Western Europe. AA children were either born overseas or in the United States, and their parents were born and raised in an East Asian context (84.8% first generation immigrants; 67.39% Chinese, 23.91% Korean, 8.7% other). While all of the AA children were fluent in English, 73.9% of the AA parents reported an East Asian language as the primary language they speak with their child. Although the AA sample was not ethnically identical to the Korean sample, previous research has shown that despite considerable within-group variation, East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Korean) cultures tend to share values and beliefs regarding emotion expression (e.g., Chao & Tseng, 2002). Families were recruited through flyers at their preschools and compensated for their participation with storybooks and a classroom gift.

### Measures

**Teacher-rated social competence.** Teachers of EAs and AAs filled out questionnaires in English. Korean teachers completed Korean translations of the questionnaires, which were produced through a process of translation, editing and reconciliation for conceptual equivalence by a team of four native Korean speakers.

**Peer acceptance.** We used a 7-item subscale from the adapted version of the Perceived Competence Scale for Children (Harter, 1982; see also Eisenberg, Fabes, Murphy, & Maszk, 1995); e.g. "This child has a lot of friends," "This child finds it hard to make friends" (reverse-scored) to assess peer acceptance. Teachers completed items on a 4-point scale (1 = *really false*, 4 = *really true*), with higher scores representing greater peer acceptance. In the current sample, Cronbach's alpha was .88 across groups (.90 for EA, .87 for AA, and .86 for Koreans).

**Prosocial behavior.** The Social Competence Behavior Evaluation: Preschool Edition – Short form (SCBE-30; LaFreniere & Dumas, 1996) assesses social competence and behavior problems in

children aged 30 to 78 months. Teachers reported the frequency with which the child displays each behavior on a 6-point scale. Translated versions of the SCBE-30 have been used in numerous studies on diverse groups of children including Chinese (Q. Chen & Jiang, 2002) and Japanese preschoolers (Masataka, 2002). We used the 10-item Social Competence subscale to assess Prosocial Behavior (e.g. “negotiates solutions to conflicts with other children,” “cooperates with other children in group activities”) with higher scores representing higher social competence. In the current study, Cronbach’s alpha was .91 for Prosocial Behavior across groups (.93 for EA, .92 for AA, and .88 for Koreans).

**Antisocial behavior.** We used the 10-item Anger-Aggression subscale of the SCBE-30 to assess Antisocial Behavior (e.g. “gets into conflict with other children,” “defiant when reprimanded”). Higher scores on this subscale represented lower social competence. In the current study Cronbach’s alpha was .91 for Antisocial Behavior across groups (.92 for EA, .92 for AA, and .89 for Koreans).

**Children’s observed emotional expressivity.** The children participated in two emotion-eliciting tasks from the Laboratory Temperament Assessment Battery manual for preschoolers (Lab-TAB; Goldsmith, Reilly, Lemery, Longley, & Prescott, 1999). Using a version of the Lab-TAB coding system (Goldsmith et al., 1999), observers coded negative and positive emotion arousal behaviors: intensity, bodily, behavioral, and verbal cues. In order to create composites for anger, sadness, and happiness, respective arousal behaviors were standardized and summed together. First, “I’m Not Sharing” (i.e., Stickers task) was used to elicit anger and sadness. In this task, the experimenter divided up stickers with the child unfairly to observe how the child coped with losing stickers. The Anger composite included angry facial expressions (e.g., brows slanting down toward the center, pursed lips), bodily anger (e.g., tensing, slapping hand on the table), and angry verbal expressions in tone and content (e.g., “You can’t do that!”) during the Stickers task. The Sadness composite included sad facial expressions (e.g., inner corners of brows raised, frown), bodily sadness (e.g., downcast head, slumped shoulders), and sad verbal expressions in terms of tone and content (e.g., “I wanted that sticker”) during the Stickers task. Third, to elicit happiness, the children participated in “Popping Bubbles” (i.e., Bubbles task) where they were invited to pop as many bubbles as he/she could with different parts of his/her body. Observers coded the presence of smiling, laughter, and approach behavior (e.g. jumping, high kicks) during the Bubbles task to form the Happiness composite.

Majdandžić and van den Boom (2007) found modest to moderate convergence between questionnaires and Lab-TAB observations, and adequate inter-rater reliability and internal consistency of composite scores. In the current sample, there were 5 EA and 8 AA coders who were randomly assigned to code EA and AA videotapes (coder race was not matched to participant race). Four Korean American coders who spoke English and Korean fluently were randomly assigned to code EA, AA, and Korean tapes. The first author also coded a subset of EA, AA, and Korean (translated) videos. All coders completed intensive training on a set of 4 training videos with the first author. For additional quality assurance and to avoid drift, the entire team was periodically assigned to code the same video. All videos were coded by two coders with differences reconciled at weekly meetings with the first author; the resultant

consensus codes were used in the analyses. While the main analyses were run using consensus codes, the intraclass coefficients (ICCs) were calculated as a measure of inter-rater reliability based on the two coders’ original independent ratings from a random sample of 89 videos (70%). Overall, the ICC’s were .94 for Anger, .84 for Sadness, and .96 for Happiness. For EA, the average measure ICC’s were .92 for Anger, .69 for Sadness, and .94 for Happiness. For AA, the average measure ICC’s were .97 for Anger, .92 for Sadness, and .97 for Happiness. For Koreans, the average measure ICC’s were .68 for Anger, .79 for Sadness, and .93 for Happiness. Thus, inter-rater reliability was excellent for most composites across subgroups in the sample.

Internal consistency reliability of the composites was acceptable in the overall sample. Cronbach’s alphas for each composite of finalized codes were .85 for Anger, .79 for Sadness, and .70 for Happiness. Alphas ranged from .70 to .80 for EA and from .64 to .94 for AA. For Koreans, alphas were .92 for Anger, .35 for Sadness, and .78 for Happiness. Although .35 is low, we note that ICC’s for component sadness codes were high for Koreans (sad facial expression = .83, bodily sadness = .79, verbal sadness = .88). Thus, while the internal consistency of observable emotion composites was lower for sadness among Korean children, there was strong evidence of inter-rater reliability of the component codes, suggesting possible cultural differences in the modal expression of sadness for this group.

## Procedure

Children and teachers were recruited from preschools in Los Angeles, CA, and Seoul, Korea. Informed consent and the aforementioned measures from the teacher and assent from the child were obtained. After building rapport with the children, research assistants racially matched to child participants conducted study procedures privately in an unoccupied preschool classroom. The protocol was conducted in English in the US and Korean in Korea. The order of the positive or negative emotion tasks was counterbalanced. Behavioral observations of structured experimenter–child interactions at school were videotaped and later coded for emotional features. Teachers completed study questionnaires in preschool classrooms.

## Results

### *Preliminary analyses of teacher-rated social competence*

To determine which covariates to use in multivariate models, we examined bivariate correlations between social competence scores and demographic variables. Peer Acceptance was correlated with gender ( $r = .22, p = .013$ ) and Antisocial Behavior was correlated with age ( $r = -.24, p = .008$ ). Thus, gender was used as a covariate in the subsequent multivariate models predicting Peer Acceptance ratings, and age was used as a covariate in models predicting Antisocial Behavior ratings. Both gender ( $r = .25, p = .005$ ) and age ( $r = .22, p = .012$ ) were correlated with Prosocial Behavior and thus used as covariates in subsequent multivariate models predicting Prosocial Behavior ratings.

As shown in Table 1, there were significant omnibus group differences in teacher reports of Antisocial Behavior,  $F(2, 124) = 9.46, p < .001$ . Specifically, post-hoc tests using the Bonferroni

**Table 1.** Sample descriptives by ethnicity.

Variable	Full sample			European American			Asian American			Korean			F
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N	
Teacher-rated social competence													
Peer acceptance	2.97	0.68	127	3.14	0.72	39	2.98	0.69	46	2.79	0.61	42	2.85†
Prosocial behavior	3.76	1.02	127	3.87	1.14	39	3.60	1.06	46	3.83	0.83	42	0.91
Antisocial behavior	2.08	0.95	127	2.06 <sup>a</sup>	0.96	39	1.73 <sup>a</sup>	0.80	46	2.48 <sup>b</sup>	0.94	42	9.46***
Child emotional expressivity													
Anger composite	0.03	2.73	120	1.15 <sup>a</sup>	3.39	36	-.12 <sup>b</sup>	2.74	43	-.079 <sup>c</sup>	1.54	41	5.33**
Sadness composite	-0.11	2.52	120	0.87 <sup>a</sup>	2.93	36	0.24 <sup>a</sup>	2.75	43	-1.33 <sup>b</sup>	0.96	41	9.03***
Happiness composite	-0.11	2.36	121	0.88 <sup>a</sup>	2.15	37	-.07 <sup>b</sup>	2.52	43	-1.05 <sup>c</sup>	2.03	41	7.15**

Note. Letters indicate significant group differences ( $p < .05$ ). Peer Acceptance is rated on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5. Prosocial behavior and Antisocial behavior are rated on a 6-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 6. Possible scores for the Anger Composite range from -1.27 to 15.00, the Sadness Composite scores range from -2.43 to 11.02, and the Happiness Composite scores range from -5.28 to 7.21. For all variables, higher scores indicate more of that quality.

†  $p < .10$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

correction revealed that teachers rated Korean children ( $M = 2.48$ ,  $SD = .94$ ) as having more Antisocial Behavior than EA children ( $M = 2.06$ ,  $SD = .96$ ) ( $p_{K-EA} = .042$ ) and AA children ( $M = 1.73$ ,  $SD = .80$ ) ( $p_{K-AA} < .001$ ); EA and AA children received similar ratings. There were no significant group differences in teacher ratings of Peer Acceptance or Prosocial Behavior.

### Preliminary analyses of child observed emotional expressivity

Correlation analyses revealed that observed Anger expression was correlated with gender ( $r = -.18$ ,  $p = .041$ ); thus gender was used as a covariate in the Anger analyses below. Gender and age were not related to observed Sadness or Happiness.

Significant group differences in observed emotional expressivity emerged for Anger,  $F(2, 115) = 5.33$ ,  $p = .006$ , Sadness,  $F(2, 115) = 9.03$ ,  $p < .001$ , and Happiness,  $F(2, 116) = 7.15$ ,  $p = .001$ . Post-hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction revealed that Korean children exhibited less Happiness than EA children ( $p_{K-EA} = .001$ ), but AA children were not significantly different from Korean or EA children. Similarly, Korean children exhibited less Anger than EA children ( $p_{K-EA} = .005$ ); however, AA children were not significantly different from the other two groups. In addition, Korean children exhibited less sadness than EA children ( $p_{K-EA} < .001$ ) and AA children ( $p_{K-AA} = .009$ ), but EA and AA children did not differ in Sadness display (See Table 1).

### Cultural moderation of the association between teacher-rated social competence and child emotional expressivity

To examine the possibility that the associations between teachers' social competence ratings and children's emotionality differed across the cultural groups, we conducted 9 sets of hierarchical multiple regression analyses. We tested interactions between cultural group and the three emotional expressivity observational variables (Anger, Sadness, Happiness) in predicting the three teacher-rated social competence variables (Peer Acceptance, Prosocial Behavior, Antisocial Behavior). Hierarchical regression analyses were employed as follows: social competence was regressed on age or gender (see the above section on Preliminary analyses of teacher-rated social competence) in Step 1, centered observed emotional

expressivity variables and two dummy codes for cultural group (one for AAs and the other for Koreans, with EAs being the reference group) were added in Step 2, and interactions between cultural group and observed expressivity were added in Step 3. Results are displayed in Table 2.

**Peer acceptance.** The first model revealed that there was no main effect of Anger expression on Peer Acceptance. However, there was a significant interaction ( $\beta_{AA-EA} = -.28$ ,  $p = .019$ ) suggesting that the relationship between observed Anger and teacher rated Peer Acceptance were significantly different for EAs compared to AAs. To explore the interaction effect, post hoc regression analyses were run for each group separately. For EA and Korean children, there was no significant relationship between Anger and Peer Acceptance, whereas this relationship was significant and negative for AA children ( $\beta_{AA} = -.39$ ,  $p = .009$ ) (see Figure 1).

There was no main effect of Sadness on Peer Acceptance. Furthermore, there were no significant interactions to suggest that the relationships between Peer Acceptance and the Sadness composite were different across groups.

There was no main effect of Happiness on Peer Acceptance. However, there was one significant interaction term ( $\beta_{K-EA} = -.27$ ,  $p = .049$ ) that suggested that the relationships between Happiness and Peer Acceptance differed by group. However, post hoc regression analyses showed that the simple effects between the Happiness composite and Peer Acceptance were not significant for all three cultural groups (see Figure 1).

**Prosocial behavior.** When examining teacher rated Prosocial Behavior, there were no main effects of Anger. However, there was a significant interaction ( $\beta_{AA-EA} = -.26$ ,  $p = .024$ ) that suggested that the relationship between the Anger and Prosocial Behavior differed by group. Post hoc regression analyses revealed that there was a significant negative association between observed Anger and Prosocial Behavior for AAs ( $\beta_{AA} = -.29$ ,  $p = .048$ ), but not for EA or Korean children (see Figure 1).

There was no main effect of observed Sadness on teacher-rated Prosocial Behavior. There were also no significant interactions between cultural group and Sadness.

Finally, there was no main effect of Happiness on Prosocial Behavior, nor interactions between Happiness and cultural group membership on Prosocial Behavior.

**Table 2.** Children's emotional expressivity and ethnicity predicting teacher social competence measures.

Variable	Teacher-rated social competence											
	Peer acceptance				Prosocial behavior				Antisocial behavior			
	B	SE	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	B	SE	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	B	SE	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$
<b>PANEL A</b>												
Step 1: Covariate												
Gender	0.30	0.12	0.22*	0.05*	0.43	0.17	0.22*	0.11**				
Age					0.04	0.02	0.23**		-0.04	0.01	-0.24**	0.06**
Step 2: Main effects												
Asian American <sup>a</sup>	-0.22	0.15	-0.15	0.06†	-0.27	0.22	-0.13	0.02	-0.29	0.20	-0.14	0.18***
Korean <sup>b</sup>	-0.41	0.16	-0.28*		-0.01	0.23	-0.01		0.60	0.20	0.30**	
Anger	-0.04	0.02	-0.15		-0.02	0.03	-0.06		0.08	0.03	0.24**	
Step 3: Interactions												
Asian American <sup>a</sup> × Anger	-0.12	0.05	-0.28*	0.04†	-0.16	0.07	-0.26*	0.04†	0.06	0.06	0.10	0.01
Korean <sup>b</sup> × Anger	-0.07	0.08	-0.10		-0.04	0.11	-0.04		-0.01	0.10	-0.01	
<b>PANEL B</b>												
Step 1: Covariate												
Gender	0.30	0.12	0.22*	0.05*	0.43	0.17	0.22*	0.11**				
Age					0.04	0.02	0.23**		-0.04	0.01	-0.24**	0.06**
Step 2: Main effects												
Asian American <sup>a</sup>	-0.19	0.15	-0.13	0.05	-0.27	0.22	-0.13	0.02	-0.35	0.20	-0.17†	0.16***
Korean <sup>b</sup>	-0.39	0.16	-0.27*		-0.06	0.23	-0.03		0.60	0.21	0.30**	
Sadness	-0.03	0.03	-0.09		-0.04	0.04	-0.10		0.07	0.03	0.19*	
Step 3: Interactions												
Asian American <sup>a</sup> × Sadness	-0.04	0.06	-0.09	0.00	0.00	0.08	-0.01	0.00	0.12	0.07	0.21†	0.06**
Korean <sup>b</sup> × Sadness	-0.04	0.12	-0.05		0.10	0.17	0.09		0.41	0.15	0.36**	
<b>PANEL C</b>												
Step 1: Covariate												
Gender	0.31	0.12	0.22*	0.05*	0.45	0.17	0.23*	0.11**				
Age					0.04	0.02	0.24**		-0.04	0.01	-0.24**	0.06**
Step 2: Main effects												
Asian American <sup>a</sup>	-0.19	0.15	-0.13	0.04	-0.30	0.22	-0.14	0.02	-0.32	0.20	-0.16	0.12**
Korean <sup>b</sup>	-0.36	0.16	-0.25*		-0.01	0.23	-0.01		0.49	0.21	0.25*	
Happiness	-0.01	0.03	-0.04		0.00	0.04	-0.01		0.02	0.04	0.04	
Step 3: Interactions												
Asian American <sup>a</sup> × Happiness	-0.12	0.07	-0.27†	0.04†	-0.14	0.10	-0.20	0.02	0.07	0.09	0.11	0.04†
Korean <sup>b</sup> × Happiness	-0.15	0.07	-0.27*		-0.10	0.11	-0.13		0.22	0.10	0.29*	

Note. Each panel denotes a hierarchical regression model with a different observed emotional expressivity variable (Panel A = Anger, Panel B = Sadness, Panel C = Happiness).  $N = 127$ .

<sup>a</sup> Asian American = 1, European American = 0

<sup>b</sup> Korean = 1, European American = 0

†  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

**Antisocial behavior.** In the first model predicting teacher rated Antisocial Behavior, there was a main effect of observed Anger ( $\beta = .24$ ,  $p = .006$ ). However, there were no significant interactions between cultural group and Anger on Antisocial Behavior (see Figure 2).

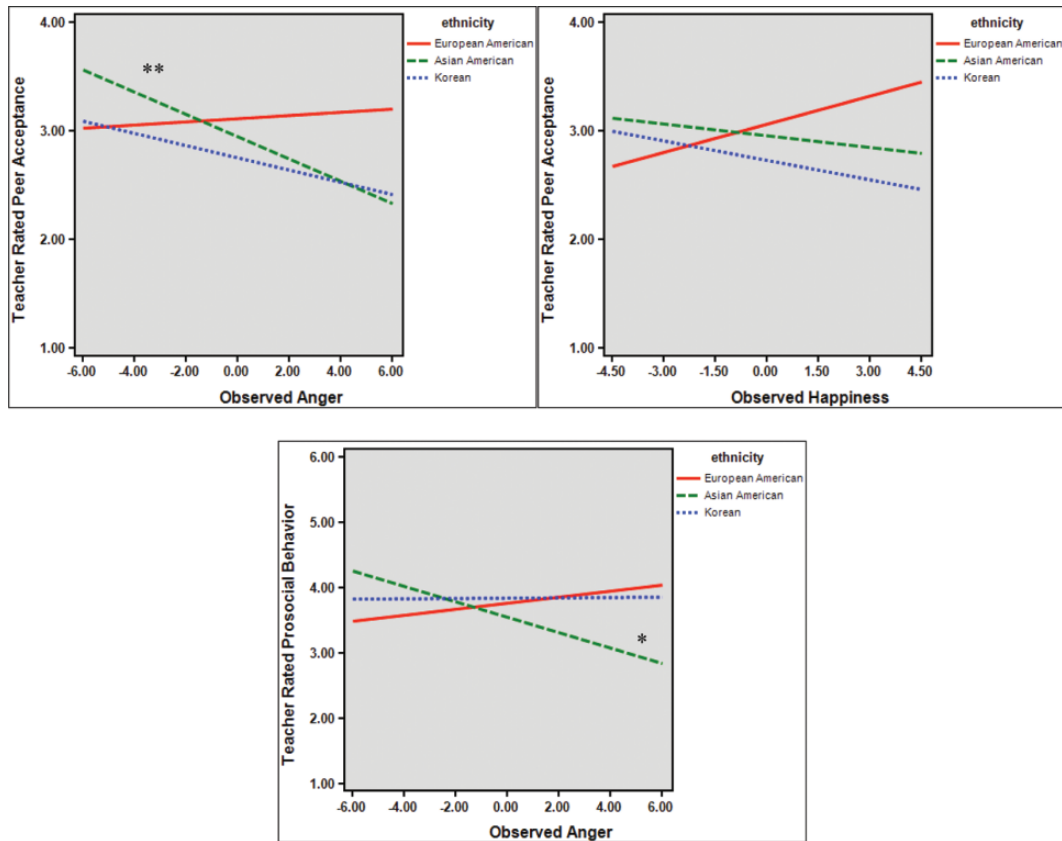
In the next model, there was a main effect of observed Sadness ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $p = .030$ ) on Antisocial Behavior. In addition, there was a significant interaction term ( $\beta_{K-EA} = .36$ ,  $p = .005$ ) that suggested that the relationship between Sadness and Antisocial Behavior differed by group. Post hoc regression analyses revealed that there was a positive link between observed Sadness and Antisocial Behavior for AAs ( $\beta_{AA} = .39$ ,  $p = .007$ ) and Koreans ( $\beta_K = .41$ ,  $p = .004$ ), but the association was not significant for EA children (see Figure 2).

There was no main effect of Happiness on teacher-rated Antisocial Behavior. However, results revealed a significant interaction between Happiness and Korean group membership in predicting Antisocial Behavior ( $\beta_{K-EA} = .29$ ,  $p = .025$ ). For EAs and AAs, there was no significant association between Happiness and

Antisocial Behavior, while there was an observed positive relationship for Korean children ( $\beta_K = .30$ ,  $p = .044$ ) (see Figure 2).

## Discussion

The findings from the current study suggest cultural differences in how teachers perceive and evaluate emotional expressivity in childhood, specifically, how teacher ratings of children's social competence on three dimensions (peer acceptance, prosocial behavior, antisocial behavior) are associated with objective assessments of children's expressivity. Across the 9 models tested, we found 5 instances wherein culture moderated the associations between children's emotion expressivity and teacher ratings of social competence. Contrasts between European American and Korean samples indicated that expressivity was associated with poorer evaluations of competence for Korean youngsters, but more positive evaluations for their European American counterparts. For example, sadness expression was strongly linked to teacher



**Figure 1.** Simple slopes of observed emotional expressivity regressed on teacher rated Peer Acceptance and Prosocial Behavior for European Americans, Asian Americans, and Koreans.

Note.  $N = 127$ . †  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

impressions of antisocial behavior for Koreans, but not for European American children.

Interestingly, this evidence of cultural moderation extended to children's displays of both negative and positive affect. For EA children, displays of high arousal positive affect and happiness when presented with a novel approach task were linked with teacher rated peer acceptance. This is consistent with some findings from primarily EA samples showing that displays of positive emotion are related to children's observed and reported social competence (Denham et al., 1990; McDowell & Parke, 2005; Sroufe et al., 1984). In contrast, Korean children's observed happiness was positively correlated with teacher rated antisocial behavior. These findings are consistent with theories suggesting that standards of social competence may emphasize self-control and emotion restraint in East Asian contexts. According to Tsai and colleagues (Tsai, Miao, et al., 2007), high arousal states are concordant with goals of interpersonal influence in Western contexts but contravene interpersonal goals of adjusting to others in East Asian contexts. In both instances, greater expressiveness, regardless of valence, was related to lower perceived social competence in Korean preschoolers but these associations were reversed or not significant for EAs.

Revealing cultural similarity, Korean, Asian American, and European American children's displays of angry affect were uniformly related to teacher evaluations of antisocial behavior. This highlights the overlap in social constructions of anger expression as disruptive to harmony and peer relations across contexts (Hubbard, 2001).

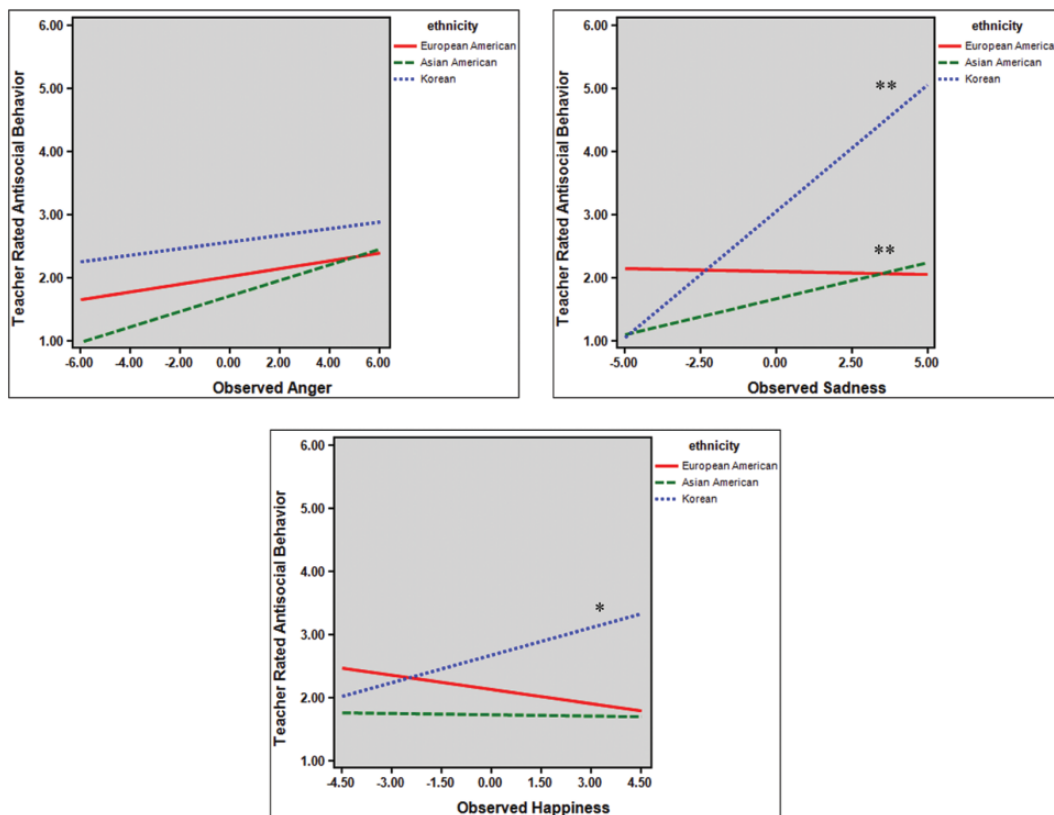
We also explored potential differences between social competence evaluations (i.e., peer acceptance, prosocial behavior,

antisocial behavior) of Asian American versus European American children as a function of emotional expressiveness. Observed differences in how expressivity is related to social competence evaluations in these groups might show that children of East Asian descent are held to different standards of emotionality based on teacher expectancies. However, similar patterns in associations across these groups might suggest that prevailing Western norms sanctioning and/or encouraging open expression of feelings applied evenly across groups. The findings indicated that emotionality displayed by AA children was viewed differently than EA children in some instances. Among EA children, anger display in response to an unfair distribution scenario was not related to ratings of peer acceptance and prosociality; however, AA children who displayed anger were rated as significantly less accepted by peers and less prosocial. One possible interpretation of this finding is that a violation of group-based stereotypes of AA children as deferent and cooperative results in different standards of conduct that penalizes AA children for anger expression relative to EA children. However, this remains speculative and requires further investigation using intergroup and social cognitive paradigms.

### Limitations and future directions

This study has a number of limitations that suggest future directions of research. First, the study used a cross-sectional and correlational





**Figure 2.** Simple slopes of observed emotional expressivity regressed on teacher rated Antisocial Behavior for European Americans, Asian Americans, and Koreans.

Note.  $N = 127$ . †  $p < .10$ ; \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

design. To clarify the links between teacher perceptions of social competence and child emotional expressivity, prospective studies are needed. Second, while this study benefited from observational measures of children's emotionality, social competence was only assessed by teacher report, which may, to some extent, reflect expectations shaped by cultural values. Korean children were rated by teachers as higher on antisocial behavior than European American preschoolers. This pattern is not consistent with East vs. West comparative studies that rely on naturalistic observation (e.g., Weisz, Chaiyasit, Weiss, & Eastman, 1995). It likely illustrates the problem of differing referent groups, an inherent problem in cross-cultural studies using informant reports (Heine & Norenzayan, 2006). However, for our purposes, the interpretation of mean differences is less important as we are focused on the within-group associations between children's observed emotionality and teachers' culturally-informed appraisals of social competence. Future research should assess the criterion validity of teacher ratings of social competence across cultures, with multiple criterion methods including naturalistic or laboratory observation.

Third, our measures of emotion expressivity emerged from structured emotion elicitation tasks that may not reflect spontaneous or naturalistic emotion expression. The tasks involved interactions with an adult experimenter, and it is unclear the extent to which expressiveness across these tasks would vary as a function of peer versus stranger versus caregiver interactions. Thus, gains in internal validity and experimenter control are balanced by concerns about the external validity of the emotion tasks. Fourth, given that the parents of these subjects are largely graduate students or

university professors, our university preschool sample may not be representative of the population. Similarly, due to the nature of the setting and recruitment limitations, we grouped together US children and teachers who vary in cultural origin. Furthermore, levels of individualism/collectivism were not measured in children or teachers. Indeed, East Asians in educated countries may be collectivistic in some domains, such as family and community, but individualistic in the domains of education and work (Kim, Triandis, Kagitçibasi, Choi, & Yoon, 1994). Therefore, future research should replicate these findings with larger, more diverse samples and systematically assess the personality (e.g., individualism/collectivism), backgrounds (e.g., acculturation), and values (e.g., about emotional expression), of the participating young children and their teachers. Perhaps it would be useful to conduct a parallel analysis by examining teacher ratings of other aspects of behavior that may or may not moderate by cultural background in a similar fashion. It would also be interesting to include an observational index of social competence as well as peer assessments in addition to the teacher assessments.

A common critique of cross-cultural psychological research is the focus on description of national differences, upon which inferences are made concerning the meaning and cultural origins of observed differences (Heine & Norenzayan, 2006). Previous studies have interpreted mean differences in emotional expressivity as evidence of different prevailing cultural values and socialization practices that shape display rules. However, this inference is subject to multiple criticisms. National and ethnic groups may differ on heritage cultural traditions, but they also differ along a variety of

other ecological and structural dimensions (e.g., physical environments, economic conditions, income inequality) that may also explain observed differences (Heine & Norenzayan, 2006). Group differences in temperamental constitution and genetic contributions to arousability represent a particularly viable, alternative interpretation of group differences in affect display (Matsumoto, 2006). As such, this study contributes uniquely to the literature by examining the within-context implications of commonly observed differences in affect display of adult socialization agents (i.e., preschool teachers) in three cultural groups. Specifically, our study highlights the importance of examining the cultural context in which adult perceptions occur when exploring its associations with children's socio-emotional development. Future research should examine the functional significance of differences in teacher rated social competence and observed affect in children from diverse family backgrounds.

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