

# 한국 취학 전 아동의 바람직한 사회적 행동에 관한 연구

Cultural Influences on Social Behaviors : A Study on Desirable Social Behaviors  
for Korean Preschool Children

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## ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study was to examine what social behaviors are valued within Korean culture for children of preschool age. The sample consisted of 40 mothers of preschool children and 40 preschool teachers. Two instruments were used : an open-ended interview and the Preschool Behavior Q-sort(Baumrind, 1968). Korean mothers and preschool teachers emphasized social behaviors based on cultural values. However, social behaviors that Korean mothers and preschool teachers emphasized were not, for the most part, the expected behaviors about respect for authority or obedience. Rather, they valued considerateness, politeness, mastery behaviors that represent another aspect of traditional values.

**Key Words** : 사회적 행동(social behaviors), 문화차(Cultural differences), 취학전 아동(preschool children).

## I . INTRODUCTION

### 1. Aims and Significance

The purpose of this study was to examine what social behaviors are valued within Korean culture for preschool-aged children, and, specifically, to document the extent to which modern Korean parents and preschool teachers continue to emphasize social behaviors that are consistent

with traditional Korean values.

Studies by Baumrind(1967, 1971) and Baumrind and Black(1967) focused on how parenting style differences influence competent behaviors of preschool-aged children. The samples in these studies were from a middle class white population in the U.S. In her studies, Baumrind found that preschool children of authoritative parents(e.g., high on warmth and high on control) were consistently more socially responsible and independent

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than were children of either authoritarian(e.g., high on control and low on warmth) or permissive (e.g., high on warmth and low on control) parents. Although these studies focused on parenting styles, we can infer what kind of social behavior middle class American parents value and encourage their children to learn by carefully reviewing the Preschool Behavior Q-sort(Baumrind, 1968) items that were used to assess children's behaviors.

However, societies with different cultural values may define different social behaviors as valued, just as Baumrind's parenting styles do not apply for every ethnic group. In general, research examining Asian families has shown that the effect of authoritative parenting is not predictive of school success. Although Asian-American students have the highest school performances, their parenting styles are not related to the authoritative parenting style(Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). Moreover, children with controlling and more authoritarian-type parents do well socially(Chung, 1994) and academically(Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992).

Researchers have tried to explain parenting style differences as a function of cultural group membership, just as Ogbu(1981) proposed a cultural-ecological model to interpret the mechanisms by which child rearing transmits both socioeconomic and cultural differences. Although studies of Western families have shown that children perceive parental control to be related to parental hostility and rejection(Saavedra, 1980), parental control is closely associated with perceived warmth and acceptance by Chinese adolescents(Lau & Cheung, 1987) and by Korean adolescents

(Rohner & Pettengill, 1985). In Asian cultures, including Korea, the notion of control not only has very positive connotations that are shaped by tradition it is also viewed as the responsibility of parents. Chinese researchers(e.g., Chao, 1994, 1996; Chen, 1997) argue that scoring high on authoritarianism and control has entirely different implications for Chinese than for European-Americans due to their different cultural systems. According to Chao(1994), for the Chinese, the term "child training" has been used synonymously with child rearing and Chinese parental control involves this notion of training.

Like the perception of parenting styles, children's social behavior should also be viewed as culturally relative. The same behavior may be evaluated differently as a function of the cultural context in which it occurs.

Many studies have examined the importance of social behaviors of young children. Generally, studies about social behaviors using European-American samples have shown consistent results. For example, it has been reported that social skill deficits in early childhood have negative implications for children's development and well being(Asher & Parker, 1989) and are related to maladjustment later in life(Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989). Aggression and social withdrawal are two forms of this problematic personal and social adjustment(Moskowitz, Schwartzman, & Ledingham, 1985; Parker & Asher, 1987). However, studies about other ethnic groups, especially studies about Korean people are quite rare. In addition, studies that have been done with children of Asian descent in the U.S. have

focused primarily on the impact of parenting styles on children's school success(e.g., Chao, 1996; Dornbusch et al., 1987). Consequently, studies about social behaviors of Asian, let alone Korean, preschool-aged children's social behaviors, hardly exist.

In the small body of social behavior research that does exist, researchers have not adequately considered the influence of culture on social behaviors. Social skills could be defined as "socially acceptable learned behaviors, which enable a person to interact effectively with others and avoid socially unacceptable responses" (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). According to this social validity definition, social skills are those behaviors that, within a given situation, predict important social outcomes for children(Gresham, 1986). However, studies that do exist rarely refer to a definition of desirable social behavior that reflects Korean cultural values.

Thus, it is meaningful to find out what constitutes socially desirable behavior for Korean preschool-aged children and to do so in a way that reflects Korean cultural values. It is especially important to discover the extent to which modern Korean parents continue to emphasize social behaviors that are consistent with traditional values.

The research questions for this study are as follow :

1. What social behaviors are valued within Korean culture for preschool-aged children?
2. Do Korean mothers and preschool teachers emphasize different behaviors according to the gender of children?

## II . METHODS

### 1. Sample

Forty Korean mothers with preschool-aged children and forty Korean preschool teachers were recruited from eight schools. Schools were selected from parts of Seoul, Korea where most residents are considered middle class based on their living expenses and incomes.

The children's ages ranged from 3 years to 5 years(mean=4.4 years), mothers' ages ranged from 29 years to 43 years(mean=34.2 years). The majority of parents were highly educated. Seventy-five percent of mothers and ninety percent of fathers had earned at least a bachelor's degree.

### 2. Instruments

#### 1) Interview

The purpose of this interview was to generate participants' spontaneous opinions about preschool-aged children's desirable social behaviors. It was important to hold the interview before mothers and teachers saw the items in the Preschool Behavior Q-sort(Baumrind, 1968), so that their interview responses were not influenced by the items of the Preschool Behavior Q-sort.

Specific questions were a) What social behaviors do you think an ideal preschool-aged child definitely needs to have? b) What social behaviors do you think an ideal preschool-aged child definitely should not have? c) What social behaviors do you think an ideal preschool-aged

girl needs to have? d) Is there anything she definitely should not do? e) What social behaviors do you think an ideal preschool-aged boy needs to have? f) Is there anything he definitely should not do? These same interview questions were used for both the mothers' and the teachers' interviews but gender specific questions(questions c-f) were presented in counterbalanced order.

### 2) Preschool Behavior Q-sort

The Preschool Behavior Q-sort(Baumrind, 1968) has frequently been used to assess preschooler's social behaviors(e.g., Baumrind, 1967, 1971; Baumrind & Block, 1967; Chung, 1994; Denham & Burger, 1991; MacDonald & Parke, 1984) and is composed of a 72-item Q-set .

Evidence of the validity of the Preschool Behavior Q-sort has been reported by Waters, Wippman, and Sroufe(1979). In addition, Denham and Burger(1991) reported test-retest reliability of the whole set of items averaging .79 over a 9-month period.

Q-sort methodology can be used to describe either an abstract construct or an individual subject. In the present study, Q-sort methodology was used to describe an ideal individual. This criterion sorting provides an effective way of assessing how desirable Korean mothers and teachers consider specific social behaviors.

### 3) Translation

For this study, the Preschool Behavior Q-sort was translated into Korean. To ensure content comparability, a back-translation procedure was used.

## III. RESULTS

### 1. Mothers' interviews

"Get along with" category(N=21) was the most frequent response to the interview question about desirable social behavior. For example, mothers provided descriptions such as "Appropriate interaction with peers," and "Actively involved in making friends." The "Polite" category(N=15) was the second most frequent answer. Social behaviors such as "Good manners, courtesy, politeness, bowing" and "Responses appropriate when adults ask questions" were included in this category. Considerate behaviors(N=12) such as considering other people, helping other people, and trying not to hurt/be inconvenient for other people were also fairly frequent answers. In addition, some mothers mentioned "Obedience" (N=4) and "Respect" category(N=4), all values that are emphasized by Confucianism.

Answers to the interview question about undesirable social behaviors most frequently included the following : "Greed" (N=22) and "Aggressive behaviors including physical and verbal aggression, fighting, annoying friends" (N=12). Quite a few mothers were concerned about "Bad manners." For example, they provided descriptions of bad manners such as "A child is rude, ill-mannered, not polite" (N=2), "A child doesn't bow or say things appropriately" (N=1), "A child does not apologize when he/she acts wrongly or inappropriately" (N=1), and "A child does not express thanks/appreciation when he/she thinks it is needed" (N=1).

Mothers had much less to say about the four gender-related questions. Over thirty mothers said to the author that they thought that there were no specific differences between boys and girls for desirable or undesirable social behaviors for ideal preschoolers.

## 2. Teachers' interviews

Like mothers, teachers focused on considerate and polite behaviors. Answers about the "Polite" category(N=18) were the most frequent, followed by the "Considerate" category(N=14). However, other responses such as "Self-control" category (N=13), and "Concedes" (N=11) were also frequent responses to the question about desirable social behaviors. In the "Self-control" category, teachers described such behaviors as expressing his/her opinion accurately without crying, controlling his/her desire, and solving problems by controlling his/her behavior. Generally, teachers' answers were more focused on interpersonal relationships than mothers and emphasized more how to get along with other people. Many behaviors that teachers mentioned in the interview were categorized as politeness, considerateness, empathy, and self-control.

Twenty-six teachers out of 40 selected "Aggressive behaviors including physical and verbal aggression, hits other friends, throws toys or other stuff, uses abusive language, follows violent scenes on TV" as undesirable social behaviors for Korean preschoolers. "Not considerate" category(N=10) and "Lack of self-control" category(N=9) were also frequent answers.

Like mothers, when asked about gender-specific questions, thirty-three teachers claimed that there were no specific differences between boys and girls with respect to desirable or undesirable social behaviors.

## 3. The Preschool Behavior Q-sort

Mean scores for each item placement were calculated separately for mothers and preschool teachers. A correlational analysis was then conducted to examine the association between mothers' and teachers' sorting of the Preschool Behavior Q-sort. A statistically significant correlation was found between mothers' and teachers' mean scores( $r=.98$ ,  $p<.001$ ), showing that mothers and teachers had very similar ideas about how the items should be ranked.

Mothers and teachers unanimously ranked these two items, "Has strong sense of self as a positive force" and "Gives his or her best to work and play" first and second as desirable social behaviors for Korean preschoolers. Three items, "Excludes other children from pair or group play", "Bullies other children", and "Insulting", were selected by mothers and teachers as the most undesirable social behaviors for Korean preschoolers, although placements of these items by mothers and preschool teachers were slightly different.

Surprisingly, items such as "Obedient", "Concerns about adult disapproval", and "Does not question adult authority" received only middle place rankings. High rankings had been expected because these items reflect traditional Confucian thinking about respect for authority.

Instead, concern about mastery or doing one's best, and the ability to work by oneself appeared to be most highly valued by Korean middle class mothers and preschool teachers.

## IV. DISCUSSION

### 1. Implications of the major findings

This study was designed to discover which social behaviors are valued by Korean mothers and preschool teachers for preschool-aged children and whether social behaviors that are consistent with traditional values are still emphasized. Results showed that social behaviors that Korean mothers and preschool teachers emphasize were not, for the most part, the expected behaviors about respect or obedience. Rather, they valued considerate and polite behaviors that represent another aspect of traditional values. In addition, the results of the Preschool Behavior Q-sort did not, as expected, show traditional thinking about respect for authority or obedience. The second research question regarding gender differences was not supported.

In the interviews, only a few Korean mothers and preschool teachers mentioned the obedient behaviors as had been expected based on prior research on Asian or Asian-American children. Korean mothers and preschool teachers did, however, emphasize other traditional Korean values such as behaving considerately and politely toward other people, showing good manners, bowing, and using respectful language towards

elderly people. The reason that these behaviors have not been mentioned much in the research may be the fact that Confucian ideas about obedience and respect for authority had long been used to support political ideology in Korean society. For example, respectful and obedient behaviors between the sovereign and subject were considered the most important relationships. However, Confucian writings also highly emphasize considerate, polite and self-controlled behaviors. According to the Confucian philosophy as reviewed by Lin(1990), the key characteristics of the ideal person are sincerity, righteousness, filial obligation, and reciprocal respect in relationships with others. To become an ideal person, a person bears a responsibility constantly : a) to sharpen sensations - visual and auditory - in order to examine people and events clearly, b) to behave in a gentle and respectful manner, c) to speak sincerely and with care, d) to ask others' advice on matters about which he or she has doubts, e) to control his or her temper when angry and consider carefully the likely results of different sorts of reactions when angry, and f) when seeing an opportunity for personal gain, to think primarily about what would constitute righteous behavior in such a situation.

A belief in gender equality, however, does not mean that Korean mothers and preschool teachers treat boys and girls the same. Since interview questions in the present study were about ideal preschoolers, mothers and teachers might have tried to express their ideal principles rather than actual behaviors that unconsciously influence the socialization process. This may be especially

plausible because the participants in the present study consisted of mothers from middle class and highly educated families and preschool teachers who served mainly middle class families. These middle class people have had more opportunity than working class people to be influenced by westernized education.

The mean placements of the Preschool Behavior Q-sort items by Korean mothers and preschool teachers did not show traditional Korean thinking about respect for authority and obedience. Items such as “Obedient”, “Concerns about adult disapproval”, and “Does not question adult authority” received only middle place rankings. In addition, Korean mothers and preschool teachers expressed concern about mastery or doing one’s best, and the ability to work by oneself. For example, “Has strong sense of self as a positive force”, “Self-starting and self-propelled”, “Stretches to meet the situation when much is demanded of him or her” and “Willing to pursue tasks alone” were highly ranked.

However the interviews clearly elicited statements about behaviors which were not included in the Preschool Behavior Q-sort but which explicitly reflect traditional values such as behaving considerately towards other people, showing good manners, or politeness. In addition “Greed” was frequently mentioned as an undesirable behavior in the interviews. “Greed” behaviors included a child’s insistence on what he/she wants, impossible/unreasonable demands, and excessive possessiveness. These behaviors were also not included in the Preschool Behavior Q-sort. If items related to polite or considerate

behavior and “Greed” behaviors, which were mentioned frequently in the interviews, were to be included in the Preschool Behavior Q-sort, the ranking order of items might be different.

Taken together, behaviors that are not included in the Preschool Behavior Q-sort but mentioned frequently in the interviews and items in the Preschool Behavior Q-sort such as mastery behaviors which are more highly emphasized by Korean mothers and preschool teachers suggest that there would be differences between the social behaviors seen as desirable in Korean culture and the behaviors valued by European-American culture.

## 2. Limitation and suggestions for the future research

The sample of this study was limited to highly educated middle-class families and two-parent families who volunteered to participate. Thus, within Korean culture, studying a different socioeconomic group may produce different results. Because of this limited sampling, generalizations from this study about social behaviors of Korean preschool-aged children should be drawn carefully. Parental income, educational and occupational level may affect the behaviors that are regarded as most desirable for preschool-aged children. A more comprehensive study including various SES levels and family forms might yield different results.

Despite these limitations, the present study contributes to our understanding that valued social behavior differs by culture and that researchers should consider the influence of culture on social

behaviors. Specifically, the present study documented which social behaviors of Korean preschoolers are valued by Korean mothers and preschool teachers. Frequent themes in the Korean interviews such as considerateness and politeness, and the Q-sort items that received high ranking on the Preschool Behavior Q-sort such as mastery behaviors distinguish Korean mothers' and preschool teachers' values from those expressed in the studies of Baumrind(1967, 1971) and Waters, Noyes, Voughn, & Rick(1985).

Future researchers need to undertake further investigations of the Preschool Behavior Q-sort in Korea. Since participants in the present study consisted of middle class mothers and preschool teachers mainly serving middle class families, future researchers should include various SES groups such as working class mothers and preschool teachers serving working class families. Second, the sample of present study was not large enough to conduct a factor analysis of the Q-sort items. Based on the reliability analysis, it is likely that different factor structures might emerge in Korean samples. Thus, future researchers should investigate factor structures of the Preschool Behavior Q-sort for ideal Korean preschoolers, using a large number of raters. Third, future researchers could consider creating additional Q-sort items that emerged from the interviews(such as considerateness and politeness) and might yield more appropriate measurements for Korean studies. Furthermore, a better designed comparison study between Korea and the U.S. is suggested for future researchers. The interview questions posed to Korean mothers and preschool

teachers should be also asked of the U.S. mothers and preschool teachers. It might be possible that politeness and considerateness, which were mentioned frequently in the Korean interviews, could also have emerged as socially desirable for preschool-aged children in American interviews.

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