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What to Do When Someone Expresses a Misconception? A Cross-Cultural Examination of Children's White Lie-Telling Behaviour

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Abstract

This study explored white lie-telling behaviour in 3- to 6-year-old children from three cultural groups: Anglo Canadian (n = 49), Chinese Canadian (n = 45), and Eastern-European Canadian (n = 11). In a video-conferencing setup, a female researcher expressed a misconception about her artwork and asked participants for their opinion, in the presence versus absence of a stated social consequence (i.e., two conditions). Parental measures of collectivism and parenting styles were also collected. The results indicated that the likelihood of children telling a white lie (versus challenging the researcher's misconception) did not differ significantly across cultural groups or conditions and was not predicted by parental collectivism, authoritativeness, or authoritarianism. However, the effect of authoritativeness on white lie telling did approach significance. These findings are discussed in relation to possible factors that might have accounted for the lack of cultural differences.