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The Perceived Social Contexts of Adolescents' Misconduct: A Comparative Study of Youths in Three Cultures

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This cross-cultural, ecologically framed study (Bronfenbrenner, 1989) examined relations between adolescents' involvement in misconduct and their perceptions of others' behavior and attitudes toward youths' misconduct (i.e., family members, close friends, school peers, and neighborhood adults). Participants were 16- to 17-year-olds in the Los Angeles area ($n = 201$), Seoul, Korea ($n = 391$), and Tianjin, China ($n = 502$). As anticipated, U.S. youths engaged in more misconduct than Korean and Chinese youths, and Koreans exceeded Chinese. In multivariate analyses, perceived behavior and sanctions of close friends were the strongest predictors of misconduct across all 3 cultural settings. An independent effect of school peers on misconduct was de-

tected only among Chinese youths, whereas a unique effect of neighborhood adults was found only among U.S. adolescents. The absence of perceived neighborhood effects for Korean and Chinese youths was due primarily to shared variance between perceived behavior of neighbors and family members. Results of this study suggest that living in settings with closer links to the global economy is associated with lax conduct and the perception of more lenient attitudes toward adolescent misbehavior.

The family is the major starting point for the socialization and development of children. Sooner in some societies, and later in others, peers and nonkin adults in the community acquire meaningful roles in the lives of children. Because of their growing capacities for functioning in settings outside the home (often in the absence of family members) and the increasing range of physical mobility children are permitted as they grow older, adolescents interact with and are influenced by a wide array of others. In industrialized countries such as the United States and Korea, for example, and even in the major rapidly industrializing countries such as China, it is commonplace for adolescents to spend substantial time with peers and to be familiar with people and activities in the larger neighborhood. In the neighborhood venue, individuals who enter the adolescent's social world may diverge behaviorally and attitudinally from family members and peers.

An abundant literature attests to the importance of the behavior and attitudes of family members, peers, and others in adolescents' misconduct, and also to the role of adolescents' perceptions of the behavior and attitudes of others in influencing their conduct. For example, the current level of sexual behavior of early adolescents has been shown to be significantly related to their next-older sibling's level of sexual activity 2 years earlier (Rodgers & Rowe, 1988); and adolescents whose parents or peers engage in more alcohol and drug use acknowledged higher rates of substance use themselves (Coombs, Paulson, & Richardson, 1991; Jessor, 1992). Researchers also have shown that perceptions of others' behavior are associated with adolescents' own level of involvement in misconduct (Greenberger, Chen, & Beam, 1998). Finally, studies that examined indexes based on larger social aggregations such as schools, neighborhoods, and communities have revealed effects on adolescents' academic achievement and rates of socially deviant or criminal activity (Natriello & McDill, 1986; Reiss, 1995; Schwab-Stone et al., 1999; Wilson & Kelling, 1982).

Cross-cultural research on adolescent problem behavior suggests that European and American children and adolescents are more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviors such as physical aggression, defiance, and antisocial acts than are their African and Asian peers (Achenbach,

Hensley, Phares, & Grayson, 1990; Achenbach, Verhulst, Baron, & Akkerhuis, 1987; Lambert, Weisz, & Knight, 1989; Weine, Phillips, & Achenbach, 1995). These behavioral differences typically have been interpreted in terms of differences in cultural values or syndromes. Thus, cultures that are higher in "individualism" are thought to be more conducive to the overt expression of deviance than cultures that are more "collectivist"—that is, cultures in which the interdependence of selves tends to encourage suppression of behavior that is socially disapproved. It is possible, however, that cultural differences in the level of adolescent misconduct do not emerge until middle adolescence—at least among youths of Chinese versus European ancestry. Two sets of investigators failed to find differences in rates of problem behavior of U.S. and Chinese children, early adolescents, or both (Chen, Greenberger, Lester, Dong, & Guo, 1998; Weine et al., 1995); whereas other investigators found that middle adolescents of European ancestry in Australia and the United States reported more misconduct than did their peers of Chinese ancestry in these two settings or in Hong Kong. Chen et al. (1998) suggested that differences in misconduct might emerge by middle adolescence, in response to cultural differences in the extent of parental autonomy-granting (Feldman & Rosenthal, 1990) and peers' influence on one another.

A long line of research in the United States has illuminated the family and peer correlates of misconduct (see, e.g., Jessor, 1992). In contrast, cross-cultural research on adolescent misconduct has tended to focus somewhat disproportionately on family factors (e.g., Chen et al., 1998; Feldman, Rosenthal, Monte-Reynaud, Leung, & Lau, 1991). In cultural settings that differ in their emphasis on individualistic versus collectivist values, however, the potential sources of social influence extend beyond that of family members and friends. In some cultures, the behavior and attitudes of larger social collectives (e.g., schoolmates, even though they may not be "friends," neighbors, and coworkers) also may be influential. We know of no cross-cultural studies that simultaneously assess multiple sources of social influence on adolescent misconduct.

In this study, we examined the frequency of self-reported misconduct among middle adolescents (ages 16 to 17) in the United States, China, and Korea and explored the associations between misconduct and adolescents' perceptions of the behavior and attitudes of family members, close friends, school peers, and neighborhood adults. We focused on neighborhood adults (rather than neighborhood peers) because the former may play an important role both as behavioral models and sources of social control (Reiss, 1995), and because adolescents' perceptions of neighborhood peers seem likely to overlap with their reports about their close friends and school peers. We included these measures from different social contexts

because of their theoretical importance in ecological models of adolescent development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

Comparison of adolescents in the three sites from which we obtained samples is of interest because of similarities as well as differences among and between them. The three countries currently are linked by economic and political interests, and by immigration from the two Asian countries to the United States; China and Korea are linked additionally by a long political history and shared philosophical (religious) perspectives. Despite these connections, the three countries differ considerably with respect to the social organization of, and larger societal influences on, adolescents' lives. For example, the United States, Korea, and China (and the cities in each country from which we drew our sample) differ, in declining order, in the degree to which they have experienced industrialization, had contact with the capitalist nations, and now participate in the global economy. These factors are likely to have implications for young people's emerging values and social relationships, as we suggest later.

Our hypotheses were as follows:

1. Middle adolescents' self-reported involvement in problem behaviors will differ across the three samples. Specifically, U.S. middle adolescents will engage in more misconduct than will either of their Asian counterparts, and Korean adolescents will exceed Chinese in their involvement in socially disapproved behavior. These predictions are based on a number of considerations. Globalization (Kearney, 1995) refers to the permeation of once-local communities or "cultures" by processes such as migration, tourism, commerce, and communications. The interpenetration of communities and cultures has important consequences, including a greater variety in the images of behavior, goods and products, and lifestyles to which youths are exposed. These factors, along with the existence of more diverse norms and values within a globalized community, are likely to increase the instigations to adolescent misconduct; thus, our expectation of higher levels of problem behavior among U.S. than Korean or Chinese youths. However, Korean youths, certainly those residing in Seoul, are living in a society that has undergone and continues to experience substantial economic, political, and social change. American clothes, music, and movies are part of the world of adolescents in Korea's major city and expose youths to values, behaviors, and styles of relating to others that are discrepant from cultural traditions. In fact, appreciable intergenerational conflict, especially regarding familial obligations and expectations, has been widely reported (Whang, 1997). In contrast, Chinese adolescents live in a society that, although changing, still adheres substantially to collectivist values and emphasizes the individual's obligation to uphold traditional ways and behave in a

manner that reflects well on the family (Bond, 1996). Although Tianjin is a port city with increasing links to the Western world, it is considerably behind Seoul in the degree to which global processes have penetrated the culture. Thus, we predicted higher levels of misconduct among adolescents in Seoul than in Tianjin.

2. For analogous reasons, U.S. youths will perceive the behavior of family members, close friends, school peers, and neighborhood adults to be more deviant or potentially problematic than will Korean and Chinese youths. We expected Koreans' perceptions of the behavior and attitudes of others to fall midway between those of U.S. and Chinese youths.

3. The perceived *behavior of family members* will be significantly and positively associated with adolescents' behavior (i.e., misconduct) in all three cultural settings. We had no basis for making any predictions about possible between-group (country) differences in the extent to which family members' and adolescents' behavior would be associated. We know of no cross-cultural studies that have examined the intergenerational transmission of deviant or potentially problematic behavior or adolescents' modeling of family members' involvement in such behavior.

4. The perceived *attitudes of family members* toward adolescent misconduct will be more strongly associated with the behavior of adolescents in China and Korea than that of adolescents in the United States. This hypothesis rests on the assumption that a stronger sense of obligation to meet family expectations, and higher value-consensus among the adult generation, prevail in the two Asian countries than in the United States.

5. Perceptions of *close friends' behavior* and *attitudes toward misconduct* (lenient vs. disapproving) will be more strongly associated with the level of U.S. adolescents' misconduct than that of Chinese or Korean youths. (In all cases, perceptions of greater peer involvement in misconduct and weaker sanctions against one's own misconduct should be associated with a higher level of respondents' problem behavior.) This hypothesis is based on studies that indicate that U.S. youths spend significantly more time with peers than do their Chinese and Korean counterparts (Chen et al., 1998; Fuligni & Stevenson, 1995), and on findings of Chen et al. (1998), which showed that greater time involvement with peers, typical of U.S. youths, increases friends' potential to influence each others' behavior. We made no prediction about differences in the relative effects of friends' misconduct and attitudes on the behavior of Chinese versus Korean youths.

6. Perceptions of the behavior of adolescents' *school peers* (not necessarily "friends" but nonetheless part of their daily social environment) will be more strongly associated with the level of misconduct of Chinese and Korean youths than U.S. youths. This hypothesis is based on the notion that a stronger collectivist orientation prevails in the two Asian nations than in

the United States, and that for American youths, the existence of close friendship relationships, small cliques, and other groupings based on common reputation or interests may fragment or take the place of the influence of peers in general (Brown, 1990).

7. With respect to the cross-cultural relations between perceptions of neighborhood adults' behavior and adolescents' misconduct, we advanced no *a priori* hypotheses. On the one hand, neighborhood adults' behavior might be more strongly associated with U.S. youths' than Asian youths' misconduct because of various factors that have weakened the authority of the American family (e.g., marital disruption, high geographic mobility) and allowed youths greater contact with nonfamilial adults (e.g., widespread youth employment; Fuligni & Stevenson, 1995; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). Alternatively, the Asian youths in this study might be more responsive to the norms of neighborhood adults because of concerns about how their behavior might damage the family's reputation in the community.

METHOD

Participants

All participants in this study were 11th graders who attended public high schools in middle- or working-class neighborhoods. Schools were selected from three coastal cities that vary in their current stage of industrial development and extent of global contacts. The 201 American youths in our study sample came from a school in the greater Los Angeles area—a metropolitan area with a high degree of industrial and postindustrial development, much foreign commerce and tourism, and a culturally diverse population. The 391 Korean youths were enrolled in five schools in Seoul, one of the most industrialized cities in Asia, comparable in this respect and in regard to its linkages with other countries in the world to Hong Kong and the major cities in Japan. The 502 Chinese youths came from four schools in Tianjin, a more recently industrializing port city, that, along with Beijing and Shanghai, is one of three cities under the direct jurisdiction of the Chinese national government. Of these three mainland Chinese cities, Tianjin has the lowest per capita income and the fewest college graduates (State Statistical Bureau, People's Republic of China, 1998). Among the three cities from which we sampled adolescents for this study, Tianjin clearly has had the least exposure to other cultural systems, foreign visitors, and the ideas and products of the Western world.

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the three samples. Chinese youths were 1 year older, on average, than their American

TABLE 1
Sample Characteristics

	<i>U.S.^a</i>	<i>Korea^b</i>	<i>China^c</i>
Sex (%)			
Male	46.5	50.9	51.6
Female	53.5	48.8	48.4
Age			
M	16.6	16.4	17.6
SD	.57	.55	.60
Marital status of parents (%)			
Married	57.7	88.2	93.6
Divorced or separated	29.4	4.3	3.4
Widowed	7.5	5.9	2.6
Never married	5.5	0.8	0.2
Adolescent co-resides with (%)			
Both biological parents	56.2	91.0	87.7
Mother or father only	21.9	5.9	6.0
Mother and stepfather	14.4	1.0	0.2
Father and stepmother	5.5	0.3	0.2
Neither parent	5.0	1.8	4.8
Father's education (%)			
Junior high school or less	8.0	8.2	39.8
Some high school or graduate	33.0	31.6	18.1
Vocational training or 2-year college	32.4	3.7	30.1
B.A. or B.S.	20.7	39.5	11.5
M.A. or higher degree	5.9	17.1	0.4
Mother's education (%)			
Junior high school or less	8.4	17.7	52.5
Some high school or graduate	37.9	21.4	48.8
Vocational training or 2-year college	33.2	2.3	18.5
B.A. or B.S.	16.8	28.8	7.3
M.A. or higher degree	3.7	2.3	0.2
Ethnicity (%)			
Caucasian or European American	52.7	—	—
Latino American	16.4	—	—
Asian or Pacific Island	11.5	—	—
African American	10.9	—	—
Korean	—	100.0	—
Han	—	—	94.4
Other	8.5	—	5.6

^aN = 201. ^bN = 391. ^cN = 502.

counterparts because they begin formal schooling a year later. As would be expected, substantially more Asian than U.S. adolescents were living with their still-married biological parents. The three groups differed significantly with respect to level of parental education, $F(2, 1050) = 101.09$ for fathers; $F(2, 1067) = 69.33$ for mothers, both $p < .001$. As expected, in view of cultural differences in the availability of education to the parent generation, adolescents in the Chinese sample had parents with far less education than those in the Korean and U.S. samples. Scheffé contrasts between Chinese fathers and mothers and their counterparts in the U.S. and Korean samples all were significant; as well, Korean fathers in the sample had more education than U.S. fathers (all contrasts significant at $p < .05$). About 53% of the U.S. sample were of European background; about 16% were Latinos; approximately 11% each were of Asian or Pacific Islander origins; and 9% classified themselves as "other" or "mixed." Approximately 94% of the Chinese were of Han ancestry. Of the Korean sample, 100% were ethnic Koreans.

Procedure

All data were collected from adolescent respondents by means of anonymous, self-report questionnaires administered during a classroom period. In the United States, active consent was obtained from both adolescents and their parents through signed permission letters; of the 300 enrolled 11th graders, 83% were present on the day of testing, and 201 (83% of those present, 67% of all enrolled 11th graders) obtained the necessary consent forms and subsequently completed the survey. In China and Korea, parental permission was vested in the school, and 95% of students completed usable surveys.

Instrument development for this cross-cultural study involved several steps. The authors, whose cultural backgrounds correspond with each group examined, collaborated extensively in the operationalization of concepts and construction of measures—in some cases, drawing on existing measures. Additionally, teachers, graduate students, and undergraduate college students provided input to questionnaire items. A version of the survey instrument was first written in English, with which all authors had either proficiency or substantial familiarity. The bilingual researchers involved in the study then translated the survey instrument into their native language, which was reviewed by other native language speakers who were proficient in English. Adjustments in items were made when needed. In view of cultural differences in response style (Chen, Lee, & Stevenson, 1995), we anchored response scales, where possible, with terms that were

relatively unambiguous (e.g., Did adolescents engage in a behavior "once" or "several times" during the past year? Would their friends, if aware of the adolescent's conduct, "say nothing" or "express disapproval?").

Measures

Adolescents' Problem Behaviors were assessed by means of a 61-item scale similar to those used in research by others (Feldman et al., 1991; Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991). Only those items were included for which there was "opportunity" across cultures (thus, automobile-related misconduct was excluded, because Chinese youths have virtually no access to cars) and about which all authors agreed that the behavior would, or could, potentially, constitute misconduct in their respective cultural settings. The scale included 9 risk-taking items (e.g., did something or went somewhere dangerous just for the excitement); 5 items about substance use (e.g., drank hard liquor); 6 items about physical aggression toward others (e.g., got into a fist fight); 6 items pertaining to theft (stole money or property); 12 items reflecting school misconduct (e.g., cheated on test, "ditched" school for a day); and an additional 18 items covering a variety of behaviors (e.g., littered the environment, was detained or arrested by police). Respondents indicated whether they had engaged in each of the 61 behaviors "never," "once or twice," or "more often" during the past 6 months. Cronbach's alpha was .96, .92, and .91 for the U.S., Korean, and Chinese samples, respectively.

Perceived behavior of others was assessed by means of four scales. Adolescents responded to two 10-item questionnaires that assessed Perceived Behavior of Close Friends and Perceived Behavior of School Peers, and to two 7-item questionnaires that assessed Perceived Behavior of Family Members and Perceived Behavior of Neighborhood Adults. These items were drawn from several domains of the Problem Behaviors scale previously described. Adolescents indicated whether "none," "some," or "many" of their close friends, schoolmates, and adult neighbors had engaged in each of the behaviors during the past 6 months, and answered "yes" or "no" regarding family members' involvement in the listed behaviors (e.g., frequent use of alcohol or nicotine, physical aggression, theft). Coefficient alpha for perceived behavior of close friends, schoolmates, and neighbors was acceptable across all groups and ranged from .73 to .90. Coefficient alpha for perceived behavior of family members was a more moderate .62, .58, and .53, for U.S., Chinese, and Korean adolescents, respectively.

Perceived attitudes of parents and close friends toward the adolescent's hypothetical involvement in misconduct were assessed by comparable 11-item scales reflecting the various domains included in our Problem Behaviors measure. For Parental Sanctions, adolescents reported whether they thought their parents' reaction to each type of misconduct would be "would not care," "would be somewhat upset," or "would be very upset." For Close Friends' Sanctions, respondents indicated whether these friends would be likely to "approve" or "say nothing" (scored as 1) versus express disapproval (scored as 2). Coefficient alpha for Parental Sanctions ranged from .76 to .84; for Close Friends' Sanctions, from .85 to .86.¹

Plan of Analysis

For exploratory purposes, we first examined mean levels on the main measures of the study and conducted one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with country as a factor. To uncover similarities and differences in the structure of the data among the three culture groups, we next examined, separately for each sample, the correlations among variables. Because adolescents' perceptions of the behavior and attitudes of various others were not, in general, statistically independent, we then conducted multiple regression analyses to determine the unique effects of family members, friends, school peers, and neighborhood adults on adolescent misconduct. The total Problem Behavior score was the dependent variable in all tests of hypotheses. For each sample (adolescents in a particular cultural setting), the effects of perceived behavior of others and perceived sanctions of others were modeled separately (see Cohen, 1990, regarding the information value of "small" models). No a priori ordering of the variables was implemented. Gender was included in all models, in light of consistent cross-cultural findings that boys exceed girls in their involvement in misconduct and to explore possible gender differences in the relations between the perceived behavior and attitudes of others toward misconduct and adolescents' involvement in problem behaviors. Interactions of gender with each measure of perceived behavior and sanctions were entered individually, on Step 2 of the relevant analyses.

¹Measures of perceived school peers' and neighborhood adults' sanctions were not included in the survey to limit the already-considerable amount of redundancy due to use of multiple analogous measures (i.e., measures of parental and close friends' sanctions; measures of the behavior of family members, close friends, school peers, and neighborhood adults).

RESULTS

Levels of Misconduct and Sanctions Against Misconduct Across Cultural Contexts

ANOVAs and subsequent Scheffé contrasts revealed strong overall support for Hypotheses 1 and 2. Adolescents' self-reported level of involvement in misconduct differed significantly among the three groups, $F(2, 1087) = 111.14, p < .001$. Scheffé contrasts revealed that U.S. adolescents engaged in more misconduct than either Chinese or Korean adolescents of the same age (16 to 17 years old); and as hypothesized, Korean youths engaged in more misconduct than did Chinese youths (ps for all Scheffé contrasts reported here and later were significant at $p < .05$).

Further examination of the data revealed that four subsets of problem behavior items (see Measures) had satisfactory internal consistency and thus could be treated as subscales: risk-taking, $\alpha = .70$ to $.83$; physical aggression toward others, $\alpha = .70$ to $.79$; property violation, $\alpha = .60$ to $.79$; and school misconduct, $\alpha = .77$ to $.85$. ANOVAs of these subscales generally followed the same pattern: that is, U.S. youths > Koreans > Chinese. The exception was that U.S. and Korean adolescents did not differ significantly in level of risk taking. The largest cultural differences emerged in the domains of school misconduct, $F(2, 1089) = 98.15, p < .001$ and physical aggression, $F(2, 1090) = 56.38, p < .001$. Despite overall differences in school misconduct, we noted one striking similarity: The vast majority of adolescents in all three settings reported copying homework at least once in the past year (94% of U.S. youths, 97% of Koreans, 70% of Chinese).

Examination of items on the physical aggression subscale revealed that the proportion of U.S. youths who had committed the various acts was typically at least twice that of Koreans, Chinese youths, or both. For example, figures for the item "hit or threatened to hit someone" were 52%, 18%, and 11% in the order previously indicated. Although substance use did not form a reliable scale for Chinese youths (it did, in contrast, for the other two groups), it is clear that several types of substance use were reported far more often by American adolescents; for example, marijuana use was 41% in the U.S. sample versus under 1% in each of the two Asian settings.

Perceptions of others. Adolescents' perceptions of family members', friends', and school peers' misconduct also differed significantly (see Table 2), and the same pattern of subgroup differences emerged as in the case of adolescents' self-reported misconduct. Consistent with Hypothesis 2, U.S. youths perceived more problematic behavior among family members,

TABLE 2
Means and Standard Deviations of Variables in This Study

	U.S.		Korea		China		F	Scheffé ^a
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Adolescent misconduct	1.46	.31	1.34	.20	1.21	.16	108.40**	U.S. > C, K K > C
Family members' behavior	.22	.21	.17	.15	.13	.15	22.18**	U.S. > C, K K > C
Close friends' behavior	1.82	.50	1.40	.36	1.31	.27	147.44**	U.S. > C, K K > C
School peers' behavior	2.61	.31	1.88	.47	1.67	.34	412.33**	U.S. > C, K K > C
Neighborhood adults' behavior	1.64	.45	1.40	.29	1.50	.33	31.88**	U.S., C > K U.S. > C
Parental sanctions	2.71	.33	2.78	.24	2.78	.27	5.46*	C, K > U.S.
Close friends' sanctions	1.42	.29	1.61	.26	1.69	.27	68.06**	C, K > U.S. C > K

Note. C = China; K = Korea.

^a $p < .05$.

* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

friends, and school peers than did either of the two Asian groups, and Koreans perceived more problem behaviors in these social environments than did Chinese youths. Additionally, the three groups of adolescents differed significantly with respect to perceptions of adult neighbors' behavior, $F(2, 1026) = 31.88, p < .001$. As expected, adolescents in the United States reported more problematic behavior than did Chinese; however, Scheffé tests revealed a departure from the pattern of results for Korean and Chinese adolescents reported thus far, that is, both U.S. and Chinese participants perceived more problematic behavior among neighborhood adults than did Koreans.

ANOVAs also revealed differences among the three culture groups with respect to perceived sanctions against adolescent misconduct. These differences were highly significant for close friends' sanctions, $F(2, 1070) = 68.06, p < .001$; and although significant, were more modest in the case of perceived parental sanctions, $F(2, 1078) = 5.46, p < .01$. In general, parents and friends were seen as less tolerant of respondents' misconduct in those cultural contexts in which adolescent misconduct was lower. Thus, as predicted (Hypothesis 2), U.S. youths perceived a lower level of negative sanctions from parents and friends than did Chinese and Koreans; and Koreans perceived friends as less disapproving of misconduct than did Chinese respondents. These findings are summarized in Table 2.

It should be noted that the variances reported in Table 2 typically were greater in the United States than in either of the Asian samples. Levene's test for equality of variances was significant at or beyond $p < .05$ in 13 of 14 United States–China and United States–Korea comparisons. Comparisons of variance between the Korean and Chinese samples, again based on Levene's test, revealed significantly greater variance among Korean youths on three of seven measures, all pertaining to misconduct (i.e., adolescent misconduct, and perceived misconduct of close friends and school peers); whereas variance was greater among Chinese youths on neighborhood adults' behavior and parental sanctions. We return to the issue of differential variance on the key measures of this study in the Discussion section.

Correlational Analyses

Table 3 shows the zero-order correlations between adolescents' self-reported levels of misconduct and their perceptions of others' behavior and attitudes. Because the focus of our analyses is on the subsequent multivariate analyses of association among variables, we comment only briefly on the correlational data. The data shown in Table 3 are consistent with the prediction that family members' perceived behavior and attitudes would be associated with adolescent misconduct across cultural settings (Hypotheses 3 and 4), although the correlation between family members' and adolescents' behavior was trivial in magnitude for Chinese youths. For the United States–China comparison, the correlations between family members' behavior and adolescent misconduct differed significantly ($z = 3.63, p < .001$).

TABLE 3
Correlation of Perceived Behavior and Attitudes of Others With Adolescents' Self-Reported Misconduct

	<i>United States</i>	<i>Korea</i>	<i>China</i>
Family members' behavior	.38***	.20***	.10*
Close friends' behavior	.70***	.52***	.50***
School peers' behavior	.05	.18***	.29***
Neighborhood adults' behavior	.33***	.20***	.25***
Parental sanctions	-.42***	-.28***	-.35***
Close friends' sanctions	-.47***	-.46***	-.39***

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

As anticipated (Hypothesis 5), perceptions of close friends' behavior were significantly and positively related to misconduct, and tended to be more strongly associated with youths' behavior among U.S. than Korean or Chinese youths. For the United States–China comparison, the difference was significant, $z = 3.71, p < .001$. As expected, perceived sanctions of close friends also were related (inversely) to misconduct, but the expected cultural differences did not emerge (see Hypothesis 5). Consistent with Hypothesis 6, Asian youths' level of misconduct tended to be more related to perceived behavior in their larger peer context (i.e., the school) than was the case for U.S. youths, and the United States–China comparison was statistically significant, $z = 2.89, p < .01$. The association between perceived behavior of neighborhood adults and respondents' misconduct was positive but did not differ appreciably across the three cultural settings (see Hypothesis 7).

Finally, it should be noted that perceptions of the behavior of family members, close friends, school peers, and neighborhood adults were positively, but in nearly all cases, only moderately intercorrelated, $r_s = .20$ to $.30$. Parents' and friends' sanctions also were positively correlated, $r_s = .26$ to $.29$. As would be expected, parents' and friends' behavior were negatively associated with their perceived sanctions against adolescent misconduct, at levels ranging from $r = .39$ to $r = .62$.

Multivariate Models of the Contributions of Perceived Behavior and Sanctions of Others to Adolescent Misconduct

Perceived behavior of others. As Table 4 indicates, sex and the perceived behavior of close friends made unique contributions to adolescent misconduct in all three cultural contexts. Boys, and adolescents who believed their friends engaged in more problematic behavior, reported engaging in more misconduct themselves. Comparison of the unstandardized beta coefficients across samples (Table 4) tended to confirm findings from our earlier correlational analyses (Table 3), which showed that close friends' behavior was more consequential for adolescent misconduct in the United States than in the other two countries. In the Chinese sample only, perceived behavior of school peers and family members also made independent contributions to adolescents' misconduct. Most interesting, the perceived behavior of neighborhood adults contributed uniquely to the explained variance in adolescents' misconduct in the United States but not in either of the Asian settings.

TABLE 4
Regression of Problem Behaviors on Gender and Perceived Behavior of Others and Summary of Significant Interactions

	United States			Korea			China		
	B	β	t	B	β	t	B	β	t
Sex	-.10	-.15	2.83**	-.08	-.23	4.37***	-.06	-.20	5.11***
Family members' behavior	.12	.08	1.19	.06	.05	.98	.08	.08	1.97*
Close friends' behavior	.39	.62	10.97***	.21	.38	6.85***	.24	.40	9.97***
School peers' behavior	-.06	-.06	1.04	-.02	-.01	-.11	.07	.14	3.40***
Neighborhood adults' behavior	.10	.13	2.15*	.05	.07	1.40	.03	.07	1.68
Sex $\times$ Neighborhood Adults' Behavior	Adj. R ² = .53***	—	—	Adj. R ² = .28***	—	—	Adj. R ² = .32***	—	—
	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.01	-.08	2.23*

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

As indicated in the Plan of Analysis, interactions of gender with each of the three measures of perceived behavior of others were tested. The only significant interaction detected was that for Sex $\times$ Neighborhood Adults' Behavior, in the Chinese sample: Perceptions of neighborhood adults' behavior were more closely linked with boys' misconduct than that of girls.

Overall, more of the variance in U.S. adolescents' misconduct was accounted for by perceptions of others' behavior (53%) than was the case for Chinese (32%) or Korean youths (28%).

Perceived sanctions of others. Perceived sanctions of parents and close friends (together with gender) accounted for roughly similar amounts of the variance in adolescent misconduct across the three settings: 35% in the United States, 28% in Korea, and 26% in China. Table 5 reveals striking similarities across the three samples in the relations between adolescent misconduct and the perceived sanctions of parents and friends. Girls, and adolescents who believe their parents and close friends will be more disapproving of their misconduct, reported lower levels of misconduct. As well, in all three countries, the effect of friends' sanctions was qualified by a significant (in one case, trend-level at $p < .06$) interaction with gender of respondent. Friends' sanctions were associated somewhat more strongly with the behavior of boys than girls in the United States, $r = -.53$ versus $r = -.41$, and Korea, $r = -.45$ versus $r = -.30$; however, the contrasting pattern emerged in the Chinese sample (i.e., friends' sanctions were more consequential for girls' misconduct, $r = -.39$, than for that of boys, $r = -.24$). Finally, in the United States only, the effect of parental sanctions interacted significantly with gender: Boys' level of problem behavior was more strongly associated with perceived parental sanctions.

Post Hoc Analysis

A further, stepwise regression analysis was conducted to determine whether the perceived sanctions of important others regarding one's misconduct contributed anything more to the prediction of adolescents' problem behavior after the effects of perceived behavior of parents and peers had been taken into account. In other words, do others' attitudes toward adolescents' violation of conventional norms matter? Or does others' behavior overpower the effect on adolescents of their attitudes? The four variables assessing perceived behavior of others were entered on the first step of these analyses. The two measures of perceived sanctions, those of parents and close friends, were added on Step 2. The resulting change in R^2 was a trivial 1% in the United States, but a more substantial 6% and 8% in Korea

TABLE 5
Regression of Problem Behavior on Gender and Perceived Sanctions of Others and Summary of Significant Interactions

	United States			Korea			China		
	B	β	t	B	β	t	B	β	t
Sex	-.12	-.19	3.12***	-.09	-.24	5.25****	-.06	-.10	4.57****
Parental sanctions	-.27	-.28	4.56****	-.08	-.10	2.05**	-.17	-.29	7.13****
Close friends' sanctions	-.41	-.38	6.17****	-.27	-.36	7.66****	-.15	-.26	6.34****
	Adj. $R^2 = .35****$			Adj. $R^2 = .28****$			Adj. $R^2 = .26****$		
Sex $\times$ Parental Sanctions	.05	.17	2.71***	—	—	—	—	—	—
Sex $\times$ Close Friends' Sanctions	.04	.11	1.94*	.02	.11	2.50**	-.01	-.09	2.11**

* $p < .06$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

and China, respectively. Most important, the previously described significant effect of perceived parental sanctions (see Table 5) survived control for measures of perceived behavior in all three samples, albeit at a trend-level $p < .052$ in the United States. The previously demonstrated unique effect of perceived peer sanctions, also shown in Table 5, survived control for measures of various others' behavior in the Korean and Chinese samples, but not in the U.S. sample. Indeed, the betas for peer sanctions in the former samples had t values > 4.00 , both significant well beyond $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

In the concluding section of this article, we highlight key findings, attempt to integrate them with results of previous research, and call attention to several limitations of the current study and to directions that future research might take.

Levels of Misconduct and Related Behaviors and Sanctions of Others

As predicted, a sample of middle adolescents living in the greater Los Angeles area reported significantly more misconduct than their 16- to 17 year-old peers in Seoul and Tianjin; as well, the Korean adolescents significantly exceeded Chinese youths in misconduct. The same pattern of findings emerged in relation to adolescents' perceptions of the behavior of family members, close friends, school peers, and neighborhood adults. Relatedly, U.S. 16- to 17-year-olds viewed their parents and friends as more tolerant (i.e., less disapproving) of their misconduct than did either Chinese or Koreans; and Koreans viewed their friends as more tolerant of misconduct than did their Chinese peers. In summary, adolescents reported consistent levels of problem behaviors and attitudes toward such behavior across the various social contexts they traverse within their different cultural settings.

One possible interpretation of the findings previously summarized is that societies that have more extensive global contacts and are exposed to more individualistic values present adolescents with a wider choice of behavioral options. These options include ones that depart from traditional norms and that may not be sanctioned by adults. In point of fact, the multiplicity of values and ensuing loss of value consensus in the community (Baumeister & Tice, 1986) also may affect the behavior and attitudes of adults. The significant mean differences on most measures of behavior and

attitudes between youths in Seoul and in a Chinese city that more recently has been launched into the world system tend to support the view that social and economic change alters the normative context of adolescent development. Differences among the three samples in the amount of variance that were detected on most measures included in this study also support the view that adolescents in more globally connected and culturally diverse settings are growing up in environments characterized by more heterogeneous norms. Indeed, because stage of industrialization, degree of globalization, and the extent of diversity of local populations are likely to covary, it will be difficult to pinpoint the effects of each.

The findings of this study are consistent with the findings of Feldman et al. (1991) regarding cross-cultural differences in middle adolescents' level of misconduct. The current findings also are consistent with the argument of Chen et al. (1998) that rates of misconduct for Chinese and U.S. youths—similar in early adolescence—would be likely to diverge as youths entered middle adolescence. These authors' prediction was based in part on the stronger associations that had emerged between misconduct and the perceived peer behavior and attitudes of peers among U.S. than among Korean (Seoul) and Chinese (Beijing) adolescents. The convergence of findings from the Chen et al. (1998) study and this study, showing that youths from the more industrialized Asian locations (Taiwan and Seoul) tended to report more problem behavior and lax attitudes toward such behavior than youths in the more traditional Chinese environments (Beijing and Tianjin), further strengthens our conjecture that macrosocial factors and adolescent misconduct are linked.

Cross-Cultural Similarities

Several findings were replicated cross-culturally in this study: (a) A higher average level of involvement in problematic behaviors was reported by boys than girls; (b) adolescents who perceived their friends as engaging in more misbehavior engaged in more misbehavior themselves; and (c) youths who believed their parents and close friends would respond less negatively to their misconduct engaged in more misconduct. As well, the strong association in three different cultural settings between close friends' perceived behavior and attitudes toward misconduct and adolescents' own involvement in misconduct underscores the importance of peers in adolescent development. Despite the strong influence of close friends' perceived behavior across settings, perceived parental and friends' sanctions contributed uniquely to lower levels of misconduct among the groups. Most interesting, the relative effect of friends' sanctions vis-à-vis parents'

sanctions (see standardized regression coefficients) was greatest among Koreans, the group in which the adolescent generation is shifting away from traditional values (Whang, 1997). The greater importance of friends' than parents' sanctions in this setting is consistent with Mead's (1928/1978) suggestion that peer influences may be especially strong in rapidly changing societies, where "old ways" are no longer sufficient for successful adaptation in the future.

School Peers', Neighborhood Adults', and Adolescents' Misconduct

The fact that perceived behavior of school peers was not related to U.S. adolescents' own level of problem behavior (see Tables 2 and 3) seems to indicate that students in this high school form mutually indifferent peer groups (i.e., "If you are not a close friend, what I believe *you* do and think is of no importance to *my* views and behavior"). The absence of a unique effect of school peers on Korean youths' misconduct appears to require a different explanation. Comparison of correlations (Table 3) with regression coefficients in the corresponding multivariate model (Table 4) tend to support the interpretation that close friends' and school peers' behavior share common variance, and that the behavior of the latter does not contribute uniquely to the explanation of adolescents' misconduct. In contrast, the finding that both close friends' and school peers' misconduct were related to Chinese adolescents' behavior suggests a third type of social environment: one in which there is considerable independence of perceptions of close peers' and school peers' levels of misconduct, but each adds uniquely to the explanation of adolescents' involvement in such behavior.

The association between perceived behavior of neighborhood adults and adolescent misconduct was stronger for U.S. than Chinese or Korean youths: That is, the neighborhood adults "effect" emerged, when other variables were controlled, in the U.S. sample but not in either of the other samples. Post hoc analyses (not reported earlier to conserve space) indicated that the absence of an effect of neighborhood adults' behavior on adolescent misconduct in the Korean and Chinese samples was due mainly to shared variance with family members' behavior: Adolescents in the two Asian settings, compared to U.S. youths, seem to live in or perceive that they live in neighborhoods where the adults' behavior is more similar to that of their family members. It makes intuitive sense that Korean and Chinese youths live in more homogenous cross-context settings. In contrast, youths in the United States are more likely to live in culturally diverse and

value-heterogeneous neighborhoods, due largely to economic factors that allow or oblige families with different values to live in close proximity. The finding that Chinese youths' perceptions of family members' behavior contributed independently to the explanation of adolescent misconduct should be qualified by a further observation: The size of this effect was small relative to that of other variables in the model and attained significance because of the large sample size for Chinese youths.

Other Issues

Attitudes of others toward adolescents' misconduct contributed uniquely to understanding variations in Korean and Chinese middle adolescents' misconduct after controlling for others' perceived behavior. This finding offers additional support for the hypothesis that the opinions of others play a larger role in the lives of adolescents in societies that are more collectivist in orientation. On a different theme, boys' problem behavior was generally more strongly associated with perceptions of others' approval or disapproval of misconduct than was the problem behavior of girls. This finding is consistent with U.S. research that points to boys' greater susceptibility to peer influence to engage in misconduct (Steinberg, 1998). The discrepant pattern of findings for Chinese youths—girls' misconduct more strongly associated with close friends' sanctions, and boys' misconduct more associated with perceived behavior of neighborhood adults—should be replicated before interpretations are proffered.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Differences in variance on the central measures of this study, especially the greater variance in the U.S. sample relative to the Korean or Chinese samples, may have had the effect of increasing the observed magnitude of associations between these measures and U.S. adolescents' level of misconduct. Additionally, low variance on several measures of the study may have contributed to the lower R^2 values for models pertaining to the Korean and Chinese samples. Alternatively or additionally, the models tested in this study may not have included measures of other social contexts that are important to Asian youths, for example, the behavior and attitudes of teachers (Chen & Dong, 1999). Differences in school dropout and survey participation rates of the populations that were sampled also merit brief commentary. The higher dropout and lower participation rates of U.S. youths strongly suggest that the results of this study underestimate the already significant

U.S. versus Korean and Chinese means on various measures of problematic behavior, troubled relationships, and antisocial attitudes (e.g., U.S. vs. Asian youths' mean levels of misconduct). This is all the more so when readers recall that automobile-related misconduct was eliminated from the problem behavior scale because it was not cross-culturally relevant (see Measures).

All data for this study were collected from adolescents' reports at one point in time. Some readers might wonder whether self-report data from Asian youths, compared to U.S. youths, might be more constrained by a need to present the self and others (especially, family members) in a positive light. Although we know of no evidence to support this view when surveys are completed anonymously, differences in the accuracy of reports from the three samples remain a possibility. It would be desirable in future cross-cultural research, albeit difficult and costly, to obtain additional data about adolescents' problem behavior from other sources and to employ other methods of data collection. It would be powerful to show that some of the findings of this study could be reproduced with data obtained from close friends and others, or with data generated by experimental manipulation of social influences on adolescents' actual or hypothetical behavior (see, e.g., a classic study by Bronfenbrenner and Devereux, reported in Devereux, 1970). Researchers' agendas should include further exploration of how adolescent behavior responds to macrolevel changes in their society, especially to global influences that may undermine core cultural values. Cross-sectional studies, and those that focus exclusively on adolescents (both characteristics of this study), leave important questions unanswered, such as the order in which behavioral and attitudinal change occurs in adolescents and the adult generation and who most influences whom. (For an interesting discussion of generational susceptibility to change, see Inglehart, 1997.) Longitudinal studies that also include explicit measures of degree of industrialization, global linkages, and local population diversity would be especially valuable in clarifying whether these societal parameters, either as a group or individually, lead to alterations in adolescents' behavior and attitudes and their perceptions of the behavior and attitudes of people in the various social contexts of consequence to them.

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