

CULTURE, NARRATIVES ABOUT INTERPERSONAL EXPERIENCES, AND
PSYCHOSOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

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This dissertation examined children and college students' narratives about interpersonal experiences in cultural contexts and the relations to their psychosocial adjustment. Study 1 investigated the role of culture in shaping college students' memory narratives about interpersonal transgressions. Although both Asians and European Americans tended to minimize the harm in the perpetrator memory and maximize the harm in the victim memory, Asians exhibited a greater degree of harm minimization in both types of memories than did European Americans. Furthermore, for the victim memory, harm maximization (i.e., amplifying harms done by others) was negatively associated with self-acceptance for Asians, whereas harm minimization (i.e., downplaying harms done by others) was negatively associated with self-acceptance for European Americans. Study 2 focused on how mothers and children of different backgrounds co-constructed narratives about children's past peer experiences. European-American and Chinese immigrant mother-child pairs exhibited differences in reminiscing style, talking about children's internal states, and endorsing coping strategies. Regardless of culture, reminiscing that focused on peer roles and children's internal states, particularly in negative peer experiences, was associated with children's positive self-views concurrently and longitudinally. By employing a

projective story completion technique, study 3 examined European-American and Chinese immigrant children's narrative representations of peer experiences and tested how the concurrent and long-term relations of peer interaction themes in the narratives to children's psychological adjustment may differ between the two groups. Narrative peer interaction themes, particularly conflict resolution, were associated with European American children's positive self-views, low loneliness, and low social anxiety at both time points. The associations of narrative peer interaction themes to children's positive self-views emerged to be significant for Chinese immigrant children only at time 2 but not at time 1. Furthermore, narrative peer interaction themes did not correlate with Chinese immigrant children's loneliness or social anxiety at either time point. In sum, results highlighted how culture can not only impact the way that individuals and families construct narratives about interpersonal experiences but also moderate the relations of narrative representations about interpersonal experiences to individuals' psychosocial functioning. This dissertation extended current theory and practices on the interrelations among culture, interpersonal experiences, and psychosocial adjustment.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Qingfang Song was born to Kangping Song and Xi Li in Hunan, China. She attended China Agricultural University, where she received a bachelors degree in Management in 2003. She received a masters degree in Human Development and Family Studies from Texas Tech University in 2006, and a doctorate in Developmental Psychology from Cornell University in 2016. Dr. Qingfang Song will start an assistant professor position in Family and Consumer Sciences Program at Western Kentucky University in August 2016.

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CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Narratives can provide a lens to underline the cognitive processes that individuals utilize to understand, interpret, and evaluate the narrated events (e.g., Bruner, 1987; McAdams, 1992). Such cognitive processes in narrative construction can entail important functions, including meaning-making out of past experiences to understand the current self (e.g., Fivush & Haden, 1997), expressing deep thoughts and emotions to achieve better well-being (see Pennebaker, 1997, for review), and forming coherent and positively themed scripts to guide future behaviors (e.g., Zahn-Waxler, Park, Usher, Belouad, Cole, & Gruber, 2008). As the extant literature have investigated the influences of interpersonal experiences on psychological functioning, relatively less interest has been dedicated to the internal representations of interpersonal experiences. Integrating theories of attachment theory, social-cognitive theories, autobiographical memory studies, and the sociocultural perspective, the current studies focused on the narratives about interpersonal experiences in cultural contexts and its relations to psychosocial adjustment.

Several theoretical perspectives have been proposed to highlight individual's internal representations of past interpersonal experiences, which can guide their cognition, behaviors, and functioning in interpersonal domain. According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980), young children construct 'internal working models' based on their early interactions with primary caregivers. Such 'internal

working models' with primary caregivers can direct representations of the self and others in other types of interpersonal relations, such as peer relations and friendship (e.g., Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986). Social-cognitive theories, the concepts of scripts or schemata for examples, (e.g., Schank & Abelson, 1977), have also suggested that children develop relationship scripts or schemas from repeated social interactions. Those scripts or schemas store information about the self, others, and the interactive contingencies between them, and can direct children's social behaviors in the future (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994; Hudson & Shapiro, 1991).

The internationalization process of past interpersonal experiences and how such internal representations can be assessed are noteworthy. According to those theorists (e.g., Nelson, 1981), individuals' internal representations, are formed and developed not only through direct experience and observations but also symbolically, for example, through language. Relatedly, individuals' social knowledge structure, in terms of internal working models, scripts, schemata, can be assessable through behavioral and verbal measures (e.g., Abelson, 1981). For example, children's behavioral enactment with props and verbal accounts in response to relationship-oriented pictures and hypothetical situations have been used to tap children's representations of attachment experiences (e.g., Bretherton, Ridgeway, & Cassidy, 1990).

Of particular importance, the use of narrative approach has been fruitful to elucidate the cognitive and affective representations of past interpersonal events, which have been demonstrated to associate with children's self-views, behavioral problems, and emotional distress (e.g., Laible, Carlo, Torquati, & Ontai, 2000; Wang

& Fivush, 2005; Zahn-Waxler et al., 2008). However, those studies mainly focused on generalized attachment experiences or shared experiences between parents and children, while individuals' narratives about a variety of interpersonal experiences, particularly peer experiences, have been rarely examined. Another limitation is that most studies were based on Western samples. Little is known about how different cultural values may impact the way that narratives about interpersonal experiences are constructed.

Narratives are socially and culturally conventionalized forms where cultural values pertaining to emotions, self, and social conventional rules can influence information processing involved in representing past experiences (e.g., Nelson & Fivush, 2004, Wang & Fivush, 2005). One important difference between Western cultures and Asian cultures is the independent and interdependent self-construal, shaping the way individuals process and organize information about the past events, and the interactive process through which parents and children reminisce about their shared experiences. Specifically, to cultivate individuality, European American mothers encourage elaborate conversations and focus on children's internal states (e.g., emotions, desires, and thoughts). In comparison, Chinese immigrant mothers often engage children in pragmatic conversations with explicit moral evaluations of behaviors, frequently teach children behavioral and social conventional rules, and emphasize the importance of reestablishing harmonious relations. Thus, a set of studies employed samples from Western and Asian cultures, aiming to explore how culture may influence narratives about one-time specific interpersonal experiences (study 1 and study 2) and repeated peer experiences (study 3). The three studies also

investigated how narrative construction of interpersonal experiences were associated with European American, Chinese immigrant, and Asian/Asian American's psychosocial functioning, in terms of self-acceptance, peer-related self-views, and psychological adjustment.

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CHAPTER 2

HARMED OR NOT HARMED? CULTURE IN INTERPERSONAL TRANSGRESSION MEMORY AND SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Introduction

How people remember the interpersonal aspects of their lives can greatly influence their relationship satisfaction (e.g., Karney, & Coombs, 2000; Karney, & Frye, 2002), evaluations of themselves and others (Takaku, Green, & Ohbuchi, 2010; Wilson, & Ross, 2001), and subjective well-being (Kitayama, Markus, & Masaru, 2000). Although studies have examined factors that moderate people's memory for interpersonal transgressions from the perspectives of the perpetrator and the victim (Feeney & Hill, 2006; Kraft, 2009), no study that we know of has taken into consideration the role of culture in shaping the remembering process (Wang, 2013). This study examined perpetrator and victim memories in Asian and European American young adults, and how the construction of such memories was related to individuals' self-acceptance.

Autobiographical memory is long-lasting memory for personal experiences "significant to the self-system" (Nelson, 1993; pp. 8). McAdams (2001) has argued that autobiographical memory entails an internalized and evolving story of the self for the construction of identity. Notably, such memory is not a mirror image of the reality but constructed in accordance with the self-system, whereby our knowledge, beliefs, self-goals and motive can profoundly influence what and how we remember our past experiences (Conway, 2000; Wang, 2013). One factor of the self-system, namely, self-

serving motivation, may play a particularly important role in interpersonal transgression memory.

Self-serving Motivation

Self-serving motivation, also referred to as self-enhancing motivation, drives people to focus on the positive aspects of the self and to evaluate the self optimistically so as to maintain or enhance positive self-regard (Heine & Lehman, 1995; Taylor & Brown 1988). It also drives people to ascribe successes to their personal qualities and attribute failures to external causes (Campbell & Sedikides, 1999; Mullen & Riordan, 1998). Pertaining to memory, studies have shown that people, especially those with high self-esteem and thus stronger self-enhancing motivation, remember their past successes better than failures (Silverman, 1964), and remember their task performance better than it actually was (Crary, 1996). Also, to fashion a positive self-appraisal, people deprecate past successes to accentuate their current achievements, and they subjectively distance unflattering experiences while feeling temporally close to favorable experiences (e.g., Wilson & Ross, 2001, 2003). In general, people selectively remember positive information that can boost their self-regard, while forgetting or misrepresenting negative information related to the self (for a review, see Sedikides & Gregg, 2003).

The influence of self-serving motivation has also been observed in memories for interpersonal transgressions, whereby people often exhibit role-based biases for the purpose of maintaining a positive self-evaluation. Rather than taking responsibilities for a transgression that may shed negative light on the self, perpetrators who “hurt” or “wronged” others are more likely than victims to include happy endings, justify their

behaviors, and diminish their culpability in their memory accounts of transgressions (e.g., Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Mikula, Athenstaedt, Heschgl, & Heimgartner, 1998). Victims, in contrast, tend to maximize the harm resulted from the perpetrators' behaviors, describing perpetrators' intentions as malicious and emphasizing negative outcomes and consequences. When participants were asked to retell a hypothetical story by identifying either with the perpetrator or the victim, similar discrepancies between perpetrator and victim accounts were confirmed (Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997). Thus, people selectively emphasize some aspects of an event and downplay the others in their memories to maintain favorable self-views, depending on the role they played in the event. The influence of self-serving motivation on interpersonal transgression memory may be further modulated by culture.

Culture, Self-serving Bias, and Relationship-serving Bias

There has been mixed evidence regarding the cultural boundary of self-serving bias. Some researchers have argued that people from many Asian cultures do not exhibit self-serving biases, at least in some situations such as when dealing with failures (e.g., Heine, 2005; Heine, Lehman, Maukus, & Kitayama, 1999). Recent studies, however, have suggested that self-enhancing or self-serving motivation is universal and can be observed for culturally valued qualities (Sedikides & Gregg, 2003; Takaku et al., 2010). For instance, Asians, both native and overseas, consider themselves better on collective aspects of the self (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003) and evaluate more favorably their social traits than do North Americans (Ross,

Heine, Wilson, & Sugimori, 2005), although they do not exhibit self-serving biases when judging their individual traits.

The influence of self-serving bias on interpersonal transgression memory may take an interesting twist for Asians. On one hand, given the inherent social nature of transgression events, self-serving biases (i.e., minimizing harms done by oneself in perpetrator memories and maximizing harms done by others in victim memories) may still be apparent among Asians for whom maintaining positive self-regard in interpersonal contexts is of paramount importance (e.g., Ross et al., 2005; Yashima, Yamaguchi, Kim, Choi, Gelfand, & Yuki, 1995). On the other hand, given their relationship focus (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), Asians may further exhibit a relationship-serving bias in their memory for interpersonal transgressions. Research has shown that people who greatly value their relationships are motivated to perceive others and their relationships in a positive light (e.g., Campbell, Sedikides, Reeder, & Elliot, 2000; Endo, Heine, & Lehman, 2000). When recalling transgression memories, they often make benign attributions for others' wrongful behaviors, produce benevolent explanations for the transgressions, and construct memories in ways that enhance positive evaluations of others and the relationships (Fincham, Beach, & Baucom, 1987; Kearns & Fincham, 2005; Murray & Holmes, 1993; Murry, Holmes, & Griffen, 1996). Thus, relationship-serving motivation may drive Asians to minimize harms done by both themselves and others to promote social harmony. It will be theoretically informative to examine how self-serving motivation and relationship-serving motivation both play out in Asians' interpersonal transgression memories, in contrast to those of European Americans.

The Present Study

The purpose of this study is to examine self-serving and relationship-serving biases in interpersonal transgression memories in a cross-cultural context. Asian and European American college students each recalled two interpersonal transgression memories in which they acted as either a perpetrator (perpetrator memory) or a victim (victim memory). Following prior studies (Baumeister et al., 1990; Kearns & Fincham, 2005), the memories were coded for content categories that were then summed into two scores: the minimization score reflects the extent of downplaying the harms caused by an offender, and the maximization score reflects the extent of amplifying the harms caused by an offender. Accordingly, for the perpetrator memory in which the narrator him- or herself was the offender, minimizing the harm from the offender incurs positive evaluations of the self and maximizing the harm incurs negative evaluations of the self. For the victim memory in which the narrator was the victim and another person was the offender, minimizing the harm from the offender incurs positive evaluations of the other person and the relationship and maximizing the harm incurs negative evaluations of the other person and the relationship (See Table 2.1).

Table 2.1

The implications of minimization and maximization for evaluations of the self and others in perpetrator and victim memories.

	Minimization	Maximization
Perpetrator Memory <i>Harm caused by self</i>	Positive evaluations of self	Negative evaluations of self
Victim Memory <i>Harm caused by others</i>	Positive evaluations of others	Negative evaluations of others

Because the construction of interpersonal transgression memories may have direct implications for one’s self-regard, we further examined the relation of the memories to participants’ self-acceptance, a measure of positive self-regard that reflects an individual’s positive evaluations of the self and past experiences, and his or her acceptance toward both positive and negative qualities of the self (Ryff & Singer, 2008). I hypothesized that for Asians, self-acceptance would be positively associated with harm minimization and negatively associated with harm maximization in both types of memories. For European Americans, self-acceptance would be positively associated harm minimization in perpetrator memories and harm maximization in victim memories, and negatively associated with harm maximization in perpetrator memories and harm minimization in victim memories.

Method

Participants

A total of 168 undergraduate students at Cornell University participated in this study to receive partial course credits. They included 76 Asians (23 men and 53 women) and 92 European Americans (15 men and 77 women). Among the Asians¹, 33 were Chinese, 14 were Korean, 10 were Indian, 8 were of other East and South Asian cultural backgrounds, and 11 did not provide specific information. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Procedure and Measures

Participants came to the lab in small groups of one to five and completed a booklet that contained instructions on the recall of interpersonal transgression memories and a number of questionnaires.² Participants were asked to recall an incident in which “you hurt or wronged someone other than a romantic partner” (perpetrator memory), and an incident in which “someone other than a romantic partner hurt or wronged you” (victim memory). This method was adopted from Kearns and Fincham (2005). Participants were instructed to provide the full story of each event and include as many details as possible. They also indicated when each event occurred. The order in which participants reported different memories was counterbalanced.

After the memory task, participants provided demographic information and completed a survey on psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989) that assessed self-acceptance. For each item (e.g., “When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out”), participants indicated on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) how well that item described how they thought or felt. Negative items were reverse coded so that higher scores reflected more positive

appraisals of the self. The scale was created by summing scores from 9 items, with a Cronbach's alpha = .85.

Coding

To capture the content of the perpetrator memory and the victim memory, we adapted categories developed by Baumeister et al. (1990) to evaluate the presence (scored 1) or absence (scored 0) of a series of themes (see Table 2 for a list of the coding categories). Two coders independently coded 20% of the data for intercoder reliability estimate. Cohen's Kappa across the 21 categories ranged from .53 to 1.0 ($M = .91$) for the perpetrator memory and from .65 to 1.0 ($M = .90$) for the victim memory. Two coding categories for the perpetrator memory (i.e., victim's anger was justified, perpetrator's behavior described as incomprehensible or inconsistent) had modest intercoder agreement ($\text{kappa} < 0.6$). However, when calculated in percent agreement, the intercoder reliability for the two categories was 83% and 86%, respectively, comparable with those in prior studies (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1990; Kearns, & Fincham, 2005). Disagreements between the two coders were dissolved through discussion. One coder coded the remaining data.

Following prior studies (Baumeister et al., 1990; Kearns & Fincham, 2005), a minimization score was created for perpetrator memory and victim memory, respectively, by summing the 11 coding categories characterizing individuals' attempt to minimize the severity of harm caused by the perpetrator's behavior (e.g., stressing the positive outcome of the event), and a maximization score was created for each memory by summing the 10 coding categories characterizing individuals' attempt to maximize the severity of harm caused by the perpetrator's behavior (e.g., stressing the

malicious or hurtful intention of the perpetrator).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

In both cultural groups, the most commonly involved people in perpetrator memories were friends (50% Asian; 45% European American), family members (25% Asian; 28% European American), and acquaintances from school or workplace (24% Asian; 22% European American). The most commonly involved people in victim memories were friends (55% Asian; 61% European American), family members (8% Asian; 12% European American), and acquaintances from school or workplace (28% Asian; 22% European American). Chi-square analyses revealed no significant cultural differences in the types of people involved in either perpetrator memories, $X^2(4, N = 168) = 3.82, p = .43$, or victim memories, $X^2(4, N = 168) = 4.01, p = .41$. The data from 4 participants whose perpetrator memory or victim memory involved romantic partners or who did not provide a perpetrator incident as requested were excluded from analyses.

Participants' ages did not differ significantly at the time when the perpetrator (mean age = 16.38 years, $SD = 3.92$) and victim incidents (mean age = 16.18 years, $SD = 3.84$) occurred, $t(163) = .57, p = .57$. The order in which participants recalled the memories (i.e., perpetrator memory prior to victim memory vs. victim memory prior to perpetrator memory) had effects on only 2 out of the total 42 content categories across the two memories.³ Memory order was therefore not considered further.

Next we present results regarding the influences of memory type (perpetrator vs. victim) and culture (Asian vs. European American) on participants' tendencies to

minimize and maximize harms in their memory accounts. We then turn to the results concerning relations between harm minimization and harm maximization in memory accounts and self-acceptance.

Minimizing and Maximizing Harms

A series of McNemar tests were conducted to examine the likelihood that participants referred to each memory content category as a function of memory type for Asians and European Americans, respectively. As shown in Table 2.2, there was a general tendency in which both Asian and European American participants were more likely to minimize the harm in the perpetrator memory than in the victim memory, and more likely to maximize the harm in the victim memory than in the perpetrator memory.

We further conducted Fisher's exact tests to examine whether there were cultural differences in the presence of each memory content category. Pertaining to perpetrator memory, Asians were more likely than European Americans to minimize the harm by describing the perpetrator's apologies or amendment, $p = .03$, and including external or mitigating circumstances, $p = .03$, but to maximize the harm through the inclusion of long-term preceding events, $p = .04$. Pertaining to victim memory, Asians were more likely than European Americans to minimize the harm by emphasizing positive consequences or denying negative consequences, $p = .05$, describing the perpetrator's behavior as impulsive, $p = .06$, and attributing part of the cause to themselves, $p = .03$, but to maximize the harm by admitting their inner angry feelings, $p = .06$.

Table 2.2

Results of Memory Content Coding

Minimization Categories	Asians			European Americans		
	%	%	<i>p</i>	%	%	<i>p</i>
	Perpetrator	Victim		Perpetrator	Victim	
Positive consequences or denial of negative consequences	12	14	1.00	18	4	.004
Perpetrator apologizes or make amends	27	11	.02	13	7	.21
External or mitigating circumstances	55	14	.000	37	16	.002
Perpetrator's behavior was impulsive	36	11	.001	25	3	.000
Perpetrator's behavior could not be helped	9	1	.07	7	0	.03
Perpetrator's behavior was justified	36	8	.000	25	7	.001
Victim's response portrayed as an overreaction	0	1	1.00	0	1	1.00
Victim provoked the incident	17	4	.02	22	1	.000
The cause of the incident includes the victim	51	35	.10	48	20	.000
The perpetrator regrets the incident	40	5	.000	42	4	.000
Self-blame	48	8	.000	36	4	.000

Table 2.2 Continued

Maximization Categories						
Long-term past events preceding the incident	37	27	.17	22	30	.23
Negative consequences	35	34	1.00	28	38	.13
Damage to the relationship	23	19	.68	15	21	.42
Victim is still angry or hurt	0	4	.25	1	5	.22
Perpetrator's behavior described as incomprehensible or inconsistent	20	54	.000	21	55	.000
Perpetrator's behavior was immoral	7	18	.02	15	13	.84
Perpetrator's behavior was deliberately hurtful or malicious	4	14	.09	3	7	.51
Victim's anger was justified	31	65	.000	25	64	.000
Victim was angry but no overt expression of anger	7	18	.02	8	8	1.00
Multiple or accumulated provocation	17	30	.11	24	25	1.00

Note: McNemar test was conducted without continuity correct and exact *p*-values were reported.

Next, a 2 (memory type) x 2 (culture) mixed analysis of variance was conducted on the total minimization and maximization scores, respectively, with memory type as a within-subject factor and culture as a between-subject factor. For minimization, there was a main effect of memory type, $F(1, 162) = 192.02$, $MSE = 1.89$, $p < .001$, whereby perpetrators minimized the harm more than victims for both Asians, $t(72) = 8.12$, $p < .001$, and European Americans, $t(90) = 12.20$, $p < .001$. Culture effect was also found for minimization, $F(1, 162) = 8.95$, $MSE = 2.28$, $p = .004$, whereby Asians minimized the harm to a greater degree than did European Americans in both the perpetrator memory, $t(164) = -2.20$, $p = .03$, and the victim memory, $t(132.43) = -2.36$, $p = .02$. No significant interaction effect was detected, $F(1, 162) = .23$, $MSE = 1.89$, $p = .63$.

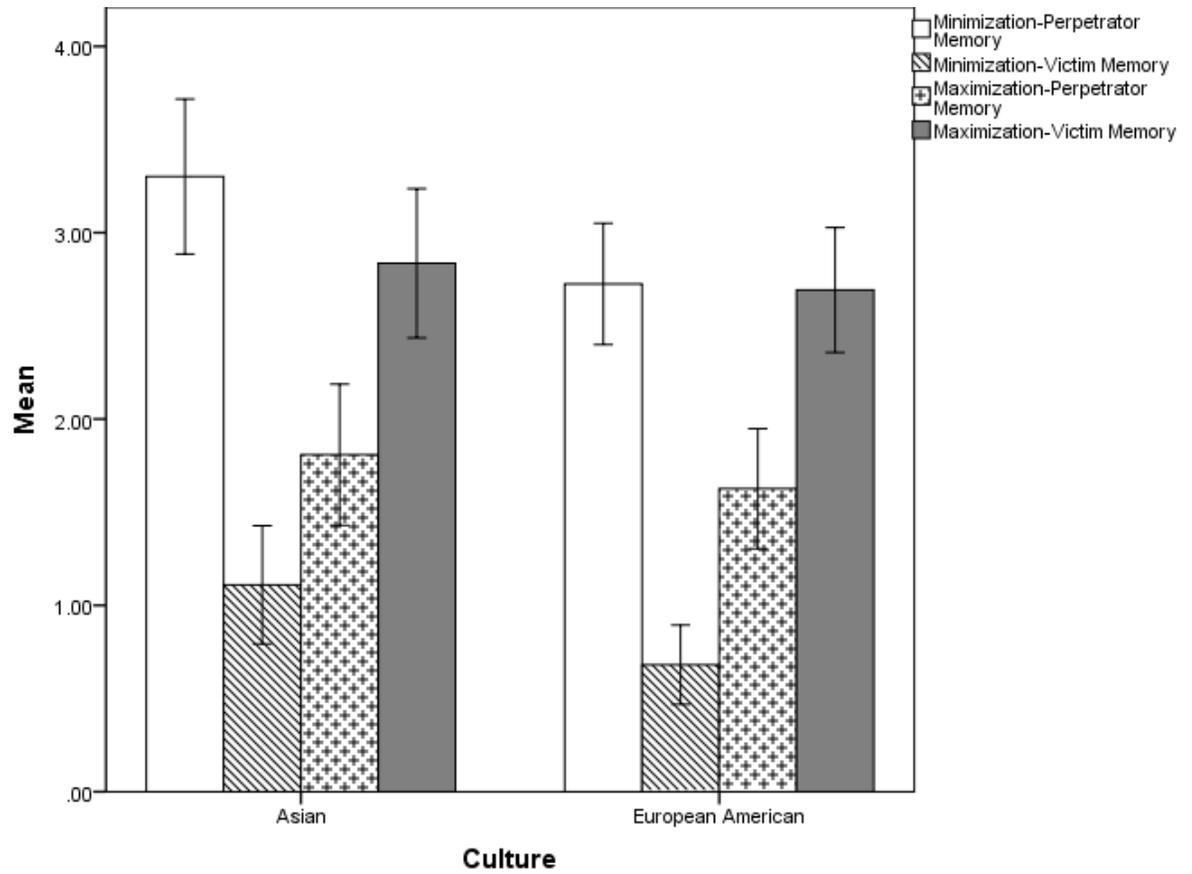
For maximization, there was also a main effect of memory type, $F(1, 162) = 58.26$, $MSE = 1.52$, $p < .001$, whereby victims maximized the harm more than perpetrators for both Asians, $t(72) = -4.75$, $p < .001$, and European Americans, $t(90) = -6.13$, $p < .001$. The two groups did not differ in maximization in either perpetrator memory, $t(164) = -.25$, $p = .80$, or victim memory, $t(164) = -.63$, $p = .53$. No significant interaction effect was detected, $F(1, 162) = .02$, $MSE = 1.52$, $p = .89$.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the mean minimization and maximization scores as the function of memory type and culture.

Figure 2.1

Mean frequency of narrative variables as the function of memory type and group.

Error bars represent standard errors of the means.



Harm Minimization, Harm Maximization, and Self-acceptance

There was no cultural difference between Asians ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.72$) and European Americans ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.65$) in the total score of self-acceptance, $t(163) = -.20$, $p = .16$. Zero-order correlations between self-acceptance and minimization and maximization scores were calculated for Asians and European Americans, respectively. For Asians, self-acceptance was negatively correlated with harm maximization in the victim memory, $r = -.27$, $p = .02$. In contrast, for European Americans, self-acceptance was negatively correlated with harm minimization in the victim memory, $r = -.24$, $p = .02$. No significant correlations were found for perpetrator memory ($r_s = -.18$ to $.02$, $p_s = .12$ to $.88$).

Discussion

Prior research has demonstrated that perpetrators and victims construct interpersonal transgression memories differently in a self-serving manner (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1990; Kearns & Fincham, 2005; Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997). Yet there has been no study to investigate whether such biases are prevalent across cultures, in spite of the large literature concerning the interaction between culture and self-motivations in influencing cognition and behavior (Heine, 2005; Heine et al., 1999; Sedikides & Gregg, 2003). To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine self-serving and relationship-serving biases in interpersonal transgression memories as a function of culture, and the relation to self-acceptance.

As expected, Asian participants exhibited self-serving biases in interpersonal transgression memories similar to those of their European American counterparts. Participants of both cultures were more likely to minimize the harm in the perpetrator

memory than in the victim memory, whereby they blamed victims for provoking the incidents, expressed their regrets and self-blame, and framed their behaviors as impulsive, justifiable, or excusable due to external or mitigating circumstances. Participants were also more likely to maximize the harm in the victim memory than in the perpetrator memory, whereby they described perpetrators' behaviors as incomprehensible or inconsistent and justified victims' anger. These findings add to the current debate concerning whether self-serving bias is pan-cultural, and suggest that individuals of Asian cultural backgrounds also remember themselves in a favorable light when the events are situated in interpersonal contexts.

On the other hand, relationship-serving biases also emerged in Asians' interpersonal transgression memories. Compared with European Americans, Asian participants downplayed interpersonal conflicts by minimizing the harm to a greater degree in both the perpetrator memory and the victim memory. This is in line with their motivation to promote social harmony and maintain positive views of others and interpersonal relationships (e.g., Sedikides et al., 2003; Ross et al., 2005; Endo et al., 2000).

Analyses of individual memory content categories further revealed cultural differences in specific ways of minimizing interpersonal harms in memory accounts. In particular, compared with European Americans, Asians were more likely to refer to external or mitigating circumstances for their hurtful behaviors in the perpetrator memory, and also more likely to share the blame by admitting themselves as partly responsible for the incident in the victim memory. Prior research has shown that Asians, especially East Asians, are more inclined to attend to the broad context than

European Americans, who tend to focus on the main characters and attribute their actions to their intentions (e.g., Chua, Leu, & Nisbett, 2005). It appears that by taking a holistic perspective, Asian participants viewed interpersonal conflicts as likely a result of external circumstances or shared responsibilities of all parties involved. In this way, they justified perpetrators' behaviors and downplayed the severity of interpersonal harms.

Interestingly, Asians were more likely than European Americans to refer to past events prior to the target incident in which they acted as a perpetrator. This may reflect Asians' greater tendency to reflect on the past from a broad time frame to learn lessons and guide behaviors when remembering personal experiences (Wang, 2013; Wang & Conway, 2004). Asians were also more likely than European Americans to refer to their angry feelings in the victim memory. Anger, different from sadness, often focuses on the cause of a perceived goal failure (e.g., a relationship conflict) and motivates a goal reinstatement (e.g., to restore the relationship; Levine, 1995; Wang, 2003). This finding may therefore reflect the Asians' greater expectation to reverse the perpetrator's harmful behavior and restore social harmony. It may be fruitful to further examine the specific ways of minimizing or maximizing interpersonal harms in future memory research.

Self-serving bias and relationship-serving bias in interpersonal transgression memories were further differently related to self-acceptance in the two cultural groups. As expected, Asians who made more harm maximization in the victim memory tended to have lower self-acceptance. Amplifying harms done by others is not conducive to relationship harmony and, for Asians who greatly value interdependence (Markus &

Kitayama, 1991), negative self-evaluations may arise as a result. In contrast, European Americans who made more harm minimization in the victim memory, namely, those who exhibited less self-serving bias, tended to have lower self-acceptance.

Downplaying others' fault may imply that the self should be partially blamed for the incident and thus may result in negative self-evaluations. This finding is consistent with the general literature that among Westerners, people with higher self-esteem exhibit greater self-serving biases in memory than those with lower self-esteem (Crary, 1996; Silverman, 1964; Wilson & Ross, 2001, 2003).

The relations of harm minimization and harm maximization to self-acceptance were only found for the victim memory, but not for the perpetrator memory in which one's own transgression was at the center. Presumably, perpetrator memories may deal more directly with one's moral weakness. Simply minimizing the negativity of the transgression or attributing part of the responsibility to the victim may not be sufficient to facilitate self-acceptance. Perhaps a more proactive approach to reconstructing the memories, such as to acknowledge self-weakness as common humanity (Leary, Tate, Adams, Batts, Hancock, 2007; Neff, 2010), to interpret the transgression as to promote self-growth (Lilgendahl, McLean, & Mansfield, 2013), or to provide mixed accounts that include both apology and mitigating and justifiable circumstances (Takaku et al., 2010), is required to foster self-acceptance.

Notably, the relations of the memory biases to self-acceptance were based on correlational data. It is possible that reconstructing interpersonal transgressions in either a harm-minimizing or a harm-maximizing manner influences the level of self-acceptance, or self-acceptance may shape the way people remember interpersonal

transgressions. To identify the direction and causality of the relationship, future studies can employ experimental manipulations to, for example, instruct participants to recall interpersonal transgression memories by using either harm minimization or harm maximization and then assess the effects on their subsequent states of self-acceptance.

In summary, biases in constructing interpersonal transgression memories from the perspectives of perpetrators and victims are prevalent among both Asian and European American young adults to fulfill self-serving goals. Yet Asians, who ascribe greater importance to maintaining harmonious interpersonal relations, exhibited greater relationship-serving biases in both the perpetrator and victim memories, when compared with European Americans. Remembering interpersonal transgressions appears to have varied implications across cultures for psychological well-being.

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Footnotes

¹ Sixty-nine participants self-identified as Asian American and 7 self-identified as Asian. Analyses with or without the 7 participants yielded identical patterns of results. The final results were based on the entire sample. For simplicity, we refer to the sample as Asians.

² Participants also recalled a positive interpersonal event and answered questions on areas such as environmental mastery, positive relations, purpose in life, and autonomy. These data were for other research purposes and were not included in the current study.

³ There were no significant effects of order in 19 out of 21 content categories for perpetrator memory ($ts = -1.78$ to 1.86 , $ps = .07$ to $.96$), or in all 21 content categories for victim memory ($ts = -1.50$ to 1.53 , $ps = .13$ to $.98$). For perpetrator memory, the order had significant effects on the descriptions of perpetrator's behavior as immoral and as not being able to be helped, $ts = -2.17$ and 2.02 , $ps = .03$ and $.05$.

CHAPTER 3

MOTHER-CHILD REMINISCING ABOUT PEER EXPERIENCES IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS: THE RELATION TO CHILDREN'S PEER-RELATED SELF-VIEWS

Introduction

The way children perceive themselves in relation to peers plays a critical role in their psychosocial development, affecting their interpersonal skills, peer experiences, and well-being (Caldwell, Rudolph, Troop-Gordon, & Kim, 2004; for reviews, see Rudolph & Asher, 2000). Although self in peer relations has been found to be closely associated with children's everyday experiences with peers (Boivin & Hymel, 1997), the social-cognitive process through which it is constructed remains a relatively uncharted area. Family reminiscing practices in which mothers and children recount, explain, and evaluate past peer experiences together may provide an important venue for children to form positive self-views in relation to peers (Fivush, Haden, & Reese, 2006; Fivush & Nelson, 2006). This study investigated the relation of mother-child reminiscing about peer experiences to children's peer-related self-views in cultural contexts.

Self in Peer Relations

Self in relations involves representations of the self in connection with others. It plays an important role in directing cognition, emotion, and behavior in social contexts (Harter, Waters, & Whitesell, 1998). The way that children come to view themselves in relation to peers may guide children's cognition and behavior during peer interactions, and has implications on children's psychological well-being (Crick

& Dodge, 1994; Parker et al., 1995; Rudolph & Asher, 2000). This is particularly important in middle childhood when children form strong attachment to friends, experience more complexed peer relations, and exert critical influences on later adjustment (Berndt, 2004; Ladd, 1999; Pederson, Vitaro, Barker, & Borge, 2007). Research has shown that school-aged children who have negative representations of the self and peers face a variety of increased peer adversities, including low status of peer acceptance, peer victimization, and peer rejection (Rudolph, Hammen, & Burge, 1995; Salmivalli & Isaacs, 2005). Furthermore, negative self-views, together with social disengagement experiences, make children susceptible to stress and symptoms of depression (Caldwell et al., 2004). Children experience low self-worth, hopelessness, sadness, and depression when they perceive themselves as unworthy or incompetent of positive social interactions (Kaslow, Rehm, & Siegel, 1984; Rudolph, Hammen, & Burge, 1997).

Pertaining to the developmental antecedents of self in peer relations, extant literature has focused on the link between children's peer experiences and their peer-related self-views. Several scholars have proposed social information processing theory and the concepts of scripts and schema, which all point to the important tenet that self in peer relations is the representational product of past experiences (Baldwin, 1992; Boivin & Hymel, 1997; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Parker, Rubin, Price, & DeRosser, 1995). Children develop abstract knowledge, schemas, and judgment towards self and peer interaction partners from their memory database of daily social experiences. Studies have shown that peer experiences, particularly peer adversities, are associated with children's negative self-views in peer relations (Boivin & Hymel,

1997; Troop-Gordon, & Ladd, 2005). However, children's peer-related self-views are not a mere reflection of their peer experiences. For example, aversive peer experiences only partially account for negative self-views (Hymel, Franke, & Freigang, 1985), and feelings of loneliness (Boivin & Hymel, 1997). Furthermore, researchers have failed to find the accordance between peer aggression and children's self-evaluation of social competence and views of peer relations (Hymel, Bowker, & Woody, 1993; Patterson, Kupersmidt, & Griesler, 1990). This gap between experiences and self-views suggests other important variables in the development of self-views from past experiences. How children make sense of their experiences involves a constructive process in which parents may scaffold the interpretation of the experiences through joint reminiscing (Nelson & Fivush, 2004; Wang, 2006; Wang, Doan, & Song, 2010). Parents may further suggest strategies during discussion to help children deal with peer difficulties, and thus facilitate positive self-views (Abaied & Rudolph, 2011; Kliewer, Fearnow, & Miller, 1996; Kliewer, Parrish, Taylor, Jackson, Walker, & Shivy, 2006).

Mother-Child Reminiscing and Children's Self-Development

Parent-child reminiscing is a common type of family practices whereby parents and children recount together details of past events. Through the parent-guided narrative interactions, children may come to understand and organize important aspects of past events into personal stories, and further internalize an evaluative framework for extrapolating personal meanings from past experiences in connection with their present selves (Fivush, et al., 2006; Reese & Cleveland, 2006). In the face of emotionally negative experiences, parents may provide coping strategies, thus

helping children to resolve the negative emotions and form representations of the self (e.g., Bird & Reese, 2006; Fivush, Berlin, Sales, Mennuti-Washburn, & Cassidy, 2003). With age, children become increasingly able to verbally contribute to the conversations, and often take on their parents' ways of discussing, interpreting, and remembering the past (Fivush et al., 2006; Nelson, 1996). By middle childhood and early adolescence, children often take active roles in initiating conversations, providing specific event details, and discussing their own perspectives (Marin, Bohanek, & Fivush, 2008; Recchia, Wainryb, Bourne, & Pasupathi, 2014).

Parent-child reminiscing varies in style across families. Elaborative reminiscing, where parents and children elicit and provide embellished details about the past events under discussion, has been found to be associated with children's ability to construct coherent stories of the past based on which children form stable self-representations (Fivush et al., 2006; Wang, 2006; Wang, Doan, & Song, 2010). Furthermore, parents and children may engage in active meaning-making by highlighting children's subjective perspectives regarding the events, such as their thoughts, feelings, and personal judgments. Studies have shown that maternal frequent references to children's emotions (e.g., "You were happy") or the emotional meaning of the event (e.g., "It was fun") are associated with more consistent self-views (Welch-Ross, Fasig, Farrar, 1999) and raise greater self-esteem in children (Reese, Bird, & Tripp, 2007). Such references also help children understand themselves in terms of personal traits (Wang, Doan, & Song, 2010) and moral characters (Recchia et al., 2014). In addition, causal talk where parents and children discuss the causes and consequences of children's past internal states is more beneficial to children's self-

knowledge, compared with simple attributions of internal states to children (Bird & Reese, 2006; Marin, Bohanek, & Fivush, 2008; Reese et al., 2007). This is particularly important in reminiscing about negative events, where parents often elaborate to a great extent on the causes and consequences of children's feeling states, and make frequent comments on what the event meant to the child (Bird & Reese, 2006; Marin, et al., 2008; Reese et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2010). Mother-child discussion of active coping strategies by seeking social support and comfort can further delineate the personal meaning of negative events and thus facilitate the integration of those experiences to forming consistent self-views (Bird & Reese, 2006)

Very little research has been conducted on parent-child reminiscing about peer experiences and the relation to children's peer-related self-views. In an exploratory study, we examined conversations regarding peer experiences between European-American mothers and their preschool-aged children, and the children's peer-related self-views and social competence (Song & Wang, 2013). We found that children had more positive self-views and greater social competence when mothers and children adopted a more elaborative style, highlighted the emotionally positive aspects of the events, and focused on the roles of peers as opposed to the child in discussing peer experiences, particularly negative ones. Nevertheless, the findings were limited by the small sample and potential measurement issues of the study. The important role of parent-child reminiscing in the development of self in peer relations during the critical period of middle childhood has yet to be examined, especially in longitudinal approaches.

Narrative Socialization of the Self in Cultural Contexts

Parent-child reminiscing practices are also an important cultural practice through which culture-dependent values and goals pertaining to the self can be imparted (Miller, Fung, & Koven, 2007; Wang, 2013; Wang & Brockmeier, 2002). To cultivate individuality and an autonomous sense of self, European-American parents often adopt an elaborative style when reminiscing with their children, including eliciting and providing embellished event details, and focusing on children's internal states such as thoughts, desires, and emotions. When discussing negative emotional events, European-American mothers tend to reassure the child that everything is all right in order to help children cope with the negativity. In contrast, parents in East Asian cultures, with the goal of promoting self-other relatedness and a sense of belongingness (Fivush & Wang, 2005; Mullen & Yi, 1995; Wang, 2004), often focus on social interactions and emphasize behavioral rules and disciplines while brushing over children's internal states. Relatedly, compared with European-American mothers who frequently discuss the causes and consequences of children's internal states, Chinese mothers engage less in such causal talk about children's subjective experiences but are more concerned with behavioral appropriateness (Fivush & Wang, 2005; Wang, 2001; Wang et al., 2010).

The varied style and content in mother-child reminiscing activities across cultures can explain cultural differences in children's self-knowledge. European-American mothers' use of an elaborative, child-focused approach to engage children in the reminiscing of past experiences contributes to the development of an autonomous self (Wang, 2006). Chinese mothers' use of a pragmatic, socially-oriented approach to family reminiscing facilitates the development of a relational sense of self

that is defined by one's social connections rather than unique attributes (Wang, 2006; Wang et al., 2010). There are intriguing empirical questions in regards to how parents in diverse cultures discuss with children peer-related past events that are socially-oriented in nature, and how such conversations shape children's peer-related self-views.

The Present Study

This study aims to establish the concurrent and longitudinal relations of mother-child reminiscing to children's self-views in relation to peers in a cross-cultural context. We focused on European-American (EA) and Chinese immigrant (CI) children in their middle childhood years. EA and CI mothers were asked to talk about past peer events with their 9 to 11-year-old children twice at home, with an interval of 1 year. In line with past research (Fivush & Wang, 2005; Wang, 2001, 2006, 2007), I expected EA mothers to use a more elaborative style than CI mothers. We also expected EA mothers and their children to more frequently discuss and explain children's internal states, and EA mothers to more frequently endorse active-cognitive coping strategies, such as reassuring children that everything was all right in dealing with negative peer experiences. In contrast, I expected CI mothers to more frequently refer to the roles of peers and discuss child-peer interactions. We also expected CI mothers to discuss more about active-behavioral strategies to deal with negative peer experiences.

We used an open-ended task to assess children's peer-related self-views, in which children responded to the question, "Tell me anything about you and other kids at school." This task was adapted from the self-description task that has been used in

previous cross-cultural studies (Wang, 2004; 2006). Compared with close-ended scales, this method allows children to freely generate responses concerning the self in relation to peers. In light of prior findings showing that European-American children and adults tend to have more positive self-views than their Asian counterparts (Stigler, Smith, & Mao, 1985; Wang, 2004), I expected that EA children in our study would view themselves more positively than CI children in peer relations.

Consistent with the general literature (Fivush et al., 2006; Mize & Pettit, 1997; Reese & Cleveland, 2006; Song & Wang, 2013; Wang et al., 2010), I expected family reminiscing about peer experiences to be an important context for the development of peer-related self-views across cultures. Specifically, I expected that an elaborative reminiscing style would be associated with more positive peer-related self-views, independent of culture. We further expected that maternal and children's references to, and causal discussion about internal states would be related to more positive peer-related self-views in children. Such associations were expected to be particularly salient for the conversations about negative peer experiences, where discussions of internal states may be especially beneficial for children to reflect on past peer interactions and glean meaningful insights from them (Bird & Reese, 2006; Reese et al., 2007; Wang et al., 2010).

Another interest was in personal perspectives in reminiscing about peer experiences. Song and Wang (2013) found that focusing on peers relative to the child when discussing negative events facilitated children's appraisal of difficult peer experiences, and promoted their self-understanding. We therefore expected that mother-child reminiscing that focused on peers in the negative event discussion would

be associated with more positive peer-related self-views. To the best of our knowledge, no other study has directly examined the relation between discussion of social interactions and child outcomes. Conceivably, discussing social interactions in positive peer experiences may highlight positive activities and exchanges between the child and peers (e.g., offering help; laughing together), thus facilitating the construction of positive peer-relational schema. When negative peer experiences are concerned, discussing negative peer interactions may still be beneficial for making connections with the current self through gaining new understanding and potentially resolving peer difficulties.

We further examined coping strategies that mothers and children discussed during reminiscing of negative peer events. Bird and Reese (2006) found that discussion of active strategies such as to seek social support was associated with children's self-concept consistency. Accordingly, I expected that mother-child discussions of active strategies (i.e., cognitive and behavioral strategies to directly address the problem, such as reappraisal and problem-solving behaviors) would be associated with more positive peer-related self-views in children. In contrast, mother-child discussions of passive strategies (i.e., cognitive and behavioral strategies to avoid the problem, such as avoidant thinking and antisocial actions) would be negatively associated with self-views positivity.

Method

Participants

Thirty-five European-American (EA) children (21 boys, mean age = 116.12 months; range = 108-125 months) and 35 first-generation Chinese immigrant (CI)

children (16 boys, mean age = 113.02 months; range = 107-125 months) and their mothers from upstate New York participated in a larger longitudinal study of social-cognitive development in middle childhood. All participants came from middle-class families. Parents in CI families were originally from Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. All but 3 CI children were born in the United States, but had lived in America since they were 2-3 years old. Parents gave permission for their children to participate and children gave informed assent. Due to family moves, 7 EA families and 6 CI families dropped from the study at time 2. There were no systematic differences between the families who remained in the study and those who left. Data from 1 EA family and 5 CI families at time 1 were unavailable due to procedural errors.

Procedure

Two female researchers visited the families twice, one year apart. English-Chinese bilingual researchers visited the CI families and interviewed children in the language that children preferred. Eighteen CI families at time 1 and 13 CI families at time 2 spoke English and Chinese interchangeably. The rest of the CI families spoke English only, and no CI families spoke Chinese only. All materials were written in both English and Chinese, and a translation and back-translation procedure was carried out to ensure their equivalence in both literal and sense meaning. Each home visit began with a mother-child reminiscing activity, followed by an interviewer-child session and a semi-structured mother-child play task, which were all video tape-recorded. The tasks relevant to the study are described below.

Mother-child reminiscing about peer experiences. During each of the two home visits, mothers were instructed to talk with their children about two specific, one-time events that involved both children and their peers. Mother-child pairs were asked to select two emotionally salient events that took place recently, one emotionally positive and one emotionally negative to the child, in accordance with prior research (Reese et al., 2007; Song & Wang, 2013; Wang & Fivush, 2005). It was emphasized that mothers should talk with their children about the past events as they usually would for as long as they wanted. The sequence of talking about positive and negative events was counterbalanced across mother-child pairs. This task took approximately 20 minutes. The researchers remained in the room to operate the video camera unobtrusively when the mother and child conversed.

Self-descriptions in relation to peers. Children were interviewed for descriptions about themselves in relation to their peers in an open-ended task adapted from prior research (Keller, Ford, & Meacham, 1978; Wang, 2004). The interviewer asked the child, “(Child’s name), I would like to write a story about you and other kids in school, to write a story that will tell about (Child’s name) and other kids in school. What’s the first thing I should put in the story?” She prompted the child after each response, “And what else should I write to tell about you and other kids in school?” until the child indicated by speech or gesture that he or she was finished. This task lasted approximately 10 minutes.

Verbal skill. At the first interview, children’s mothers filled out the Child Communication Survey adapted from Feagans and Farrans (1997). The survey consists of 18 questions to assess school-aged children’s verbal skill, including

comprehension, production, rephrase, listening, spontaneity, and fluency (e.g., “Child is easily understood when he/she is talking to you”). Mothers answered each question by rating on a scale of 1 (well below average) to 5 (well above average). This survey has shown excellent internal consistency reliability and discriminant validity, and was reliable for the current sample (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .98$). The sum of ratings was used to index the children’s verbal skill (maximum score 90). CI mothers gave ratings on their children’s ability to communicate in English and Chinese, respectively; and for CI children whose families spoke English and Chinese interchangeably, the mean score between English and Chinese verbal skills was used in the analysis.

Coding of Mother-Child Reminiscing

Recordings of the mother-child conversations about peer events were transcribed verbatim onto paper. Maternal and child utterances in the positive and negative events were tabulated separately for the following variables. Proposition, defined as a subject-verb construction, was used as the coding unit (e.g., “He hit me”; Fivush, Haden, & Adam, 1995) unless specified.

Reminiscing style. Following prior research (Fivush, 1995), the coding of reminiscing style focused on the way that information was elicited and provided during the conversations. Only utterances relevant to event details were coded. Two mutually exclusive kinds of utterances were tabulated:

1. *Elaborations.* Maternal elaborations included times when mothers introduced a topic for discussion, moved the conversation to a new aspect of the event, or added information regarding a particular aspect (e.g., M: “So what did Matthew do this time?”). Child elaborations included times when children requested new

information, moved the conversation to a new aspect, or provided new information regarding the past event being discussed (e.g., C: “*Well, we were throwing water balloons at the floor and he started hitting people with them.*”).

2. *Repetitions*. Maternal repetitions were coded when mothers repeated their previous utterances, including asking the same questions or making the same statements (e.g., M: “Oh, he was drawing on your Chinese book, doodling, right? What was going on? What were you doing?” C: “Doing something?” M: “*You need to say doing what.*”). Similarly, child repetitions were coded when children provided the same information that they mentioned in previous utterances (e.g., C: “He hit me.” M: “Tell me more about what happened.” C: “He asked me to clean up. I didn’t do it and *he hit me.*”).

Following previous studies (Fivush & Vasudeva, 2002; Kulkofsky, Behrens, & Battin, 2014), a ratio score of Elaborations / (Repetitions+1) was created to capture the extent to which mothers or children adopted an elaborative style to discuss past peer events. The denominator added “1” to take into account that some mothers or children produced no repetitions.

Reminiscing Content. The following content categories were coded. Those categories were not mutually exclusive. For example, ‘why you didn’t like her’ can be coded for internal state language ‘happy’, for causal talk ‘why you didn’t like her’, and for references to peers ‘her’.

1. *Internal state language*. Following previous research (Wang et al., 2010), terms referring to the child’s emotions (e.g., M: “You were a bit *upset.*”), thoughts (e.g., C: “*I didn’t know* how to do it.”), preferences (e.g., C: “*I wanted* a balloon.”),

and subjective evaluations (e.g., M: “It was *great*.”) were identified and coded as internal state language.

2. *Causal talk*. Occurrences where causes of child’s internal states were discussed (e.g., M: “*What made you mad?*” C: “*He didn’t let me play*”.) were coded.

3. *References to peers*. To represent the extent to which the mother and child focused on the role of peers, the number of pronouns that referred to peers (e.g., C: “*She didn’t let me do it*.”) during mother-child reminiscing was counted (Jobson, 2011).

4. *Interactions*. The instances of social interactions or group activities that involved the child and peers (e.g., C: “*We sang a happy birthday song*”) were counted.

5. *Coping strategies*. Negative peer conversations were coded for coping strategies. Based on previous work by Abaied and Rudolph (2011), several mutually-exclusive categories of coping strategies were identified: (1) active-cognitive coping, which consisted of positive thinking about the event (e.g., M: “*Are you feeling better now?*”), and positive interpretation of others’ intentionality (e.g., M: “*Maybe he just wanted to play with you*.”); (2) active-behavioral strategies, which included direct problem-solving strategies (e.g., M: “*How about we take turns?*”), and seeking adult support (e.g., C: “*I will let you (mommy) know*.”); and (3) passive-behavioral strategies of avoidance (e.g., M: “*Just stay away from them*.”) and antisocial behaviors (e.g., C: “*I will sue them and burn their house*.”). Passive-cognitive strategies were rarely mentioned and were not analyzed here. Maternal and children’s utterances suggesting or endorsing each type of coping strategies were tallied.

Two coders independently coded 20% of the data. The Intra-class Coefficients (ICCs) ranged from .87 to .99 for reminiscing variables at time 1, and from .85 to .99 for reminiscing variables at time 2. One of the coders coded the remaining data.

Coding of Self-Descriptions in Relation to Peers

As the interest of the study was to examine children's representations of self in relation to their peers, only descriptions involving interrelations between the self and peers were used for analyses. The valence of each unique proposition was further coded. Descriptions which clearly denoted positive interactions, emotions, and evaluations concerning child in relation to peers were counted as positive (e.g., "*I have lots of friends in school*"). Descriptions which clearly denoted negative interactions, emotions, and evaluations concerning child in relation to peers were counted as negative (e.g., "(there are) *some kids I don't get along with*"). Descriptions which did not clearly denote interactions, emotions, and evaluations as either positive or negative were coded as neutral (e.g., "*We have reading in the morning*"). Repetitions and meaningless responses (e.g., "*We will all become zombies*") were rare and not coded. A composite score of (Positive Self-Descriptions – Negative Self-Descriptions) / Total Self-Descriptions (Shao, Yao, Ceci, & Wang, 2010) was used for analysis.

Two coders independently coded 20% of the data. The ICCs ranged from .90 to .99 for time 1 measurement, and .93 to .99 for time 2 measurement. One of the coders coded the remaining data.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses with European-Americans (EA) and Chinese immigrants (CI) showed no main effects for age; thus, age was not considered further. Children's verbal skill was not correlated with their positive self-views, but was negatively correlated with maternal ($r = -.24, p = .06$) and children's elaborative reminiscing style in positive event discussions at time 1 ($r = -.33, p = .01$), and maternal discussion of active-behavioral strategies at time 2 ($r = -.23, p = .09$) at either marginally significant or significant levels. We also conducted one-way ANOVAs to examine possible child gender differences in the narrative and self-descriptions variables. There was a tendency that mothers were more elaborative when discussing positive event with sons ($M = 10.05, SD = 7.80$) than with daughters ($M = 6.75, SD = 9.76$) at time 1, $F(1, 62) = 3.90, p = .05$. During negative event discussions at time 1, mothers discussed less active-cognitive coping strategies with boys ($M = 2.31, SD = 2.77$) than with girls ($M = 1.09, SD = 1.15$), $F(1, 56) = 4.51, p = .04$, and boys ($M = 0.75, SD = 1.24$) discussed more active-behavioral coping strategies with mothers than did girls ($M = 0.19, SD = 0.49$), $F(1, 56) = 4.62, p = .04$. No gender differences were found for other narrative or self-descriptions variables.

In connection with the hypotheses, we first present the results pertaining to cultural differences in mother-child reminiscing about past peer events and children's self-descriptions in relation to peers, and then turn to the findings on the concurrent and longitudinal relations between the two aspects at the individual level. Six mother-child pairs at time 1 and 2 mother-child pairs at time 2 failed to discuss negative peer events. Four children at time 1, and 2 children at time 2, did not provide any

descriptions about the self in relation to peers. Thus, the degree of freedom varied slightly across relevant tests.

Mother-child Reminiscing between Groups

The majority of positive peer events were about shared positive activities, such as play dates and birthday parties (Time 1 EA, 94%; Time 1 CI, 93%; Time 2 EA, 89%; Time 2 CI, 86%). Other positive peer events included providing help and inclusion (Time 1 EA, 0%; Time 1 CI, 7%; Time 2 EA, 7%; Time 2 CI, 3%), and winning games (Time 1 EA, 6%; Time 1 CI, 0%; Time 2 EA, 4%; Time 2 CI, 10%). In comparison, negative peer discussions covered a variety of events. The most frequent negative events that mothers and children selected were about violation of friendship rules, such as teasing and conflicting over opinions (Time 1 EA, 48%; Time 1 CI, 48%; Time 2 EA, 59%; Time 2 CI, 61%), followed by missing friends (Time 1 EA, 18%; Time 1 CI, 4%; Time 2 EA, 19%; Time 2 CI, 7%), physical harm (Time 1 EA, 15%; Time 1 CI, 19%; Time 2 EA, 11%; Time 2 CI, 4%), claim over objects (Time 1 EA, 6%; Time 1 CI, 19%; Time 2 EA, 4%; Time 2 CI, 18%), losing games (Time 1 EA, 9%; Time 1 CI, 0%; Time 2 EA, 7%; Time 2 CI, 4%), and violation of classroom or general social rules (Time 1 EA, 3%; Time 1 CI, 11%; Time 2 EA, 0%; Time 2 CI, 7%). There were no significant cultural differences in the types of events being discussed.

Table 3.1
Means and Standard Deviations of Mother and Child Reminiscing Variables by Culture, Time Point, and Event Valence

Variable	Time1 Positive		Time1 Negative		Time2 Positive		Time2 Negative	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Elaboration Ratio</i>								
EA Mother	10.11	6.85	6.04	4.06	11.66	12.96	8.71	6.57
CI Mother	6.90	6.44	4.67	3.26	7.03	5.62	5.30	4.42
EA Child	12.48	11.17	9.73	6.44	10.77	8.21	9.86	8.46
CI Child	8.40	5.22	6.88	4.91	11.93	12.24	6.97	5.54
<i>Internal State Language</i>								
EA Mother	6.32	4.15	4.29	3.81	5.86	4.63	6.63	5.09
CI Mother	4.50	3.27	4.52	3.39	4.86	6.40	4.82	4.84
EA Child	3.24	2.66	2.65	2.21	3.54	3.23	5.30	4.84
CI Child	2.23	2.11	2.30	2.07	2.83	3.39	2.21	2.36
<i>Causal Explanations</i>								
EA Mother	.79	1.01	1.48	1.71	1.39	1.50	2.37	2.53
CI Mother	.93	1.23	1.15	1.14	1.38	1.99	1.36	1.93
EA Child	1.03	1.14	1.65	1.47	1.21	1.71	2.56	2.41
CI Child	.70	.92	.93	1.11	1.07	1.41	.93	1.09
<i>Peer References</i>								
EA Mother	4.32	4.80	5.68	4.30	7.07	9.48	7.00	6.07
CI Mother	5.80	6.22	9.81	10.21	6.34	8.30	8.46	8.87
EA Child	6.65	6.14	7.42	5.70	8.21	7.19	11.59	9.56
CI Child	6.73	7.05	10.70	8.61	7.70	6.98	9.04	6.92
<i>Interaction Terms</i>								
EA Mother	4.35	4.36	2.29	2.13	5.11	4.89	2.74	2.89
CI Mother	4.07	2.92	2.44	2.61	5.03	5.81	3.32	4.54
EA Child	6.71	7.51	3.45	3.05	6.46	4.82	4.44	4.82
CI Child	4.32	4.80	5.68	4.30	7.07	9.48	7.00	6.07
<i>Active-cognitive Strategies</i>								
EA Mother			1.06	1.21			1.37	1.45
CI Mother			2.30	2.89			1.61	3.29
EA Child			.71	.86			1.11	1.45
CI Child			.70	1.03			.75	1.01
<i>Active-behavioral Strategies</i>								
EA Mother			.13	.56			.44	1.01
CI Mother			2.11	2.62			2.79	5.43
EA Child			.33	1.01			.33	1.04
CI Child			.70	1.00			.79	1.40
<i>Passive-behavioral Strategies</i>								
EA Mother			0	0			.04	.19
CI Mother			.33	1.04			.57	1.00
EA Child			.03	.18			.07	.38
CI Child			.26	.59			.75	1.96

Note. Variables that exhibited significant or marginally significant cultural differences are presented as bolded.

Table 3.1 lists the means and standard deviations of mother and child reminiscing codes as a function of culture, time point, and event valence. The analyses focused on differences by culture and event valence in reminiscing codes. A series of

2 (culture) x 2 (event) mixed models were constructed in predicting each reminiscing variable at time 1 and time 2, respectively, with child gender and verbal skill as covariates. To examine cultural differences in discussing coping strategies during negative event conversations, ANCOVA models were constructed across maternal and child utterances on different coping strategies respectively at time 1 and time 2, with culture as the between subject variable, and child gender and verbal skill as covariates.

Analyses of maternal elaborations-repetitions ratio at time 1 and time 2 revealed a significant effect of event valence that mothers were more elaborative in positive event discussions than in negative event discussions at time 1, $F(1, 54) = 4.06$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .07$, as well as significant cultural effects that EA mothers were more elaborative than CI mothers across positive and negative events at time 1, $F(1, 54) = 4.30$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .07$, and at time 2, $F(1, 51) = 5.54$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .10$. Similarly, children adopted more elaborative reminiscing style in positive event discussions than in negative event discussions at time 1, $F(1, 54) = 4.69$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .08$. A significant cultural effect was found that EA children were more elaborative than CI children at time 1, $F(1, 54) = 5.83$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .10$. However, there was no significant cultural difference at time 2.

Mothers in the two cultures did not differ in their references to internal states at either time point. However, the effect of Culture x Event interaction was marginally significant in the analysis of maternal explanations of internal states at time 2, $F(1, 51) = 2.87$, $p = .10$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Post-hoc tests indicated that EA mothers talked slightly more about causes of internal states in negative peer event discussions than did CI mothers, $F(1, 51) = 3.00$, $p = .09$, $\eta^2 = .06$.

There was a main effect of event valence for children's references to internal states at time 1, whereby children tended to mention more about internal states in positive event discussions than in negative event discussions, $F(1, 54) = 3.31, p = .08, \eta^2 = .06$. Compared with CI children at time 1, EA children mentioned slightly more internal states, $F(1, 54) = 3.26, p = .08, \eta^2 = .06$, and engaged in more causal explanations, $F(1, 54) = 5.39, p = .02, \eta^2 = .09$. Analysis of child internal state reference at time 2 revealed a significant effect of culture, $F(1, 51) = 5.71, p = .02, \eta^2 = .10$, qualified by a Culture x Event interaction, $F(1, 51) = 5.95, p = .02, \eta^2 = .10$. Post-hoc tests indicated that EA children included more internal states in negative event discussions than did CI children, $F(1, 51) = 10.10, p = .003, \eta^2 = .17$, whereas no cultural difference was found for positive event discussions. A similar pattern emerged for children's causal explanations at time 2, where a significant effect of culture, $F(1, 51) = 6.99, p = .01, \eta^2 = .12$, and a significant Culture x Event interaction, $F(1, 51) = 6.66, p = .01, \eta^2 = .12$ were found. EA children engaged in more causal talk in negative event discussions than did CI children, $F(1, 51) = 11.62, p = .001, \eta^2 = .19$, but did not differ from CI children in positive event discussions.

EA mothers mentioned peers marginally less than did CI mothers at time 1, $F(1, 54) = 3.59, p = .06, \eta^2 = .06$. No other cultural differences in the peer references or interaction terms at either time point reached significance.

The results on coping strategies revealed that EA mothers talked slightly less about active-cognitive strategies than did CI mothers at time 1 at marginal significance, $F(1, 54) = 3.50, p = .07, \eta^2 = .06$. Furthermore, in comparison to CI mothers, EA mothers discussed less about active-behavioral strategies at time 1, $F(1,$

54) = 20.87, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .28$, and at time 2, $F(1, 51) = 5.90$, $p = .02$, $\eta^2 = .10$, as well as less passive-behavioral strategies at time 2, $F(1, 51) = 7.26$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2 = .13$. There were no significant cultural differences in children's utterances on active-cognitive strategies at either time point. However, EA children mentioned less active-behavioral strategies than did CI children at time 1 at marginal significance, $F(1, 54) = 3.10$, $p = .08$, $\eta^2 = .05$. EA children also talked passive-behavioral strategies less often than did CI children at time 1, $F(1, 54) = 4.62$, $p = .04$, $\eta^2 = .08$, and at a marginally significant level at time 2, $F(1, 51) = 3.61$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2 = .07$. In addition, children with more advanced verbal skills had mothers who discussed more active-behavioral strategies at time 2, $F(1, 51) = 4.15$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .08$.

Predicting Children's Self-descriptions in Relation to Peers

The 2 (culture) x 2 (time) mixed-model analyses showed that EA children and CI children did not differ in the positivity of their self-descriptions at time 1 (Mean = .19, SD = .38 for EA children; Mean = .09, SD = .16 for CI children) or time 2 (Mean = .20, SD = .34 for EA children; Mean = .17, SD = .42 for CI children). We then proceeded to test the link between reminiscing codes and self-descriptions.

Concurrent correlations. There were no concurrent correlations between mother-child reminiscing codes and children's self-description positivity at time 1 ($r_s < .20$, $p_s > .13$).

Table 3.2
Zero-order Correlations of Mother-child Reminiscing Variables at Time 1 and Time 2 to Children's Self-Descriptions Positivity at Time 2

	Time 1		Time 2	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
<i>Elaboration</i>				
Mother	-.13	.10	.24 [†]	-.07
Child	-.07	.26 [†]	.37**	.33*
<i>Internal State Language</i>				
Mother	.09	.01	.14	.24 [†]
Child	.21	.26 [†]	.20	.34*
<i>Causal Explanations</i>				
Mother	.20	.15	.23 [†]	.34**
Child	.18	.29 [†]	.26 [†]	.29*
<i>Peer References</i>				
Mother	-.01	.09	.01	.19
Child	.05	.50***	.08	.27 [†]
<i>Interaction Terms</i>				
Mother	-.10	-.02	.18	.14
Child	.05	.19	.34*	.26 [†]
<i>Active-cognitive strategies</i>				
Mother		.14		.35*
Child		.11		.24 [†]
<i>Active-behavioral Strategies</i>				
Mother		-.07		-.28*
Child		-.05		-.15
<i>Passive-behavioral Strategies</i>				
Mother		/		-.05
Child		/		-.32*

Note. [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, two-tailed.

Concurrent correlations between mother-child reminiscing at time2 and children's self-descriptions at time 2 were listed in the right two columns. Longitudinal correlations between mother-child reminiscing at time 1 and children's self-descriptions at time 2 were listed in the left two columns. Maternal and child passive-behavioral strategies at time 1 had very low occurrences and their associations with children's self-descriptions at time 2 were not calculated.

For concurrent correlations at time 2 (see Table 3.2), the strongest patterns emerged between mother-child discussions of past negative events and children's positive self-descriptions. During conversations regarding negative peer events, the self-descriptions positivity was associated with children's elaborative reminiscing and their use of internal state language, as well as both mothers' and children's causal talk about internal states. Children had more positive self-views when mothers talked more

about active-cognitive coping strategies and less about active-behavioral strategies, and when children talked less about passive-behavioral strategies. Furthermore, marginally significant correlations were found for mothers' references to children's internal states, children's references to peers and interaction terms, and children's discussion of active-cognitive strategies during negative event discussions to children's positive self-descriptions. Pertaining to positive peer event discussions, children's positive self-descriptions was correlated with their elaborative reminiscing and references to interaction terms. Mothers' elaborative reminiscing, and both mothers' and children's causal talk during positive event discussions were associated with children's positive self-descriptions at marginally significant levels.

Longitudinal correlations. The longitudinal correlations between mother-child reminiscing at time 1 and self-descriptions at time 2 are also listed in Table 3.2. All significant or marginally significant results emerged concerning child variables in negative peer event conversation. Children who referred more frequently to peers during negative event discussions at time 1 provided more positive descriptions of self in relation to peers at time 2. Children's elaborative reminiscing, references to their own internal states, and causal explanations during negative event discussions at time 1 were associated with more positive self-descriptions at time 2 at marginally significant levels. In contrast, neither a single maternal variable in the negative peer event conversation nor any maternal or child variable in the positive peer event conversation was significantly correlated with children's positive self-descriptions at time 2.

Differential Prediction of Children's Peer-related Self-views

Following our hypotheses, we tested whether independent of culture, the same reminiscing variable occurring during a negative event conversation would be uniquely predictive of children's peer-related self-views as opposed to that occurring during a positive event discussion. A series of regression analyses were conducted to examine the differential relations of positive and negative peer event discussions to children's positive self-views concurrently at time 2, after controlling for culture. In each regression, we entered culture and the relevant maternal and child reminiscing codes that were significantly or marginally correlated with peer-related self-views. We did not test reminiscing codes that had nonsignificant zero-order correlations with self-views. Child language skill was only included in the regression model involving coping strategy variables, given the marginally significant correlation between child language skill and maternal discussion of active-behavioral strategies.

Table 3.3
Regression Models for Reminiscing Codes at Time 2 Predicting Self-Descriptions at Time 2

Variable	Self-Descriptions at Time 2		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>
<i>Elaboration Model</i>			
Culture	-.03	.10	-.04
Mother elaboration: Positive event	.01	.01	.15
Child elaboration: Positive event	.01	.01	.34*
Child elaboration: Negative event	.01	.00	.28*
		$R^2 = .27, F = 4.52^*$	
<i>Internal State Language (ISL) Model</i>			
Culture	.04	.11	.05
Mother ISL: Negative event	.01	.01	.10
Child ISL: Negative event	.03	.01	.32 [†]
		$R^2 = .13, F = 2.37^{\dagger}$	
<i>Causal Explanation Model</i>			
Culture	.01	.11	.02
Mother causal explanation: Positive event	.01	.04	.04
Mother causal explanation: Negative event	.04	.03	.24
Child causal explanation: Positive event	.04	.04	.18
Child causal explanation: Negative event	.02	.03	.09
		$R^2 = .17, F = 1.89$	
<i>Peer Reference Model</i>			
Culture	-.04	.10	-.05
Child peer reference: Negative event	.01	.01	.26 [†]
		$R^2 = .08, F = 2.01$	
<i>Interaction Terms Model</i>			
Culture	-.07	.09	-.09
Child interaction term: Positive event	.03	.01	.39**
Child interaction term: Negative event	.02	.01	.21
		$R^2 = .21, F = 4.45^{**}$	
<i>Coping Model</i>			
Culture	.02	.10	.02
Language	.04	.07	-.08
Mother active-cognitive strategies	.04	.02	.28 [†]
Child active-cognitive strategies	.03	.04	.11
Mother active-behavioral strategies	-.01	.01	-.13
Child passive-behavioral strategies	-.07	.04	-.27 [†]
		$R^2 = .25, F = 2.53^*$	

Note: [†] $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

As shown in Table 3.3, after controlling for culture, child elaboration in both positive and negative event discussions uniquely predicted children's positive self-descriptions, whereas mother's elaborative reminiscing in positive event discussions

did not make a unique contribution. Children's references to internal states during negative event discussions predicted children's positive self-descriptions at a marginally significant level after controlling for culture and maternal reference of internal states during negative event discussions. Mothers' and children's causal explanations in both positive and negative event discussions made significant contributions when they were entered in separate models after controlling for culture. However, none was uniquely predictive of children's descriptions of self in peer relations when they were entered together in a regression model. Children who talked more about peers regarding negative events and included more interaction terms regarding positive events tended to have more positive peer-related self-views, independent of culture. Maternal discussion of active-cognitive strategies and children's discussion of passive-behavioral strategies made unique contributions to children's positive peer-related self-views at a marginally significant level, after controlling for culture and the other two coping strategy variables. Although maternal discussion of active-behavioral strategies predicted children's positive self-descriptions at a marginally significant level when entered separately, it did not make unique prediction when entered together with maternal discussion of active-cognitive strategies and children's discussion of passive-behavioral strategies.

We also performed a series of regression analyses to test the longitudinal relations of mother-child reminiscing variables at time 1 to children's positive self-descriptions at time 2, independent of culture. Each of the four child-reminiscing variables during negative event discussions at time 1 that were significantly or marginally correlated with time 2 self-descriptions, along with culture, was included in

a separate regression model. The resulting R² values for the models involving child references of internal states, causal talk, and peer references were 0.10, 0.10, and 0.34 respectively, at marginally significant or significant levels ($F(2, 43) = 2.49, p = .10$, for references of internal states; $F(2, 43) = 2.46, p = .10$, for causal talk; $F(2, 43) = 11.02, p < .001$, for peer references). Each of three child variables during negative event discussions ($B = 0.04, SE B = 0.02, \beta = .26, p = .08$, for references of internal states; $B = 0.07, SE B = 0.04, \beta = .26, p = .08$, for causal talk; $B = 0.03, SE B = 0.01, \beta = .56, p < .001$, for peer references) were either significant or marginally significant predictors of children's positive peer-related self-views, after controlling for culture. Child elaborative style at time 1 did not make a significant contribution to children's self-descriptions at time 2 once culture was taken into consideration ($B = 0.01, SE B = 0.01, \beta = .23, p = ns$).

Discussion

This study examined the role of mother-child reminiscing about peer experiences in the development of children's peer-related self-views in middle childhood. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first study to investigate how mothers and children co-construct peer experiences through reminiscing in cultural contexts, and its relation to children's peer-related self-views concurrently and over time. The findings suggest that certain reminiscing style and content may facilitate children's self-development. The findings further highlight that talking about negative peer experiences may serve as a particularly important context for the understanding of self in relation to peers over the long term.

Some interesting cultural differences in reminiscing variables emerged. European-American children and mothers made causal explanations about children's internal states more often than did their Chinese immigrant counterparts when discussing negative peer experiences at time 2, while such cultural differences were not observed in the positive event discussions. This study focused exclusively on peer experiences and illuminated cultural variations pertaining to the self in relation to others under different event contexts (Miller et al., 2007; Nelson & Fivush, 2004; Wang & Brockermeiser, 2002). Although Chinese immigrant parents do not encourage children to focus on their subjective states for the purpose of establishing individuality (Wang et al., 2010), they may be just as likely as their European-American counterparts to discuss children's subjective perspectives in peer experiences (e.g., "Were you happy playing with Tom?") in order to promote social connectedness and harmony with peers. On the other hand, Chinese immigrant families may be inclined to discuss the causes underlying children's negative thoughts, preferences, and emotions involving peers which may threaten satisfactory view of peer relations.

Contrary to our prediction, European-American and Chinese immigrant mothers and children did not differ in their references to interaction terms during reminiscing. Compared with previous studies that focused on reminiscing of child-centered events (Jobson & O'Kearney, 2008; Wang, 2004), mothers and children in this study were specifically asked to discuss peer-related events. Children in middle childhood experience a stark increase in social influences, particularly from peers (Sullivan, 1953). As a result, both European-American and Chinese immigrant

families with preadolescent children may be sensitive to event details concerning peers and peer interactions, and are equally likely to emphasize those when co-constructing children's past peer experiences during reminiscing.

European-American and Chinese immigrant mother-child dyads differed in discussing coping strategies in negative peer experiences. Chinese immigrant mothers discussed active-cognitive strategies slightly more often by shedding positive light on the event and peers' intentions than did European-American mothers at time 1. Prior studies have demonstrated that compared with European-American adults, Asian Americans were more likely to adopt secondary control coping strategies in the face of interpersonal stressors, that is, changing the individual's feelings and thoughts to adjust to the objective environment (Lam & Zane, 2004). Asian-American college students also tend to describe others' harmful behavior as impulsive and attribute part of the cause to themselves when recalling interpersonal transgressions made by others (Song & Wang, 2014). Minimizing the extent of harm and peers' malicious intentions serves a more prevalent means to resolve peer negativity for Chinese immigrant families than for European-American families, which can help maintain harmonious evaluations of others and interpersonal relations to fulfill a positive interdependent self-construal.

Additionally, Chinese immigrant families engaged in more discussions on behavioral strategies to deal with peer problems, not only through active actions, but also through passive actions. These results are consistent with other cultural investigations of mother-child conversations about shared experiences, in which Chinese immigrant families are more likely to use reminiscing practice as a forum to

emphasize social and behavioral norms than European-Americans (Wang & Fivush, 2005). It was noteworthy that Chinese immigrant mothers in the current study also suggested to their children passive-behavioral strategies so that further peer conflicts could be avoided and harmonious interpersonal relations would not be disturbed. Similar results were observed in adult samples that Asian-American college students were found to use more problem avoidance and social withdrawal coping strategies than European Americans when dealing with general stressors (Chang, 1996).

We did not find cultural differences in the positivity of peer-related self-views between European-American and Chinese immigrant children as hypothesized. There have been some mixed findings in cross-national comparisons of peer-related self-views. Asian children and adolescents rated themselves less positively in relation to peers than did their Western counterparts (Nishikawa, Norlander, Fransson, & Sundbom, 2007; Wastlund, Norlander, & Archer, 2001). However, some studies found that Chinese children and adolescents scored the same on self-perceived social competence as Canadian and European-American children (Chen, et al., 2004; Wang & Koh, 2015), and East Asian college students even provided more favorable statements on their social traits than did European-Americans (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Toguchi, 2003). Accordingly, some scholars argue that Asians may have generally less positive self-views than European-Americans due to their tendency to self-criticize rather than self-enhance (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997). Nevertheless, some other scholars stress that Asians exhibit self-enhancing motivation in perceiving their social and collectivistic attributes which are valued by collectivism (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005). Our results support the latter view,

showing that Chinese immigrant and European-American children exhibited equivalently positive representations of self in relation to peers in middle childhood, given that peer relations entail critical importance for both cultural groups.

Consistent with our predictions, children who were more elaborative and focused more on peer interactions had more positive self-views. The result confirmed the importance of elaborative reminiscing, particularly through providing embellished social content and peer exchanges rather than dwelling on self-focused details, may help children construct positive self-representations in relation to their peers (Fivush et al., 2006; Song & Wang, 2013). This finding also provided evidence to the social information processing theory that proposes mutual influences between the ability to encode and organize social cues from prior social situations and forming social schemas (Crick & Dodge, 1994). Since peer experiences are the focal events under discussion, it is beneficial to focus on peer interactions, which may facilitate the formation of enriched schemas pertaining to peer relations and understanding of the self in relation to peers. However, maternal discussion of event details was not directly associated with children's self-views. This may reflect the developmental characteristics for the current sample. Preadolescents have more advanced language and autobiographical memory skills so that they can rely less on their parents to provide event details and structure the memory (Fivush et al., 2011; Recchia et al., 2014). Furthermore, mothers were not the primary participants in the peer events and had limited access to the actual event information.

Surprisingly, we found that maternal utterances regarding active-behavioral strategies to deal with peer problems were negatively associated with children's

positive self-views. Our results supported a remedial model that mothers tend to give children a great deal of advice on dealing with peer situations when children particularly lack social competence (Laird et al., 1994; McDowell, Parke, & Wang, 2003). Mothers may be concerned about their children's psychosocial functioning and are intentionally compensating for it. In the current study, parents might dedicate themselves to providing active-behavioral strategies to children who were not evaluating themselves positively in peer relations. Furthermore, the regression analysis suggested that children at preadolescent ages may need maternal guidance on how to positively interpret events and peer intentions more than specific behavioral suggestions regarding peer interactions. Future cross-sectional or longitudinal studies that include a wider developmental period would help testifying this claim.

In line with previous studies (Bird & Reese, 2006; Marin et al., 2008, Song & Wang, 2003), reminiscing about negative events appeared to be a unique context in self-development. Children had more positive peer-related self-views when they focused on peers and frequently referred to and explained their internal states during negative event discussions. Negative events may constitute a particularly challenging context for mother-child reminiscing, which calls for more effort to take on the other person's views to understand the conflicts and extrapolate personal meanings that may not be obvious or pleasant. Understanding, reflections, and reinterpretation may bring in more adaptive evaluations of the self and peers in unpleasant peer interactions, contributing to more positive self-views. Importantly, mother-child reminiscing about negative events at time 1 stood out as exerting longitudinal associations with positive self-views at time 2. It is possible that children who are able to explore the role of

peers and make references and explanations about their own internal states in negative peer experiences tend to develop advanced social cognitive skills, including emotion knowledge and theory of mind (Dunn, Brown, & Beardsall, 1991; Lu, Su, & Wang, 2008). They can apply those newly gained skills to direct their subsequent positive peer encounters based on which they further form positive self-representations.

Although discussing negative events may be emotionally disturbing to children and possibly to mothers as well, encouraging children to revisit details of the events, particularly the role of peers in those events, and to understand their own subjective perspectives, may allow children to construct a broad and comprehensive picture for negative event reappraisal. Such conversations may help children develop coherent representations of peer-related past experiences, and further gain knowledge about themselves and peers in the long run.

The findings that the style and content of mother-child reminiscing at time 1 were unrelated to children's peer-related self-views at time 1, although significantly related to that assessed at time 2, are intriguing and suggest that children in middle childhood may undergo developmental changes in their views of self in relation to peers. During middle childhood, self-concept becomes increasingly differentiated across different domains such as academic competence and social competence (Harter, 1990). Due to the cognitive maturity, children in the current study may be more ready and reliable to describe the interrelations between themselves and others in an open-ended task at a later time point. Furthermore, children's susceptibility to peer influences, particularly those from aversive peer experiences, increases over time from preadolescence to early adolescence (e.g., Parker et al., 2006). Similar developmental

trend was found that individual differences in children's ruminative response style, that is, the tendency to recall more negative memories and draw more pessimistic inferences from events in their lives, become increasingly stable (e.g., Abela, Brozina, & Haigh, 2002; Abela & Hankin, 2011). Therefore, as compared to an early time point, children's peer-related self-views at a later time point may be more developmentally consequential under the influences of peer experiences and discussing those experiences.

There are some limitations that are noteworthy. Although the current findings suggest associations between mother-child reminiscing and children's self-views in peer relations, mother-child relationship quality was not taken into consideration. For instance, mother-child dyads with secure attachments are more likely to have elaborative and open communication particularly when discussing stressful events (Fivush & Vasudeva, 2002). Furthermore, derived from the attachment experience with mothers, children can form an internal working model of the self and others, which can translate into peer-self schema (Cassidy, Kirsh, Scolton, & Parke, 1996). Future studies are called for to disentangle the influences of mother-child reminiscing and other important relationship variables on children's self-development. To further illustrate the development of children's peer-related self-views in cultural contexts, additional longitudinal and cross-sectional studies are needed to examine the trajectories of children's representations of self in relation to peers across different cultural groups. It should also be noted that the current sample was small, particularly at time 2 assessment. The findings need to be interpreted with caution.

In sum, findings of this study demonstrated the importance of family narrative practices in self-development pertaining to peer relations in cultural contexts. The style and content of family conversations about past peer experiences were associated with positive peer-related self-views for both European-American and Chinese immigrant preadolescent children. The benefit of mother-child reminiscing about negative peer experiences was particularly salient over the long term. As children experience increasing influences from peer experiences throughout middle childhood and adolescence, parents continue to support and shape children's sociocognitive development through reminiscing practices about those past experiences to facilitate the important life transition for children from home to school and the community.

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CHAPTER 4

CHILDREN'S NARRATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF PEER EXPERIENCES IN CULTURAL CONTEXTS: THE RELATIONS TO PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT

Introduction

Peer experiences exert great influence on various aspects of children's adjustment, affecting their self-esteem, externalizing problems, and internalizing problems (e.g., Caldwell, Rudolph, Troop-Gordon, & Kim, 2004). Some theoretical frameworks highlight the internalization process through which children process interpersonal experiences and engender summative information concerning interactive contingencies (Abelson, 1981; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Nelson, 1981), a key social-cognitive mechanism that direct children's psychosocial functioning. Little empirical research has been dedicated to enlighten children's internal representations of peer experiences. For examples, what types of peer interactions from real experiences are encoded and organized? Whether peer conflicts are represented and resolved? More scarce is known about the associations between such representations and children's psychological adjustment in cultural contexts. Using a projective story completion technique, the present study assessed the narrative representations of peer experiences, and how such internal representations may be linked to psychological adjustment in European American and Chinese immigrant children.

Representations of Peer Experiences in Middle Childhood

Peer influences on children's psychological adjustment in middle childhood deserve special attention. Transitioning from early childhood, children in middle childhood face a salient developmental task, that is, the establishment and maintenance of peer relations. As compared to attachment relationships in the family environment, peer relations are novel, and can be more complex and stressful (e.g., Collins, Harris, & Susman, 1995). Due to the increasing amount of time that children spend at school and on extracurricular activities, peer relations endure changes in quality, complexity, and diversity (Ladd, Herald, & Kochel, 2006). On one hand, children may form intimate peer groups and strengthen friendship quality, from which they experience companionship, help, care, and validation (e.g., Parker, & Asher, 1993). On the other hand, the likelihood of experiencing peer conflict is high during middle childhood, ranging from conflict among friends, to social exclusion from groups or chronic peer victimization (e.g., Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996). Therefore, coping with peer conflict through cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies constitutes a challenging and prevalent task for children (e.g., Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004).

Given the importance of peer influences in middle childhood, extant literature mostly focused on examining the direct link between children's actual peer experiences and psychological adjustment. Numerous studies have provided empirical evidence that the number of peer affiliations that children have is linked with their positive self-evaluations of social acceptance (Boivin & Hymel, 1997), and positive qualities in best friendships can protect children from internalizing and externalizing problems (e.g., Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999), as well as help them

during school transitions (e.g., Berndt, Hawkins, & Jiao, 1999). Peer adversity, on the other hand, is associated with children's negative self-schema (e.g., Boivin & Hymel, 1997; Troop-Gordon, & Ladd, 2005) and can generate risk to well-being, such as the feelings of anxiety and depression (Roth, Coles, & Heimberg, 2000; Storch & Ledley, 2005). Nevertheless, aversive peer experiences only partially account for negative self-views (e.g., Hughes, Cavell, & Grossman, 1997; Hymel, Franke, & Freigang, 1985), loneliness, (Boivin & Hymel, 1997), and depression (Boivin, Hymel, & Bukowski, 1995). Children's psychological adjustment, which includes the way they understand themselves and peers as well as the subjective feelings of loneliness and anxiety, may not be a mere reflection of their peer experiences.

Although a burgeoning of studies have been designed to capture the complexity of direct peer experiences at the group level (e.g., peer group affiliation, crowd) and at the dyadic level (e.g., between friends), there is a lack of knowledge at the individual level: how are the features of actual peer experiences cognitively and internally represented? Given a hypothetical social situation, are children more likely to perceive it as an opportunity for affiliative or caring peer interactions or an occasion that peer conflict arises? If peer conflict occurs, do children think it can be resolved and turn into a positive outcome? Proposed by several theoretical perspectives (e.g., Boivin & Hymel, 1997; Crick & Dodge, 1994; Parker, Rubin, Price, & DeRosser, 1995), children develop abstract knowledge, schemas, and judgment towards self and interaction partners from the memory database of daily social experiences. Such script knowledge does not fluctuate as a result of a few exceptional experiences but constructed based on repeated similar situations and remains relatively stable.

Children's internal representations of peer experiences, as compared with subsets of actual peer experiences, may be a more proximal factor in affecting their psychological adjustment in middle childhood.

Narrative Representations of Internalized Interpersonal Relations

There has been an increasing interest in probing the inner world of young children (e.g., Woolgar, 2000). Influenced by Bowlby (1980), attachment theorists have long held that young children construct 'internal working models' out of early relationships with primary caregivers. More importantly, such 'internal working models' with primary caregivers can translate into representations regarding other enduring relationships, such as peer relations, and thus impacting social interactions and functioning with peers (Sroufe, 1983; Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986). Compatible with Bowlby's notion of "internal working model", scholars outside attachment theory have argued that young children's understanding of the social world is primarily organized in event schemas or scripts (e.g., Nelson, 1981; Schank & Abelson, 1977). Based on repeated similar events in real life, children develop relationship schemas that summarize the predicted roles and interaction contingencies for self and others (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994; Hudson & Shapiro, 1991). Scripts are mental representations that guide the processing of incoming information, enabling children to understand the intentions of others and behave accordingly in future social encounters.

One methodology for assessing children's internal representations of interpersonal experiences is projective story completion (Wang & Leichtman, 2000; Woolgar, 2000). For example, with the prop of a small doll or pictures, children are presented with relationship-oriented story stems (e.g., MacArthur Story Stem Battery,

Attachment Doll Story Completion Task, and Manchester Child Attachment Story Task) that leave them to complete the stories in their own way (see Bretherton, Prentiss, & Ridgeway, 1990; Green, Stanley, Smith & Goldwyn, 2000; Oppenheim, Nir, Warren, & Emde, 1997). This technique is designed to stimulate children to draw upon their scripted knowledge of relationships and resolve conflict presented in the story stems. The story narratives not only reflect children's past experiences, but also their 'construction of reality' (Holmberg, Robinson, Corbitt-Price, & Wiener, 2007).

Research has further documented that narrative themes in the completed stories show fairly consistent associations with children's actual interpersonal experiences and can entail views of self and others in interpersonal relations (Oppenheim, 2006). For example, compared with non-maltreated children, maltreated children included more negative representations of parents such as being harsh and punitive, and more negative representations of self as engaged in aggression, non-compliance, and shame in the narratives (e.g., Toth, Cicchetti, MacFie, Maughan & Vanmeenen, 2000; Toth, Cicchetti, MacFie, Rogosch, & Maughan, 2000; Toth et al., 1997). Other studies have linked narrative themes to the development of psychopathology and well-being (e.g., Warren, Emde, & Sroufe, 2000; Warren, Oppenheim & Emde, 1996; Zahn-Waxler, Parker, Usher, Belouad, Cole, & Gruber, 2008). Children whose narratives depict interpersonal interactions with more caring themes of affiliation, reparation, and prosocial behaviors exhibit developmental trajectories of no or improved behavioral problems in later years (e.g., Zahn-Waxler et al., 2008). Children who portray more negative themes, including aggression, destruction, and social withdrawal in their narratives, in contrast, tend to have more social, emotional, and behavioral problems

(e.g., von Klitzing, Kelsay, Emde, Robinson, & Schmitz, 2000; Pass, Arceche, Cooper, Creswell, & Murray, 2012; Warren et al., 1996). More important, narrative representations of interactive themes are found to mediate the associations of children's actual interpersonal experience to internalizing problems and social competence (e.g., Laible, Carlo, Torquati, & Ontai, 2000; Toth et al., 2000).

In sum, the evidence supports the notion that children construct representations of interpersonal experiences, and the interactive themes in these representations can guide their social behavior and impact their psychological functioning. However, there are two deficiencies in the extant literature. First, the literature focuses on the internal representations concerning either the attachment relationship or interpersonal relations in general. It has not examined children's representations of peer relations specifically, one particularly important type of interpersonal relations in middle childhood. Secondly, we are unaware of any studies that have examined children's narrative representations of peer relations in connection to their psychological adjustment in a cross-cultural context.

The Role of Culture

Some major theories have conceptualized contrasting views of the self in relation to others in different cultures (Hofstede, 1991; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Western cultures place a greater emphasis on the separateness of oneself as a unique person and a paramount emphasis on the individual's autonomy (personal goals, preferences, and needs) over group cohesion. This kind of self is often dubbed as the "independent" self. In contrast, East Asian cultures hold the view that the self is interconnected with others in large social networks or hierarchy. Therefore,

fitting in with others and subordinating personal needs to group integration is deemed as more important for this type of “interdependent” self. Consistently, different paths are proposed for the development of close relations in these cultural contexts, whereby relationship stability and harmony is emphasized throughout various relations in East Asia such as China and Japan, whereas tension and conflict generated from autonomy striving is perceived as more central in the U.S. (Rothbart, Pott, Azuma, Miyake, & Weisz, 2000).

Numerous studies have demonstrated how individuals from different cultures perceive and react to interpersonal conflict (e.g., Bond & Smith, 1996). As conflict is deemed as a threat to social harmony, East Asian children tend to avoid overt conflict (e.g., Benjamin, Schneider, Greenman, & Hum, 2001; Orlick, Zhou, & Partington, 1990). In the rise of interpersonal conflict, Chinese rely on indirect strategies to resolve conflict through disengagement which diminish further social interactions (French, Pidada, Denoma, McDonald, & Lawton, 2005). Conflict with friends was found to be positively associated with loneliness for Indonesian and Chinese adolescents (Liu, Li, Purwono, Chen, & French, 2015). In comparison, Western children are encouraged to be self-assertive and express self-interests, even though it will result in interpersonal conflict (e.g., French et al., 2011). Different from East Asian youth, U.S. children more frequently used active strategies, such as negotiation and seeking help from the third party, to resolve peer conflict (French et al., 2005). In mostly Western samples, effective resolution to the conflict within friendship makes a unique prediction to the lowered level of children’s loneliness (e.g., Parker & Asher, 1993), whereas failure to resolve peer conflict and conflict avoidance are associated

with loneliness and social anxiety (e.g., Johnson, LaVoie, Spenceri, & Mohoney-Wernli, 2001).

No research has been done to examine whether the cross-cultural differences in children's self-construal and conflict management are reflected in children's representations of peer experiences, with the exception of a study by Zahn-Waxler and her colleagues (1996). In this study, Japanese and U.S. preschool children completed stories concerning a series of hypothetical interpersonal situations, some dealing with distress and others interpersonal conflict. Compared with Japanese children, U.S. children included more aggressive themes in their verbal responses to interpersonal conflict situations, and expressed more aggressions both verbally and behaviorally with doll puppet when responding to distress situations. The prominence of aggressive themes in U.S. children's narratives reflected their independent orientations such as assertion and conflict. Interestingly, U.S. children also enacted more affiliation and prosocial behaviors in response to interpersonal conflict situations than did Japanese children, suggesting U.S. children might be better able to generate complex scripts for conflict resolution. However, no cross-cultural differences were found in children's verbal responses reflecting interdependent orientations, such as affiliative or reparative themes. It is noteworthy that results from this study were not separated for situations pertaining to child-peer relations (e.g., fighting with a child on a jungle gym) and parent-child relations (e.g., seeing parents go on a trip), unique contexts under which children may attribute different meanings to interpersonal conflict (e.g., Laursen & Collin, 1994). Furthermore, the study did not assess children's psychological

adjustment, so it is not clear how children's representations of peer experiences may be linked to their psychological adjustment.

The Present Study

I was interested in exploring the associations between children's narrative representations of peer experiences and their psychological adjustment in cultural contexts. This study focused on European American and Chinese immigrant children in middle childhood, examining the concurrent and longitudinal links between narrative themes and children's psychological adjustment and whether they would vary between the cultural groups.

This study adapted the narrative projective measure to assess preadolescents' representations of peer experiences. Two standardized story stems specifically related to peer situations were provided to elicit children's narratives about peer experiences. I then examined caring (i.e., prosocial, reparative and affiliative interactions) and conflictual themes (i.e., aggression and disagreement) in the narratives. Following Rothbart et al. (2000) and Zahn-Waxler et al. (1996), I expected that European American children to include less caring themes and more conflictual themes. In addition, I was interested in the occurrence of conflict resolution in the story, specifically, whether a child started the story with an aggressive theme but resolved the child-peer aggression and ended the story with a positive caring theme. Given that European American children may have more sophisticated skills and active approach to solve conflict (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1996), I expected that European American to be more likely to resolve peer conflicts in their narratives than Chinese immigrant children.

To assess children's peer-related self-views, children were asked to respond to an open-ended question, "Tell me anything about you and other kids in school." This task was adapted from the self-description task that has been widely used in previous cross-cultural studies (e.g., Wang, 2004). Children's responses were coded to reflect the positivity and engagement level of peer-related self-views, which responsively the positive evaluations and interpersonal integration level of the self in relation to peers. Children's feelings of loneliness and social anxiety, conceptualized as cognitive and affective evaluations of unsatisfying social relationships (Anderson, 1999), were also assessed through self-report questionnaires.

Pertaining to the associations between children's narrative peer interaction themes and psychological adjustment, we have the following hypotheses:

- (1) Caring themes in the narratives reflect positive interpersonal exchanges and satisfying social relations. In line with the general literature (e.g., Laible et al., 2004; Rothbart et al., 2000; Zahn-Waxler et al., 2008), I hypothesized that caring themes in children's story narratives at time 1 would predict more positive and engaging peer-related self-views, but lower levels of loneliness and social anxiety, at both time 1 and time 2. The same result pattern would be expected for both European American and Chinese immigrant children.
- (2) Conflictual themes reflect the tension between individuals due to the uniqueness of self and individuation process, which is devalued in Chinese immigrant children but may be valued in European American children (e.g., Rothbart et al., 2000). Therefore, Conflictual themes in Chinese

immigrant children's story narratives at time 1 were expected to be negatively associated with children's positive and engaging self-views but positively associated with loneliness and social anxiety, at time 1 and time 2. In contrast, opposite results were expected for European American children. Conflictual themes in European American children's story narratives at time 1 were expected to be positively associated with children's positive and engaging self-views but negatively associated with loneliness and social anxiety, at time 1 and time 2.

- (3) Conflict resolution reflects the reduced tension between individuals and reestablished positive social interactions, which is encouraged in European American children but may not be so in Chinese immigrant children (e.g., Rothbart et al., 2000). Therefore, Conflictual themes in European American children's story narratives at time 1 were expected to be positively associated with children's positive and engaging self-views but negatively associated with loneliness and social anxiety, at time 1 and time 2. In contrast, such relations were not expected for Chinese immigrant children.

Method

Participants

Thirty-four European-American (EA) children (21 boys, mean age = 9.68 years; range = 9.00 – 10.42 years) and 30 first-generation Chinese immigrant (CI) children (15 boys, mean age = 9.42 years; range = 8.92 – 10.42 years) and their mothers from upstate New York participated in a larger longitudinal study of social-

cognitive development in middle childhood. All participants came from middle-class families. Parents in CI families were originally from Mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and all but 3 children were born in the United States. The three CI children who were born outside the U.S. had lived in America since they were 2-3 years old. Parents gave permission for their children to participate and children gave informed assent. Due to family moves, 7 EA families and 6 CI families dropped from the study at time 2. There were no systematic differences between children who remained in the study and those who left.

Procedure

Two female researchers visited the families twice, one year apart. English-Chinese bilingual researchers visited the CI families and interviewed children in the language that children preferred. All materials were written in both English and Chinese, and a translation and back-translation procedure was carried out to ensure their equivalence in both literal and sense meaning. Two CI children at time 1 spoke Chinese and English interchangeably during the interview and the rest of CI children spoke English at both time points. Each home visit began with a mother-child reminiscing activity, followed by an interviewer-child session and a semi-structured mother-child play task, which were all video tape-recorded. The tasks relevant to the present study are described below.

Measures

Child story narratives about peer scenarios. Children's responses to two hypothetical peer scenarios were elicited through a projective story-completion task at time 1. The researcher started with a standardized introduction about the story

completion task and the central character in the story, “we are going to tell stories about a boy/girl whose name is John/Jenny. John/Jenny is 9/10 years old just like you. I will start each story and you will help me finish the story.” In order to make the child identify with the story character, the name, gender, and age of the story character were modified to matchup with the child. For CI children, one additional piece of information about the story character’s ethnic background, “John/Jenny mom and dad are from China,” was added to further their identification with the story character. Then the experimenter started a story stem and asked the child to complete it (i.e., “tell me what happens next”). Children were encouraged to tell the story in the way they would like and to include as many details as they could by receiving open-ended prompts (e.g., “tell me more”, “anything else happens?”). Two story stems were presented, one about John/Jenny who was always being shy and got called to answer a question in an English class, and the other one about John/Jenny seeing some kids play ball together. The order of presenting the two story stems was counterbalanced among children. This task lasted approximately 10 minutes.

Child descriptions about self in relation to peers. Children were interviewed for descriptions about themselves in relation to their peers at both time 1 and time 2. Adapted from prior research (Keller, Ford, & Meacham, 1978; Wang, 2004), the interview started with an open-ended prompt. The researcher asked the child, “(Child’s name), I would like to write a story about you and other kids in school, to write a story that will tell about (Child’s name) and other kids in school. What’s the first thing I should put in the story?” The researcher further prompted the child after each response, “And what else should I write to tell about you and other kids in

school?” until the child indicated by speech or gesture that he or she was finished. This task lasted approximately 10 minutes.

Loneliness. Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction Questionnaire (LSDQ; Asher & Wheeler, 1985), a 16-item self-report scale, was used to assess children’s feelings of loneliness (e.g., “I’m lonely”), feelings of social adequacy versus inadequacy (e.g., “I’m good at working with other children”), and subjective estimations of peer status (e.g., “I have lots of friends”). Children responded to each item by using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (“not at all true for me”) to 5 (“true all the time for me”). Positively worded items were reverse coded and the loneliness scores were summed across all items with higher scores indicative of greater loneliness and social dissatisfaction. The scale exhibited high internal consistencies ($\alpha = .85$ at time 1; $\alpha = .92$ at time 2).

Social anxiety. The Social Anxiety Scale for Adolescents (SAS-A; La Greca & Lopez, 1998) was used during both home visits to assess children’s subjective experiences of social anxiety. Children responded to 18 items on a 5-point Likert scale indicating how well the item can describe them (1 = not at all true, 5 = true all the time). Scores of all items were summed to create a Total Social Anxiety scale. In this study, the internal consistencies of the Total Social Anxiety scale were .89 at time 1 and .93 at time 2.

Child verbal skill. Mothers filled out a Child Communication Survey adapted from Feagans and Farrens (1997) to rate children’s language and communication skills. CI mothers rated their children’s verbal skills in both English and Chinese.

Children's verbal skill for the language that was used in the interview tasks was used in the analyses. This survey had a Cronbach's $\alpha = .98$ for the current sample.

Coding

All coding was performed on participants' responses in their original language. Children's verbal responses were parsed into propositions. Proposition, a subject-verb construction (e.g., "we played", Fivush, Haden, & Adam, 1995), which was used as the unit of coding for all variables except for the variable of conflict resolution in children's story narratives.

Coding of Child Story Narratives

Narrative variables of peer interaction themes were developed based on previous studies (Shields, Ryan, & Cicchetti, 2001; Zahn-Waxler et al., 1994; Zahn-Waxler et al., 2008) to capture narrative representations of peer experiences.

Caring themes. Caring peer interaction themes included prosocial (e.g., "*they helped her to participate in the game*"), reparative (e.g., "*then they said 'sorry'*"), and affiliative interactions (e.g., "*they played together*") involving the story character ("John/Jenny") and other kids. The total number of caring themes in children's verbal response was counted for each story stem.

Conflictual themes. Conflictual peer interaction themes included physical aggression (e.g., "*he spit on them*"), verbal aggression (e.g., "*they teased her*"), relational aggression (e.g., "*they didn't allow her to play if she played with her friend*"), and disagreement (e.g., "*then they began to argue about it*"). The total number of conflictual themes in children's response was counted for each story stem.

Conflict resolution. This variable was to measure the presence of resolution following a peer conflict. For example, a story started with peer exclusion (e.g., “*they said ‘no, you can’t join.’*”) and ended with peer affiliation (e.g., “*later they played happily together.*”). Resolution was coded as either 0 (not present) or 1 (present) for each story stem.

Due to the low occurrences of peer interaction themes in one scenario (i.e., called on to answer question in the English class), the two story stems were not examined separately. Final scores of caring themes, conflictual themes, and conflict resolution were averaged across the two story stems.

Coding of Self-Descriptions in Relation to Peers

A set of variables were developed based on previous studies (e.g., Wang, 2004; Wang & Leichtman, 2000; Woike, 1994) to capture different aspects of peer-related self-views. Repetition and meaningless responses (e.g., “*We will become zombie.*”) were not coded.

Positivity. The valence of each proposition was coded as indicating positive (e.g., “*I have lots of friends in school*”), negative (e.g., “*(there are) some kids I don’t get along with*”), or neutral (e.g., “*we have color rotations in the school.*”) descriptions of self in relation to peers. A composite score of “Positive Self-Descriptions / (Negative Self-Descriptions + 1)” was created to indicate the positivity of peer-related self-views.

Engagement. Each proposition was coded as engaging if it described the similarity between the self and peers (e.g., “*we go to the same class*”) and involvement in shared activities (e.g., “*I race with her*”). A proposition was coded as disengaging if

it referred to dissimilarity or comparison between the self and peers (e.g., “*I am taller than him*”) or disassociation (e.g., “*we didn’t interact much*”). A composition score of “Engaging Self-Descriptions / (Disengaging Self-Descriptions + 1)” was formed to index the level of engagement between the self and peers.

Two coders in each team independently coded 20% of the data for one task. The ICCs ranged from .87 – 1.00 across narrative theme variables. The ICCs across self-descriptions variables ranged from .90 – 1.00 for time 1 measurement and .93 – 1.00 for time 2 measurement. One of the coders in each team coded the remaining data.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

One EA child at time 1 skipped the narrative story completion task due to the procedural error. Data for this child was not included in further analysis. A few children did not complete all tasks. So the degree of freedom varied slightly across tests. Preliminary analyses showed no main effect for gender, and thus gender was not considered further. In connection with the hypotheses, we first present the results pertaining to cultural differences in children’s narrative peer interaction themes, and the outcome measures including children’s descriptions of the self in relation to peers, loneliness and social anxiety, and then turn to the findings on the concurrent and longitudinal relations between narrative peer interaction themes and children’s psychological well-being.

Cultural Differences in Narrative Themes and Psychological Adjustment

Table 4.1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Narrative Peer Interaction Themes, Peer-Related Self-Views, Loneliness, and Social Anxiety by Culture and Time Point

Variable	EA		CI	
	\bar{X} (SD)	Range	\bar{X} (SD)	Range
Caring Themes T1	1.42 (1.62)	0–7.50	1.52 (2.38)	0–12.00
Conflictual Themes T1	.55 (.89)	0–4.50	.70 (1.16)	0–5.00
Conflict Resolution T1	.23 (.31)	0–1	.23 (.29)	0–1
Positive Self-Views T1	1.42 (1.26)	0–5.50	1.20 (1.27)	0–5.00
Positive Self-Views T2	2.00 (1.77)	0–9.00	1.62 (1.96)	0–6.00
Engaging Self-Views T1	3.62 (4.00)	0–14.00	5.79 (8.03)	0–38.00
Engaging Self-Views T2	1.85 (2.17)	0–10.00	2.71 (5.82)	0–22.00
Loneliness T1	1.83 (.47)	1.06–3.00	1.90 (.45)	1.00–3.06
Loneliness T2	1.81 (.53)	1.00–3.06	1.94 (.50)	1.19–2.88
Social Anxiety T1	2.13 (.64)	1.25–3.33	2.17 (.60)	1.00–3.24
Social Anxiety T2	2.13 (.62)	1.25–3.96	2.19 (.48)	1.47–3.22

Note. EA: European American; CI: Chinese immigrant; T1: time 1; T2: time 2

Table 4.1 lists descriptive statistics for caring, conflictual, and conflict resolution themes in children’s story narratives as a function of culture. We conducted one-way ANCOVAs to examine possible cultural effects on each type of narrative themes, with child age and verbal skill included as covariates. The analysis on caring themes revealed a marginally significant main effect of age, $F(1, 59) = 3.92, p = .05$,

$\eta_p^2 = .06$, and a marginally significant main effect of child verbal skill, $F(1, 59) = 3.25, p = .08, \eta_p^2 = .05$, but no significant main effect of culture was found, $F(1, 59) = .28, p = .60, \eta_p^2 = .01$. No other effects neared significance in predicting conflictual and conflict resolution themes.

Four separate one-way ANCOVAs were conducted to examine cultural differences in the positivity, and engagement level of children's peer-related self-views respectively at time 1 and time 2, with child age and verbal skill included as covariates. There were significant age effects on the engagement level of children's self-descriptions at time 1, $F(1, 57) = 3.16, p = .08, \eta_p^2 = .05$, and at time 2, $F(1, 52) = 3.49, p = .07, \eta_p^2 = .06$. A marginally significant language effect also emerged, $F(1, 56) = 3.74, p = .06, \eta_p^2 = .06$, that children with better language skill had slightly more engaging self-views at time 1. A significant cultural effect emerged in the analysis of the engagement level of children's self-descriptions at time 1, $F(1, 56) = 4.99, p = .03, \eta_p^2 = .08$, whereby EA children ($M = 3.56, SD = 3.94$) had less engaging self-descriptions than CI children ($M = 5.79, SD = 8.03$). No cultural differences neared significance for the positivity or engagement level of children's self-descriptions at either time point.

We conducted four separate one-way ANCOVA models to test cultural differences in children's loneliness and social anxiety at both time 1 and time 2, with child age included as a covariate. There was only a significant age effect in children's social anxiety at time 1, $F(1, 59) = 7.86, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .12$. No significant age or cultural effect was found for children's social anxiety at time 2 or loneliness at either time point.

Relations between Narrative Peer Interaction Themes and Psychological Adjustment

Our primary question was to test the concurrent and longitudinal relations of caring, conflictual, and conflict resolution themes in the story narratives to children's psychological adjustment and whether such relations would hold the same for EA children and CI children. We conducted correlations between narrative themes and children's psychological adjustment for the full sample, and then separately for EA and CI children. Given the age effects on the caring themes and some psychological adjustment variables, child age was controlled in calculating correlations (see Table 4.2).

Across two cultural groups, caring themes were positively associated with children's positive self-views at time 2 and engaging self-views at time 1, and negatively associated with children's loneliness and social anxiety at time 2. Similar and different results emerged when EA and CI samples were analyzed separately. Significant associations between caring themes and children's positive self-views at time 2 were found for both EA and CI children. Caring themes were only associated with CI children's engaging self-views but not for EU children. Caring themes in EA children's narratives were associated with lower loneliness at time 1 and time 2 and lower social anxiety at time 2. However, no significant correlations between caring themes and loneliness and social anxiety were found for CI children.

Only one significant association for conflictual themes was found across the two cultural groups. Children who included more conflictual themes had more positive self-views at time 2, which was also observed in both EA and CI children when they were analyzed separately. Furthermore, Negative associations of conflictual themes to

loneliness and social anxiety at time 2 were only significant for EA children but not for CI children.

Across two cultural groups, conflictual resolution themes were positively associated with children's positive self-views at both time 1 and time 2, and negatively associated with children's loneliness at time 2. When EA and CI were analyzed separately, conflict resolution themes were associated with children's positive self-views at time 1 only for EA children but not for CI children. The correlations to children's positive self-views at time 2 were significant for both EA and CI children. Negative correlations between conflict resolution themes and loneliness at time 1 and time 2 and social anxiety at time 2 were found for EU children. No significant associations of conflictual resolution themes to CI children's loneliness and social anxiety were found.

Table 4.2

Correlations between Narrative Peer Interaction Themes and Psychological Adjustment with Child Age Partialled Out

	Full Sample			European American			Chinese Immigrant		
	Caring	Conflictual	Resolution	Caring	Conflictual	Resolution	Caring	Conflictual	Resolution
Positive Self-Views									
Time 1	.12	.03	.34**	.27	.20	.53**	.01	-.10	.13
Time 2	.64***	.53***	.64***	.67***	.48*	.59**	.67**	.69***	.73***
Engaging Self-views									
Time 1	.39**	-.08	-.03	-.03	-.25	-.14	.38*	-.25	-.24
Time 2	.23	.15	-.06	.12	.13	-.01	.25	.03	-.25
Loneliness									
Time 1	-.09	-.14	-.22	-.37*	-.34†	-.39*	.22	.05	.03
Time 2	-.35*	-.09	-.30*	-.64**	-.68***	-.66***	.29	.25	.26
Social Anxiety									
Time 1	-.03	.03	.15	-.25	-.14	-.34†	.23	.20	.13
Time 2	-.41*	-.12	-.25†	-.55*	-.44*	-.41*	.08	.18	.10

Note. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, two-tailed.

Discussion

The present study examined the role of culture in children's narrative representations of peer experiences and its relations to their psychological adjustment. An increasing number of studies have used the narrative doll story completion technique to assess children's attachment styles with caregivers and the links to children's externalizing and internalizing problems (e.g., Laible et al., 2004). Nevertheless, this is the first study to investigate how narrative themes specific to peer interactions in middle childhood may predict children's psychological adjustment concurrently and longitudinally. The findings further highlighted culture-variant patterns that conflictual and conflict resolution themes exhibited varied associated with self-views, loneliness and social anxiety for European American children for Chinese immigrant children.

Consistent with our prediction, narrative peer interaction themes, particularly conflict resolution, showed significant associations with European American children's positive self-views at both time 1 and time 2. Conflict resolution theme may entail the adaptive social information processing scheme, including appropriately understanding their own and others' intentions leading to conflict, coming up with effective strategies, and confidently carrying out strategies to deal with the conflict (e.g., Crick & Dodge, 1994). It was found that European American children who form the representations of conflict resolution tend to perceive peer relations to be intimate, satisfying, and fulfilling to their preferences and needs. We interpret this finding as further evidence that Western cultures emphasize individuality and autonomy and encourage individuals to actively resolve interpersonal conflict (e.g., Rothbart et al.,

2000). The internalization of peer experiences as conflictual but resolvable may facilitate positive evaluations of self and peer relations for independently oriented children, whereas it may not appear consequential for interdependently oriented Chinese immigrant children until later. Peer interaction themes predicted Chinese immigrant children's self-views positivity only at time 2 but not time 1. Such developmental trajectory may resemble Chinese immigrant children's acculturation process and their gradual assimilation into active conflict resolution as emphasized in American culture.

Furthermore, the links of narrative peer interaction themes to children's loneliness and social anxiety also varied for European American children and Chinese immigrant children. As expected, European American children who included more caring, conflictual, and conflict resolution themes in the narratives had lower loneliness and social anxiety. Given the prevalence of peer conflict in middle childhood (e.g., Cole, Maxwell, Dukewich, & Yosick, 2010), European American children who tend to internalize caring interactions as well as effective resolution to peer conflict may indicate adaptive representations of peer relations and get more prepared to approach challenging peer situations in the future, thus contributing to lower loneliness and social anxiety in the long run. In contrast, caring and conflictual themes were not associated with Chinese immigrant children's loneliness and social anxiety as expected. The result was somewhat consistent with finding from autobiographical memory studies that autobiographical memory plays a more central role in predicting well-being for individuals in Western cultures than those of other cultural backgrounds (e.g., Reese et al., 2016; Wang, 2014). Asian American children

were less likely than European American children to use autobiographical memory, that is, memory of personally significant past events, to develop self-understanding and help with emotion regulation (Wang, Koh, Song, & Hou, 2015). Children's narrative representation of peer experiences in the present study was a generalized form of repeated past peer experiences. Accordingly, Chinese immigrant children may be less likely to rely on such internalization to understand and direct the emotional aspects of peer experiences, which involves explicit evaluations of their satisfaction and subjective feelings in social situations.

Interestingly, there was one significant cultural difference in children's psychological adjustment that Chinese children had more engaging peer-related self-views. The engagement-disengagement aspect of peer-related self-views is in accordance with the integration-differentiation cognitive process, which pertains to perceiving stimuli as "separate" or "connected" and is associated with communal social motives (e.g., Woike, 1994; Woike, & Polo, 2001). The result was also consistent with the previous finding that Asian children and adolescents value extensive social interactions for friendship (French, Bae, Pidada, & Lee, 2006). Furthermore, caring themes made unique predictions to the engagement level of peer-related self-views particularly for Chinese immigrant children, which further underlined Chinese cultural emphasis on interdependent views of self (e.g., Triandis, 1995). Chinese immigrant children who internalize a greater number of caring themes in the narratives may perceive greater engagement between self and peers in terms of more similarity and mutual involvement. In contrast, as the engagement-disengagement aspect of self in peer relations may not be such a prominent dimension

of European American children's self-construal, caring themes were not related to the development of engaging self-views for European American children.

Contrary to our prediction, European American and Chinese immigrant children did not differ in the representations of any peer interaction themes during the narrative story completion task. This study only assessed children's representations of peer interaction themes based on verbal expressions, and it was somewhat consistent with Zahn-Waxler et al. (1996) that more pronounced cultural differences existed in young children's nonverbal expressions of anger than in the verbal expressions. Also we need to make note that this study focused on middle childhood, during which peer interactions dramatically increase and constitute a particularly important context for child development (e.g., Ladd, 2005). The result suggests that both European American and Chinese immigrant children in middle childhood may be sensitive to the caring and conflictual peer interactions and focus on peer conflict resolution to similar degrees, although peer conflict and conflict resolution may entail varied influences on psychological adjustment depending on children's cultural backgrounds.

There are some limitations that are noteworthy. Because children's actual peer experiences were not measured in the study, it was difficult to test directly the developmental pathways between actual peer experiences, narrative representations, and psychological adjustment. Transactional perspectives conceptualize reciprocal influences between peer experiences and children's perceptions of the self and peers, which can jointly influence peer stress and psychological adjustment (Caldwell et al., 2004; Ladd & Troop-Gordon, 2003). It would be important to disentangle the possible direct and mediational contributions from children's internalized representations of

peer experiences to psychosocial adjustment. By employing a longitudinal design involving assessment at two time points, the current study detected some developmental trends in Chinese immigrant children's psychosocial adjustment which was possibly due to acculturation process. To better trace the developmental trajectory in the immigration contexts, additional longitudinal studies that cover a wider developmental period and adopt more culturally-sensitive measurement are needed to examine children's knowledge of self in relation to peers across different cultural groups. In addition, the current sample was small, particularly at time 2 assessment. We need to be cautious about interpreting results based on a small sample.

Regardless, this study demonstrated the importance of piecing into children's internal representations of peer experiences, which revealed varied relations to psychological adjustment for children of different cultural backgrounds. Narrative peer interaction themes, particularly conflict resolution, predicted positive peer-related self-views and lower levels of loneliness and social anxiety for European American children, whereas associations of conflictual and conflict resolution themes with children's loneliness and social anxiety were weaker for Chinese immigrant children. The culture-disparate results further underlined cultural differences in different meanings associated with peer conflict and conflict resolution, thus encouraging research not only on comparing the extent to which children of different cultural groups narrate on those peer interaction themes, but also different dynamics in relation to various aspects of their psychological adjustment. More attention should be dedicated to the development of children's psychosocial functioning within the cultural contexts.

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CHAPTER 5

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The current studies examined the individual, familial and cultural influences on the narrative construction of interpersonal experiences. By employing narrative approach, those studies shed lights on youth's internal representation of past interpersonal experiences. These studies highlighted the impact of culture in shaping individuals' narrative representations of interpersonal experiences and the relations of narrative construction to their psychological outcomes. Theories and interventions are called for to promote youth's well-being through culturally-appropriate narrative practices.

The current studies have extended attachment theory and social-cognitive theories, elucidating the cognitive and social mechanisms involved in individuals' representations of relationship experiences. As most studies focus on the impact of actual relationship experiences on individual's psychosocial functioning, relatively little is known about the internal processes of recounting, reflecting, and regulating negative emotions pertaining to those experiences through language. Importantly, the studies suggest that narratives could be useful vehicles for constructing (e.g., Bruner, 1991; Nelson, 1981) and assessing individuals' internal representations (e.g., Woolgar, 2000). In the current studies, narratives about one-time specific interpersonal events (study 1 and study 2) and repeated interpersonal experiences (study 3), were both examined and found to be associated with self-acceptance, peer-related self-views, and

psychological adjustment. Furthermore, the importance of parental scaffolding in shaping children's narrating about past peer experiences through family reminiscing practices was revealed (study 2). The use of narrative approach in the current studies has demonstrated how the style (e.g., elaborative vs repetitive) and content (e.g., peer interaction themes, internal state language, coping strategy) may pertain to the constructive and interactive processes of representing interpersonal experiences.

Another advance of the current studies was to reveal the role of culture in narrative construction about interpersonal experiences. As compared to other cross-cultural studies (e.g., Wang, 2006) that focused on interpersonal experience shared by mother and the child, the current studies examined a variety of interpersonal experiences, particularly peer experiences. Results from the current studies suggested that the independent and interdependent self-construal may impact how interpersonal experiences are represented. Interestingly, some associations between narratives about interpersonal experiences and psychological functioning were found across cultural groups (study 1 and study 3) and other associations varied as a function of culture (study 2). Those results further demonstrated the importance of examining the meaning and appropriateness for certain narrative content in cultural contexts.

The current studies have some limitations. First of all, there was no assessment of children and adolescents' actual peer experiences. It would be informational to disentangle the direct influence of actual peer experiences on psychological outcome, as well as the indirect influence mediated through the internal representations of such experiences. Secondly, the current studies drew from culturally-diverse samples, however, we knew little about how their cultural identity and self-construal might

differ between groups and within each group. Specifically, there might be great variability among Asian/Asian American college students (study 1), in terms of immigration status and home country's cultural beliefs. The inclusion of measurement on cultural identity and self-construal could help demonstrate how cultural identity and self-construal may be used to unpack the impact of cultures on individual's narrative construction of interpersonal experiences.

Some of the interesting findings call for future studies. Although emotionally demanding, discussing and narrating about negative interpersonal experiences has been demonstrated to be particularly influential for psychosocial adjustment. Negative interpersonal experience encompasses a great range of situations, including social group exclusion, school bullying experiences, and etc. Future studies should examine and compare the narrative construction process for different types of negative interpersonal experiences, given that each type of experiences may compose different context for meaning-making and adaptive coping. Experimentally-controlled training programs to promote the use of specific social-cognitive skills in family reminiscing and individual narrating about interpersonal experiences should be conducted so that the cause and effect can be underlined.

In conclusion, the current studies explored the narratives about interpersonal experiences in cultural contexts. The investigation of how certain aspects of narrative construction may bear the same or different developmental significance for different cultural groups can be important for theories and practices. The results can have implications for prevention, intervention, and policy-making practices serving Asian American children and families.

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