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Article

## Why Do Japanese Bully More than Americans? Influence of External Locus of Control and Student Attitudes Toward Bullying

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### Abstract

It is widely accepted that Japanese, compared to Americans, commit fewer criminal and other forms of deviant acts. However, there is evidence that Japanese students have an unusually high prevalence of bullying. In the current study, we develop a rationale for predicting that Japanese students, relative to Americans, should be oriented more strongly toward an external locus of control and have more favorable attitudes toward bullying, which, in turn, might explain why student bullying is more prevalent in Japan than in the U.S. Analyses of comparable survey data from college students in Japan ( $N = 584$ ) and the U.S. ( $N = 623$ ) provide generally supportive evidence for our predictions. In agreement with expectations, Japanese students committed more bullying acts during their high school days than Americans. Further, Japanese students were oriented more strongly toward an external locus of control and had more favorable attitudes toward bullying. After controlling for both an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying, the initially significant difference between the two samples in student bullying disappeared. We discuss the utility of comparative research to increase our understanding of cross-national differences in student bullying. We suggest that longitudinal comparative data on an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying, both of which reflect individual cognitive orientations, are an important resource for further development of school intervention programs around the world.

### Keywords

Japan-U.S. comparison • student bullying • external locus of control • student attitudes toward bullying • *ijime*

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It is generally concluded that Japanese, compared to Americans, are less likely to commit deviant acts of all kinds, and this conclusion is based primarily on evidence about the types of deviance which tend to be serious and violent (e.g., Bui & Farrington, 2019; Gruszczyńska, 2002; Roberts & LaFree, 2004). This conclusion is open to challenge, however, because the kinds of deviance which have been typically examined, although prevalent in the U.S., may not necessarily reflect the kinds of deviance that are commonly committed by Japanese people (e.g., Diekhoff, Labeff, Shinohara, & Yasukawa, 1999; Fukushima, Sharp, & Kobayashi, 2015).

In Japan, student bullying is one of the most serious educational and social problems because bullying, or *ijime* in Japanese, often results in considerable distress and a decrease in the meaningfulness of a victim's life. In the collectivistic Japanese society, unlike many Western countries, student bullying usually involves a group of students ostracizing one student (e.g., Morita, Taki, Hata, Hoshino, & Wakai, 1999; Smith, Kwak, & Toda, 2016). This group bullying, or *shūdan ijime* in Japanese, often grows to include the whole class picking on one student. Because of the focus on the classroom community, students are very sensitive to the dominant flow of their classmates' thinking and acting (Akiba, 2004). Consequently, once a victim is chosen, this dominant flow leads the whole class to take part in the bullying, regardless of the immorality of the behavior.

The tendency for Japanese students to bully more than Americans has been reported by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2017) and others (e.g., Dussich & Maekoya, 2007). Furthermore, an external locus of control and attitudes that approve of bullying have been shown to increase the likelihood of student bullying (e.g., Georgiou, Ioannou, & Stavrinides, 2017; Wang, Swearer, & Lembeck, 2015). The current study examines the potential of these two individual predispositions (an external locus of control and attitudes toward bullying) as mediating roles in explaining higher levels of student bullying in Japan than in the U.S. that we expect. Our hypotheses are that Japanese students, compared to Americans, would be more likely to attribute events in their lives to external factors beyond their control and have favorable attitudes toward bullying, which, in turn, might lead Japanese to participate in more bullying acts. This research focuses on student bullying because it has been related to suicide attempts and suicidal ideation (e.g., Toda, 2016; Ttofi, Farrington, Lösel, & Loeber, 2011a) and because childhood bullies tend to commit other forms of deviance such as theft, violence and substance use (Olweus, 1993; Ttofi, Farrington, & Lösel, 2012; Ttofi, Farrington, Lösel, & Loeber, 2011b) and suffer serious adjustment problems in their later lives (Drydakis, 2014; Ttofi et al., 2011a).

### **Student Bullying in Japan and the U.S.**

Despite the accumulation of evidence about the prevalence of student bullying in different countries (e.g., Chester et al., 2015; Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014; Smith et al., 2016), comparable data from students in Japan and the U.S. are rare. In fact, most of the cross-national studies of bullying did not include Japan.

A small amount of research reveals that student bullying is more prevalent in Japan than in the U.S. According to OECD (2017), the prevalence of 15-year-old students who reported being frequently (at least a few times a month) exposed to any type of bullying was higher in Japan than in the U.S. The differences between the two countries were especially pronounced in the prevalence of students who reported being frequently made fun of by other students (17.0% in Japan and 11.4% in the U.S.) and being hit or pushed around by other students (8.9% in Japan and 3.8% in the U.S.). Dussich and Maekoya (2007) also reported that the prevalence of college students who had ever been involved in different kinds of bullying, such as

shunning, ignoring, and slapping, as perpetrators was higher for Japanese than for Americans: 17.6% in Japan and 9.5% in the U.S.

### **Locus of Control and Student Bullying**

Since there is no adequate theoretical explanation of *higher* levels of student bullying in Japan than in the U.S., a major objective of the current research is to propose such an explanation. Two plausible explanations are that Japanese adolescents, relative to their American counterparts, are oriented more strongly toward an external locus of control and have more favorable attitudes toward bullying, which consequently might result in the greater likelihood of student bullying in Japan compared to the U.S.

Locus of control is a major concept of attribution theory (Weiner, 1974). The concept refers to individual beliefs about controls that people have over events in their lives and outcomes of their own behaviors. According to Rotter (1966), the key distinction is between factors internal and external to individuals. With an internal locus of control, individuals perceive that their behaviors and the outcomes of their behaviors are attributed to their personal decisions, abilities, and efforts. With an external locus of control, individuals think that their lives are controlled by fate, luck, or other external circumstances such as control by powerful others.

Prior studies have reported a relationship between an external locus of control and student bullying. In many respects, the use of an external locus of control to rationalize an individual's perpetration of bullying acts resembles the concept of "denial of responsibility," developed by Sykes and Matza (1957), as one of the five commonly used techniques of neutralization that free people from their commitment to the law and social norms. Applying this concept to bullying involvement, individuals can shift responsibility for their engagement in bullying from themselves to external causes including, for example, their friends, parents, and even the victims (e.g., Halloran, Doumas, John, & Margolin, 1999). Pellegrini, Bartini, and Brooks (1999) argued that an external rather than an internal locus of control might make bullies feel less blameworthy and thus, make them more likely to commit bullying behaviors.

Evidence for this speculation has been generally supportive. In a series of studies, Georgiou and his colleagues (2008, 2009, 2017) found an external locus of control to be associated with past involvement in bullying at school. In research on sixth graders in Greece, Georgiou et al. (2017, p. 234) contended that, "Decreased internal locus [increased external locus] becomes then [a] predictor of more bullying experiences, possibly because these children learn to attribute their own behaviors to the control of others." In research on students aged from 11 to 15 years in the U.S., Radliff et al. (2015) found that students who admitted physical, verbal, and relational bullying tended to score higher on an external locus of control than students who denied bullying perpetration. Similar findings were reported by Atik and Güneri (2013). In a survey of students aged from 11 to 15 years in Turkey, locus of control significantly affected student experiences of bullying. The relationship was positive and significant, indicating that a stronger orientation toward an external locus of control increased the tendencies for students to commit bullying acts (see Österman et al., 1999 for similar results in Finland and Italy).

Locus of control has also been linked to cultural individualism-collectivism. In more collectivistic cultures, due to their emphasis on group identity over individual identity and individual needs over group obligations, people are more likely to attribute the outcomes of their behaviors to influences beyond their control such as peer pressure (e.g., Moghaddam, Taylor, & Wright, 1993), rather than to influences within their control. Researchers have reported evidence that the more collectivistic Japanese, relative to North American Caucasians, are oriented more strongly toward an external locus of control (e.g., Brown, Aoshima, Bolen, Chia, & Kohyama, 2007; Smith, Trompenaars, & Dugan, 1995).

## **Student Attitudes and Bullying**

In American criminology, an individual's commission of deviance has often been attributed to another individual predisposition: definitions and attitudes regarding deviance (e.g., Akers, Sellers, & Jennings, 2017; Burgess & Akers, 1966; Warr, 2002). In his differential association theory of criminal behavior, Sutherland (1947) conceptualized that definitions are a person's evaluative attitudes defining the commission of an act as right or wrong. According to Sutherland, the greater the extent to which a person holds attitudes that disapprove of certain acts, the less likely the person is to engage in these acts. On the other hand, the more a person's attitudes approve of a behavior, the greater the likelihood is that the person will engage in that behavior.

Evidence is accumulating that favorable attitudes toward bullying also increase the likelihood of student bullying. In a study of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders in the U.S., Wang et al. (2015) found evidence of direct positive effects of pro-bullying attitudes on self-reported involvement in physical and verbal/relational bullying. Likewise, using survey data collected from sixth and seventh graders in the U.S., Espelage, Hong, Kim, and Nan (2018; see also Walters & Espelage, 2018) reported that student pro-bullying attitudes significantly predicted a high probability of non-physical bullying perpetration including, for example, teasing and group exclusion.

The positive direct effect of pro-bullying attitudes on student bullying has also been reported in countries other than the U.S. In their analyses of survey data from 13 and 15-year-old Swedish and English students, Boulton, Bucci, and Hawker (1999; see also Boulton, Truemas, & Flemington, 2002) reported a direct positive effect of pro-bullying attitudes on student bullying, even after controlling for student responses to physical bullying and student gender. The same conclusion was obtained in Van Goethem, Scholte, and Wiers's (2010) study of fifth and sixth graders in Netherlands and in another study of the same age groups in Finland (Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004; see also Rigby, 2005 for findings in Australia).

A body of research on student attitudes toward bullying is emerging around the world. However, most of this research has been conducted in a single country (see Menesini et al., 1997 for an exception). Some evidence suggests that Japanese students, relative to Americans, have more favorable attitudes toward bullying. Kobayashi, Farrington, and Buchanan (2019) found in their cross-national comparative surveys that Japanese students, more so than their American counterparts, were in favor of bullying others. A similar conclusion was reached by Nesdale and Naito (2005). In a study of college students in Japan and Australia, the authors reported that Japanese college students, relative to their more individualistic Australian counterparts, had more positive attitudes towards bullies and less positive attitudes toward victims.

In summary, there is consistent evidence that an external locus of control and favorable attitudes toward bullying are risk factors for student bullying. However, one gap in the research literature on student bullying is the absence of data permitting the comparison of the relative magnitudes of effects of these two individual factors on student bullying and the extent to which an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying might explain different levels of student bullying across nations. Such cross-cultural data could answer the question of whether the higher levels of student bullying in Japan than in the U.S. might be attributable to differences between Japanese and Americans in their external locus of control and attitudes toward bullying, independently or in combination. With our comparable survey data in Japan and the U.S., we propose that Japanese students are oriented more toward an external locus of control and have more favorable attitudes toward bullying and that these differences account for the higher prevalence of student bullying among Japanese than among Americans that we expect to find.

## Methods

### Participants

Given available resources, we aimed to obtain analyzable samples of about 600 college students in each country.<sup>1</sup> For reasons linked to race and ethnicity that are explained in the appendices, this required a larger initial sample in the U.S. than in Japan.<sup>2</sup>

A total of 812 students at a Japanese university and 1,149 students at a U.S. university agreed to participate in online surveys, with a cover letter clearly stating that participation was voluntary and that all responses were anonymous.<sup>3</sup> To control for the possible effects of racial and ethnic differences among students in the U.S. (which essentially do not exist in Japanese universities), 407 non-white students in the U.S. sample and 21 non-Japanese students in the Japanese sample, along with those who were 21 years old or over, were excluded.<sup>4</sup> These restrictions, plus missing data on key variables which are described below, resulted in an  $N$  of 584 for the Japanese sample and 623 for the U.S. sample.<sup>5</sup> In the Japanese sample, 49.1% were male and 50.9% were female, while in the U.S. sample, 44.1% were male and 55.9% were female.

### Instruments

The identical questionnaires, in two different languages, included self-report measures of student bullying, an external locus of control, and student attitudes toward bullying. Also included were measures of four socio-demographic variables.

**Student bullying.** Consistent with an observation by Solberg and Olweus (2003) that a single item can reliably assess bullying behavior, we used one item to measure student bullying. The item is quite compatible with Olweus' (1993) global definition of bullying, but there is an important difference. Olweus defined bullying to have three key elements: (i) intentionality, (ii) repetition, and (iii) a clear power imbalance between perpetrator and victim (see also Farrington, 1993). However, the definition of bullying by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT, 2006) does not include unequal power between a bully (or bullies) and a victim. Thus, in the present study, student bullying was measured with the following one item: "How often did you repeatedly engage in aggressive behavior in order to physically or mentally hurt another person on purpose while you were in high school?"

The responses were given on a five-point scale ranging from "never" (coded 1) to "very often" (coded 5). The mean was clearly toward the low end of the 1-5 response range, so we dichotomized the students into those who "never" engaged in the behavior and those who did. The prevalence of students who engaged in bullying was higher for Japanese than for Americans: 17.8% in Japan ( $n = 104$ ) and 11.7% in the U.S. ( $n = 73$ ), and this difference was significant ( $p < .05$ ). The variable *Student Bullying*, therefore, was a dichotomy coded 1 for students who had engaged in bullying during their high school days and 0 for those who had not ( $M = 0.15$ ,  $SD = 0.35$ ).

**External locus of control.** We used the following item, as included in Rotter's (1966) scale, to assess students' orientation toward an external locus of control: "Many of the unhappy things in my life are due to bad luck". The response options ranged from "strongly disagree" (coded 1) to "strongly agree" (coded 4). The variable *External Locus of Control* had a mean of 1.98 with a standard deviation of 0.79. The mean scores were significantly ( $p < .001$ ) higher for Japanese than for Americans: 2.17 in Japan and 1.81 in the U.S.

**Student attitudes toward bullying.** The exact question was phrased as follows: "How wrong is it for high school students to repeatedly engage in aggressive behavior in order to physically or mentally hurt another person on purpose?" Responses were presented on a four-point scale ranging from "very wrong" (coded 1) to "not wrong at all" (coded 4). The variable *Student Attitudes Toward Bullying* had a mean of

1.33 ( $SD = 0.64$ ). The mean scores on this item were also significantly ( $p < .05$ ) higher for Japanese than for Americans: 1.38 in Japan and 1.28 in the U.S.

**Culture.** Culture – i.e., Japanese versus American – is the key explanatory variable. In all analyses, culture was coded 1 for Japanese students and 0 for Americans.

**Control variables.** In all analyses, we control for four variables typically included in studies of deviance, variables on which the Japanese and American samples might also differ. “Minority status” is not one of these variables since all such students were excluded from the analyses.

**Gender.** Gender was coded 0 for female and 1 for male. In the combined sample, 46.5% of students were male and 53.5% of students were female. Gender was very weakly associated with the Japan vs. U.S. variable ( $r = .05, p < .05$ ), indicating that the proportion of male students in the Japanese sample was slightly higher than in the U.S.

**Age.** Both samples had restricted age distributions because of the populations from which they were drawn. The current study limited the analyses to students who were 20 years of age or younger because they were still in a more deviance-prone stage of life (Hirschi, 1969). The mean ages of the Japanese and the U.S. samples were 18.3 ( $SD = 0.53$ ) and 18.8 ( $SD = 0.77$ ), respectively. In the analyses, age was an interval scale variable with a correlation of  $-.37$  ( $p < .001$ ) with Japan, reflecting the slightly younger mean age of the Japanese sample.

**Parent education.** Parent education was the only indicator of family socio-economic status.<sup>6</sup> Given the greater variety of family forms in Japan (Sugimoto, 2003), we chose to simply distinguish between students with at least one parent who had a Bachelor’s degree or higher (coded 1) and all other students (coded 0). In the Japanese sample, 60.1% of the students had at least one parent with a bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 84.3% of the American students. Thus, on this measure of socio-economic status, the two samples were very different, with a correlation with Japan of  $-.27$  ( $p < .001$ ).

**Two adult household.** Because single-parent families are less common in Japan (Statistics Bureau, 2015; U.S. Census, 2016a), a measure of family structure was included in all analyses. In order to develop a measure of family structure that was applicable to both countries, we classified students into two categories: those who were raised by one adult at any time in their lives (coded 0), and those who were always raised by two or more adults (coded 1). The exact question was phrased as follows: “While growing up, how would you describe your household?” From the various response categories that were provided, 93% of Japanese students and 83% of American students were never in a single-adult household. In the combined sample, 87.8% of the students were always with two or more adults, and the variable *Two Adult Household* had a correlation of  $.15$  ( $p < .001$ ) with Japan.

## Procedure

Data for this research were obtained from a larger cross-cultural study of deviance in Japan and the U.S. Initially, the questionnaire was designed in English. Through a series of pre-tests, it was then translated into Japanese using “back translation” (e.g., Matsumoto & Juang, 2012). The Japanese questionnaire was administered online in the Japanese university during April through May 2011, while the English questionnaire was administered online in the U.S. university during January through March 2013. In Japan, this is a national university, while in the U.S. this is one of the major state universities that are most comparable to national universities in Japan.

The enrollment in the Japanese university included about 1,800 freshmen, and the Japanese sampling frame contained a list of all of them with all 16 majors including, among others, education, science and medicine.<sup>7</sup> In the U.S., students were enrolled in several lower-division courses that fulfilled one of the

general education requirements at the university and were taken primarily by freshmen with various major interests.<sup>8</sup>

### Data Analysis

The analyses were performed in three steps. First, we examined all bivariate relationships among the variables we used as predictors. Second, we assessed the effects of being Japanese (versus American) on an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying. Finally, we tested whether the expected positive effect of being Japanese on student bullying was mediated by an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying as intervening variables. In the second and third steps, OLS regressions were performed including all four control variables. Because of directional predictions, one-tailed significance tests were appropriate, and the conventional .05 level was used for judgments concerning statistical significance.

### Results

Table 1 presents the bivariate relationships linked to our hypotheses that Japanese, compared to Americans, score significantly higher on student bullying, an external locus of control, and student attitudes toward bullying. As mentioned, the prevalence of students who engaged in bullying was significantly higher for Japanese than for Americans. Consistent with this finding, being Japanese had a significant positive correlation with student bullying ( $r = .09, p < .001$ ), indicating that Japanese students, relative to Americans, were more likely to engage in bullying during their high school days. Being Japanese (versus American) was also positively and significantly correlated with an external locus of control ( $r = .22, p < .001$ ) and student attitudes toward bullying ( $r = .08, p < .05$ ). These positive relationships indicated that Japanese students, as predicted, were more strongly oriented toward an external locus of control and had more favorable attitudes toward bullying than Americans. The relationship of being Japanese with an external locus of control was especially strong. This correlation of .22 was about three times as great as that of .08 for being Japanese with student attitudes toward bullying.

Table 1. *Bivariate correlations for all variables (N = 1,207)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Japan	-	.05*	-.37***	-.27***	.15***	.22***	.08**	.09**
2. Gender		-	-.02	-.02	.04	.08**	.22***	.12***
3. Age			-	.06*	-.11***	-.09**	.00	-.02
4. Parent education				-	.08**	-.05*	-.04	-.03
5. Two adult household					-	.05	-.00	.05
6. External locus of control						-	.16***	.13***
7. Student attitudes toward bullying							-	.34***
8. Student bullying								-

Note. One-tailed significance tests were used because of directional predictions.

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

Among the four control variables, gender was positively and significantly related to student bullying ( $r = .12, p < .001$ ), indicating that male students, compared to females, were more prone to perpetrate bullying in their high school days. Gender was also positively and significantly correlated with an external locus of control ( $r = .08, p < .05$ ) and student attitudes toward bullying ( $r = .22, p < .001$ ). These positive

relationships indicated that male students, relative to females, were more strongly oriented toward an external locus of control and had more favorable attitudes toward bullying.

OLS regressions were then carried out to assess whether the positive effects of being Japanese (versus American) on an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying remained significant even after controlling for the four demographic and socioeconomic variables. Table 2 reveals that the effect of being Japanese on an external locus of control was positive and significant ( $\beta = .22, p < .001$ ), indicating that, even with controls for gender, age, parent education, and single vs. two-adult household, Japanese students tended to have an external locus of control more than Americans. The effect of being Japanese on student attitudes toward deviance was also positive and significant ( $\beta = .07, p < .001$ ). Thus, even with these four controls, Japanese students had more favorable attitudes toward bullying than Americans. Among the four control variables, gender was the only variable that had significant effects on an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying. The positive effects indicated that male students, compared to females, were inclined more toward an external locus of control ( $\beta = .07, p < .05$ ) and favorable attitudes toward bullying ( $\beta = .22, p < .001$ ).

Table 2. OLS regressions of external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying on Japan and control variables ( $N=1,207$ )

Variable	External locus of control		Attitudes toward bullying	
	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	$\beta$
Japan	.35	.22 ***	.10	.07 **
Gender	.11	.07 **	.28	.22 ***
Age	-.00	-.00	.03	.03
Parent education	.02	.01	-.02	-.02
Two adult household	.02	.01	-.03	-.02
$R^2$	.06		.06	
<i>p</i>	<.001		<.001	

Note. One-tailed significance tests were used because of directional predictions

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

Table 3 tests the central hypotheses that an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying are intervening variables accounting for at least some of the expected positive effect of being Japanese (versus American) on student bullying.<sup>9</sup>

Table 3. OLS regressions of student bullying on Japan, external locus of control, student attitudes toward bullying and control variables ( $N=1,207$ )

Variable	Equation 1		Equation 2		Equation 3		Equation 4	
	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>b</i>	$\beta$
Japan	.06	.08 **	.04	.06 *	.04	.06 *	.03	.04
Gender	.08	.12 ***	.08	.11 ***	.03	.04	.03	.04
Age	.01	.02	.01	.02	.00	.01	.00	.01
Parent education	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.00	-.00	-.00	-.00
Two adult household	.04	.03	.03	.03	.04	.04	.04	.04
External locus of control	-	-	.05	.11 ***	-	-	.03	.06 *
Attitudes toward bullying	-	-	-	-	.18	.33 ***	.18	.32 ***
$R^2$	.02		.03		.12		.13	
<i>p</i>	<.001		<.001		<.001		<.001	

Note. One-tailed significance tests were used because of directional predictions.

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

In Equation 1, student bullying was regressed on the four control variables and the dummy variable *Japan* (coded 1 for Japanese and 0 for American). For student bullying, the direct effect of being Japanese was .08 in the predicted positive direction and significant ( $p < .05$ ). Among the control variables, being male (versus female) once again had a significant positive effect on student bullying ( $\beta = .12, p < .001$ ). In Equation 2, an external locus of control was added. The  $\beta$  for Japan on student bullying was .06. This value represented a reduction of about 30% compared with the  $\beta$  of .08 in Equation 1. In other words, about one third of the positive effect of being Japanese on student bullying, as observed in Equation 1, might be attributed to the tendency for Japanese students to perceive that events in their lives are attributable to external factors beyond their control. The  $\beta$  for Japan in Equation 2 was barely significant at the conventional level ( $p < .05$ ). Overall, therefore, these findings generally support our hypothesis that Japanese students were more likely to bully others because, compared to Americans, they tended to attribute the outcomes of their behaviors to external factors beyond their control.

Equation 3 added student attitudes toward bullying to the variables in Equation 1. When controlling for student attitudes toward bullying (but not an external locus of control) as an intervening variable, the reduction in the effect of being Japanese on student bullying was essentially the same as in Equation 2. The  $\beta$  of .06 represented a reduction of about 30% compared with the  $\beta$  of .08 in Equation 1 and the  $\beta$  for Japan in Equation 3 was barely significant ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, the more favorable student attitudes toward bullying in the Japanese sample, compared to the U.S. sample, contributed to the greater likelihood of Japanese to perpetrate bullying.

Next, Equation 4 estimated the extent to which the greater likelihood of student bullying in the Japanese sample might be explained by the tendency of Japanese to be orientated more strongly toward an external locus of control *and* to have more favorable attitudes toward bullying. Prior to explaining the findings in Equation 4, it is important to note that isolating the independent contributions of these two variables to the greater likelihood of student bullying in the Japanese sample is not simple because, as shown in Table 1, an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying were positively and significantly correlated with each other ( $r = .16, p < .001$ ). However, inspection of the multicollinearity diagnostics from SPSS regression outputs revealed no harmful multicollinearity problem.

Equation 4 added both an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying to the variables in Equation 1. The  $\beta$  of .08 for Japan in Equation 1 was reduced by about 50% and the value of .04 was non-significant. Therefore, these findings provide support for our hypotheses that Japanese students tended to commit more bullying acts during their high school days because, compared to Americans, they were more strongly oriented toward an external locus of control *and* had more favorable attitudes toward bullying. Further, as anticipated from the relative correlations of these two variables with student bullying in Table 1, the direct effect of student attitudes toward bullying was much stronger than the effect of an external locus of control. The  $\beta$  of .32 ( $p < .001$ ) for student attitudes toward bullying was five times as great as the  $\beta$  of .06 ( $p < .05$ ) for an external locus of control.

Similar results were obtained when the relative effects of these two variables on student bullying were compared separately for Japanese and Americans, with controls for gender, age, parent education, and single vs. two-adult household. The analyses (not reported here) revealed that student attitudes toward bullying and an external locus of control had the theoretically expected positive effects on student bullying in both the Japanese ( $\beta$ s = .25 and .07) and U.S. samples ( $\beta$ s = .41 and .05), although the direct effect of an external locus of control in the U.S. sample was not significant. As was true in the combined sample, the magnitude of the effect of student attitudes on student bullying was much greater than the magnitude of an external locus of control in both samples.

## Discussion

The current research focused on two individual predispositions, an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying, and combined the previously observed two relationships to account for the greater likelihood of student bullying that we expected among Japanese students than among Americans: (i) an external locus of control and student bullying; and (ii) student attitudes and bullying.

Although the sample was restricted to college students and generalization must be cautious, the evidence was generally supportive of our hypotheses. First, for both an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying, we found that the direct effect ( $\beta$ ) of Japan, after controlling for gender, age, parent education, and single vs. two-adult household, was positive and significant, supporting the hypotheses that Japanese students, compared to Americans, are inclined more toward an external locus of control and have more favorable attitudes toward bullying. Second, with an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying as “intervening” between being Japanese (versus American) and student bullying, the positive direct effect of being Japanese on student bullying was reduced by about 30%, and the  $\beta$ s for Japan in Equations 2 and 3, as reported in Table 3, were barely significant at the conventional level. Therefore, these findings generally support our hypotheses that Japanese students were more likely to bully others during their high school days because, compared to Americans, they were more strongly oriented toward an external locus of control and had more favorable attitudes toward bullying. In fact, when these two intervening variables were included in the final equation of Table 3, the  $\beta$  for Japan became non-significant.

Our findings suggest that the operationalization of student bullying needs further revisions to test different levels of student bullying between Japan and the U.S. Our measure of student bullying, although generally compatible with Olweus’ (1993) global definition of bullying, might not sufficiently reflect the prevalent forms of bullying in the two countries. We would encourage future researchers to include more specific operationalizations of the outcome variable that are culturally sensitive. As inferred from the cultural variability in individualism-collectivism (e.g., Hofstede, 1980), for example, cultural differences in socialization for autonomy and self-direction might lead Japanese students, more so than their American counterparts, to perpetrate bullying that takes place within a group rather than between two students (e.g., Morita et al., 1999).

Furthermore, Japanese students might be more inclined to engage in bullying that is conducted in the classroom mostly by the victim’s classmates (e.g., Kanetsuna, 2016), rather than outside the classroom by the same age students in different classes or by senior students. Morita and Kiyonaga (1996) classified students who are involved in group bullying in the classroom into four categories: bullies (*kagaisha*), victims (*higaisha*), audiences (*kanshū*), and bystanders (*boukansha*). We hope that measures of student bullying, which reflect these group dynamics in the classroom, will be incorporated in future research. Additionally, cyberbullying, that is more likely to be committed and experienced outside school, is another form of bullying that should be examined (Baldry, Blaya, & Farrington, 2018; Smith, 2013).

In conclusion, we want to emphasize that this is not a definitive study of relationships among culture, an external locus of control, student attitudes toward bullying, and student bullying. Our sample was small and from two public universities. Our analyses, because of the racial and ethnic homogeneity of Japanese society, were also restricted to the dominant group in both countries (i.e., Japanese and Caucasians). Accordingly, our samples of college students early in their academic years, while based on our best efforts to achieve their compatibility in ways that were important for the analyses and to obtain retrospective reports of the students’ engagement in bullying during their high school days, should not necessarily be considered representative of each of the university populations, nor of the student populations

in each country. Furthermore, our measures of the intervening variables (an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying) were based on single items, and only very few theoretical variables were included to explain different levels of student bullying between Japan and the U.S. Although the most widely used method to measure student bullying is self-report (Cook, Williams, Guerra, & Kim, 2010), peer reports might also strengthen the analyses.

Finally, longitudinal studies are needed to determine the direction of causal effects of an external locus of control and attitudes toward bullying on student bullying and to examine whether these two personality predispositions, both of which reflect individual cognitive orientations, are durable determinants of different levels of bullying that persist beyond adolescence and endure into adulthood. Thus, we would encourage future longitudinal comparative research to address these kinds of issues and increase our understanding of cross-national differences in student bullying. This understanding, in turn, could contribute to the larger literature of bullying and its complex mechanisms, as well as to further development of school intervention programs which could target cognitive processes influencing bullying perpetration around the world.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> College undergraduate students were chosen as participants for two reasons. First, we had easier access to them than to younger adolescents. Second, college undergraduate students, especially early in their academic years, are still in a more deviance-prone stage of life, and the questions referred retrospectively to their high school days. We realize, of course, that people who did not attend college were excluded from our research design and might be more (or less) likely to bully than those who did attend college. However, the inclusion of only college students applied to both samples.

<sup>2</sup> We had to address the wide discrepancy between Japanese national and American state universities in racial and ethnic diversity, a discrepancy so wide that “minority group” status could not be a variable in our analyses. Whereas 77% of the U.S. population is white (U.S. Census, 2016b), typical estimates are that 98% of the Japanese population is racially and ethnically Japanese (Statistics Bureau, 2017). Had we included a variable for race/ethnicity, separating minority group members from others, that variable would have been collinear with the dummy variable for Japan, possibly masking the effect of Japan. Consequently, our plan was to use only the questionnaires completed by Caucasian students in the U.S. and Japanese students in Japan.

<sup>3</sup> Some might question about the equivalence of self-report data in the two countries because self-disclosure in Japan, relative to the U.S., is usually (and often exaggeratedly) considered to be an inappropriate behavior (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1994). However, we made every effort to overcome this problem by informing the Japanese students that the name of the university would never be revealed and that there was no right or wrong answer to any of the questions.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, 98% of the students in the Japanese sample were 20 years old or younger and the comparable figure in the U.S. sample was 80%.

<sup>5</sup> The large number of missing cases in the Japanese sample probably can be attributed to their lack of experience in answering a long list of survey questions and the absence of extra credits that could be earned in exchange for their participation in the survey.

<sup>6</sup> We could not use family income as another indicator of family socio-economic status because we knew, in advance, that a high percentage of college students would not provide an answer. In a previous cross-cultural survey, 12% of American students and 38% of Japanese students did not provide an answer

regarding parental income. The greater non-response rate for Japanese probably could be attributed to their greater reluctance to provide such information and/or the greater likelihood of not knowing their parental income. Consequently, parental income was not included in the present questionnaire.

<sup>7</sup> Japanese students must declare a major before their admission to a university. Unlike universities in the U.S., there is no equivalent in Japan to general education courses taken by a large number of students outside their major.

<sup>8</sup> In the U.S. sample, about 50% of the students were freshmen and another 25% were sophomores.

<sup>9</sup> We used OLS regressions because we wanted direct quantitative comparisons of the magnitudes of effects of predictor variables (i.e., an external locus of control and student attitudes toward bullying). We did, however, carry out logistic regressions and they gave the same results in regard to which predictor variables were statistically significant. It is known that OLS and logistic regressions generally reach similar conclusions about significant effects with dichotomous outcome variables (e.g., Pohlmann & Leitner, 2003).

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