



## Cultural differences in how individuals explain their lying and truth-telling tendencies

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigated how cultural differences between Korea and the United States in attitudinal and normative components affect individuals' explanation of their intentions to lie or tell the truth. Study 1 examined individuals' intentions to base their lying or truth-telling tendencies on attitude-related reasons (i.e., attitudinal reasons) and subjective norm-related reasons (i.e., normative reasons). Study 2 examined individuals' evaluation of a person who used attitudinal reasons or normative reasons to explain his/her behaviors of lying or truth-telling. The results showed that neither culture used one type of reason consistently across different behaviors. Instead, the types of behaviors influenced the way attitudinal and normative components were related to behavioral intentions. The attitudinal component was important for individuals' explanations of their attitudinal reasons to lie and to tell the truth and that the normative component was important for individuals' explanations of their normative reasons to lie. However, both the attitudinal and normative components were important for individuals' explanations of their normative reasons to tell the truth. Cross-culturally, Koreans were more likely to use normative reasons when they had to explain why they intended to lie for a friend, whereas Americans were more likely to use normative reasons when they had to explain why they intended to tell the truth. In addition, Koreans and Americans had different preferences for each reason type depending on the type of behavior probably because Koreans, as compared to Americans, tend to view lying for a friend less negatively.

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### 1. Introduction

Individuals may provide different reasons when explaining to others why they intend to lie or tell the truth. Some individuals may express their personal beliefs as the main reason for lying or telling the truth, whereas other individuals may choose to express reasons that other people would perceive positively. For example, when individuals are asked why they would lie (or tell the truth) in a certain situation (e.g., a friend is in trouble), some individuals may reply that they personally believe lying is good and useful in this situation because it helps their friend, even though the more central reason behind their choice is that their friend actually expects them to lie.

The current paper aims to examine the extent to which individuals' internal reasons behind their intentions to lie and tell the truth are related to the external reasons they use to express their behavioral intentions to others. This paper differentiates

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between individuals' internal reasons and external reasons for telling the truth or lying. Internal reasons for forming behavioral intentions pertain to what individuals may consider when deciding to engage in a behavior. In the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), attitudes toward behavior and subjective norms are the main internal reasons a person chooses to do something (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). External reasons refer to the reasons that individuals offer to others when explaining their intentions to engage in a behavior (Choi & Park, 2010). Individuals may use reasons pertaining to their attitudes and/or subjective norms when explaining why they intend to engage in a behavior. This paper considers a possibility that even when attitudes are strong reasons for individuals to form behavioral intentions, some individuals may externally cite subjective norms as the reason for their behavioral intentions when asked to explain their behavioral intentions to others. For example, when intending to study for an exam, individuals' internal reason may be that they think studying will produce positive outcomes (i.e., attitudes toward behavior). But, as an external reason that individuals may tell to others, they may say that their parents want them to study hard (i.e., subjective norms). Alternatively, it may be also possible that even when subjective norms are strong reasons for individuals' behavioral intentions, some individuals may use attitudes as the external reason when explaining their behavioral intentions to others.

More important, the current paper investigates the cultural differences between Koreans and Americans regarding the relationship between their internal and external reasons for lying and telling the truth. America has been characterized as less collectivistic and more individualistic than Korea (Hofstede, 1980; Kim, 1994; Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002). Individualists prioritize their own attributes and self-concepts independent of other people, whereas collectivists prioritize interpersonal harmony, fitting in with others, and developing their self-concepts in relation to others (Triandis, 1995). Individualistic cultures emphasize that individuals should have autonomy in their relationships with others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and that their personal goals should be respected over group goals (Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). On the other hand, because individuals in collectivistic cultures consider themselves to be an element of a group, it is more important for these individuals to achieve the group's goals and ensure their group's survival rather than to worry about their own personal goals and survival (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). Because of their cultural characteristics, compared to Americans, Koreans may pay more attention to what others may think. Especially when they are to explain their behavioral intentions to others, Koreans may be more likely to use subjective norms as external reasons than Americans may. Thus, it is expected that Koreans and Americans might differ in the extent to which they are likely to use attitudes and norms as external reasons when explaining their behaviors to others. The following sections provide a brief rationale for this study and its hypotheses and research questions.

### 1.1. Determinants of behavioral intentions

Attitudinal and normative components have been often discussed as determinants of behavioral intentions. For example, Triandis (1980) discussed value of perceived consequences and affect toward behavior as attitudinal components, and social factors as normative ones. Additionally, the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1988) identified attitudes toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as predictors of intentions. Specifically, the current study focused on the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) which explained attitudinal and normative components as two major reasons for an individual's intention to engage in a behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Attitudes toward a behavior pertain to individuals' positive or negative evaluation of performing that behavior. For example, the extent to which an individual considers a behavior (e.g., lying) can result in beneficial and desirable outcomes (e.g., getting out of a difficult obligation) can be a factor affecting intention to lie or not. Subjective norms relate to an individual's perceptions about what important people in his/her life would think about his/her performing a behavior. For example, the extent to which an individual perceives people in his/her circle of friends and family to expect him/her to engage in a behavior (e.g., "My family expects me to lie in this situation.") can be a factor affecting intention to lie or not. Attitudes toward behaviors and subjective norms have been shown to be related to intentions to engage in various behaviors, such as participating in conference meetings (Lee & Back, 2008), donating blood (Warshaw, Calantone, & Joyce, 1986), and purchasing goods (Warshaw, 1980). Meta-analyses show that attitudinal and normative components have significant correlations with intentions and behaviors (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Sheeran & Taylor, 1999; Sheppard, Hartwick, & Warshaw, 1988). TRA was also used in understanding Koreans' purchasing intentions (Lee & Green, 1991; Lee, Qu, & Kim, 2007), intentions to study for an exam (Park & Levine, 1999), and intentions to share knowledge with co-workers (Bock, Zmud, Kim, & Lee, 2005). Studies using TPB also showed that in addition to perceived behavioral control, attitudes and subjective norms were significant predictors of various behavioral intentions among Koreans and Americans (e.g., Park & Lee, 2009; Yun & Park, 2010).

### 1.2. Explaining individuals' behavioral intentions

When individuals do not need to explain their behavior to others, according to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), they may freely assess the behavior in question and weigh their attitudinal and normative reasons behind their decision to engage or not engage in the behavior. When explaining their behavior to others, however, individuals may need to consider what others might think about the reasons they use to explain their behaviors. When individuals are required to explain to others why they intend to engage in a certain behavior or not, they may want to conceal the real reason behind their action or inaction, or they may prefer to offer other reasons. For example, a politician may have felt pressure from his/her aides and advisers to donate money and thus finds it necessary to do what many other politicians do to gain popularity and approval from his/her

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