

Original Article

**SELF-DENIGRATING HUMOR FOR
CONSTRUCTING RELATIONSHIPS AND REGIONAL
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN JAPAN: A FOCUS ON
BLUNDER-TELLING BEHAVIOR**

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Abstract: Based upon its historical and economic backgrounds, we hypothesized that *Kansai* (*Osaka* area) people culturally share the value of self-denigrating humor, as an interpersonal strategy for constructing friendly relationships with others. If this value has been ingrained in the contexts of their daily lives, *Kansai* people would particularly appreciate blunder-telling behavior, because it is an everyday life-interpersonal strategy of self-denigrating humor for constructing relationships. To test this, we administered a questionnaire study on *Kansai* and *Kanto* people (a comparison group). As expected, *Kansai* people showed more favor towards blunder-telling behavior than *Kanto* people (Study 1). Also, we discovered that, only *Kansai* people deeply incorporated the value of blunder-telling behavior as a part of the self (Study 2). These results appear to support our hypothesis; even in their daily life-contexts, *Kansai* people uniquely put a high value on self-denigrating humor for constructing relationships.

Key Words: culture, value, interpersonal interactions, humor, blunder-telling behavior

Introduction

With the rapid progress of globalization, there has been a significant increase in opportunities to meet and interact with people from regions we are not familiar with. These intercultural interactions may provide a wonderful opportunity which may broaden one's world; however, we may often experience unpleasant interactions. For example, we may impose our ideas on an interpersonal partner as if our ideas are absolute, and vice versa, leading to undesirable conflicts. Also, based upon our own "standards", we often

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misinterpret the partner's acts, and feel something is "incorrect". These misinterpretations lead to less fruitful interactions, letting this great chance slip away, which might otherwise expand one's view of the world.

Identifying the aspects which elucidate cultural differences can contribute to more pleasant intercultural interactions. By detecting these aspects, we can differentiate cultures which were previously considered to have no differences. This differentiation modifies our understanding in that, people, whom we thought we shared the same values with, actually do not have the same values as us. These insights into differences are important, because they do not only show that the values we take for granted are not absolute, but also provide knowledge of diverse cultural backgrounds. Knowing the partner's cultural background aids us to take account of the partner's perspectives. Consequently, it helps to avoid misinterpretations of the partner's acts. Therefore, for a remarkable increase in the experiences of intercultural interactions, identifying these aspects is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Recently, in addition to cross-national (mostly East vs. West) investigations, studies focusing on regional-cultures within a nation have been emerging in cultural psychology (e.g., Kashima, Kokubo, Kashima, Boxall, Yamaguchi, & Macrae, 2004; Kitayama, Ishii, Imada, Takemura, & Ramaswamy, 2006; Nisbett, 1993; Plaut, Markus & Lachman, 2002). These studies are important, because they have identified particular aspects to clarify regional-cultural differences in a nation, which has often been assumed to be a single culture.

For example, pioneer investigators in this field, Nisbett and his colleagues (Cohen, 1996; Cohen & Nisbett, 1994, 1997; Cohen, Nisbett, Bowdle, Schwarz, 1996; Cohen, Vandello, Puente, & Rantilla, 1999; Nisbett, 1993; Nisbett & Cohen, 1996) identified *culture of honor* (i.e., the value of violence for self-protection) to indicate regional-cultural differences in the United States. They have demonstrated that culture of honor is uniquely represented in various forms, only in the South of the United States (e.g., cognition, behavior, and emotion at individual level, and social institutions and law policy at social level).

In Japan, Kitayama et al. (2006) focused on the self-construal which widely differentiates Eastern and Western regions of the world, and showed that this aspect also differentiates *Hokkaido* and Mainland Japanese people. They hypothesized that economically motivated voluntary settlement in previously unsettled areas, i.e., frontier spirits, fosters American individualism (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). If so, *Hokkaido* people are expected to show similar patterns of cognitions and emotions to European Americans, because *Hokkaido* has a recent history of such settlement, despite having a broader culture of interdependence. Kitayama et al. (2006) conducted a series of experiments, and demonstrated the expected results.

Now, *what are other aspects which can clarify the regional-cultural differences?* We believe that, by studying *the value of self-denigrating humor, as an interpersonal strategy for constructing friendly relationships with others*, we can shed light on the unique *Kansai* (Osaka area) culture in Japan. By stating that value, we mean that a person makes efforts to be a pleasant companion through interpersonal interactions. By presenting themselves to be lower than

their partner and by producing laughter, it becomes easier for the person to come close.

Kansai's Cultural Value: Self-Denigrating Humor for Constructing Relationships

Based on *Kansai's* historical and economic backgrounds, *Kansai* people are thought to culturally share the value of self-denigrating humor, for constructing friendly relationships with others. According to historians (e.g., Amino, 1998; Miyamoto, 1966; 1969), the *Kansai* area has been developed as a merchants' centered society. In the Edo Period (1603-1867), when the major transportation means were shipping, *Kansai* was located in a convenient place for the transportation of goods. In addition to that *Kansai* was geographically located in the center of Japan, it was bordered by a calm ocean, and furthermore, there were several canals running through *Kansai*. A number of supplies and materials were brought to *Kansai*, before being transported to various regions in Japan. It was the *Kansai* area, where supplies and materials were exchanged through commercial transactions. Therefore, there were a number of merchants in *Kansai* area, and the lives of many *Kansai* people largely depended on the commerce.

Considering that the merchants would have needed to make their business successful, they would have needed to develop friendly relationships with others. Building these relationships allowed merchants to enlarge their social networks, which increased not only the number of their customers, but information sources which made it possible to increase their business opportunities. Greater profits would have been produced by having more information about the current state of supply and demand of products. Having such information would have allowed the merchants to purchase more materials at a cheaper price, and to sell more materials where there was a demand.

To survive in that merchants' society, *Kansai* people must have found the importance of self-denigrating humor, for constructing friendly relationships, not only in the contexts of their negotiations, but also in their everyday life. For, such interpersonal strategy allows the person to develop friendly relationships in the following 4 ways: (1) Humor produces laughter, which itself would simply help reduce unnecessary tensions in interpersonal interactions (Martin, 2006). (2) Also, laughing together provides a way to construct a shared reality and sense of belonging and cohesion, which increases closeness towards each other (Fine, 1979). (3) Revealing self-embarrassing information is a sign of self-disclosure, meaning that the person likes and trusts the partner, and the partner is therefore welcomed to be closer to the person (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998). (4) Disclosing negative aspects of the self means that the person is not a "Mr. or Ms. Perfect". In this sense, self-denigrating humor is a strategy of presenting the deprecated self (Tice, Butler, Muraven, & Stillwell, 1995), which manages the person's impressions as easy to approach. Thus, self-denigrating humor makes the partner more likely to lower his/ her guard and increases the intimacy toward that person, allowing the person to come closer to the partner.

Although, the present *Kansai* may not be a merchants' centered society any longer, considerable factors, such as, functional autonomy (Allport, 1937) and plural ignorance (Allport, 1924), for instance, may contribute to the unique merchants' value being ingrained in the present *Kansai* culture. Given that cultural values derived from past economic roots are passed down through generations in a culture (e.g., Nisbett & Cohen, 1996; Cohen, Vandello, et al., 1999), we could assume that *Kansai* people still put a high value on self-denigrating humor, for constructing relationships.

That the value, uniquely emerged and developed from merchants' society is still held by *Kansai* people has been implied by the findings in the studies of social psychology. Hama (1995a; 1995b) examined regional-cultural differences between *Kansai* and *Hokkaido* people in customer services. He argues that the customer services in *Hokkaido* are not as good as in *Kansai*. He attributes this regional-cultural differences to their different communication styles; *Hokkaido* people have explicit and *Kansai* people have implicit communication styles. In contrast to *Hokkaido* people, *Kansai* people have acquired social skills in which they appropriately sense and provide information that the others may want to know. In addition, so that the others can enjoy the interactions, *Kansai* people are more attentive to the psychological burden that the others may experience. For example, resuming conversation which was once cut off requires extra efforts (Wright, 1987). Thus, by adding unnecessary information and so on, *Kansai* people are more likely to avoid stopping the conversation so that the others do not have to start again.

To test this idea, Hama had university students play the role of a telephone operator and deal with a customer (confederate) inquiring about a steak buffet in a hotel. The expected results were demonstrated. For example, even though the customer did not directly ask about the reservations, *Kansai* people were more likely to provide necessary information ("reservation is required one day before"), than *Hokkaido* people. In addition, for an inquiry, such as "I would like to know about the steak buffet" from a customer, most *Hokkaido* people simply responded as "yes", and cut off the on-going conversation. However, more *Kansai* than *Hokkaido* people avoided making the customers resume the conversation. They either asked further questions ("what would you like to know?") or provided specific information ("it costs 4,800 yen for an adult"), for continuing the rally. The similar results were replicated in the subsequent field experiment (Hama, 1995b).

Hama's studies imply that *Kansai* people highly value the interpersonal strategies which have emerged from merchants' negotiations. To have the customer feel good with the interactions, *Kansai* people were more likely to appropriately sense what the customer wanted to know from the context, and provide such information, even without a direct request from the customer. In addition, to save the customer from being tired of the interactions, *Kansai* people did not merely respond to what they were asked. They also provided extra information, for continuing the rally of the conversation.

However, the contexts focused on in Hama's studies are limited. As discussed above, *Kansai*'s unique cultural value emerged from merchants' negotiations. Because customer service is one of the contexts of negotiations, it

saliently educes the merchants' unique value. Therefore, the contexts in Hama's study are those where the merchants' unique value can easily be detected. To argue that the merchants' unique value is broadly ingrained in *Kansai* culture, we need an investigation which focuses on their everyday life-contexts, where the value is not pronounced.

Blunder-Telling Behavior as a Self-Denigrating Humor Strategy

The present study focuses on one of the everyday life-interpersonal strategies of self-denigrating humor, for constructing relationships, such as blunder-telling behavior. Here, the blunder is defined as "a mistake caused by oneself, which leads to embarrassment, yet is not considered to be serious or inconvenient to others." A typical example is; "when I got to school and opened my backpack to take out my pencil case, to my surprise, I found a TV remote control there instead." Blunder-telling behavior refers to the behavior of telling others a blunder which a person has experienced him/herself. Given that a blunder is not a significant mistake, but is still a failure, this may threaten one's self-esteem (e.g., Heatherton & Polivy, 1991; Park, Crocker, & Kiefer, 2007). Therefore, blunder-telling behavior is self-denigrating (Boxer & Cortes-Conde, 1997; Zajdman, 1995), and one of the *face-threatening acts* (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Nonetheless, blunder-telling behavior can be a humorous strategy at the same time. It can produce laughter with a cognitive gap, which may be created by the result of the mistake. In this anecdote, the TV remote control is not appropriate to take to school. The fact that the TV remote control is at school, therefore deviates from a general expectation. According to the humor theory (Wyer & Colins, 1992), such a cognitive gap between the expectation and actual story line elicits humor from the audience.

The purpose of the present study was to examine whether, the *Kansai* cultural value of self-denigrating humor for constructing relationships, is generalized to contexts where the value is less pronounced. For this purpose, the present study focuses on such interpersonal strategy in everyday-contexts: Blunder-telling behavior. Given that this behavior is a strategy of self-denigrating humor for constructing relationships, if *Kansai* people highly value self-denigrating humor for constructing relationships, even in their daily interactions, they would particularly appreciate this behavior.

Kanto as a Comparison Group

To demonstrate that *Kansai* people highly value blunder-telling behavior, the present study employs *Kanto* people as a comparison group. Based on the historical and economic background of *Kanto* (*Tokyo* area), although *Kanto* people may value constructing relationships as much as *Kansai* people, they are thought to use different interpersonal strategies for developing relationships. Specifically, because *Kanto* people emphasize to save one's face, they presumably restrain and put little value on self-denigrating humor, for constructing relationships. Accordingly (e.g., Amino, 1998; Miyamoto, 1966; 1969; Takemitsu, 2003), *Kanto* has developed as a *Samurai*-centered region.

Since Ieyasu Tokugawa established the Edo *Shogunate* in 1603, Japan's government has been located in *Kanto*. Therefore, in *Kanto*, in that period, there were a number of Samurai people who made a living serving their master, the *Shogun*, and governing general people. Being above the general people, *Samurai* people should not have allowed others to laugh at themselves. If they were laughed at, they were seen as incompetent. By being seen as incompetent or incapable of maintaining authority, *Samurai* people were more likely to experience rebellions from peasants. Thus, to survive in that society, *Kanto* people are thought to have needed to take good care of saving *face*, as in Goffman (1982)². Given that, self-denigrating humor is a face threatening act, although *Kanto* people may have valued constructing relationships as much as *Kansai* people, they are thought not to have put a high value on self-denigrating humor for developing relationships. Due to this historical and economic background of *Kanto*, and again, that the value derived from the historical and economic background has been carried through generations, *Kanto* people are thought to put less value on self-denigrating humor, as a strategy for constructing relationships than *Kansai* people.

As *Kanto* people do not highly value self-denigrating humor, and blunder-telling behavior is a kind of self-denigrating humor, then, *Kanto* people would not welcome that behavior. Through blunder-telling behavior, a person is revealing negative information about him/herself, and thus, an interpersonal partner may regard the person as foolish. Now that the partner thinks of the person as incompetent or not worthy of respect, the person would feel embarrassed, and lose face. Therefore, those *Kanto* people, who put a little value on self-denigrating humor for constructing relationships, would not greatly appreciate blunder-telling behavior as much as *Kansai* people.

Study 1

Study 1 examines the regional-cultural differences in the value of blunder-telling behavior, as an interpersonal strategy for constructing relationships. Our hypothesis is straightforward; compared with *Kanto*, *Kansai* people are more favorable of blunder-telling behavior. However, we do not expect to show the expected regional-cultural differences so easily, because these differences were more difficult to demonstrate than we had expected in our previous studies (Niwa & Kato, 2005; 2006; 2007a; 2007b).

A possible reason for the difficulty arises in that *owarai* (being funny) has recently been in fashion, and the value of being funny has broadly prevailed

² According to historians (e.g., Amino, 1998; Miyamoto, 1966; 1969; Takemitsu, 2003), the *Samurai's* features were also seen in people in other social classes, including merchants, in the *Kanto* area. Important customers (*Samurai* and other people who have acquired *Samurai*-like features) of the merchants disrespected those who lost face. Thus, to run a business, merchants in *Kanto* were also required to maintain face.

over Japan (labeled as *owarai-boom*)³. As reported in the news (Brasor, 2004), comedians are in great demand on TV programs, and there is not a single day that passes without seeing comedians on TV. Because of this boom, Kanto people may also admit to the positive aspects of being funny, and they may positively evaluate humorous strategies. Consequently, the expected differences may not clearly appear on the simple attitudinal scale of blunder-telling behavior.

Now, *how could we detect regional-cultural differences in the value of blunder-telling behavior?* We believe that the differences could be demonstrated, when the value of blunder-telling behavior is disconfirmed. Our argument is based on Minoura (1992) who has proposed 3 developmental stages of incorporating a cultural meaning system (D'Andrade, 1984; Quinn & Holland, 1987). Through interviews with Japanese children growing up in the United States, she has noted that, acquired and embedded meanings come to function in the human organism at 3 levels: Cognitive, behavioral, and affective. At first, children come to recognize cultural differences in interaction patterns (the cognitive). Second, they come to understand the value behind cultural practices and to master those practices (the behavioral). Third, people internalize cultural patterns to the extent that, an emotional reaction is evoked when their routine patterns of behavior are interrupted (the affective). In her interviews, she asked those children who had seemed to have mastered American ways of interaction (e.g., self-assertion) why they acted like Americans. Some children unemphatically answered, "because American people expect me so". Other children, however, passionately justified their American ways of behaving (e.g., you need to show what you want). On the basis of these non-affective or affective reactions, Minoura classified the former type of children into the behavioral, whereas the latter into the affective level of the internalization of American culture. Minoura then argues that, at the behavioral level, cognitive representations do not invoke "passion". At the affective level, however, due to some affective components, when routine patterns of behavior are interrupted, a "cold" cognition which people take for granted, may be shaken, and a "hot" negative affection (Mandler, 1984) may become apparent.

Given her premises and our above discussions of the unique regional-cultural values (i.e., Despite the *owarai-boom* across Japan, *Kansai* people still value self-denigrating humor, as a strategy for constructing relationships more than *Kanto* people), we speculated that the value of blunder-telling behavior may function at the affective level in *Kansai* and the behavioral level in *Kanto* people. If that is the case, when this value is disconfirmed, "hot" negative emotion would be aroused in *Kansai* people, and they would passionately disagree with it, because something they truly care about is negatively treated. On the other hand, even when that value is disconfirmed, *Kanto* people who do not care for blunder-telling behavior, from the bottom of their hearts, would not deny it so greatly.

³ *Owarai-boom* refers to the recent popularity of comedians on TV. The word *owarai* is the honorific form of the word *warai*, meaning "a laugh" or "a smile". Comedians have always been popular in *Kansai*, but recently their popularity has spread across the whole of Japan through variety-talk shows. In this trend, many minor comedians have been finding sudden fame and popularity. This, in turn, has induced the value that "being funny" is good, and thus a trend in wanting to make others laugh just as comedians do on TV.

Because *Kansai* people would react more negatively, than *Kanto* people, to the disconfirming statements about the value of blunder-telling behavior, they are expected to disagree more.

For this reason, to investigate regional-cultural differences in the value of blunder-telling behavior, we employed 3 types of value statement, Positive, Negative, and Disregard. Positive type literally describes positive effects of blunder-telling behavior (e.g., it helps to increase the listener's intimacy toward the teller). To disconfirm the value of blunder-telling behavior, we also employed the Negative and Disregard types. The Negative type describes negative effects (e.g., it can be a threat for maintaining one's face). Finally, the Disregard type underestimates the overall effects (e.g., it only reports the failure experiences) of this behavior. If only *Kansai* people have internalized the value of blunder-telling behavior, even in the affective level, these 2 types of disconfirming statements about the value of blunder-telling behavior would "touch their nerves", and invoke their negative emotions. Consequently, *Kansai* people, strongly opposed to these types of statements, would react more negatively, and thus disagree more strongly with these types, than *Kanto* people.

Method

Questionnaire

In the face sheet, we asked demographic questions such as gender, age, and prefectures where the participants have lived (in chronological order as well as the durations in months).

To measure the value of blunder-telling behavior, we employed 3 different types of statements about the value of blunder-telling behavior: Positive, Negative, and Disregard. Positive items depict positive effects of blunder-telling behavior in interpersonal relationships, Negative items described negative consequences of blunder-telling behavior, and Disregard items are those that reject the positive effects of blunder-telling behavior. Each type consists of 5 items (see Table 1). For each of the 15 items, participants were asked to rate "How descriptive is each statement on your thoughts on blunder-telling behavior?" from (1) not at all to (7) very.

Participants

Initially, we had 419 undergraduate students⁴ (220 males and 199 females) from universities⁵ located either in *Kanto* or *Kansai*. Of those, we

⁴ We believe that, although university students are not yet socially independent (i.e., they are still largely dependent on their parents), they are good representatives of a culture. They have implicitly learned their cultural values, by being agents in that cultural context, including interaction with other people, for about 20 years. Supporting our argument, Minoura (1992) also shows qualitative data which indicates that people could have internalized cultural value by the age of 15.

⁵ To exclude a different factor, such as education level, we selected private universities for both *Kansai* and *Kanto* samples. Nonetheless, we believe that the value of constructing relationships

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further selected participants from prefectures in either *Kanto* or *Kansai*, who had continuously lived in those regions between the ages of 9 and 15 years⁶. Final subjects were 55 males and 69 females from *Kansai* (Mean age = 20.04, *SD* = 1.12), and 120 males and 66 females from *Kanto* (Mean age = 19.21, *SD* = .98).

Table 1. Items in the Value of the Blunder-Telling Behavior

Type	Items
1. Positive	
1. (2)	It provides a good opportunity to show a funny aspect of the self.
2. (5)	It can change a bad experience into a great experience by laughing about it with other people.
3. (7)	It lets us enjoy fun moments with others by laughing together.
4. (10)	It provides me with a great opportunity to become close to others.
5. (14)	It makes our daily lives more fun.
2. Negative	
6. (1)	It induces embarrassment by being foolish.
7. (4)	It only reminds me of the embarrassments I have experienced.
8. (8)	It only provides a negative image of the self.
9. (12)	It only disgraces the self in public.
10. (15)	It degrades how others perceive me.
3. Disregard	
11. (3)	It simply reports the blunder that I have experienced.
12. (6)	It is not worth talking about to others.
13. (9)	It does not mean much.
14. (11)	It does not play a significant role in my relationships with others.
15. (13)	It does not have any important meanings.

Note. Numbers in parenthesis indicate the order presented in a questionnaire.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered in classes. The instructors announced that the present study's goal was to examine the general attitude about

through self-denigrating humor has been widely prevailed over *Kansai*, no matter which social or educational level people are classified in (e.g., ranging from housewives to old male professors).

⁶ The definition of the prefectures in *Kansai* and *Kanto* are based on a well-established dictionary of Japanese language, called *Kojien* (Shinmura, 1998). According to *Kojien*, *Kansai* includes *Shiga*, *Kyoto*, *Osaka*, *Hyogo*, *Nara*, and *Wakayama* whereas *Kanto* includes *Ibaragi*, *Tochigi*, *Gunma*, *Saitama*, *Chiba*, *Tokyo*, and *Kanagawa*. We empirically defined "participant's regions" as "the prefecture where they have continuously lived during the period between the ages of 9 and 15 years". This definition is based upon the study by Minoura (1992), which suggests that the age between 9 and 15 is a critical period for incorporating particular cultural norms, especially in interpersonal domain.

blunder-telling behavior. The participants were thus blind to the purpose of this study. Approximate time to complete a questionnaire was 10 to 15 minutes.

Results

We expected that, compared with *Kanto* people, *Kansai* people would more disagree with the Negative and Disregard types of the value statements about blunder-telling behavior. To test this, we first calculated Cronbach's alphas of each type of value statement (i.e., Positive, Negative, and Disregard) for an index of the internal consistencies. Because the alphas were adequately high (i.e., .81, .86, and .62, Positive, Negative, Disregard, respectively), we calculated the mean scores of each.

We conducted 2 (Culture) X 3 (Type of statement) repeated ANOVA on the mean averages of the types of statement (Table 2). Expectedly, an interaction of Culture and Type appeared significant ($F_{(1, 307)} = 8.13, p < .01$). We then examined and calculated the simple main effects of Culture on each type. As expected, the simple main effect of Culture appeared not significant on the Positive type ($F_{(1, 307)} = .82, n.s.$). This meant that *Kansai* people did not rate significantly higher than *Kanto* people on the Positive type. Nonetheless, the simple main effects of Culture expectedly appeared significant on the Negative ($F_{(1, 307)} = 6.99, p < .01$) and Disregard types ($F_{(1, 307)} = 14.86, p < .01$), indicating that *Kansai* people disagreed with these types more than *Kanto* people.

Table 2. Means and SDs of Ratings on Value of the Blunder-Tellings

Types	Region	Mean	(SD)	F	(p)	d
1. Positive	<i>Kanto</i>	5.09	(1.18)	.82	(.36)	-.11
	<i>Kansai</i>	5.21	(1.06)			
2. Negative	<i>Kanto</i>	3.00	(1.24)	6.99	(.01)	.31
	<i>Kansai</i>	2.63	(1.12)			
3. Disregard	<i>Kanto</i>	3.84	(1.08)	14.86	(.00)	.45
	<i>Kansai</i>	3.35	(1.11)			

Discussion

The results were consistent with our hypothesis that *Kansai* people are more favorable towards blunder-telling behavior. The results indicated that, *Kansai* people disagreed more strongly with the Negative and Disregard types of the value statement of blunder-telling behavior, than *Kanto* people. It can be interpreted that, because *Kansai* people are more strongly opposed to the disconfirming statements about the value of blunder-telling behavior, they reacted more negatively against these types of statements, than *Kanto* people.

Why were the differences revealed, only when the values of blunder-telling behavior were disconfirmed? One possible answer is that only *Kansai* people have internalized the value of blunder-telling behavior, to the extent that, an emotional reaction is evoked when their value is disconfirmed. Because *Kansai* people earnestly put a high value on blunder-telling behavior, when this value was disconfirmed, they reacted sharply against it, and strongly disagreed with these types of statements. *Kanto* people, on the other hand, may admit to the value of blunder-telling behavior; however they may do so, only due to the recent trend of being funny in Japan (i.e., *owarai-boom*). Those *Kanto* people, who do not passionately care for that behavior, did not deny so strongly the disconfirming statements about the value of blunder-telling behavior. Therefore, these results appear to support our hypothesis; even in their daily life-contexts, *Kansai* people uniquely put a high value on self-denigrating humor for constructing relationships.

Then, how does the value of blunder-telling behavior relate to blunder-telling behavior itself, in Kansai people? In our view, because Study 1 indicated that *Kansai* people highly value blunder-telling behavior, this value would have been deeply integrated as a part of their self. For *Kansai* people, no matter which contexts they are involved in, blunder-telling behavior has significant meanings to them. They are highly sensitive to various stimuli relevant to this behavior. For instance, they consider to whether contexts can allow them to engage in such behavior. Also, they enjoy considering which of their unsuccessful experiences can be used as blunder-telling behavior, and how these experiences can be exaggerated to produce laughter. Consciously or unconsciously, in every social interaction, *Kansai* people attempt to appeal the value-integrated self, through blunder-telling behavior.

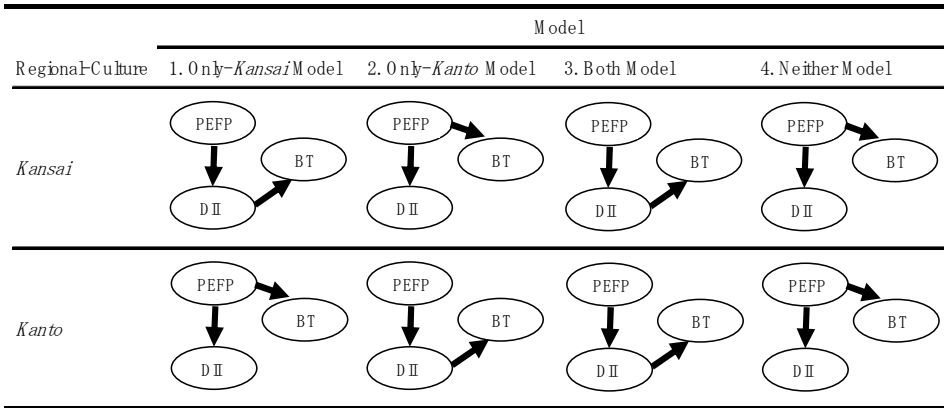
Supporting these notions, a theoretical framework of self-presentation studies have provided an approach to investigate whether or not the value of blunder-telling behavior has been deeply incorporated as a part of the self system. Accordingly (e.g., Leary & Kowalski, 1990; Schlenker & Pontari, 2000), if a person attempts to convey a particular self-image to others, that particular self-image plays a mediation role. Self-presentation is defined as, the goal-directed activity of controlling information about the self to create an audience's impression (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000). To be motivated for self-presentation, a person needs to make positive evaluations, towards those who have a higher tendency on a given characteristic (e.g., being funny), for instance (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Now that a person is motivated to create an impression on others, the issue becomes the kind of impression the person wants to make. Based on the positive evaluation, the person forms a desirable identity image (Schlenker & Pontari, 2000): A construction of the self which the person would like to be. Consequently, a person self-presents to control self-relevant information, in order to create desirable images to the person's audience. For, such self-presentation would improve the audiences' evaluation of the person in such a way that, the created images in the audience's impression, would be consistent with the desirable identity images which the person holds (see also, Schlenker & Weigold 1992; Schlenker & Pontari, 2000).

Applying the above described theoretical framework to blunder-telling behavior, if *Kansai* people have incorporated the value of blunder-telling behavior as a part of the self, *desirable identity image of being funny* (DIIF) would mediate their blunder-telling behavior. Assuming that *Kansai* people highly value blunder-telling behavior and this behavior is a strategy of producing laughter, they are thought to have formed the positive evaluation for funny people (PEFP). Consequently, if this value is important to the self, *Kansai* people would have formed the desirable identity image of being funny (DIIF). Furthermore, if *Kansai* people attempt to convey a DIIF to others through blunder-telling behavior, DIIF is expected to play a role of mediation in their blunder-telling behavior. Thus, to test the hypothesis which postulates that *Kansai* people have uniquely internalized the value of blunder-telling behavior as a part of the self, Study 2 examines the regional-cultural differences in the role of DIIF in blunder-telling behavior.

Study 2

Study 2 examines whether DIIF plays a mediation role, in blunder-telling behavior, only in *Kansai* people. To test this, we explore 4 alternative two-group Models (Table 3) and determine, which proposed Model best fits the data of *Kansai* and *Kanto* people.

Table 3. Path Models of *Kansai* and *Kanto* in Proposed Models



All of the Models (i.e., *Kansai*-Only, *Kanto*-Only, Both, and Neither Model) were generally based on our conceptual analysis of blunder-telling behavior, from a self-presentation perspective. The Blunder-Telling behavior (BT) is a predicted variable. The desirable identity image of being funny (DIIF) and the positive evaluation for funny people (PEFP) are predicting variables. The *Kansai*- and *Kanto*-Only Models have different path models for *Kansai* and *Kanto* people. Specifically, in the *Kansai*-Only Model, the *Kansai* path model assumes that positive influences of PEFP on BT are mediated by DIIF, whereas the *Kanto* path model assumes no such mediation effect of DIIF. The *Kanto*-Only Model assumes reversed path models of *Kansai* and *Kanto* as in the

Kansai-Only Model. That is, in the *Kanto-Only Model*, the *Kanto* path model assumes a mediation role of DIIF in BT, while the *Kansai* model assumes a direct influence of PEFP on BT. The Both and Neither Models have the same pattern of relations for both *Kansai* and *Kanto* people. In the Both Model, both the *Kansai* and *Kanto* path models assume a mediation role of DIIF. In the Neither Model, there is no such mediation effect, in either the *Kansai* or *Kanto* path model.

If our hypothesis is supported, the *Kansai-Only Model* should be detected to be the best fit Model, in which DIIF plays a mediation role in blunder-telling behavior, only in *Kansai* people.

Method

Questionnaire

In the face sheet, we asked demographic questions, such as, gender, age, and prefectures where the participants have lived (in chronological order as well as their durations in months). After these questions, we asked participants to rate their self-perceived (self-estimated) frequency of “Blunder-Telling (BT),” “Desirable Identity Image of Being Funny (DIIF),” and “Positive Evaluations for Funny People (PEFP),” on a 7-point scale.

Blunder-Telling Behavior (BT). To measure the frequency of blunder-telling behavior, based on our definition of blunder, we constructed 10 blunder items. Each blunder was described in one sentence (see Table 4). For 10 blunder items, participants were asked to rate “How likely are you to tell ‘those whom you would like to get closer to’ about the blunders you committed?” from (1) not at all to (7) very much likely.

Positive Evaluations for Funny People (PEFP). To assess the degree of positive evaluations for funny people, using 14 positive adjectives (see Table 5), we asked participants to rate “How descriptive is this adjective for describing those who are good at making others laugh?” from (1) not at all to (7) very descriptive.

Desirable Identity Image of Being Funny (DIIF). To measure the degree of desirable identity image of being funny, we used 4 items to describe “being funny” (i.e., those who are funny, fun, able to produce laughter, and able to produce warm up conversations). We also used 7 filler items⁷, for example, those who are mentally strong, kind, sincere, or modest. We asked participants to rate “How descriptive is this sentence of the image that you would like to be like?” from (1) not at all to (7) very descriptive.

Participants

Initially, we had 313 undergraduate students (130 males and 183 females) from universities located either in *Kanto* or *Kansai*. Of those, we

⁷ To test the discriminant validity of DIIF, we conducted a correlational analysis between DIIF and the filler items. The highest correlational coefficients indicated .62, demonstrating the adequate discriminant validity of DIIF.

further selected participants using the same criteria as Study 1. The final subjects were 52 males and 57 females from *Kansai* (Mean age = 20.40, *SD* = 1.49), and 33 males and 67 females from *Kanto* (Mean age = 20.74, *SD* = .91).

Table 4. Results of Factor Analysis of the Blunder-Telling Items

Blunder-Telling Items	Factor Loadings
1. (7) While I was casually playing with the lighter, the flame grew surprisingly big and burned my eyebrows.	.77
2. (5) I went into what I thought was my apartment, saying "I'm home", but actually I was on the wrong floor and it was a stranger's	.74
3. (6) While swimming in the ocean, a big wave took away my loosely tied swim suite.	.72
4. (8) On the way back from the community bath, I had to chase after my dirty underwear, because the wind took it away	.70
5. (10) While competing with my friend on drinking milk in one gulp, though I won, I choked and the milk came out from my nose.	.65
6. (1) Because I did not notice the cactus on the chair, I promptly sat down on it and got a thorn in my ass.	.65
7. (2) As I was picking the dirt off my shoes, I realized the dirt was actually dog's poop. My finger have stunk for a couple of days.	.60
8. (3) The night before, I drank too much alcohol. The next morning, I found myself lying on a stranger's door step.	.58
9. (9) When I called my friend's house, I talked to her sister for a while, mistakenly thinking that I was talking to my friend.	.52
10. (4) While holding my pee, I bursted into laughter, and wet my pants.	.48

Note. Numbers in parenthesis indicate the order presented in a questionnaire.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered in classes. The instructors announced to the participants that the present study's purpose was to study the behavior of blunder-telling behavior. The questionnaire took approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

Results and Discussion

Preliminary Analysis

We calculated mean average scores of BT (Blunder-Telling behavior), PEFP (Positive Evaluation for Funny People), and DIIF (Desirable Identity Image of being Funny) for each region. Cronbach's alphas of these variables indicated .88, .92, and .88, for BT, PEFP, and DIIF, respectively, suggesting highly internal consistencies.

To examine the regional-cultural differences in the self-estimated frequency of blunder-telling behavior, the degree of the evaluation for funny people, and of the funny self-image that they want to be, we conducted a repeated one way ANOVA as a function of Culture on the mean scores of BT, PEFP, and DIIF. As results, no main effect of Culture appeared on BT ($F_{(1, 207)} = 1.15, n.s.$),

PEFP ($F_{(1, 207)} = .19, n.s.$), or DIIF ($F_{(1, 207)} = 2.89, n.s.$). Nonetheless, this finding is not surprising. As described above, we expected difficulty in demonstrating differences, due to the *owarai-boom* prevalent over Japan. For this confounding factor, therefore, the present finding may also have not demonstrated the regional-cultural differences on these variables.

Table 5. Results of Factor Analysis of the PEFP Items

Items of PEFP	Factor Loadings
1. (10) brilliant	.74
2. (13) competent	.73
3. (8) great	.72
4. (9) sharp	.71
5. (12) smart	.70
6. (11) insightful	.68
7. (14) respectable	.68
8. (5) charming	.68
9. (6) attractive	.67
10. (2) pleasant	.67
11. (7) talented of producing laugh	.64
12. (1) entertaining	.60
13. (4) delightful	.56
14. (3) friendly	.56

Note. Numbers in parenthesis indicate the order presented in a questionnaire.

Model Comparison

We used AMOS (Version 7) to generate parameter estimates with a maximum likelihood algorithm. To increase the values of the fit index, we selected 4 items each from BT and PEFP⁷. The selected 4 items indicated the highest factor loadings of each BT and PEFP. Table 4 and Table 5 indicate those results of BT and PEFP, respectively. Because the correlational analysis among the variables indicated adequate correlational coefficients, the total of the 12 items (4 items for each variable) were thus targeted in the following Structural Equation Modeling.

Following the above noted conceptualizations, we explored different 4 Models, each of which tests two-group models: the *Kansai* and *Kanto* models. Accordingly, if the value of blunder-telling behavior has become a part of the self, the increased BT is led by greater DIIF, rather than PEFP. Conversely, if this value has not been a part of the self yet, the increased BT should not be guided by greater DIIF. Instead, greater PEFP would directly lead to increased BT. Therefore, in the *Kansai-Only* Model which assumes that only *Kansai* people have taken the value of blunder-telling behavior as a part of the self, the *Kansai* path model experiences nullification of the path from DIIF to BT, whereas the *Kanto* path model experiences nullification occurring directly from PEFP to BT. Conversely, in the *Kanto-Only* Model which assumes that only

Kanto people have taken the value of blunder-telling behavior as a part of the self, the *Kanto* path model experiences nullification of the path from DIIF to BT, whereas the *Kansai* path model experience nullification which occurs from PEFP to BT. In the Both Model, which assumes both *Kansai* and *Kanto* people have internalized the value of blunder-telling behavior as a part of the self, both the *Kansai* and *Kanto* path models experiences nullification of the path from DIIF to BT. Assuming that neither of *Kansai* nor *Kanto* people have taken the value of blunder-telling behavior as a part of the self, neither of the *Kansai* nor *Kanto* path model experiences such a nullification in the Neither Model. Rather than that, in the Neither Model, both the *Kansai* and *Kanto* models experience a direct nullification of the path from PEFP to BT.

To determine which Model (*Kansai*-Only, *Kanto*-Only, Both, and Neither Model) best fits the data of *Kansai* and *Kanto* people, the value of AIC of each Model was calculated. As expected, the *Kansai*-Only Model showed the smallest value of AIC among the 4 alternative Models (see Table 6), which indicates that the *Kansai*-Only Model has the best statistical fit among the proposed Models. The other fit indexes also suggested that the *Kansai*-Only Model is the best one which fit the data of *Kansai* and *Kanto* people (see also Table 6).

Table 6. AIC, GFI, AGFI, RMSEA, and BCC of 4 Alternative Models

Model	AIC	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	BCC
<i>Kansai</i> -Only	255.89	.870	.839	.052	264.53
<i>Kanto</i> -Only	273.51	.859	.826	.058	282.16
Both	263.75	.865	.832	.055	272.39
Neither	265.73	.864	.832	.055	274.37

In the *Kansai*-Only Model, different relationships between DIIF and BT were assumed for the *Kansai* and *Kanto* models ($\chi^2=195.89$, $df=126$). In the *Kansai* model, DIIF mediated between PEFP and BT (PEFP to DIIF: $\beta = .51$, $p < .01$, DIIF to BT: $\beta = .64$, $p < .01$). These results suggest that positive evaluation of being funny did not directly lead to the increased blunder-telling behavior, but instead desirable self-image of being funny mediated between these 2. Conversely, in the *Kanto* path model, DIIF did not play a mediation role in BT (PEFP to DIIF: $\beta = .51$, $p < .01$). Instead, PEFP directly led to increased BT (PEFP to BT: $\beta = .53$, $p < .01$). These results imply that, rather than the funny self-image, positive evaluation toward funny people directly led to *Kanto* people's increased frequency of blunder-telling behavior.

The above results support our argument that *Kansai* people have deeply internalized the value of blunder-telling behavior as a part of the self. The least value of the AIC was indicated in the *Kansai*-Only Model, which assumes that DIIF mediates blunder-telling behavior in *Kansai*, but not *Kanto* people. Considering that the mediation role of DIIF is an index of the integrated value of

the self in blunder-telling behavior, these results can be interpreted as supporting our argument.

General Discussion

Through 2 studies, the present results indicated consistency with our argument, in which, the value of self-denigrating humor as an interpersonal strategy for constructing relationships is another aspect which can shed the light on regional-cultural differences in Japan. Based upon historical and economic background, we speculated that although both *Kansai* and *Kanto* people highly value constructing friendly relationships with others, they value different interpersonal strategies for such a purpose. Specifically, only *Kansai* people uniquely put a high value on self-denigrating humor for constructing relationships. If this value has been ingrained in the present *Kansai* culture, to the extent that, the value has been generalized to the contexts of their daily life, *Kansai* people would uniquely put a high value on an everyday life-interpersonal strategy of self-denigrating humor for constructing relationships, such as blunder-telling behavior. Study 1 tested this hypothesis, and indicated that, *Kansai* people are more favorable of blunder-telling behavior than *Kanto* people.

Study 2 investigated the relationship between the value of blunder-telling behavior and the behavior itself in *Kansai* people. Based upon the results of Study 1, we speculated that *Kansai* people have deeply taken the value of blunder-telling behavior as a part of the self. To test our speculation, we applied a theoretical framework of the self-presentation studies. Accordingly, if that is the case, desirable identity image of being funny (DIIF) plays a mediation role in *Kansai* people's blunder-telling behavior. To examine the regional-cultural differences in the mediation role of DIIF, Study 2 conducted model comparisons among the 4 alternative Models (i.e., *Kansai*-Only, *Kanto*-Only, Both, and Neither Models). Supporting our speculation, the results showed the best fit index on the *Kansai*-Only Model, which assumes the mediation role of DIIF in *Kansai* people, but not *Kanto* people.

The present study importantly suggests that the value of self-denigrating humor for constructing relationships has been rooted in *Kansai* culture. The previous studies (Hama 1995a; 1995b) implicate that *Kansai* people put a high value on interpersonal strategies for constructing relationships, which uniquely emerged and developed from a merchants' society. However, the examined contexts were limited where this value is salient. Customer service is a context of merchants' negotiation, and the value of such strategies is easily remarked in this context. To argue that this value is ingrained in *Kansai* culture, an investigation was needed which focused on the context where this value is not necessarily pronounced. Focusing on the interpersonal strategy in everyday life-contexts, such as blunder-telling behavior, the present study demonstrated that *Kansai* people eagerly hold the value of blunder-telling behavior, and have internalized such a value as a part of the self.

Blunder-telling behavior is an interpersonal strategy of self-denigrating humor, which can guide a person to construct friendly relationships with others. Engaging in this behavior allows a person to present their self as being lower

than others and produce laughter at the same time. Producing laughter can facilitate to develop relationships with others, by reducing unnecessary tensions between the person and the partner (Martin, 2006; Robinson & Smith-Lovin, 2001), and providing not only opportunities to get to know each other (Vinton, 1989), but also a sense of belonging and cohesion (Fine, 1979). Indeed, the funnier people are, the more attractive they are found by their friends and co-workers (Wanzer, Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield, 1996). Interestingly, O'quin, & Aronoff (1981) empirically demonstrated that humor-included-negotiation assisted people to bargain over prices more than simple serious negotiation. Through negotiating with other merchants, Kansai people must have implicitly learned such a positive interpersonal strategy.

Limitation and for Future Studies

One of the limitations of this study is that we did not specify particular contexts. Because blunder-telling behavior particularly leads to opposite consequences in different contexts, the value of this behavior would greatly vary in different contexts. Generally, people do not actively engage in this behavior, especially when it may cause embarrassment. Nonetheless, in despite of the temporal embarrassment, because the value of self-denigrating humor for constructing relationships has been rooted in *Kansai*, *Kansai* people would engage in this behavior. Consequently, the regional-cultural differences may be greater when the behavior causes temporal unfavorable outcomes. We did not, however, specify or manipulate different contexts of blunder-telling behavior. Future study should explore regional-cultural differences in different contexts, by varying the contexts of the behavior.

Taking an approach from the self-presentation studies' paradigm, we identified that the desirable identity image of being funny plays a mediation role in *Kansai* people's blunder-telling behavior. Nonetheless, this approach may not directly examine such a self-image. In order to strongly argue that *Kansai* people attempt to convey their funny self-image to others through blunder-telling behavior, we may directly ask participants which self-image they wanted to impose on others, after their actual performance of this behavior. Or, we could compare the differences in this behavior while manipulating their different desirable self-image (e.g., funny vs. strong).

An interesting implication is that there might be regional-cultural differences in the degree of the internalization of the value of being funny. Specifically, *Kansai* people may have internalized this value more deeply than *Kanto* people. Both of the *Kansai* and *Kanto* people highly agreed with the positive statements about the value of blunder-telling behavior, positive evaluation for funny people, and desirable identity image of being funny. We attributed these non-differences to the *owarai-boom*. Due to this boom, both groups may admit the value of being funny. However, the *owarai-boom* is just a temporary trend which has recently prevailed across Japan. *Kanto* people, who have newly acknowledged self-denigrating humor, have not internalized this value as deeply as *Kansai* people, who have grown up in this value-context since they were born. Consequently, *Kansai* people reacted more negatively than

Kanto people against the disconfirming statements about the value of blunder-telling behavior, and a desirable funny self-image plays a mediation role in *Kansai*, but not in *Kanto* people. These results suggest that the value of being funny is more than just knowledge, particularly for *Kansai* people. We thus believe that the differences which appeared in the present study, reflect the differences in the level of internalization of the value of self-denigrating humor.

The present study implies that *Kansai* people have an elaborated schema for self-denigrating humor. The result indicated that the value of self-denigrating humor, for constructing relationships has been generalized to *Kansai*'s everyday life-contexts, where this value is not necessarily salient. It thus suggests that, *Kansai* people are attentive and try hard to make interactions enjoyable for others in their daily contexts⁸. They may frequently experience similar thoughts for having others enjoy interactions. Schema becomes elaborated by repeated similar experiences (Fiske & Tylor, 1991). Thus, we can expect that *Kansai* people may have elaborated schemas of self-denigrating humor for constructing relationships.

Finally, future studies could employ an older sample for revealing more significant differences. Like our other previous studies, the present study also had the difficulty of demonstrating great differences between *Kansai* and *Kanto* people. As described above, we attributed this difficulty to the *owarai-boom* in Japan. The university students have been employed as a sample; however, this particular sample may be especially sensitive for catching up with a trendy fashion, and easily influenced by this. Older people, on the other hand, who are thought not so greatly aware of trends from the media, would not be affected by the *owarai-boom*, as much as young people. Therefore, *Kanto* people of an older generation would not positively evaluate funny people, and they particularly put little value on blunder-telling behavior which may result in a loss of face.

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⁸ Though there seem no empirical evidence, several sociologists and novelists have described *Kansai*'s unique interpersonal patterns. For example, Jun'ichiro Tanizaki (a Japanese novelist) has described his own culture-shock experience when he moved from *Kanto* to *Kansai*. In his essay (Tanizaki, 1995), confessed that he is sometimes overwhelmed by those *Kansai* people who aggressively attempt to become closer to him. Also, a Japanese sociologist, Hiroshi Inoue, describes unique interpersonal interaction patterns of *Kansai* people in everyday life-contexts. According to his essay (2003), conversations in *Kansai* seem to sound like a stand-up comedy show to *Kanto* people.

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