

Everyday Experiences of Account-Giving from Victims' and Offenders' Perspectives: A Comparison of U.S. American and Japanese Students' Perceptions

Takuji SHIMADA Tenri University, Japan

Carl L. THAMELING

University of Louisiana at Monroe, USA

Jiro TAKAI

Nagoya University, Japan

Abstract: This study explored the process of interpersonal accounts that U.S. American and Japanese students (218 and 260, respectively) experienced as victims of an offense and as reproached offenders. The perceived cause of the offense had a significant bearing on victims' judgment of offense severity and reproach strategies. Victims also associated interpersonal norm violations with account tactic preferences. Offenders' perspectives failed to support most of the hypotheses, however. A hierarchical regression analysis indicated that a violation of interpersonal norms is a significant predictor of severe reproach. U.S. American and Japanese students differed in their attitudes toward social norms and their self-serving tendency.

Keywords: Account-giving, severity, blameworthiness, reproach, cultural differences

1. Introduction

Everyday social interactions are replete with face-threatening encounters where individuals often speak and behave offensively. The targets of these offensive acts, victims, often expect the offender to account for his or her offensive behavior. In some cases, these social expectations lead victims to reproach the offender who then feels obligated to account for his or her unexpected behavior. An account is one communicative means for the offender to maintain social order by verbally filling in the gap between action and expectations (Scott & Lyman, 1968). The offender who accounts for his or her actions in an acceptable manner can restore his or her relationship with the victim. If corrective communication fails, however, episodes can escalate to conflict (Schönbach, 1990).

There are at least four types of accounts: concessions, excuses, justifications, and refusals (Schönbach, 1990) which are ordered on a mitigating-aggravating continuum. Concessions and excuses are more mitigating, whereas justifications and refusals are more assertive (Holtgraves, 2002). Account sequences follow a standard guide of development in offensive situations. For instance, an offense arouses a request for repair, or a reproach, which is followed by an account, which is followed by an evaluation of the account (Cody & McLaughlin, 1990; Schönbach, 1990).

Cross-cultural researchers have demonstrated cultural differences in account preferences by representing the U.S. and Japan as individualist and collectivist cultures, respectively. Prior studies have reported that individualistic U.S. Americans preferred more assertive accounts, whereas collectivistic Japanese use more mitigating accounts (Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990; Itoi, Ohbuchi & Fukuno, 1996). Compared with the preference of accounts, little research has directed attention to the functions of reproach influencing the offender's choice of accounts. Moreover, although prior studies have repeatedly found offense severity as the most important determinant in account choice, the construct of "severity" has been ambiguous. Because each phase of account sequences is interdependent, offense severity and the victim's reproach strategies should have consequences for the offender's accounts.

The current research aims to examine the unresolved questions left by previous research. Specifically, this study attempted to examine U.S. American and Japanese students' perceptions of offense, appropriate use of reproach, and account tactic preference while acting as the victim of an offense and the reproached offender. Investigating these cross-national variations in account-giving was also motivated by the potential to enhance cross-national relationships between U.S. Americans and Japanese who might find themselves interacting in a situation where either one is the victim or offender.

1.1. Severity of the Offense and Attributed Causes of Offenses

One of the most important dimensions of an offense is its severity (Cupach, 1994; Schönbach, 1990). Schlenker (1980) conceptualizes offense severity in terms of two principal determinants: the undesirability of the event and the offender's apparent responsibility for the event. Undesirable behaviors, such as, lying, cheating and hurting others, are perceived negatively because they do not correspond with expected social norms. An offender's responsibility for an undesirable event can vary in terms of personal causality, controllability of the cause, and intentionality (Weiner, 1995).

Blameworthiness is closely linked to the concept of responsibility, representing different causes for offenses (Shaver, 1985). Extant research acknowledges three distinctive causes for an offense to occur: accidents, negligence, and intentional acts. While all three offenses can generate harm and inconvenience for the victim, intentional actions are more culpable because the offender intended to harm the victim, posing a severe threat to the identities of the victim. Nevertheless, the blameworthiness of an intentional offense can vary regarding whether the behavior is performed with reasonable intention or not (Averill, 1982; Malle, Guglielmo & Monroe, 2012). If an offender's intentional act is construed as reasonable (such as in the case of a father who drives slightly over the speed limit in order to get his sick daughter/son to an emergency room), the offender is less likely to receive harsh criticism or punishment.

Individuals tend to assign the most responsibility to those who committed unjustified acts, less responsibility to justified acts and unintentional but foreseeable acts and the least responsibility to unintentional and unforeseeable acts (Gonzales, Haugen & Manning, 1994; McGraw, 1987). Therefore, we predicted that:

- H1: Causes of offenses will be related to the judgment of offense severity, such that an intentional offense, especially an unjustified one, will be judged more negatively than a negligent act and an accident.

1.2. Severity of the Offense and Nature of Reproach

Reproach is a face-threatening act, calling into question the legitimacy of the offender's behavior and social worth. It can send varying levels of regard for the offender, and thus, the degree of the threat may be adjusted by the victim's choice of reproach strategies (Hodgins & Liebeskind, 2003).

The likelihood of a severe offense eliciting a severe reproach has been well-documented in the literature (e.g., Cupach, 1994; Schönbach, 1990). Individuals are particularly sensitive to the violations of interpersonal norms. Such violations often evoke strong emotional responses such as anger (Metts, 1994; Metts & Grohskopf, 2003; Ohbuchi et al., 2004). Ohbuchi et al. (2004) reported that the perceived violations of interpersonal norms (e.g., social conventions, fairness and role expectation) evoked anger more frequently than those of social norms (e.g., laws, regulations and safety).

Similarly, extant research provides support for the responsibility dimensions of offense severity. For instance, Averill (1982) asked 160 participants to describe their most recent anger-inducing incident by choosing from four types of causes (accident, negligence, justified acts, and unjustified acts), and reported that 51% described their incidents of anger as being caused by unjustified acts, 31% by negligence, 11% by justified acts, and 7% by accident. Ohbuchi and Ogura (1984) administered Averill's questionnaire to 254 Japanese participants, reporting that 54.1% depicted their anger incidents as being caused by negligence and 32.1% by unjustified acts. Averill (1982) postulated that an individual's anger is justified when the intentional wrongdoings and unintentional misdeeds are due to negligence and carelessness. Because a severe reproach is perceived as an expression of anger, we predicted:

- H2: Compared with other types of offenses, those involving violations of interpersonal norms will be associated with more severe reproaches.
- H3: There will be a significant association between severe reproaches and unjustified, negligent offenses.

1.3. Severity of the Offense and Accounting Tactic Preferences

Research has demonstrated that offense severity also affects the preferences of accounting tactics, proffering two competing possibilities: the defensiveness prediction and the politeness prediction (Hodgins, Liebeskind & Schwartz, 1996). Advocates of defensiveness predictions (e.g., Schönbach, 1990; Schlenker, 1980) argue that offense severity motivates the offender to reduce or eliminate the negative repercussions through "extreme" accounting tactics, assuming that he or she should reject more responsibility for a very undesirable event than they do for a minor error. By contrast, politeness predictions (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987) posit that the severity of an offense that poses a grave threat to the offender should motivate him or her to pay homage to the victim's face, eliciting more concessionary accounts. Both defensiveness and politeness predictions are tenable, depending on the

causal attribution of the offense (Hodgins et al., 1996) and the nature of the reproach (Cody & Braaten, 1992).

As previously stated, some offenses are inherently more severe because they violate interpersonal norms (Metts & Grohskopf, 2003; Ohbuchi et al., 2004). Since violations of interpersonal norms are typically intentional offenses, offenders are expected to offer self-protective accounts like excuses, justifications and refusals.

H4: The use of self-protective accounts will be associated with higher ratings of offenses involving violations of interpersonal norms.

1.4. Cultural Differences in the Process of Accounts

Prior research has indicated that there are cultural differences of individualism-collectivism in account preferences. Individualist cultures (e.g., the U.S.) stress the importance of individual identity over group identity, giving priority to personal goals and needs over those of others (Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Because individualists are motivated to attain personal satisfaction through competition and individual effort, they prefer assertive and self-protective accounts. By contrast, collectivist cultures (e.g., Japan) emphasize the importance of the group identity over the individual identity, giving priority to the group over one's own goals and needs (Hofstede, 1991; Triandis, 1995). Because collectivists are motivated to maintain social harmony, they prefer mitigating and non-assertive accounts (Itoi et al., 1996; Takaku, 2000).

Beyond individualism-collectivism, the U.S. and Japan differ in cultural looseness and tightness, characterizing the U.S. and Japan as loose and tight, respectively (Triandis, 1995). The strength of social norms (i.e., how evident and ubiquitous norms are within societies) and the strength of sanctioning (i.e., how tolerant people are of deviance from norms) are the two decisive features of societal tightness-looseness (Gelfand, Nishii & Raver, 2006). Tight cultures are characterized as homogeneous, where people agree on what to do, adhere strictly to the culture's norms, and receive or give harsh criticism for minor deviations from the norms (Triandis, 1995). Gelfand et al. (2006) contend that individuals in tight cultures are more attentive to discrepancies from norms and have more negative reactions when other's behavior as well as their own deviates from standards, as compared with individuals in loose cultures. Therefore,

Q1: Do Japanese view social norm violations more negatively than U.S. Americans?

1.5. Offender's and Victim's Perspective on the Account-Giving Process

This study examined the account-giving process from the perspectives of the offender (account-giving) and victim (account-receiving) because several studies have detected the self-serving attribution tendency between the offender and the victim (e.g., Feeney & Hill, 2006; Schütz, 1999). Self-serving attributions refer to an individual's general tendency to take credit for their successes but blame others or the situation for their failures. Individuals often make self-serving attributions when their self-esteem is threatened, and such situations typically develop into account episodes. Consequently, how

people construct accounts is heavily influenced by their self-serving attributional tendency (Snyder & Higgins, 1988).

Baumeister, Stillwell and Wotman (1990) compared two autobiographical narratives about anger: one in which participants were angered by someone (victims' account) and one in which they angered someone else (offenders' account). The data collected from 63 undergraduates revealed that victims' accounts included lasting consequences, continuing anger, and long-term relationship damage, whereas offenders' accounts referred to denial of negative consequences, featuring apologies and happy endings. Victims tended to describe the offenders' motives and actions as incomprehensible, senseless, unjustified, immoral, and deliberately cruel or harmful. Offenders, however, perceived their motives as uncontrollable, justifiable, or due to mitigating circumstances. They were likely to view the victims' expressions of anger as overreactions.

Baumeister et al. (1990) demonstrated that motivations for self-protection and self-enhancement play a critical role when people narrate their own past events. As Baumeister et al. (1990) indicated, the study of recalled narratives has methodological weaknesses in that stories are more likely to be selectively constructed, conveniently retrieved and contain self-serving distortions and rationalizations. However, it is a reliable method for studying motivation because the approach has achieved a higher return on external validity. Therefore, this study directed focus on whether one's role as offender and victim would have an impact on one's recalled experiences involving the use of accounts triggered by an offense.

Q2: Do individuals have a tendency to underestimate the harm they have caused others when they are the offenders and overestimate harm if they have suffered as victims?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 218 U.S. American (87 men, 127 women, and 4 unidentified) and 260 Japanese (147 men and 113 women) undergraduate students from a southern American public University and a liberal arts college located in the western part of Japan, respectively. Both groups volunteered to participate in exchange for extra course credit. The questionnaire was administered during a regular class time and took about 20-30 minutes to complete. Participants were eliminated from the final analysis if they failed to provide responses from both the victim's and offender's roles. This decision reduced the Japanese N to 251 (141 men and 110 women) and the U.S. American N to 217 (86 men, 127 women and 4 unidentified). All of the Japanese participants were native Japanese. U.S. American participants included 141 Caucasians (64.7%), 56 African Americans (25.7%), 4 Asians (1.8%), 7 Hispanics (3.2%), and 9 others (4.1%). Japanese participants ranged in age from 18 to 61 ($M=19.79$, $SD=3.74$) and U.S. American participants from 17 to 54 ($M=21.16$, $SD=4.80$).

2.2. Materials and Procedure

The questionnaire administered to participants consisted of demographic questions and a series of questions inquiring about their interpersonal experience with accounting from the perspectives of victims and offenders (see Appendix).

Questionnaire: A Japanese version of the (Averill, 1982) questionnaire “the everyday experience of accounts” was constructed by selecting and modifying items related to the process of accounts and adding newly developed items to suit our research needs. The original version of Averill’s (1982) questionnaire was designed to examine anger not as the mere cause of aggression but as the process of uncomfortable interpersonal experience people typically undergo, which is comparable to our conceptualization of the account-giving process.

The first author translated the questionnaire into English, then a hired professional bilingual speaker who translated it back into Japanese. After that, the first author consulted with the second author regarding the adequacy of the translation. Because many of the Japanese participants were unfamiliar with the word accounts (*benmei* in Japanese), excuses (*benkai* in Japanese) were used instead. Excuses were defined as “verbal explanations offered to explicate the inappropriate or awkward behavior” and this definition was clearly written in the questionnaire.

Participants were instructed to recall the most unforgettable account-receiving experience as the victims and account-giving experience as the offenders and provide responses in terms of those particular incidents. Questionnaires were randomly distributed. Half of the participants responded to the questions regarding offender’s (account-giving) experience first, while the other half answered the questions based on victim’s (account-receiving) experience to counterbalance the order. This order was reversed to ensure that each participant assumed the role as both victim and reproached offender.

Participants were instructed to indicate the causes of the account-giving (or the perceived cause of the other party’s account-giving to them) by choosing one from four alternatives (1 = an accident that was impossible to avoid [accident]; 2 = my (or other party’s) negligence or carelessness that was easily avoidable [negligence]; 3 = an intentional act with a valid reason [justified offense]; 4 = an intentional act without a valid reason [unjustified offense]). The next question inquired about whether a reproach or a request for an explanation was made: 1 = I (or the other party) did not call for an explanation; 2 = I (or the other party) requested an explanation nonverbally; 3 = I (or the other party) asked for an explanation; 4 = I (or the other party) demanded an explanation in an accusing tone. This four-level item was created based on Braaten et al’s (1993) typology of reproach.

Data for the use of accounts were collected through an open-ended question. Participants were asked to explain what they said to the victim (the offender’s role) or what the other party said to them (the victim’s role) in their own words. Severity of harm that triggered their account episodes was assessed in six types of offense: 1 = possible or actual physical injury (physical injury); 2 = possible or actual property damage (property damage); 3 = frustration or the interruption of activities (frustration); 4 = a loss of personal pride or self-esteem (a loss of pride); 5 = violation of socially accepted ways of behaving (violation of social norms); 6 = violation of important personal expectations or wishes (violation of personal expectations). Those six items, adopted from Averill’s (1982) questionnaire, are

common elements in anger-evoking, offensive events.

Participants were asked to indicate to what extent these six elements were involved by choosing one of the three alternatives, 1 = not at all involved; 2 = somewhat involved; 3 = very much involved.

2.3. Categorization of Open-Ended Responses

Open-ended responses of accounting tactics were analyzed via SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys. This text-mining software helps categorize open-ended responses by automatically extracting key concepts and ideas via a linguistics-based approach (e.g., meaning-based extraction of key concept) and statistics-based approach (e.g., word frequency counts). Accounts were first grouped according to the automatically extracted key concepts. After this phase, we repeated the fine-tuning task to refine the linguistic resources and category definitions using Schönbach’s (1990) categorization of concessions (apologies), excuses, justifications and refusals as a yardstick. Table 1 presents the examples of our categorization.

Table 1. Examples of Account Categories

Apologies
He said he was sorry and that won’t happen again.
“I’m sorry. It was just a joke.”
Excuses
“I wasn’t feeling well.”
“I’m tired and have lack of sleep.”
Justifications
I explained that it was more important to me than job.
“I did it for her protection. I don’t want her hurt.”
Refusals
She didn’t give a reason for calling off date.
“It was not my fault.”

The coding procedure included dividing each account into elements and assigning a category to each element. Verbal phrases containing distinct meanings were chosen as elements. For instance, an account would be divided into elements and coded as follows: “I’m sorry” (an expression of regret, a concession); “but I was tied up with many other things” (appeal to the external circumstances of the situation, an excuse). This account included two elements; i.e., one concession and one excuse. Thus, more than one category was assigned and the number of account elements was counted for each participant’s accounts.

The responses were coded by a trained bilingual judge unfamiliar with the study. Inter-judge/ rater reliability scores (i.e., concordance estimate) were calculated between the computer-assisted category and the one constructed by the judge. The reliability scores of the Japanese data from the victims’ and the offenders’ roles were .84 and .91, respectively. The corresponding concordances for the U.S. American data were .89 and .78.

3. Results

3.1. The Effects of the Cause and Culture on the Judgment of Offense Severity

H1 predicted that causes of offenses would be associated with the judgment of offense severity. To test this hypothesis, 2 x 4 x 6 mixed-design ANOVAs were performed for victims' and offenders' data with cultural membership (U.S. Americans or Japanese) and cause of offense (accident, negligence, justified act or unjustified act) as the between-subject factors and six types of offense as the within-subject factor. Tables 2 and 3 reveal the means and standard deviations for victims' and offenders' data.

The victims' data did not reveal a main effect for cultural membership, $F(1, 408)=0.15$, $p=.70$. There was, however, a significant main effect for cause, $F(3, 408)=10.18$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2=.07$. As H1 predicted, Tukey HSD tests revealed that severity was rated significantly higher when the offense was caused by an unjustified act than by the other three causes. In addition, the severity caused by a justified act was significantly lower than by negligence and by an unjustified act.

This analysis also yielded a significant main effect for offense type, $F(5, 404)=54.04$, $p<.001$, $\eta^2=.40$. Bonferroni tests revealed that the judgments of the six types of offense differed significantly from one another. Participants rated frustration ($M=1.95$, $SD=.83$) and violations of personal expectations ($M=1.86$, $SD=.83$) as the two most severe offenses, followed by violations of social norms ($M=1.64$, $SD=.79$) and a loss of pride ($M=1.39$, $SD=.68$). Physical injury ($M=1.10$, $SD=.38$) and property damage ($M=1.15$, $SD=.45$) were rated the lowest, indicating that participants are less likely to encounter incidents involving those two types of offense in their day-to-day living.

There was a significant interaction effect between cultural membership and offense type, $F(5, 404)=3.20$, $p=.008$, $\eta^2=.04$. Japanese victims rated the offenses involving physical injury, property damage and violation of social norms as more severe than U.S. Americans, who in turn rated the offenses pertinent to frustration as significantly more severe than Japanese. This provides an affirmative answer to Q1, that Japanese are more critical of social norm violations than U.S. Americans.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Different Causes and Harm (Victim's Role)

Types of Harm	Culture	Accident	Negligence	Negligence	Unjustified
Physical Injury	American	1.00(.00)	1.11(.34)	1.09(.43)	1.07(.33)
	Japanese	1.31(.70)	1.11(.43)	1.09(.39)	1.05(.22)
Property Damage	American	1.00(.00)	1.15(.44)	1.07(.34)	1.18(.47)
	Japanese	1.50(.73)	1.13(.40)	1.06(.28)	1.24(.62)
Frustration	American	1.82(.73)	2.16(.85)	1.70(.80)	2.20(.89)
	Japanese	1.56(.73)	1.88(.78)	1.53(.76)	2.10(.80)
A Loss of Pride	American	1.12(.33)	1.30(.56)	1.37(.66)	1.71(.79)
	Japanese	1.25(.58)	1.31(.66)	1.62(.78)	1.63(.80)
Norm Violation	American	1.29(.69)	1.62(.78)	1.79(.81)	1.69(.79)
	Japanese	1.56(.81)	1.79(.81)	1.31(.66)	1.98(.88)

Expect.	American	1.53(.80)	2.05(.81)	1.65(.90)	2.25(.84)
Violation	Japanese	1.75(.77)	1.71(.75)	1.59(.80)	1.98(.82)

Note. *Ns* for accident, negligence, justified and unjustified acts are 17, 94, 43, and 55 for U.S. Americans and 16, 118, 32, and 41 for Japanese, respectively. Values setting within and next to parentheses represent standard deviations and means, respectively.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Different Causes and Harm (Offender's Role)

Types of Harm	Culture	Accident	Negligence	Negligence	Unjustified
Physical Injury	American	1.15(.51)	1.02(.14)	1.07(.34)	1.06(.24)
	Japanese	1.19(.48)	1.06(.32)	1.12(.43)	1.13(.50)
Property Damage	American	1.12(.42)	1.10(.37)	1.06(.30)	1.11(.47)
	Japanese	1.19(.48)	1.08(.34)	1.06(.31)	1.06(.25)
Frustration	American	1.76(.71)	1.92(.81)	1.59(.71)	1.67(.69)
	Japanese	1.77(.84)	1.76(.80)	1.96(.87)	1.94(.85)
A Loss of Pride	American	1.21(.42)	1.26(.56)	1.27(.56)	1.39(.61)
	Japanese	1.42(.67)	1.33(.57)	1.51(.76)	1.50(.82)
Norm Violation	American	1.12(.33)	1.37(.64)	1.23(.54)	1.44(.70)
	Japanese	1.74(.82)	1.76(.79)	1.45(.67)	1.81(.92)
Expect. Violation	American	1.52(.67)	1.84(.80)	1.64(.78)	1.72(.83)
	Japanese	1.61(.67)	1.82(.77)	1.67(.79)	1.88(.81)

Note. *Ns* for accident, negligence, justified and unjustified acts are 33, 49, 107, and 18 for U.S. Americans, and 31, 131, 51, and 16 for Japanese, respectively. Values setting within and next to parentheses represent standard deviations and means, respectively.

The results revealed a significant interaction effect between cause and offense type, $F(15, 1218)=4.36$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.05$. The severity involving physical injury and property damage was rated lower than by the other types of offense regardless of the cause, whereas the severities produced by frustration, violations of social norms and personal expectations were rated consistently higher. One exception was a loss of pride, which was rated higher when the offense was caused by unjustified acts, indicating that a victim's pride is lost greatly when being harmed by the offender's senseless and incomprehensible conduct.

Next, for the offender's data, the results indicated a main effect for cultural membership, $F(1, 428)=9.10$, $p=.003$, $\eta_p^2=.02$. Japanese offenders ($M=1.49$, $SE=.03$) rated their offenses more severely than U.S. Americans ($M=1.36$, $SE=.03$).

This analysis yielded a significant main effect for offense type, $F(5, 424)=53.78$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.39$. Bonferroni tests revealed that physical injury and property damage were rated lower than the other four offenses, indicating that participants did not recall incidents involving these two elements as much. Again, participants rated frustration and violation of personal expectations as the two most severe offenses, followed by violation of social norms and a loss of pride. Thus, the participants' ratings for the

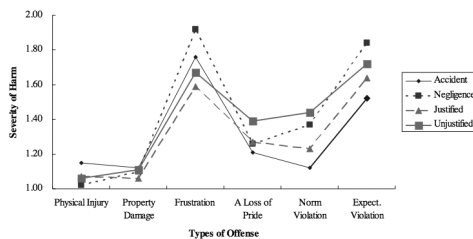
severity were: frustration ($M=1.76$, $SD=.79$) = violation of personal expectations ($M=1.72$, $SD=.77$) > violation of social norms ($M=1.49$, $SD=.72$) = a loss of pride ($M=1.33$, $SD=.60$) > physical injury ($M=1.08$, $SD=.36$) = property damage ($M=1.08$, $SD=.35$). The fact that the same pattern of offense severity evaluation was found in the victims' as well as the offenders' responses seems to indicate that occurrences of everyday account-giving episodes in Japan and the U.S. are likely to involve the elements of frustration, violations of personal expectations and social norms and a loss of pride.

Unlike the victims' data, a main effect for the cause of offense did not reach statistical significance, $F(3, 428)=0.89$, $p=.45$, indicating that participants rated the four causes equally in terms of offense severity. This is not consistent with H1.

There was a significant interaction effect between cultural membership and offense type, $F(5, 424)=4.89$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.06$. Japanese offenders rated violation of social norms more severely than U.S. Americans, indicating that the answer to Q1 is in the affirmative. In addition, Japanese offenders rated loss of pride as a more serious offense than U.S. Americans.

Finally, the cultural membership x cause x offense interaction was significant, $F(15, 1278)=1.07$, $p<.05$, $\eta_p^2=.01$. As Figure 1 exhibits, the violation of social norms was mainly responsible for the interaction effect. Japanese failed to distinguish violation of social norms from that of personal expectations unless the offense was caused by a justified act. In contrast, U.S. Americans had little difficulty differentiating the two violations.

a) U.S. American Offenders



b) Japanese Offenders

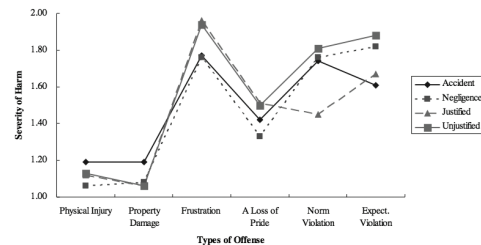


Figure 1. A Comparisons of U.S. American and Japanese Offenders' Ratings of HarmSeverity as a Function of Four Types of Causes and Six Types of OffenseNorm Violation = Violation of Social Norm, Expectation Violation = Violation of Personal Expectation.

Taken together, H1 was partially supported. Although the victims' data provided support for the hypothesis, the offenders' data did not. Regardless of the cause, offenses involving physical injury and property damage were rated consistently less severe than the other four types of offenses, and those relating frustration and violation of personal expectations were rated more severe than the other four. Moreover, cultural differences existed in the ratings of social norm violations such that Japanese account-giving situations involved this element more than those of U.S. Americans (see Table 3). This provides an affirmative answer to Q1.

3.2. The Effects of Offense Severity on the Nature of Reproach

H2 predicted the links between interpersonal norm violations and the harshness of reproach. This hypothesis was tested by subjecting the data to a hierarchical regression with the nature of reproach as the criterion variable. The scale measuring the nature of reproach was treated as an interval scale because the problem of out-of-range predicted values of the dependent variable, the main reason for using an ordinal logistic regression, was not present (Menard, 2002). The first block included six types of offense and the second block included a control variable, two cultural groups. Although all offense types comprise a violation of interpersonal offense, violations of personal expectations and social norms are linked more directly to interpersonal offense (Mikula, Petri, & Tanzer, 1990).

As Table 4 indicates, the first block was significant, contributing 18.3 % of the variance in reproach, with frustration and property damage being the significant predictors within the block. However, the second block was not significant, indicating no cultural differences in the nature of reproaches.

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Reproach

	R2 change	F change	Beta
<i>Victim's Data N=416</i>			
Block 1: Types of Offense	.195	16.49***	
Physical injury			-.07
Property damage			.10
Frustration			.40***
A loss of pride			-.02
Norm violation			.08
Expectation violation			.01
<i>Offender's Data: N=436</i>			
Block 2: Cultural Membership	.001	65	-.04
Physical injury			.02
Property damage			-.04
Frustration			.15**
A loss of pride			.01
Norm violation			.07
Expectation violation			.16**
Block 2: Cultural Membership	.00	.02	.01

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

For the offender's data, the first block was significant, contributing 7.2 % of the variance in reproach. The main contributors were frustration and violation of personal expectations. Again, the second block was insignificant.

Frustration is a catch-all variable, being an immediate emotional response after an interpersonal offense (Averill, 1982). Because the violation of interpersonal norms could be a cause of frustration,

the impact of interpersonal offense may be revealed more clearly by eliminating the influence of frustration. As such, hierarchical regressions were performed after excluding frustration from the first block. For the victims' data, the first block was significant, explaining 7.2% of the variance in reproach. As predicted, the main contributors were violations of social norms ($\beta=.15$, $p=.008$) and personal expectations ($\beta=.17$, $p=.002$). The second block was not significant. For the offenders' data, the first block was significant, explaining 5.5% of the variance in reproach. The main contributor was violation of personal expectations ($\beta=.20$, $p<.001$). The other four were not significant predictors, nor was the second block. Thus, we found support for H2.

H3 predicted that unjustified and negligent offenses would be linked to severe reproaches. To test this hypothesis, 2 x 4 factorial design ANOVAs were performed for the victims' and offenders' data with cultural membership and cause of the offense as the between-subject factors.

For the victims' data, there was a significant main effect for cause, $F(3, 408)=8.82$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.06$. Tukey HSD tests revealed that the severity of reproach was rated significantly higher when the offenses were caused by negligence and unjustified acts than by accident and justified acts. This finding is consistent with H3. For the offenders' data, however, a main effect of cause was not significant, $F(3, 429)=0.39$, $p=.763$, and neither was cultural membership, $F(1, 429)=1.38$, $p=.241$. Thus, we found partial support for H3.

3.3. The Effects of Offense on the Preferences for Accounting Tactics

H4 predicted an association between offense severity and offender's preference for accounting tactics. Independent-sample t-tests were performed for each accounting tactic. To examine the effects of offense severity on the preference for accounting tactics, scores of the six types of offenses were summed to create an index of offense severity. Cronbach's alphas were .73 and .67 for U.S. American victims and offenders, and .66 and .57 for Japanese victims and offenders.

As Table 5 indicates, offense severity was associated with the use of excuses, justifications and refusals when judged from the victim's role. Offense severity was also linked to the use of excuses from the offender's role. Victims associated offense severity with receiving more justifications and refusals and fewer excuses from the offenders. Intriguingly enough, offenders offered more excuses when the severity was high. This finding could be an indication of victim-offender perspective difference and could in turn provide an affirmative response to Q2.

To test H4, the six offenses were used as independent variables to examine the contributions of each individual offense. To avoid committing type I errors, Bonferroni corrections were applied and set the critical value at $p<.008$ (.05/6). Table 5 reveals the results. Victims reported receiving fewer excuses for the offense involving their loss of pride, more justifications for the offenders' violation of personal expectations and more refusals for the offenders' violations of social norms and personal expectations. Offenders reported using more excuses when perceived as committing a violation of personal expectations. Taken together, the victims' data supported H4, but not the offenders'.

Table 5.

T-Tests Examining the Effects of Offense Severity and Six Types of Offenses on the Preferences for Accounting Tactics

<i>Victim's Role</i>	<i>Apologies</i>		<i>Excuses</i>			<i>Justifications</i>			<i>Refusals</i>		
	No <i>n</i> =329	Yes <i>n</i> =88	No <i>n</i> =225	Yes <i>n</i> =192		No <i>n</i> =351	Yes <i>n</i> =66		No <i>n</i> =366	Yes <i>n</i> =51	
<i>Severity</i>	9.17	8.89	9.47	8.70	<i>p</i> =.002*	8.99	9.76	<i>p</i> =.027*	8.93	10.41	<i>p</i> <.001*
<i>Physical damage</i>	1.11	1.08	1.15	1.05		1.12	1.02		1.08	1.25	
<i>Property damage</i>	1.15	1.18	1.20	1.10		1.15	1.20		1.13	1.31	
<i>Frustration</i>	1.97	1.89	1.98	1.91		1.91	2.18		1.93	2.10	
<i>Loss of pride</i>	1.40	1.39	1.54	1.23	<i>p</i> <.001*	1.38	1.50		1.37	1.61	
<i>Norm violation</i>	1.64	1.64	1.65	1.63		1.63	1.68		1.60	1.96	<i>p</i> =.002*
<i>Expect violation</i>	1.91	1.72	1.94	1.78		1.81	2.18	<i>p</i> =.003*	1.82	2.18	<i>p</i> =.003*
<i>Offender's Role</i>	<i>Apologies</i>		<i>Excuses</i>			<i>Justifications</i>			<i>Refusals</i>		
	No <i>n</i> =318	Yes <i>n</i> =119	No <i>n</i> =201	Yes <i>n</i> =236		No <i>n</i> =350	Yes <i>n</i> =87		No <i>n</i> =421	Yes <i>n</i> =16	
<i>Severity</i>	8.44	8.61	8.19	8.74	<i>p</i> =.009*	8.55	8.22		8.48	8.75	
<i>Physical damage</i>	1.08	1.08	1.10	1.07		1.07	1.11		1.08	1.13	
<i>Property damage</i>	1.09	1.07	1.10	1.07		1.09	1.06		1.08	1.19	
<i>Frustration</i>	1.75	1.79	1.68	1.84		1.76	1.79		1.76	1.81	
<i>Loss of pride</i>	1.33	1.34	1.30	1.37		1.36	1.25		1.33	1.37	
<i>Norm violation</i>	1.47	1.57	1.42	1.57		1.53	1.38		1.50	1.56	
<i>Expect violation</i>	1.71	1.75	1.61	1.82	<i>p</i> =.003*	1.75	1.62		1.72	1.69	

Note. For the tests of each offense type, Bonferroni corrections were applied and set the critical value at $p=.008(.05/6)$.

4. Discussion

This study attempted to clarify the everyday account-giving process that U.S. Americans and Japanese experience as victims and offenders.

4.1. Blameworthiness of Offense from Victim's and Offender's Perspectives

As H1 predicted, a significant association existed between the blameworthiness of the offense and the judgment of offense severity. The victims' data revealed that unjustified and negligent offenses were judged more negatively than accidental and justified offenses. This finding is consistent with the research by McGraw (1987), who reported that offenders who committed unjustified offenses carried more of the responsibility for an offense, followed by justified and foreseeable (negligent) offenses, and the least responsibility was attributed to those who committed unforeseeable (accidental) offenses. Offenders who had committed an unjustified offense were perceived as more blameworthy because they had hurt a victim intentionally. Likewise, those offenders who had committed a negligent offense were perceived as more culpable because they failed to foresee the negative consequences most people would have foreseen. As such, negligent offenses may not be intentional but controllable. Comparatively, those individuals who had committed justified offenses may have succeeded in reframing the offensive situation for the victim simply because they had used effective accounting tactics. Similarly, accidental offenses are neither intentional nor controllable, and thus, are judged less blameworthy.

Contrary to expectations, offenders' data failed to distinguish the blameworthiness of offense. One possible explanation for this finding is the self-serving bias and/or role-related differences between offenders and victims in evaluating offenses. The research supporting the formulation of Q2 strongly

suggests offenders tend to minimize and downplay the offenses by referring to external or mitigating circumstances, depicting their actions as uncontrollable or describing the victim as partly responsible for the outcome of a situation (Baumeister et al., 1990). As such, the offenders' evaluation of the offense and their understanding of the victims' reality may be flawed and misleading. This does not mean that the victims' evaluation is free from distortion. Victims are also likely to exaggerate the offense by portraying the offenders' behavior as immoral, unjustified, and incomprehensible (Baumeister et al., 1990). Nevertheless, because the victims' interpretation of the offense often activates the subsequent accounting sequence through their reproach strategies, not the offenders', the former's interpretation may be more critical as to how the account episode will unfold.

4.2. Violations of Interpersonal Norms, Blameworthiness and Severe Reproach

As H2 predicted, violations of interpersonal norms appear to invite harsh rebukes. Although a severe reproach or rebuke may be the immediate response out of frustration, violations of interpersonal norms such as violations of social norms and personal expectations may be the major trigger for frustration to occur. In fact, the correlations between frustration and violations of social norms and personal expectations were not small, .37 and .50 for the victim's data and .22 and .31 for the offender's data, respectively. As Averill (1982) speculates, frustration is a critical but rarely sufficient condition for rebuke. Because this hypothesis was supported by the two cultural groups, the severity of these offenses may be widely acknowledged.

The blameworthiness of the offense may also influence the nature of reproach, such that negligent and unjustified offenses elicit harsh reproaches while accidental and justified offenses do not, as H3 predicted. Support for H3, however, was obtained only from the victims' data, which may be an indication of the actor/observer difference and/or the self-serving attribution bias as noted in the research supporting Q2 (Baumeister et al., 1990; Feeney & Hill, 2006; Schütz, 1999; Snyder & Higgins, 1988).

4.3. Preferences for Accounts from Victim's and Offender's Perspectives

Regarding the link between the types of offense and the preference for accounts, the victims' data, not the offenders' data, found the predicted relationships. Violations of interpersonal norms (violations of social norms and personal expectations) are mainly responsible for the use of justifications and refusals. That is, victims expect offenders to use self-protective accounts like justifications and refusals more than any other account tactic when they violate interpersonal norms. In contrast, the offenders' data indicated that justifications and refusals were not used but more excuses were used for the violation of interpersonal norms. Moreover, the directions regarding the use of excuses between the victim's and offender's role are opposite; the victims perceived that fewer excuses were received for interpersonal norm violations. Again, this discrepant result could be due to the perception gap between the two roles. Compared with justifications and refusals, excuses are more polite and mitigating accounts (Holtgraves, 2002), and thus, offenders may have minimized the severity of their offense experiences

and moderated the use of accounts in a self-serving manner. In fact, a paired-sample t-test indicated that severity judgments (total scores for the six types of offense) of the offenders' data ($M=8.51$, $SD=2.22$) were significantly lower than the victims' data ($M=9.11$, $SD=2.54$), $t(385)=4.36$, $p<.001$. This finding provides another affirmative response to Q2, but only from the victim's and not the offender's perspective.

4.4. Findings Regarding Cultural Differences

This study found a cultural difference in the judgment of offense severity. For instance, Japanese offenders judged their offense more severely than U.S. Americans. The nature of the offense chosen by the two cultural groups may be responsible for this result. Whereas 131 out of 229 (57.2%) Japanese offenders recalled negligent acts as their most memorable offenses, 107 out of 207 (51.7%) U.S. Americans selected justified offenses as their choice. This apparent discrepancy is not evident in the victims' data (see the notes in Tables 2-3). This explanation, however, does not account for why the Japanese students chose comparable account episodes regardless of their roles while the U.S. American students selected different types of accounts depending on the two roles.

One possible explanation for this finding is the nonequivalent construct for the word "excuses" between the two cultures. As noted earlier, due to the participants' unfamiliarity of the word "accounts" or "*benmei*" in Japanese, we replaced it with the word "excuses" or "*benkai*" in Japanese. The words "accounts" and "excuses" are close in meaning in English (Snyder & Higgins, 1988; Weiner, 1995). Similarly, *benkai* is a synonym of *benmei* in Japanese. Whereas Japanese construed excuses as verbal strategies used for negligent offenses, U.S. Americans associated them with verbal statements offered for wider situations. In other words, Japanese interpreted "excuses" in a narrower sense than U.S. Americans, who could have construed them as "accounts," including apologies, excuses, justifications, and refusals. Although this interpretation is plausible, there should be another possibility because U.S. American victims did recall negligent offenses as their most unforgettable account-receiving experiences.

A more likely explanation is a cultural difference in self-serving biases. A recent meta-analysis of 266 studies (Mezulis, Abramson, Hyde, & Hankin, 2004) reported that Asians exhibited a significantly smaller self-serving bias ($d=.30$) than U.S. Americans ($d=1.05$). Even when compared with other Asians, Japanese display a particularly smaller self-serving bias ($d=-0.30$), with the 95% confidence interval for the mean effect size including zero, suggesting the possibility of no self-serving bias in Japanese culture.

The speech act of offering accounts often follows an offense that may be an extremely painful and face-threatening experience for the offender. Because the most unforgettable account-giving experience could be too distressing to recall, it is possible that U.S. American offenders chose less stressful account episodes to protect their self-esteem and avoid negative feelings about themselves. The justified offenses chosen by many U.S. American offenders are ideal for defending their social worth. By contrast, more than half of the Japanese offenders chose negligent offenses just as many Japanese victims did. A negligent offense is disgraceful and face-threatening to the offenders because it

indicates their mistake and carelessness. The fact that the Japanese chose comparable account episodes regardless of the roles whereas the U.S. Americans chose quite different ones depending on the two roles can be interpreted as a manifestation of the latter's stronger self-serving attributional tendency.

Japanese differed from U.S. Americans in their judgments of social norm violations. Triandis (1995) argues that, because collectivists (e.g., Japanese) need to fit into the group and maintain harmonious relationships with other group members, behaving in line with social norms is a more critical consideration than individualists (e.g., U.S. Americans). Collectivist cultures are also tighter than individualist cultures (Gelfand et al., 2006; Triandis, 1995). The members of a tight culture agree about what is deemed proper conduct and are expected to adjust their behavior to social norms. Severe criticism and conflict is likely to result if the members deviate from expected social norms. Therefore, to have one's behavior judged as appropriate by others may be more important in a collectivistic, tight culture such as Japan.

This study also found that Japanese offenders viewed their offense of hurting the victims' pride as more serious than U.S. Americans. This is consistent with face-negotiation theory (Ting-Toomey, 2005), which posits that collectivists tend to express greater other-face and mutual-face maintenance concerns than individualists. However, this finding should be interpreted with caution because Japanese offenders responded to more negative account-giving episodes than U.S. Americans. A more rigorous experimental study may be necessary to confirm this finding.

4.5. Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations. First, this study collected data via a questionnaire and responses were derived from the most unforgettable account episode U.S. American and Japanese students actually experienced in their everyday life. The findings may not reflect the overall account episodes experienced between the two cultural groups precisely. Nonetheless, U.S. American and Japanese students received the equivalent questions to answer, and thus, a reasonable level of reliability was established regarding the findings.

Second, the data was collected in two regional areas, one in the U.S. and the other in Japan, and technically speaking, the findings are limited to these two regions. Future research should include a wider range of regional areas for data collections to confirm the findings.

Third, this study did not take into account individual differences. Several individual differences may be operative, including self-esteem, sense of control (Schönbach, 1990; Snyder & Higgins, 1988), cultural self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), etc. Future research should examine the effects of these individual differences on the process of account episodes.

Despite these limitations, this study extends this line of research in two important ways. First, this study examined account episodes from the victim's and offender's roles. Although many studies on anger (Averill, 1982; Baumeister et al., 1990) and teasing (Kowalski, 2000) employ this method to elucidate the perception gap between actors and observers, no such attempt was made to examine the process of account-giving. By examining the two roles, this study provided additional evidence indicating the possible perception gap between victims and offenders in account episodes. This gap

may be attributed to (cultural difference in) self-serving attributional bias. Future research should delve into this issue.

Second, this study sheds light on the associations between blameworthiness and undesirability, two key components of offense severity, and accounts. Individuals do not issue a harsh reproach for all kinds of wrongdoing, but especially for the violation of interpersonal norms. Similarly, the degree of blameworthiness influences the nature of reproach. Individuals judge unjustified and negligent offenses more negatively, inviting more serious reproaches than justified and accidental ones, and this is especially evident from the victim's perspective. The weaker support from the offender's data may be an indication of a self-serving bias. As such, future research should employ a more rigorous experiment to control this tendency more effectively.

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Author Note

Takuji Shimada is a professor in the Faculty of International Studies at Tenri University, Japan. He obtained his Master's degree in Speech Communication at Indiana University. He has published articles in Human Communication Studies and Japanese Journal of Communication Studies.

Carl L. Thameling is an associate professor of Communication at the University of Louisiana at Monroe. He earned a PhD in Speech Communication from Indiana University. His research has been published in Small Group Research, Psychological Reports, and Communication Teacher. Jiro Takai is a professor of social psychology at Nagoya University. He has a PhD in Communication from the University of California, Santa Barbara. He has published his research in International Journal of Intercultural Relations, Journal of Social Psychology, and Psychological Reports.

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Appendix

The questionnaire used to inquire about respondents' experiences with accounting from the perspectives of victim and [offender in brackets].

An Experience Regarding Someone Giving Excuses to You [An Experience Regarding You Making Excuses to Someone else]

1. What caused the person to make an excuse to you? Please choose one of the most appropriate statements below. [What caused you to make an excuse to the person (people)? Please choose one of the most appropriate statements below.]
なぜ、[その人に]あなたに対して弁解しなければならなかったのですか、その原因としてもっとも適

切なものを1～4から1つ選んで下さい。

1. It was an accident that was impossible to avoid.
不慮の事故など、[私]相手には回避できないことであった。
2. It was due to his/her negligence or carelessness and was easily avoidable.
[私]相手の怠 慢・不注意などによるものであり、回避可能なことであった。
3. The person did it deliberately with valid reason.
正当な理由により[私]相手が意図的に行ったものであった。
4. The person did it deliberately without valid reason.
不当な理由により相手が意図的に行ったものであった[意図的に行ったものだった が、私にはそうする権利はなかった]。

2. Did you call for an explanation? Please choose the closest item below. [Did the person call for an explanation from you? Please choose the closest item below.]

あなたはその人 に[相手はあなたに]説明を要求しましたか。回答としてもっとも近いものを1～4から1つ選んで下さい。

1. I said nothing.(I did not call for an explanation.)[He or She said nothing.(He or She did not call for an explanation.)]
何も言わなかった(説明を要求しなかった) [相手は何も言わなかった。(説明要求は なかった)]。
2. I called for an explanation not in words but in actions (nonverbally). [He or She called for an explanation not in words but in actions (nonverbally).]
表情や身振りで説明を求めた[相手から表情や身振りで説明を求められた]。
3. I asked for an explanation why s/he did it. [He or She asked for an explanation why I did it.]
どうしてそんなことをしたのかを尋ねた[相手からどうしてそんなことをしたのか尋ねられた]。
4. I demanded an explanation in an accusing tone. [He or She demanded an explanation in an accusing tone.]
相手を責める口調で強く説明を求めた[相手から私を責める口調で説明を求められた]。

3. What did s/he say to you? What explanation did s/he offer? Please elaborate on it as specifically as you can. [What did you say to him/her? What explanation did you offer? Please elaborate on it as specifically as you can.]

相手の人はどのような説明をしましたか[あなたは、相手の人に何と言いましたか](どんな弁解をしましたか)。できる限り詳しく説明して下さい。

4. What damage did you suffer from his or her questionable behavior? Using the scale below, indicate the level of involvement for each occurrence. [What damage did he or she suffer from your questionable behavior? Using the scale below, indicate the level of involvement for each occurrence.]

弁解の原因となった不適切な出来事によって、[あなたは相手にどんな被害を与えましたか]あなたはどんな被害を受けましたか。以下のそれぞれの項目について、どの程度その要素が含まれているかを回答して下さい。

- 1 = not at all involved 全く含まれていない
 2 = somewhat involved 含まれているが、重要な要素ではない
 3 = very much involved 重要な要素として含まれている

- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. possible or actual physical injury
身体的被害 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2. possible or actual property damage
物質的損害 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3. frustration or the interruption of activities
欲求不満 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4. a loss of personal pride
プライドを損傷 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. violation of socially accepted ways of behaving
道義に違反 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 6. violation of important personal expectations or wishes
期待に | 1 | 2 | 3 |