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Cultural Differences in the Function and Meaning of Apologies

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Abstract
One of the most effective means for re-establishing trust in negotiations and disputes is by making an apology. However, the function and meaning of an apology (and thus its effectiveness for negotiators) may differ across cultures. We hypothesized that people from an individual-agency culture (such as the United States) understand apologies as analytic mechanisms for assigning blame and re-establishing

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personal credibility. In contrast, apologies in collective-agency cultures (such as Japan) are understood to be general expressions of remorse rather than a means to assign culpability. A survey of Japanese and Americans found that, compared to Americans, Japanese apologized more often and were more likely to apologize for actions in which they were not involved; on the other hand, Americans were more likely than Japanese to equate apologizing with personal blame. A subsequent experimental study showed that these cultural differences in the function and meaning of apologies have implications for trust repair in disputes: apologies for integrity violations led to greater trust repair for Japanese than for Americans, but apologies for competence violations were somewhat more effective for Americans than Japanese. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

Keywords
culture, negotiations, apologies, trust, conflict

Apologies are critical for resolving disputes and repairing trust between negotiators. Disputes are typically characterized by anger and a focus on power and rights rather than interests (Ury, Brett, and Goldberg 1988), leading to either poor deals or impasses. In bargaining contexts, an absence of trust between parties often serves as a major roadblock to efficient deals, usually preventing information sharing and the uncovering of common interests (Thompson 2008). However, apologies can be a particularly effective means of restoring or building trust in negotiations (Schweitzer, Hershey, and Bradlow 2006; Ury 1991). A simple apology can redirect distrustful negotiators or angry disputants back to focusing on underlying interests and the search for mutually compatible deals.

However, norms for apologizing vary widely across different cultures. For example, during the recent dispute over accelerator problems in many of Toyota's vehicles, CEO Akio Toyoda made multiple explicit, public apologies: at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2010, Toyoda indicated that he was "deeply sorry" for the incident and laid out a series of steps to correct the problem and compensate customers (Buckley and Maynard 2010). Indeed, Toyota went so far as to take out full-page ads in major U.S. newspapers to apologize for the massive recalls, saying in the ads, "We apologize from the bottom of our hearts for the great inconvenience and worries that we have caused you all." More strikingly, similar ads were also placed in Japanese newspapers, even though recalls were not widespread on Japanese models (Kageyama 2010). In contrast, disputes in the United States have more often than not seen the complete absence of apologies. For example, the recent congressional hearings concerning potential malfeasance behind the investment banking profits and bonuses in the U.S. in 2009–2010 was accompanied by, at best, lukewarm remorse and few explicit apologies by companies such as Goldman Sachs, JP Morgan Chase, Morgan Stanley, Citigroup, and AIG who received government bailouts (Gordon and Hall 2010). Indeed, many of the major actors involved in the crisis, such as Robert Rubin of Citigroup, explicitly refused to apologize for their role in the crisis (Dash and Chan 2010).

As negotiations and disputes increasingly occur between individuals from different cultures, knowledge about how to most efficiently and effectively resolve conflicts and miscommunications and repair trust is becoming increasingly important. Although apologies can be effective for negotiations, conflict resolution, and trust repair, the above examples suggest that there may be distinct cultural differences in how, when, and why apologies are used. Thus, without adequate cross-cultural knowledge, it is possible that using one's own cultural lens to respond to conflict in a different culture may actually escalate conflict rather than reduce it.

We propose that one factor contributing to cultural misunderstandings in conflict management and negotiations in the U.S. and Japan is a very different understanding of the function and meaning of an apology. We suggest that in the United States, apologies are fundamentally used to assign and assume blame for an event, with responsibility usually attributed to individual actors (e.g., Gries and Peng 2002; Morris and Peng 1994). In Japan, however, responsibility is viewed as more diffused across individuals (e.g., Menon, Morris, Hong, and Chiu 1999; Morris and Peng 1994; Morris, Menon, and Ames 2001; Zemba, Young, and Morris 2007), and as a result, apologies are understood to be an expression of general remorse that is not necessarily diagnostic of blame or responsibility (Ide 1998).

We conducted two studies to test whether there are cultural differences in the function and meaning of apologies in Japan and the U.S. Our initial survey study documented cultural differences in the function and meaning of an apology; a subsequent experimental study showed that these cultural differences have implications for the repair of trust following competence- and integrity-based violations.

Apologies and Culture

One of the primary roles of culture is to provide functional solutions to critical issues of social interaction (Chiu and Hong 2006). Trust repair is one of those critical issues, and apologies are used in many different cultures to repair trust following trust violations. However, previous research has found that the type of trust violation affects the degree to which an apology is effective (e.g., Kim et al. 2004). For example, apologies have been shown to be relatively effective for violations that arise from a lack of competence (i.e., the intellectual, technical, or interpersonal skills required) but less effective for violations that arise from a lack of integrity (i.e., adherence to an acceptable set of personal values and morals) (Kim et al. 20004; Kim, Dirks, Cooper, and Ferrin 2006; for a review, see Kim, Dirks, and Cooper 2009). We propose that culture may also impact the effectiveness of apologies, and that this effect of culture will interact with the type of

trust violation (competence versus integrity) that has occurred (Barnlund and Yoshioka 1990; Sugimoto 1997). Our reasoning is that the meaning of what an apology is, and the function for which apologies are used, may differ considerably depending on the cultural context.

Some prior research has documented differences in the function and meaning of apologies in Japan and the U.S. (e.g., Takagi 1996; Sugimoto 1997; Barnlund and Yoshioka 1990), consistent with the different definitions of apology. For our purposes, an apology is defined as "an admission of responsibility accompanied by the expression of regret" (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, and Dirks 2004). Note that this definition contains two keys elements: both an admission of fault as well as an expression of regret of the part of the apologizer.[1] Thus, an apology in the U.S. may inherently convey both admission of error as well as an expression of repentance. Indeed, previous research has shown that Americans are more likely to provide explanations (accounts) when apologizing than Japanese, and Americans tend to understand apologies as a way to define responsibilities and duties (Sugimoto 1997). In Japanese, however, an apology is conceptualized somewhat differently, being previously defined as a person's recognition of a burden suffered by the target (Oki 1993), where a sense of interconnectedness or indebtedness is implied when an apology is given (Ide 1998). Consistent with this conceptualization, previous research has shown that Japanese tend to understand apologies as a way to alleviate interpersonal stress associated with damaged relationships, and to acknowledge interconnectedness and indebtedness to others (Ide 1998; Takagi 1996).

Although this previous work documents cultural differences in the function and meaning of apologies in Japan and the U.S., it neither provides a strong theoretical explanation for why such differences exist, nor does it identify the consequences of apologizing for trust repair in these two cultures. Thus, we sought to extend previous research in two ways: First, we propose a theoretically grounded explanation for why apologies differ in Japan and the U.S.; second, we use that explanation to predict the consequences of apologizing in response to different types of trust violations in each culture.

Cultural Differences in Agency and Locus of Control

We suggest that the function and meaning of an apology differs between the U.S. and Japan primarily because of different psychological assumptions of personal agency in these two cultures. In individualistic, independent cultures such as the

[1] The terms "remorse," "regret," and "repentance" are used interchangeably in this article since they often define each other. For example, the definition of remorse is "deep regret for a wrong committed" (Remorse, 2010).

United States (Hofstede 1980; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995), the primary cause of a given action or event is typically attributed to individuals (e.g., Menon et al. 1999; Morris et al. 2001). There is a fundamental assumption of individual agency in U.S. culture with the locus of control for events residing within individuals; in other words, individuals are seen as the primary causal agents for events. This focus is one of the main drivers of the "fundamental attribution error" (e.g., Ross 1977), the tendency for individuals from Western cultures to overestimate the role of the individual, and underestimate contextual factors in causing events.

In Japan, however, the predominant locus of agency is at the group or societal level: Japanese are less likely than Americans to see individuals as responsible for events, but more likely than Americans to see groups or organizations as responsible (Menon et al. 1999; Zemba et al. 2007; for a review, see Morris et al. 2001). Thus, groups and situational contexts are seen as primary causal agents in Japan. For example, Menon and colleagues (1999) compared newspaper accounts of rogue trader scandals in American and Japanese newspapers and found that American journalists were more likely than Japanese journalists to suggest that individual traders were primarily responsible for the scandals; Japanese journalists, on the other hand, focused more than American journalists on the traders' organizations as the primary causes of such scandals (Menon et al. 1999). Furthermore, in another East Asian region with distinct cultural similarities to Japan in terms of history, philosophy, and religion, participants in China who read a news account of a pharmacist filling prescriptions incorrectly, causing hundreds of customers to become sick, were more likely to blame the pharmacy for the event, while Americans reading the same account blamed the individual pharmacist (Chiu, Morris, Hong, and Menon 2000).

This research identifying differences between the U.S. and Japan in the locus of agency, and thus the locus of control over events, leads us to propose that an apology will be understood to be less an admission of individual responsibility for an event in an interdependent, group-agency culture like Japan as compared to an independent, individual-agency culture like the U.S. Our hypothesis is also consistent with research which suggests that Japanese are less susceptible to the fundamental attribution error than Americans because they more actively consider situational and contextual factors in assigning causal responsibility, thereby taking the onus off individual actors (for a review, see Nisbett, Peng, Choi, and Norenzayan 2001). Overall, then, we propose that the meaning of an apology in Japan is analogous to a general expression of remorse with the function of acting as a normative social lubricant intended to acknowledge that someone has been harmed or inconvenienced and to offer sympathy, but not necessarily to establish a distinct trail of culpability (Ide 1998; Sugimoto 1997). Indeed, consistent with this proposition, recent work has demonstrated that those with a chronic interdependent self-construal (which tends to be particularly salient in the Japan) respond

most positively to apologies that include empathetic expressions, consistent with the function of apologies as a social lubricant (Fehr and Gelfand 2010). Therefore, since an apologizer in Japan is not necessarily understood to be personally blameworthy, and because apologies are important tools to establish interpersonal harmony, Japanese should apologize in a wider range of circumstances, and apologize even when blame is ambiguous compared to Americans. Following this line of reasoning, we made the following predictions:

Hypothesis *1: Apologies will occur more frequently in Japan than in the U.S.*

Hypothesis *2: Japanese will be more likely than Americans to apologize in circumstances when responsibility for the violation is ambiguous, or when individuals do not have responsibility for the event themselves.*

In contrast, because the locus of agency is on individual actors in the U.S., we propose that the meaning of an apology in the U.S. is analogous to taking blame for an action (Scher and Darley 1996), an association that is explicitly reinforced by the legal system in the U.S. (Robbennolt 2003.) Indeed, in a recent military dispute between the U.S. and China, an expression of remorse by the United States government for the death of a Chinese pilot was interpreted by the Chinese government as an apology; however, the U.S. government vehemently denied an apology had been made, with then-Secretary of State Colin Powell remarking, "There is nothing to apologize for. To apologize would have suggested that we have accepted responsibility for having done something wrong. And we did not do anything wrong," (quoted in Gries and Peng 2002). Thus, we argue that Americans tend to apologize only when explicitly taking blame for their actions. Further, this acceptance of blame should lead Americans to take steps to re-establish their own sense of self-worth and credibility following the apology, which is likely to be damaged following the admission if guilt or responsibility are implied. Consistent with this line of reasoning, evidence suggests that those with a chronic independent self-construal (which is highly salient in the U.S.) respond most positively to apologies offering compensation, which implies recognition of guilt on the part of the apologizer (Fehr and Gelfand 2010). Therefore, we predicted that Americans would equate apologizing with blame-taking more than Japanese, and use the apology to re-establish their self-worth. We therefore made the following predictions:

Hypothesis *3: Americans will be more likely than Japanese to equate apologizing with taking the blame for the transgression.*

Hypothesis *4: Americans will be more likely than Japanese to use apologies to re-establish their own sense of self-worth and credibility.*

In sum, we propose that the function of apology in the U.S. is fundamentally analytical: An apology in the U.S. means that the party apologizing takes control of the situation himself, offers an account of his actions, accepts blame, and attempts to re-establish personal credibility and self-respect. In contrast, in Japan the function of the apology is social and holistic: Its function is to maintain social order and acknowledge that something socially inappropriate has occurred. Thus, to apologize in Japan is to act in a socially normative way; to apologize in the U.S. is to establish who is at fault.

Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to test our hypotheses concerning the function and meaning of apologies in the U.S. and Japan. The study was based on a survey of college students in both countries.

Method

Participants. Thirty-eight U.S. female undergraduates from a large midwestern university in the United States (age: *Mean* = 19.66, *SD* = 1.10) and 40 Japanese female undergraduates from a large university in central Japan (age: *Mean* = 18.78, *SD* = 1.40) participated in this study for a monetary payment or course credit. Participants in Study 1 were limited to females given previous work on significant gender effects in apologies (e.g., Holmes 1989). Because this was an initial, exploratory study with a small sample, we preferred to negate gender effects so that cultural effects would emerge more reliably. However, Study 2 contained both males and females to insure our results generalized across genders.

Procedure and materials. The study was an anonymous paper and pencil survey administered in a classroom-type setting. Participants were told that the study was a questionnaire about apologies and that they should fill out the questionnaire as honestly as possible. The survey was generated in English and then translated into Japanese by a professional translator. Equivalency was checked by back-translation.

We asked a number of questions to test our hypotheses. Frequency of apologies (H1) was assessed by asking participants how many times in the last week they had apologized. Likelihood of apologizing in different situations (H2) was assessed by asking how likely participants would apologize for, 1) something they themselves did, and 2) something a co-worker did. We also asked how likely they would be to 3) take the blame for an event even if they were not responsible, and 4) whether they would accept responsibility for an event only if they were responsible. All responses were provided on Likert-type scales with responses ranging from 1 (*not likely at all*) to 7 (*extremely likely*).

The link between apologies and the acceptance of blame (H3) was assessed with the following questions, 1) "When you apologize you are not admitting guilt;" 2) "If you apologize the other won't blame you." Finally, the relationship between apologies and the re-establishment of the apologizers' credibility (H4) was assessed by asking participants to what extent the purpose of an apology was, 1) "To help establish that the apologizer is a good person in spite of what happened," and, 2) "To allow the apologizer to re-establish his dignity." All responses were provided on Likert-type scales with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), with *4* marked as a neutral point (*neither agree nor disagree*).

Results and Discussion

Apology frequency. Hypothesis 1 predicted that apologies would be more frequent in Japan than in the US. This hypothesis was supported: Japanese participants reported making more apologies during the prior week (M =11.05, SD = 19.26) compared to American participants (M = 4.51, SD = 8.77, $t(76) = -1.97$, $p < .05$).

Apology context. Hypothesis 2 predicted that Japanese were likely to apologize in a wider range of situations than Americans. Consistent with predictions, we found that American participants were more willing to apologize for something they themselves did (US: M = 6.6, SD = .89) compared to Japanese participants (M = 6.1, SD = 94, $t(76) = 2.1$, $p < .03$). However, Japanese participants were more likely to apologize for something a co-worker did (M = 4.2, SD = 1.28) than American participants (M = 3.4, SD = 1.67, $t(76) = 2.32$, $p < .02$). Japanese participants (M = 6.3, SD = .72) were also more likely to take the blame even when they were not responsible compared to American participants (M = 5.94, SD = 1.52), $t(76) = -2.15$, $p < .04$). On the other hand, American participants (M = 5.08, SD = 1.53) indicated that they were more willing to take blame only when they were at fault than Japanese participants (M = 3.92, SD = 1.38), $t(76) = 3.49$, $p < .01$.

Apologies and the acceptance of blame. The cross-cultural difference in willingness to apologize when not at fault was tested specifically by Hypothesis 3, which proposed that Japanese would be less likely than Americans to equate apologizing with the acceptance of blame. Results showed that Americans (M = 4.82, SD = 1.72) were more likely to indicate that an apology meant that individuals were guilty than Japanese (M = 4.05, SD = 1.31), $t(76) = -2.23$, $p < .03$). However, Japanese (M = 4.15, SD = 1.12) were more likely to say that an individual wouldn't necessarily blame the person apologizing for the violation compared to Americans (M = 3.47, SD = 1.13), $t(76) = -2.65$, p < .01.)

Apologies and the re-establishment of self-worth. Finally, Hypothesis 4 predicted that Americans would be more likely than Japanese to use an apology as an

opportunity to re-establish personal credibility. Consistent with this hypothesis, Americans (M = 4.60, SD = 1.46) were more likely to agree that an apology helps establish that the apologizer is a good person in spite of what happened than Japanese (M = 3.40, SD = 1.23), $t(76) = 3.93$, $p < .001$. Americans (M = 4.47, SD = 1.35) also agreed that an apology allows the apologizer to re-establish his dignity more than Japanese (M = 3.27, SD = 1.27), $t(76) = 3.79$, $p < .001$.

These results support the hypotheses proposed in Study 1 that the function and meaning of apologies are fundamentally different in the U.S. and Japan. Japanese reported apologizing more frequently than Americans, whereas Japanese were more likely than Americans to apologize in situations for which they had little or no responsibility. Japanese were less likely to equate apologizing with accepting responsibility for the event than Americans. Japanese were also less likely than Americans to use apologies to re-establish their sense of self-worth and credibility. However, because this study was hypothetical in nature and did not specify the context(s) in which we tested our hypotheses, it was important to further examine these effects in a more concrete situation.

Study 2

Study 2 was conducted to investigate some of the consequences of cultural differences in apology-making, in particular the implications of apologies in the aftermath of competence- or integrity-based trust violations. Previous research indicates that the degree to which trust is repaired following a behavioral transgression depends on the type of trust violation (Kim et al. 2004, 2006; 2009). This contingency appears to be due primarily to how people weigh information that can be embedded in or implied by the apology. On the one hand, an apology conveys negative information in that it confirms that the person could possibly bear some individual responsibility for the trust violation. On the other hand, an apology also conveys positive information to the extent that it signals that the transgressor is repentant and will strive to correct the problem (Kim et al. 2006). Thus, the ultimate benefit of an apology after a trust violation depends on the positive effects from the apology's signal of repentance outweighing the negative effects from the apology's confirmation of guilt.

Research suggests that this relative weighting of positive and negative information depends on whether the violation has been framed as a matter of competence or integrity. In particular, Kim and colleagues based their studies on a schematic model of dispositional attribution, which suggests that although people tend to more heavily weigh positive rather than negative information about competence, they tend to weigh negative information more heavily than positive information about integrity (Reeder and Brewer 1979). This difference seems to arise from different attributional implications of competence and integrity violations. On the one hand, competence violations are seen as relatively context dependent:

Those with high competence are seen as capable of exhibiting many levels of performance. Thus, for a given task, competence will depend on their motivation and the specific demands of the task. However, those with low competence should only be able to perform at levels that are commensurate with or lower than their competence level (Kim et al. 2006). Thus, a single success offers a reliable signal of competence, whereas a single failure may be discounted as a strong signal of incompetence. In other words, a competence violation does not necessarily lead to an individual attribution of low competence.

In contrast, people tend to intuitively believe that integrity violations are less dependent on the situation: Those high in integrity are presumed to refrain from dishonest behavior regardless of the situation; however, those with low integrity may exhibit either dishonest or honest behavior depending on their specific incentives and opportunities (Kim et al. 2006). Thus, a single honest act may be discounted as a signal of high integrity, given that both honest and dishonest people can behave honestly in certain situations (e.g., when there are benefits for behaving honestly or sufficient surveillance to prevent dishonest acts). However, a single dishonest act is generally considered a reliable signal of low integrity, given the belief that only persons of low integrity would behave dishonestly. In other words, an integrity violation is likely to lead to an individual attribution of low integrity. Kim and colleagues (Kim et al. 2004, 2006; Ferrin et al. 2007) drew on these differences in the perceived diagnosticity of information and found consistent support for the notion that an apology's positive signals of repentance would outweigh its negative signals of blame for matters of competence, but that the opposite would be true for matters of integrity. However, most of the above differences were found in the United States, and our Study 1 results indicate that in Western culture there are assumptions of blame and repentance underlying apologies that are less present in Japanese culture.

Thus, overall we expected that compared to Japan, apologies in the U.S. convey both stronger positive signals of repentance as well as stronger negative signals of blame. Therefore, we predicted that an apology would repair trust more successfully in the U.S. than Japan after a competence violation since, as noted above, positive information (i.e., signal of repentance) is weighed more heavily than negative information (i.e., assumption of blame) following a competence violation. However, we predicted an apology would repair trust less successfully in the U.S. than in Japan after an integrity-based violation, since negative information is weighed more heavily than positive information following an integrity violation. We expected these findings to emerge both for trusting beliefs (the perceived trust-relevant qualities of the trustee, such as competence and integrity) and trusting intentions (a behavioral willingness to make oneself vulnerable to the trustee in risky situations).

Hypothesis 5: *An apology will repair trusting beliefs less successfully with Japanese than with American observers after a competence-based trust violation, whereas an*

apology will repair trusting beliefs more successfully with Japanese than with American observers after an integrity-based trust violation.

Hypothesis 6: *An apology will lead to more trusting intentions with Japanese than with American observers after an integrity-based trust violation, whereas an apology will lead to more trusting intentions with American than with Japanese observers after a competence-based trust violation.*

Method

Design. This study implemented a 2 (Violation-Type: Competence vs. Integrity) by 2 (Culture: U.S. vs. Japan) by 2 (Evidence: Guilty vs. Innocent) between-subjects design, with the Evidence condition added to increase the generalizability of our findings. Participants from Japan and the U.S. were randomly assigned to the Violation-Type and Evidence conditions.

Participants. Our American sample consisted of the 102 undergraduates (58 female) from a Western U.S. university. Our Japanese sample consisted of 103 (45 female) undergraduates from three Japanese universities. There were no differences in age between the American and Japanese samples (US: M = 20.83, SD = 2.58; Japan: M = 20.78, SD = 2.18).

Materials and procedure. Our procedures followed those of Kim and colleagues (2004). Participants were asked to take the role of a manager who was in charge of hiring, and subsequently managing, a senior-level tax accountant. If hired, the candidate would be offered a 1-year contract. Participants were told that, to expedite the hiring process, a recruiter from the firm had already interviewed the applicants and that these interviews had been videotaped and transcribed so participants could quickly and conveniently assess the applicant pool. Participants were then given the transcript for one of these interviews and shown the accompanying video clip so they could provide their own evaluation of the applicant. After watching the interview, participants completed a questionnaire.

We utilized the versions of this interview, originally developed by Kim et al. (2004), in which the applicant apologized for either a competence- or integrity-based trust violation. The bulk of each version of the interview contained identical video footage; only the segments containing the manipulation differed across study conditions. During the course of the interview, the recruiter disclosed to the job applicant that she had contacted some of the applicant's references from the previous employer and that these references informed the recruiter that the applicant had been involved with an accounting-related violation in her previous job. The framing of this trust violation represented the Violation-Type manipulation. For both the Competence and Integrity violations, the job applicant was accused of filing an incorrect tax return that understated a client's capital gains

income. In the Competence condition, the job applicant was accused of filing the incorrect return due to inadequate knowledge of the relevant tax codes. In the Integrity condition, the job applicant was accused of filing the incorrect return intentionally. Immediately after the trust violation was mentioned, the job candidate responded to the allegation by apologizing for the act in question. The candidate admitted responsibility for the trust violation, apologized for the infraction, and stated that such an incident would not happen again.

The Evidence manipulation was provided through a memo from the company's human resources department, addressed to "all management in charge of hiring," stating that the State Board of Public Accountancy had investigated and ruled on the accusation. The memo summarized the ruling by concluding that the candidate was innocent or guilty, and noted that the State Board ruling was attached. In the Innocent condition, the Board ruled as follows: "A thorough independent audit of her client files indicates no evidence of malfeasance. Ms. Ballou's record is cleared of all charges. She will remain fully licensed as a Certified Public Accountant and retain all membership privileges in our association." In the Guilty condition, the Board ruled as follows: "A thorough independent audit of her client files indicates evidence of malfeasance on the part of Ballou. Her record will reflect violation of tax codes 901.402(9) and 901.402(7) for this client. The Board deems that she will remain fully licensed as a Certified Public Accountant but the Board will reconsider this matter if there are future violations."

The Japanese versions of the materials were developed by translating the English transcripts, then back translating, and then correcting the Japanese in any portions of the transcript that did not clearly back translate into English. This was done by two independent fluent bilingual Japanese English speakers, one of whom is an experienced translator. Then the original English language versions of the video clips were dubbed into Japanese. In the original clips the two parties, the interviewer and the job applicant were women, one Caucasian and the other Asian. Two Japanese women read the transcript interactively with the video and the dubbing was placed on the sound track by a professional technician.

Dependent measures. We measured trusting beliefs and trusting intentions per Kim et al. (2004). There were three items concerning the protagonist's competence (e.g., "Ballou is very capable of performing her job") and three items concerning the protagonist's integrity (e.g., "Ballou has a great deal of integrity"). Trusting intentions were measured with five items assessing 1) willingness to risk (e.g., "I would give Ballou a task or problem that was critical to me, even if I could not monitor her actions.") and 2) five items assessing potential job responsibilities (e.g., "In the coming year, how much responsibility would you give Ballou in relation to her fellow accountants?"). Scale reliabilities were acceptable: competence (Japan α = .76;U.S.α = .90), integrity (Japan α = .81;U.S.α = .91), willingness to risk (Japan α = .71;U.S.α = .70), and job responsibilities (Japan α = .69;U.S.α = .67).

Manipulation check. Participants responded to two manipulation check items: one item checked understanding of whether the video they watched illustrated a competence versus an integrity violation. The second item checked whether they perceived that the party was innocent or guilty. Twenty-three participants (17 Japanese, 6 Americans) incorrectly responded to the first manipulation check, and 12 (9 Japanese, 3 Americans) participants incorrectly responded to the second manipulation check. These participants were excluded from further analyses.

Results and Discussion

Trust repair. We ran an overall 2 (Violation-Type: Competence vs. Integrity) by 2 (Culture: U.S. vs. Japan) by 2 (Evidence: Guilty vs. Innocent) MANOVA with gender as an initial covariate. The analysis indicated no significant effects for gender, so subsequent analyses were reported collapsed across gender. In addition, the Evidence type x Culture interaction was not significant ($p > .47$), indicating that our main hypotheses were not moderated by whether the protagonist was ultimately found guilty or innocent, so subsequent analyses were collapsed across the guilty and innocent conditions.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 predicted that after a competence-based trust violation an apology would repair trust more successfully for Americans than Japanese, but that after an integrity-based trust violation an apology would repair trust more successfully for Japanese than Americans. These predictions were largely supported. Our preliminary MANOVA revealed an acceptable marginally significant overall Culture x Violation Type interaction, $p = .059$. This overall effect was then further bolstered by strong univariate results for each dependent measure (see Table 1). Significant interactions were found for perceptions of integrity, willingness to risk, and job responsibilities: (integrity: $F(1,168) = 5.85$, $p < .03$; willingness to risk: $F(1,168) = 4.08$, $p < .05$; job responsibilities: $F(1,168) = 4.81$, $p < .04$). These results support Hypotheses 5 and 6. The interaction was not significant for perceptions of competence. However, this null effect is actually fairly consistent with prior research that has shown that perceptions of integrity are more strongly affected by trust violations and repair efforts than perceptions of competence (Kim et al. 2004).

Table 1 shows that these interactions were largely due to cultural differences in the integrity violation condition. In this condition Japanese were more willing to offer job responsibilities to the protagonist compared to Americans, $F(1,88) = 15.03$, $p < .001$, and more willing to risk future vulnerability to the violator compared to Americans following an apology for an integrity violation ($F(1,88) = 10.48$, $p < .01$). No mean difference was found for perceptions of integrity, though the means were in the predicted directions. This trend indicates that the observed Culture x Violation-Type interaction for integrity beliefs was driven by the combination of higher trust for Americans (vs. Japanese) following an apology for a

Table 1. Trust Repair as a Function of Violation Type and Culture, Study 2

Trust Repair	*Violation Type*	*Culture*	*Mean*	SD
Competence Perception	Competence	Japan	4.47	1.25
		US	4.73	1.34
	Integrity	Japan	5.62	0.64
		US	5.98	0.84
Integrity Perception	Competence	Japan	4.78	0.98
		US	5.22	1.11
	Integrity	Japan	3.39	1.18
		US	3.20	1.21
Willingness to Risk	Competence	Japan	3.28	0.87
		US	3.07	0.84
	Integrity	Japan	3.46	0.76
		US	2.83	0.76
Job Responsibilities	Competence	Japan	3.44	0.83
		US	3.35	0.83
	Integrity	Japan	3.61	0.81
		US	3.07	0.80

competence violation, and higher trust for Japanese (vs. Americans) following an apology for an integrity violation. Contrary to predictions, there were no mean differences in trust repair between Americans and Japanese for an apology following a competence-based violation. Nevertheless, the overall pattern of means across the measures generally supported the hypotheses that trust repair following an apology would differ based on the interaction of culture and the type of transgression.

General Discussion

Apologies are an effective means of re-establishing trust in negotiations and dispute resolution. However, the two studies presented here are among the first studies to examine cultural differences in the function and meaning of apologies and the effectiveness of apologies for trust repair. In our first study, participants from an individual agency culture (United States) viewed apologies as analytical mechanisms for assigning blame and re-establishing personal credibility, a finding wholly consistent with Americans' tendency to attribute events to individual causation; in contrast, individuals from a collective agency culture (Japan) viewed an apology more as a general expression of remorse rather than as a means to assign culpability, a finding consistent with the tendency of people from collective

cultures to attribute events to contextual and group-level factors rather than individual actors (e.g., Chiu et al. 2000; Menon et al. 1999; Morris et al. 2001).

The findings from Study 2 refine our contribution by showing that compared to Americans, Japanese were more accepting of an apology after an integrity violation; this manifested itself in greater trusting beliefs and trusting intentions toward the person making the apology. We argued that because Japanese are less likely to equate an apology with the acceptance of blame than Americans, apologies would carry both less positive and less negative information in Japan than in the U.S. Moreover, because negative information about integrity tends to be weighed more heavily than positive information about integrity, the tendency for Japanese to infer less negative-integrity information (i.e., less blame) from an apology than Americans should cause apologies to be more effective in Japan than in the U.S. after an integrity-based violation. This finding was supported in our data.

This is the first research, as far as we are aware, to show cultural variation in the utility of apologies for competence and integrity violations, in addition to offering a theoretically grounded framework (individual vs. group-level agency) for understanding this cultural variation. In addition, we believe this finding is highly consistent with recent research on apologies and implicit trust beliefs. This work showed that apologies are more effective when targets believe moral behavior is malleable (i.e., those who have incremental beliefs) compared to those who believe moral behavior is fixed (i.e., those who have entity beliefs) (Hasulhun and Schweitzer 2010). Since previous work has demonstrated that Japanese have a predominant incremental view of human behavior and North Americans a more entity view (e.g., Heine et al. 2001), results from Study 2 suggest that for a relatively serious trust violation such as one involving integrity, Japanese may see such a transgression as more correctable than Americans; thus, an apology has more utility when individuals see violations as more correctable.

We also predicted but did not find that an apology would be more effective for a competence-based violation in the U.S. than Japan. However, it is important to note that prior trust repair research has also reported some variation in which specific violations and dependent measures were most effected in different studies (Kim et al. 2004, 2006; Ferrin et al. 2007). Thus, as with that prior research, it may be more meaningful that Study 2 obtained strong support for its predicted interactions as a whole (i.e., that although an apology would repair trust less effectively with Japanese than with American observers after a competence violation, an apology would repair trust more effectively with Japanese than with American observers after an integrity violation), than the fact that its ensuing subgroup analyses found significant differences for integrity but not competence violations

This research has important implications for trust repair, negotiations, and conflict management. Although some research suggests that the most effective

means of repairing broken trust, particularly in the short-term, is an apology (Schweitzer et al. 2006), our studies show just how complex the consequences of an apology may be. Thus, in a culture like Japan where an apology does not necessarily mean blame is being conveyed or accepted, individuals may be able to effectively apologize to diffuse conflict even if the transgression concerns questions of personal integrity and even if the apologizer is not explicitly at fault. However, this strategy is less advised in a culture like the U.S. where an apology for an integrity violation implies blame and acknowledgement of low integrity.

For example, consider the cultural misunderstanding that may ensue when Americans observe a Japanese manager like Akio Toyoda trying to resolve a dispute by apologizing for his company's serious quality control problems in early 2010. Americans may hear the apology as a response to a competency violation (if the problems are attributed to the inherent difficulty of avoiding all potential problems in technically complex modern automobiles), and infer that Toyota will fix them. Or they may hear the apology as a response to an integrity violation (e.g., if the problems are attributed to negligence or efforts to cut corners to boost profits) and thus may not forgive Toyota as readily. Japanese audiences, on the other hand, may view the apologies more as normative social lubricants that are situationally appropriate but are less diagnostic of blame-taking; or, consistent with an incremental view, Japanese may see the transgressions as more correctable than Americans. Indeed, the Japanese media are sometimes more critical of the actual ritual surrounding the apology, rather than the content of the apology itself. For example, even though Sony executive deputy president Yutaka Nakagawa called a news conference and explicitly apologized in the wake of the laptop battery-recall crisis in the summer of 2006, he was roundly criticized in the Japanese media for not bowing deeply enough (far short of the typical 90-degree bow) during the apology (Kageyama 2006). Thus, an apology in one cultural context can have very different functions, meanings, and consequences in another culture, and can exacerbate or ameliorate conflict depending on whether these signals are conveyed and interpreted appropriately.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

One limitation of the current findings is the context-free nature of the survey in Study 1, in which participants answered general questions about apologies without the benefit of specific contextual cues. This is less than ideal given that the Japanese language and culture is highly context-dependent (Hall 1976; Brett 2007). In addition, general cross-cultural surveys may have less than ideal predictive validity because of the lack of a common context across cultures (Heine et al. 2002; Kitayama 2002). However, because were we interested in the general use of and motivations behind apologies in the two cultures, and because results from

Study 2 replicate the implications of Study 1 within a specific, common context, we believe this concern is somewhat ameliorated. A second limitation is the lack of exact equivalence in the words used in apologies in Japan and the United States. As research has previously noted, the most common word in Japanese for an apology is "*sumimasen*," which can also be used to express a variety of concepts including remorse, regret, concern, contrition, as well as being used as a way to excuse oneself (Ide 1998). Indeed, given all these meanings, it may be that the use of "*sumimasen*" is simply broader in Japan than in the U.S. and such an expression may not always be taken to mean that someone is technically apologizing in Japan. As a result, the implication of blame may be less fundamentally intertwined with apologies because of semantic differences in the words used for apologizing across the languages, with the use of "sumimasen" not always conveying the implication of apology. However, it is important to note that semantics are also a means to reflect and transmit psychological values and norms (Chiu and Hong 2006) and that language serves as a transmission device to reinforce the culturally appropriate ways of apologizing, which may be broader in Japan than the U.S.

Although the current research did not look at apologies in negotiation contexts specifically, we believe our findings have distinct and important implications for both bargaining and dispute contexts. Because apologies are effective in disputes as a means to diffuse anger and rebuild damaged trust, apologies should ultimately facilitate negotiators' ability to focus more on interests rather than power and rights, which tend to be the result of distrust, anger, or threats (Ury et al. 1988). Apologies may also be effective when there is low or damaged trust in bargaining situations because of miscommunications or misunderstandings, or because of hardball tactics, lying, or a previous history of ineffective negotiations with the same person. Indeed, previous research has shown the critical role of trust in facilitating negotiation outcomes in a variety of bargaining contexts (e.g., Butler 1999; Kimmel et al. 1980; Maddux, Mullen, and Galinsky 2008), and the current research bolsters previous research showing the utility of an apology for trust repair. Thus, any means of establishing or repairing trust across different types of negotiation situations should have utility for negotiations in general, since trust is a critical element across negotiations' contexts. However, as the results from Study 2 make clear, apologies in both dispute and bargaining situations will be differentially effective depending on type of trust violation (competence, integrity) and the cultural background of the violator and recipient, and it behooves negotiators to carefully consider such factors in deciding whether and how to apologize.

Because the current studies are some of the first to look at cultural variation in the function and meaning of apologies, there is opportunity for additional research on a number of fronts. One area of future research might be to extend the current theorizing to other East Asian countries (e.g., China, Korea, Taiwan,

Thailand) and other Western countries (e.g., Canada, Western Europe, Australia) to insure generalizability to other individual- and collective-agency cultures. In addition, it would be especially interesting to explore apologies in countries that are relatively understudied in the psychological literature, for example, Southern European, Middle Eastern, African, and Latin American cultures, most of which are highly relational and likely to be more collective agency-oriented (Hofstede 1980). Related to this, future research may also want to consider how different cultural dimensions such as power-distance (Hofstede 1980) may interact with our effects; for example, would the likelihood of apologizing, or the effectiveness of apologizing for competence- and integrity violations, show systematic variation depending on status differences between the apologizer and the target of the apology? Since Japan is higher in power-distance than the U.S., it is possible that the current pattern of results may be further moderated by status differences among the actors for Japanese individuals, but such status-based contextual variation may be weaker for Americans. This is an interesting avenue for future research.

It also behooves researchers to look at cultural variance in other types of trust repair mechanisms, such as denials (Kim et al. 2004), reticence (Ferrin et al. 2007) and penance and regulation (Dirks, Kim, Ferrin, and Cooper 2007). Indeed, the current results strongly suggest the differential utility of a range of different trust repair and conflict resolution mechanisms in different cultural contexts. In addition, future research involving field studies in organizations would help improve the generalizability of our findings that were obtained in a lab context. Finally, although the current results have clear implications for negotiations and dispute resolution, the current studies were not carried out explicitly within negotiation contexts. Thus, future research should look specifically at the implications of apologies in negotiation settings involving individuals from different cultures to determine whether the current findings do indeed hold in cross-cultural negotiations.

Conclusions

Overall, our results show how critical it is to understand the function and meaning of an apology in different cultures. Such understanding can help individuals make better strategic decisions as to when and why an apology may be an effective strategy to facilitate negotiations, resolve conflict, and repair trust, and whether to choose an apology versus other trust repair mechanisms to address disputes or misunderstandings. Indeed, as negotiations and disputes become increasingly international, issues of quality and the ensuing attributions for culpability in the aftermath of perceived transgressions will be carefully scrutinized through the lens and laws of negotiators' own culture. Our research suggests that apologies

should be carefully considered and constructed with culture in mind, to ensure that they act to reduce rather than exacerbate conflict.

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