Workers’ Decisions to Comply:

A Comparison of the Perceived Threats of Managerial Sanctions, Embarrassment and Shame in Japan and the United States

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Drawing on the extended deterrence model, we develop a rationale for predicting that Japanese employees, compared to American employees, perceive greater threats of managerial sanctions, embarrassment, and shame for noncompliant behavior. In the research reported here, parallel measures are created of the perceived threats of each punishment for three forms of productive deviance (taking a long lunch or break, coming to work late or leaving early, and using sick leave). The cultural differences in perceived levels of these threats for the rule violations are then examined in merged samples of employees in Japanese and U.S. university hospitals. Consistent with the prediction, threats of all three sanctions are perceived to be higher among Japanese employees than American employees.

Introduction

The seminal articles by Marwell and Schmitt (1967a, 1967b) have provided much of the foundation in the field of communication for the study of compliance-gaining strategies in the workplace. With factor analysis, Marwell and Schmitt identified a set of strategies that individuals might use in an effort to get others to comply with their wishes. Attention was directed toward those individuals seeking compliance from others, not toward those who provide, more or less, the compliant behavior. This emphasis on compliance-seekers has dominated theory and research concerning compliance in the communication literature. Much effort with mixed results has been devoted to refining and applying these two early studies to work settings. Some researchers have formulated alternative classification schemes of managerial compliance-gaining strategies (e.g., Hirokawa and Miyahara, 1986; Kipnis and Schmidt, 1988; Kipnis, Schmidt, Swaffin-Smith, and Wilkinson, 1984; Kipnis, Schmidt and Wilkinson, 1980; Riccilo and Trenholm, 1983). Others have focused on situations and on personality traits, socio-demographic characteristics, and attitudes of managers as factors that determine the extent to which any one compliance-seeking strategy might be more effective than others (e.g., Erez and Rim, 1982; Hirokawa and Miyahara, 1986; Kipnis et al., 1984; Kipnis et al., 1980; Riccilo and Trenholm, 1983; Rim and Erez, 1980).

Theory and research in this area have given scant attention to the “compliance-providers”—i.e., to factors that mold the subordinates’ decisions concerning whether or not to comply. Although there are exceptions (e.g., Grasmick and Kobayashi, 2002a, 2002b; Kobayashi, Grasmick, and Friedrich, 2001; also see the instructional communication literature such as Burroughs, Kearney, and Plax, 1989; Kearney, Plax, and Burroughs, 1991;
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Lee, Levine, and Cambra, 1997; McQuillen, Higginbotham, and Cummings, 1984), past theory and research typically have considered characteristics of situations, managers and subordinates as the independent variable and adoption by managerial authorities of their compliance-gaining strategies as the dependent variable. Thus, little has been learned about why and how subordinates reach the decision to comply or not to comply with organizational rules.

Our objective is to shift attention to the subordinates who decide whether or not to comply and to do so from a cross-cultural perspective by comparing Japanese and American workers. The explicit emphasis on rational decision-making in the extended deterrence model in the field of criminology is our starting point (Grasmick, Blackwell, Bursik, and Mitchell, 1993; Grasmick and Bursik, 1990; Grasmick, Bursik, and Arneklev, 1993).

Grasmick and his colleagues have argued that actors, in deciding whether or not to comply with the law, take into account three types of punishment—state-imposed legal sanctions, socially-imposed embarrassment, and self-imposed shame. In other words, compliance-providers, as well as compliance-seekers, are active information processors in various compliance-gaining interactions. In fact, these three types of punishment threats parallel somewhat the discussion by Etzioni (1961) of compliance relations of organizations. Hollinger and Clark (1982, 1983) have examined the effects of subordinates’ perceptions of managerial threats (formal sanctions) and more “informal” sanction threats on compliance with rules in the workplace.

Research on this extended model of deterrence has relied exclusively on data collected in the U.S. Some studies (e.g., Grasmick and Bursik, 1990) have noted that certain characteristics of compliance-providers, such as age and sex, affect their perceptions of threats of formal sanctions, shame, and embarrassment. However, theory and research to date have not addressed the possibility of differences across cultures in the levels of these threats that are perceived by subordinates. The present study proposes and then tests the general hypothesis that Japanese workers perceive higher levels of these threats than do their American counterparts.

The Costs of Noncompliance

The first possible punishment that decreases expected workplace deviance is the threat of managerial sanctions. This is an extension of the formal legal sanctions that are central to conventional deterrence theory. While the state is the source of the formal punishment threat for legal deviance, the management (or administration) is the one for workplace deviance. This kind of punishment occurs primarily in the form of material and/or physical deprivation when managerial authorities detect an employee’s transgression. In calculating the projected costs of deviant behavior, employees take into account both the possibility of apprehension and the subsequent penalty by managerial authorities and the severity of this penalty should it be imposed. The resulting perceived threat of management sanctions, conceptualized as the product of certainty and severity, is thus an organizationally-imposed cost factor for the expected rule violation. The focus on the product of certainty and severity is important because, if an employee is rational, when the severity of punishment is trivial, then even high levels of certainty of punishment are not likely to deter. Likewise, the deterrent effect of the
certainty of punishment increases as the severity of punishment increases since even very certain punishments are not likely to deter when their magnitude is inconsequential (see Becker, 1968; Ehrlich, 1973; Grasmick and Green, 1980). Thus, in the present study that concerns rational decision-making, the “threat of punishment” is conceptualized as the product of certainty and severity.

Grasmick and Bursik (1990) suggest that the same reasoning applies to the external and internal controls from control theories (e.g., Hirschi, 1969). External controls are viewed as socially-imposed punishments that originate in the reactions from significant others (broadly defined to include colleagues, supervisors, and employers) that employees anticipate should they violate the rule. These reactions, should they occur, are experienced by the employee as embarrassment. Rational employees, contemplating a violation of the rule, would take into account the possible pain of being embarrassed. The socially-imposed embarrassment, like organizationally-imposed punishment, has the dimensions of certainty and severity. The threat of embarrassment is conceptualized as the product of the two. As the certainty of embarrassment increases, so too does the deterrent effect of its severity. Likewise, as the severity increases, so does the deterrent effect of its certainty.

Internal controls, Grasmick and Bursik (1990) propose, function in the same manner to produce a threat of self-imposed punishment should the employee violate the rule. Employees who believe in the moral legitimacy of the rule (the “belief” component in Hirschi’s theory), or who have a self-concept incompatible with breaking the rule, experience guilt feelings or shame should they violate the rule. Shame, like formal sanctions and embarrassment, also has the dimensions of certainty and severity. In a rational choice perspective, when calculating projected costs of deviant behavior, employees take into account the possibility (certainty) and likely magnitude (severity) of shame, the threat of shame being the product of the two.

The Perceived Levels of Punishment Threats: Does Culture Matter?

Grasmick and his colleagues (Grasmick, Blackwell, Bursik, and Mitchell, 1993; Grasmick and Bursik, 1990; Grasmick, Bursik, and Arneklev, 1993) consistently find that the threat of shame (internal constraint) is a stronger deterrent to rule violation than is the threat of embarrassment (external constraint). Like most research in the field of deviance, however, all of this research has been conducted in the United States. No single piece of research has considered the possibility of variation across cultures in the perceived levels of the three kinds of punishment: individuals in some cultures might perceive a greater threat of shame than those in other societies.

Several scholars (e.g., Gudykunst and Kim, 1997; Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede and Bond, 1984; Markus and Kitayama, 1991), in their observations about the United States and Japan, have noted the stronger “collectivistic” orientation of Japanese culture, an observation that has implications for managerial sanctions, embarrassment, and shame in Grasmick’s model of deterrence. These scholars suggest that Japanese, much more so than Americans, merge themselves into collectivities so that their self-concepts and identities are much more strongly tied to the group than is the case for Americans.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) distinguish between “independent” and “interdependent” self concepts, a distinction that has implications for the hypothesized effects of shame and
embarrassment in Grasmick’s extended deterrence model. Markus and Kitayama suggest that Americans in the highly individualistic U.S. culture tend to develop an independent self-concept that emphasizes their own uniqueness and independence from others. People in the more collectivistic Japanese culture, on the other hand, tend to develop an interdependent self-concept. With an interdependent self-concept, their identity is bound to social relations and maintaining their proper place in those relationships. One implication of this argument, if Markus and Kitayama are correct, is that threats stemming from others in one’s group—i.e., embarrassment—are more salient mechanisms of control in Japanese society.

These mechanisms of control are crucial, Braithwaite (1989) argues, in developing children’s moral standards that produce a threat of self-imposed punishment. He notes that “as socialization moves from building responsiveness to external controls to responsiveness to internal controls, direct forms of shaming becomes less important than induction” (1989, p. 72). Japanese are thus more likely to internalize guilt and feel ashamed when considering a rule violation. The perceived levels of shame and embarrassment for noncompliance with rules perhaps depends on where the culture is located along some continuum of individualism-collectivism.

We propose that collectivism and perceived threat of managerial sanctions also vary jointly—that is, the more collectivistic the tendency, the greater the perceived levels of formal sanction threat. People in the more collectivistic Japanese culture, much more so than Americans, are so closely observed in terms of violation of societal, collective rules that they conclude they cannot avoid detection. In other words, they encounter more agents of social control, or at least they believe they do, and are more likely to formulate perceptions that they will be caught if they violate a rule and thus, perceive greater levels of formal sanction threat. These speculations lead to the following hypotheses that our research is designed to test:

H1: A perceived threat of managerial sanctions is higher among Japanese workers than among Americans.
H2: A perceived threat of embarrassment is higher among Japanese workers than among Americans.
H3: A perceived threat of shame is higher among Japanese workers than among Americans.

Methods

Sample
Data to test the hypotheses were collected in the summer of 1997. A self-administered questionnaire was completed by a sample of employees at all levels of the hierarchy of university hospitals in a northeastern part of Japan and in a southwestern part of the United States. We excluded doctors from the sample because their work requirements are different, and the dependent variables described below do not necessarily apply to them. Data procedures guaranteed anonymity since most of the questions concerned rule violations in the work setting. The Administrative Officers of the two hospitals granted the researchers permission to distribute questionnaires to a sample of employees.

The workforce in the Japanese hospital consisted of about 850 employees spread over five medical divisions, and the sample was stratified according to the size of the divisions, with names drawn from lists provided by division supervisors. The workforce in the U.S. hospital consisted of about 1,000 employees, and the U.S. sampling frame was a list of all the
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1,000 employees. A total of 275 Japanese and 1,000 English self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the employees in the Japanese and the U.S. hospitals, respectively, along with a cover letter indicating that participation was voluntary, that the research was being conducted by people outside the organization, and that all responses were anonymous. The respondent’s name was not included on any of the material distributed or collected. Completed questionnaires were returned to a central location in sealed envelopes. A total of 256 Japanese and 340 English questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 93.1% and 34.0%, respectively.

To control for the possible effect of ethnic differences among respondents in the U.S. hospital, 68 non-white respondents were excluded from the analysis. This restriction, plus missing data on any of the dichotomous variables described below, results in an N of 269 for the U.S. sample and 255 for the Japanese sample. The Japanese sample differed significantly from the U.S. sample in percentage male (15.7 percent in the Japanese sample, 27.9 percent in the American sample), mean age (36.3 in the Japanese sample, 41.4 in the American sample), and mean years of education (14.6 in the Japanese sample, 15.6 in the American sample).

Measures

Shame, Embarrassment, and Management Sanctions.

Perceived threats of shame, embarrassment, and managerial (formal) sanctions are operationalized as the product of respondents’ estimates of the certainty and the severity of each sanction for each of the following three types of employee deviance used in Hollinger and Clark’s (1982) research on deterrence in the workplace: (a) taking a long lunch or break without approval, (b) coming to work late or leaving early without approval, and (c) using sick leave when not really sick. Opportunities for these three forms of workplace deviance are readily available to workers, and the behaviors do not require any special skills or expertise (Harper and Hirokawa, 1988; Hirokawa and Miyahara, 1986; Hollinger and Clark, 1982). In fact, Hollinger and Clark (1982) report that these three are the most common forms of employee deviance—at least in U.S. work environments and that they are extremely costly forms of deviance to business organizations. The perceived threat questions in the current study parallel the original measures by Grasmick and Bursik (1990), which were modified to take into account the workplace setting. For perceived certainty for each of the three violations, respondents were asked as follows:

**SHAME:** Would you feel guilty if you …

**EMBARRASSMENT:** Would most of the employees whose opinions you value lose respect for you if you …

**MANAGERIAL SANCTIONS:** Do you think you would get caught if you …

Response options for each item were “definitely would not” (coded 1), “probably would not” (coded 2), “probably would” (coded 3), and “definitely would” (coded 4).

Perceived severity for each of the three punishment threats for each of the three violations was measured with the following items:
SHAME: If you did feel guilty for doing this, how big a problem would it create for you?

EMBARRASSMENT: If most of the employees whose opinions you value did lose respect for you, how big a problem would it create for you?

MANAGERIAL SANCTIONS: If persons in authority caught and punished you, how big a problem would it create for you?

Response options for each severity item were “no problem at all” (coded 1), “hardly any problem” (coded 2), “a little problem” (coded 3), “a big problem” (coded 4), and “a very big problem” (coded 5).

Finally, for each of the three types of punishment threats (shame, embarrassment, and management sanctions) for each of the three violations, the certainty item was then multiplied by the severity item. These products are treated as variables in the subsequent analyses. Each threat scale potentially ranges from 1 to 20.

Culture.
Culture—i.e., Japanese vs. American—is the key independent variable. Japanese, compared to American, are expected to show higher perceived threats of shame, embarrassment, and managerial sanctions. In the analysis, Culture is coded 1 for Japanese respondents and 0 for Americans. The mean is .487, which is the proportion of the sample who are Japanese.

Control variables.
The analysis is conducted with controls for sex, age, and education. Grasmick and Bursik (1990) suggest that all these are related to perceived threats and to present intentions to violate rules. The Japanese and American samples, as noted earlier, also differ for these variables. Sex is a dummy variable coded 1 for males and 0 for females and has a mean (i.e., proportion male) of .22. Age and years of formal education are interval level variables with means of 38.9 and 15.1 and standard deviations of 10.1 and 1.8, respectively. When these variables are controlled, any effect of “culture” (i.e., Japanese vs. American) on perceived levels of punishment threats cannot be attributed to differences between the two samples in the socio-demographic characteristics.

Analysis

t-tests
Table 1 reports simple comparisons, with no controls, of the Japanese and U.S. samples for the measures of perceived threats. As expected, for each of the three types of noncompliance, the product of certainty and severity of each of the three perceived threats is greater for Japanese than for American respondents, and the difference is significant beyond the .001 level.

Regression analysis
Tables 2-4 consider differences, with controls, between the Japanese and U.S. samples for the measures of perceived punishment threats of shame, embarrassment, and management sanctions. Equation 1 is the ordinary least squares regression of the threat on only the dummy
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In Equation 2, the control variables are added to determine whether any effect of being Japanese in the first equation is merely a function of the sociodemographic composition of the two samples. Since direction is predicted, one-tailed tests are used for judging significance. Throughout the tables, standardized regression coefficients (Beta’s) are reported.

Perceived Threat of Managerial Sanctions.

Table 2 reports the results for perceived threat of managerial sanctions for each of the three forms of workplace deviance (taking a long lunch or break without approval, coming to work late or leaving early without approval, and using sick leave when not really sick). Equation 1 reveals three positive bivariate effects of being Japanese, suggesting that perceived threat of managerial sanctions is significantly higher among Japanese workers than among American

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Japanese American</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(N=255)</td>
<td>(N=269)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Certainty × Severity of Shame</td>
<td>13.80</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>15.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Certainty × Severity of Embarrassment</td>
<td>11.80</td>
<td>7.79</td>
<td>10.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Certainty Sanctions × Severity of Management</td>
<td>12.41</td>
<td>7.91</td>
<td>12.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Certainty × Severity of Shame</td>
<td>15.45</td>
<td>10.32</td>
<td>12.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Certainty × Severity of Embarrassment</td>
<td>12.63</td>
<td>9.26</td>
<td>8.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Certainty Sanctions × Severity of Management</td>
<td>13.54</td>
<td>10.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean Certainty × Severity of Shame</td>
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<td>5.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Certainty × Severity of Embarrassment</td>
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<td>9.90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean Certainty Sanctions × Severity of Management</td>
<td>12.40</td>
<td>7.41</td>
<td>12.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: OLS Regression of Intention to Perceived Threat of Managerial Sanctions on Independent Variables (N=524; one-tailed tests in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Long Lunch or Break</th>
<th>Come to Work Late or Leave Early</th>
<th>Use Sick Leave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Eq. 1</td>
<td>Eq. 2</td>
<td>Eq. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>.468</td>
<td>.422</td>
<td>.285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>(&lt;.001)</td>
<td>(&lt;.001)</td>
<td>(&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–.115</td>
<td>–.153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(.002)</td>
<td>(&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.001)</td>
<td>(.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>–.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(.317)</td>
<td>(.074)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.317)</td>
<td>(.119)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–.126</td>
<td>–.143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(.001)</td>
<td>(.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td></td>
<td>(.001)</td>
<td>(.110)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.219</td>
<td>.249</td>
<td>.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

variable for Japanese vs. American. In Equation 2, the control variables are added to determine whether any effect of being Japanese in the first equation is merely a function of the sociodemographic composition of the two samples. Since direction is predicted, one-tailed tests are used for judging significance. Throughout the tables, standardized regression coefficients (Beta’s) are reported.
workers. For taking a long lunch or break without approval, the coefficient is +.468; for coming to work late or leaving early without approval, +.285; and for using sick leave when not really sick, +.487.

Equation 2 adds the control variables, and the effect of being Japanese remains significant beyond the .001 level. For taking a long lunch or break without approval, the coefficient is +.422; for coming to work late or leaving early, +.209, and for using sick leave, +.443. These are only slightly lower than the bivariate effects from the corresponding Equation 1s.

Meanwhile, several of the control variables have significant direct effects on perceived threat of managerial sanctions. For all three deviant behaviors, males perceive a significantly lower threat than females. This finding is consistent with earlier evidence. Education also has significant inverse effects on perceived managerial sanctions for two forms of deviant conduct (taking a long lunch or break and coming to work late or leaving early), indicating that those with higher levels of education perceive a lower threat of the formal sanctions when considering violations of these two workplace rules. Age, on the other hand, is not related to perceived threat for any of the three violations.

**Perceived Threat of Shame.**

The comparable analysis for perceived threat of shame is reported in Table 3. Similar to the findings of managerial sanctions, the bivariate Beta’s of Japanese are positive and significant (<.001), indicating that overall the Japanese sample scores significantly higher than the American sample on perceived threat of shame for all three forms of production deviance. For taking a long lunch or break without approval, the coefficient is +.551; for coming to work late or leaving early without approval, +.493; and for using sick leave when not really sick, +.241.

When the control variables are added in Equation 2, the positive effect of being Japanese remains significant (p < .001). For taking a long lunch or break without approval, the coefficient is +.542; for coming to work late or leaving early, +.439, and for using sick
leave, + .265.

The equation also reveals that males perceive a significantly lower threat of shame than females. Furthermore, education has significant, although not consistent, direct effects on perceived guilt-feelings for two of the three deviant behaviors (coming to work late or leaving early and using sick leave). Workers with higher levels of education perceive a lower threat of the formal sanctions for coming to work late or leaving early without approval. Those with higher levels of education, on the other hand, perceive a higher threat of the sanctions for using sick leave when they are not really sick. Age has a significant positive effect on the perceived threat of shame only for using sick leave.

Table 4: OLS Regression of Intention to Perceived Threat of Embarrassment on Independent Variables (N = 524; one-tailed tests in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Long Lunch or Break</th>
<th>Come to Work Late or Leave Early</th>
<th>Use Sick Leave</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eq. 1</td>
<td>Eq. 2</td>
<td>Eq. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese Beta</td>
<td>.417</td>
<td>.402</td>
<td>.339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>(&lt;.001)</td>
<td>(&lt;.001)</td>
<td>(&lt;.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male Beta</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-.076</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(.032)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Beta</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>-.048</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(.123)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Beta</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>(.227)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.174</td>
<td>.183</td>
<td>.115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceived Threat of Embarrassment.

Results for perceived threat of embarrassment are reported in Table 4. In the first equation, the Betas for Japanese are positive and significant beyond the .001 level. As a whole, therefore, Japanese respondents perceive a significantly higher threat of embarrassment than do the American respondents. For taking a long lunch or break without approval, the coefficient is + .417; for coming to work late or leaving early without approval, + .339; and for using sick leave when not really sick, + .213.

The effects of being Japanese remain positive and significant (p < .001) in Equation 2 when the control variables are added. For taking a long lunch or break without approval, the coefficient is + .402; for coming to work late or leaving early, + .311; and for using sick leave, + .208.

For all three forms of deviance, males perceive a lower threat of embarrassment than females. Age has a significant inverse effect, but only for “come to work late or leave early.” Education has a significant positive effect for “use sick leave.”
Discussion

Our goal was to focus attention on the potential costs of noncompliance to the compliance-providers in work settings and, in so doing, perhaps to explain why higher punishment threats might be perceived among Japanese than among American workers. We drew from Grasmick’s version of control theory that recognizes three potential threats people confront should they violate a rule—self-imposed shame, socially-imposed embarrassment, and managerially-imposed remunerative sanctions. From observations by others about the greater collectivism in Japanese culture, we predicted that Japanese workers would perceive higher threats of shame, embarrassment, and managerial sanctions.

In fact, the Japanese hospital employees perceived higher threats of shame, embarrassment, and managerial sanctions. While the magnitude of the difference varied across types of threats, the analysis generally supported our hypothesis about cultural differences in the perceived levels of punishment threats. The differences were statistically significant and remained that way with controls for age, sex, and educational differences between the two samples.

There are limitations to our research. Most importantly, only a narrow segment of the labor force was sampled—hospital employees. Future research should consider whether our arguments about cultural differences and our findings apply to a broader range of labor force participants. But there is another, and perhaps more important issue to address in subsequent studies. At least on the surface, the Japanese labor force appears to be more rigidly stratified by age and sex than is the American labor force. Consequently, the effects of age and sex on perceived threats of sanctions might vary across the two cultural settings. Perhaps in Japan the ascribed statuses of youth and being female carry with them an even greater fear of sanctions for noncompliance than in the U.S. In the present study we have treated the concept of “cultural differences” quite broadly, as a single variable that separated Japanese and American workers. Future research should refine our approach and consider culture as it interacts with age and sex to shape workers’ perceptions of sanction threats and, ultimately, their decisions to comply or not comply with organizational rules.

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References


