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Apologies and expectations of forgiveness: Investigating cross-cultural
differences between Americans and Indians

By

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Abstract

Committing an offence that harms another individual may sometimes result in interpersonal conflict. To resolve such conflict, the transgressor may attempt to make amends by offering an apology. The likelihood of apologizing for a transgression and expectations that the victim would move on without an apology may depend on the social relational context in which the transgression occurs. Although previous cross-cultural studies on apologies and forgiveness have examined differences between individualistic and collectivist cultures, there is a major gap in research studies that explore differences between Western and South Asian cultures in specific. In an exploratory study ($N = 197$) featuring 102 American and 95 Indian participants, we asked whether people would apologize for their transgressions in different hypothetical situations. We elicited their beliefs about (i) the victim moving on without an apology, (ii) the victim being upset because of the transgression, (iii) the offence posing a threat to the relationship, and (iv) their motivation to maintain their relationship with the victim. We found that Americans were 5.5% more likely to apologize than Indians. We detected no significant cross-cultural differences in the transgressor's beliefs that the victim will move on without an apology. We also found a significant gender effect: Men were 3.8% less likely to apologize than women, irrespective of the country of the transgressor. In addition, our findings suggest that there might be larger variations in the likelihood to apologize *within* both the cultures, rather than *across* both the cultures. These findings might inform future studies on resolving interpersonal conflict in response to an offence.

Introduction

In Western societies, people often apologize to the victim of an offence that they commit. However, the decision to apologize and expectations of the victim's response to the offence may vary among people from different cultures. In this paper, we investigated cross-cultural differences in the likelihood of apologizing for the same type(s) of transgression between Americans and Indians. Are there cross-cultural differences in how the transgressor would expect the victim to respond to the offence? Do cross-cultural differences exist in the transgressor's beliefs about how the offence may possibly affect the victim or their relationship?

Previous cross-cultural studies on apologizing and forgiveness have examined how the worldview of collectivist societies diverge from individualistic ones (Sandage et al, 2020; Ho & Fung, 2011; Hook et al., 2009). Most of these studies have compared western nations with countries in South America, Africa, as well as East and South-East Asia (Worthington & Wade, 2020). Worthington and Wade (2020) indicate that there is a major gap of literature that focuses specifically on how South Asian populations vary from Western societies with respect to apologies and forgiveness (Worthington & Wade, 2020). The present study aims to address this gap and contribute to our understanding of how cultural differences might affect beliefs, attitudes, and behavior relating to apologies and expectations of victim forgiveness following offences.

The role of apologies in interpersonal conflict

Imagine that you promised to help your new colleague with a challenging work project. However, you pulled out of the commitment at the last moment. Breaking your promise may offend your colleague. You believe that apologizing to your colleague might prevent escalation of any interpersonal conflict and help maintain a positive relationship. Such situations are a ubiquitous

aspect of social life. While assessing the committed offence, the transgressor may consider the harm caused to the victim by the offence. Turiel (1983) argues that people reference the harm arising from a situation while making moral judgments about the situation.

Earlier theories of moral judgment proposed that harm is objective: people can tell a harmful situation from a non-harmful one through reasoned deliberation and judgment (Kohlberg, 1969; Turiel, 1983). However, subsequent theories indicate that harm may also be discerned by intuitive, affect-based gut feelings, and not just through reasoned deliberation (Haidt, 2001, 2012). For instance, the Theory of Dyadic Morality recognizes harm as intuitive, dyadic (involves two parties – an agent and a victim) and subjective (varies by person, culture, and context) (Schein & Gray, 2018). Rai and Fiske (2011) embed moral judgments in social-relational contexts: these judgments are influenced by the type of social relationship between the offender and the victim as well as by the obligations and prohibitions that are specific to a culture (Rai & Fiske, 2011).

When a person commits an offence, the moral violations underlying the offence may evoke guilt, shame, disgust, or outrage (Rai & Fiske, 2011). These emotions may motivate transgressors to apologize (Rai & Fiske, 2011). An apology is an explicit acknowledgement of the wrongness of a transgression (Schonbach, 1980). Apologies are often offered and accepted to manage interpersonal conflict and mitigate its effects (Green et al., 2019). They are often communicated to compensate for an offence or to repair the damage caused by the offence (Tabak et al., 2012). Apologizing may involve displaying remorse, regret, guilt, contrition, empathy, and benevolent future intentions (Schonbach, 1980; Tabak et al., 2012).

Cultural differences in apologies and expectations of forgiveness

Drawing comparisons between individualistic and collectivistic cultures continues to be the primary framework for most studies that seek to explore cultural differences in apologies and forgiveness (Sandage et al., 2020). While individualistic societies emphasize independence, self-reliance, and self-responsibility, collectivist societies on the other hand lean towards interdependence, social harmony, and adherence to group norms (Sandage et al., 2020). The cultural context in which the offence occurs may influence whether a transgressor seeks amends after committing an offence and how the victim responds to such an offence. While individualistic cultures emphasize the intrapersonal benefits of forgiveness (such as relief from anger or resentment), victims in collectivist cultures on the other hand respond to concerns surrounding inter-dependence and group norms (Hook et al., 2019). Ho and Fung (2011) propose a framework for conceptualizing differences in forgiveness across cultural groups, which identifies how individualistic and collectivist worldviews may influence the perceptions of a transgression. Their framework traces such differences to emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and socio-cultural elements of forgiveness that are distinctive to each culture (Ho & Fung, 2011).

However, most of these studies assume individualistic and collectivist cultures to be largely homogenous and as a result may not recognize cultural distinctions within these worldviews. For instance, although Asian culture is broadly considered collectivist, there is large variation in cultural norms among Asian countries (Lu, 2022). For instance, Lu (2022) found that East and South-East Asians were less assertive and less likely to negotiate their salaries compared to South Asians. South Asians on the other hand were found to behave akin to people from Western (individualistic) societies during negotiation. These findings demonstrate how sub-cultures within a broader “collectivist” worldview may reflect divergent patterns of social communication.

Sandage et al. (2020) emphasizes that cultural worldviews can significantly influence beliefs and perceptions of what counts as an offence, the severity of the offence as well as practices related to forgiveness.

Apologies and expectations of forgiveness vary based on the nature of social relationships

When a person commits an offence against another, and both the parties continue to interact, both the parties (as well as their relationship) are affected by the offence (Strelan, 2020). Forgiveness and repair processes often begin in the initial moments after a transgression (Green et al., 2019). In such circumstances, each party often moves from a gut-level decision that is self-oriented (selecting the best outcome for oneself) to making a choice that focusses on the well-being of the partner as well as the relationship (Green et al., 2019). This ‘transformation of motivation’ tends to be an ongoing process in relationships (Green et al., 2019).

The offender’s apology is often a strong predictor of forgiveness; the victim may evaluate the apology and realize that they no longer feel disrespected, which makes it easier for them to forgive (Strelan, 2020). Although perpetrator amends (for instance, apologies) play a critical role in determining the extent and timeline of victim forgiveness, Green et al. (2019) and Fehr et al. (2010) emphasize that the perspective of the perpetrator has often been neglected in forgiveness research.

Past research views forgiveness in friendships, work relationships and family relationships as functionally similar on many fronts (Green et al., 2019). However, different types of social relationships are associated with distinct moral obligations and prohibitions (Finkel & Rusbult, 2008; Rai & Fiske, 2011). Green et al. (2019) note that work and family relationships vary in significant ways, particularly in terms of relationship goals, closeness, and power differentials.

Relationship goals and motivations in the workplace tend to be exchange-based and utilitarian (Clark & Mills, 1979). On the other hand, the goals and motivations of family relationships and friendships are more communal or need-based: these relationships are associated with greater trust, commitment, and lesser emphasis on keeping track of accounts regarding outcomes (Clark & Mills, 1979). As a result, the same conflict may be interpreted differently in the workplace and with family (Clark & Mills, 1979).

Comprehensive research on forgiveness by Green et al. (2019) has demonstrated that the motivation for amends and type of amends may vary for the same offence, depending on whether it takes place in a family or workplace setting. In the workplace, reducing the motivation to seek revenge and avoidance is considered more relevant than replacing such motivation with benevolence (Green et al, 2019). For instance, two co-workers in a conflict may choose to reconcile to the extent that they could coordinate their work, with or without forgiveness (Green et al., 2019). On the other hand, since family relationships are based to a greater extent on trust and commitment, it is likely that people give greater importance to apologies and forgiveness in families than in a workplace setting (Green et al., 2019). This might imply that an offense threatens work relationships more than family relationships because people are less likely to apologize and expect forgiveness in work settings.

Rai & Fiske (2011) note that to regulate and sustain social relationships, people tend to pursue motives that are directed towards (a) unity (to support the integrity of in-groups); (b) hierarchy (to respect rank in social groups); (c) equality (to ensure equal treatment and opportunity); and (d) proportionality (to ensure rewards and punishment are proportionate to merit, and to ensure judgments are based on utilitarian calculus of costs and benefits). Although these four moral motives are thought to be universal, there are cultural variations in the specific

situations in which people activate these motives and how people respond to such situations (Rai and Fiske, 2011)

Overview of current study

This study presents a cross-cultural comparison among participants from United States and India to explore differences in apologies for the same type of transgression(s). This is an exploratory study that investigates whether there are any cross-cultural differences in the likelihood to apologize, and if so, what influences such differences. Green et al. (2019) and Fehr et al. (2010) highlight that the perspective of the perpetrator has often been neglected in forgiveness research. In this study, we aim to bridge this gap by considering the transgressor's expectations of the victim's response to the offence, and the extent to which the transgressor believes the offence may impact the relationship with the victim. Specifically, we examine whether there are any cross-cultural differences in the transgressor's beliefs about: (a) the victim being upset in response to the offence; (b) the offence posing a threat to the relationship; (c) maintaining the relationship; and (d) the victim moving on in the absence of an apology.

Previous studies highlight how people give greater importance to apologizing and forgiving for an offence in family settings compared to the workplace (Green et al., 2019). Is apologizing and forgiving for an offence given as much importance in Indian families (i.e., between people who are socially close to each other)? How important is it to communicate apologies and forgive for an offence in Indian workplace settings (i.e., between people who are socially more distant from each other)? Our study aims to investigate if there are cultural differences between Americans and Indians in the likelihood to apologize to a victim who shares a close or distant relationship with the transgressor. We also examine if there are cultural differences in the transgressor's

expectations that the victim (close or distant other) will move on after an offence in the absence of an apology.

Methods

Participants. We recruited 269 participants: 105 US citizens on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and 164 Indian citizens using convenience sampling.¹ In the final sample, we retained only those participants who (i) passed all attention checks; (ii) did not provide duplicate responses; (iii) completed the entire survey. Among the recruited participants, 72 (27%) failed to meet at least one of the above criteria (3 US and 69 Indian participants), thus we excluded these observations. The final sample contained 102 US citizens (Mean age = 39.5) and 95 Indian citizens (Mean age = 31.5). We report the sociodemographic data of these participants in Table 1.

Table 1

Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants in the final sample

Characteristic	US		India	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender				
Male	57	55.9	31	32.6
Female	44	43.1	64	67.4
Prefer not to answer	1	0.9	0	0
Race				
Asian	6	5.9	93	97.9

¹ In a small-sample pilot study that preceded the main study, we first tried to recruit Indian citizens on Amazon Mechanical Turk as well. However, out of the 54 Indian participants only 18 (33%) passed the basic quality checks. Due to the low quality of responses obtained from Indian citizens on MTurk, we decided to use convenience sampling during the final data collection, instead of recruiting Indian participants on MTurk. In the final study, the Indian participants were recruited using Snowball Sampling. We sent out the Qualtrics survey to friends and family of the author using social media and these respondents further sent the survey out to their friends and family. We collected responses until we received 164 responses from Indian participants.

The eligibility criteria for US participants recruited on MTurk were as follows: a resident of the United States of America, over the age of 18, be English speaking, and have a 99% or higher approval rating on MTurk.

Black or African American	8	7.8	0	0
Hispanic Latino or Spanish origin	4	3.9	0	0
Others (mixed)	1	0.9	0	0
White	82	80.3	0	0
Prefer not to answer	1	0.9	2	2.1
Education				
High School	23	22.5	2	2.1
Some college	23	22.5	1	1.1
Bachelor's or equivalent	46	45.1	27	28.42
Master's or equivalent	7	6.9	57	60
Doctoral or equivalent	2	1.9	6	6.3
Prefer not to answer	1	0.9	2	2.1
Lived abroad	15	14.7	44	46.3
Strength of religiosity				
Not at all important	51	50	23	24.2
Slightly important	14	13.7	19	20
Moderately important	15	14.7	32	33.7
Extremely important	22	21.5	21	22.1

Note: $N = 197$ ($n = 102$ for US citizens and $n = 95$ for Indian citizens). US participants were on average 39.5 years old and Indian participants were on average 31.5 years old. The US sample had more males than the Indian sample: The US sample comprised 56% males and 43% females, and the Indian sample comprised 33% males and 67% females.

Procedure and materials. The study was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at The University of Chicago and conducted ethically (IRB21-2008). Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The survey was designed on Qualtrics.

Participants read descriptions of nine hypothetical transgressions, in which they imagined that they harmed or offended someone else. Each of the nine scenarios involved two people: a transgressor (i.e., the participant) and a victim (for example: “your best friend”, “your new

colleague”). The task of the participants was to imagine each of these nine scenarios and indicate what they would believe about them (e.g., to what extent would the offense threaten their relationship), and how they would respond to them (e.g., whether they would apologize).

The following transgressions were included in the hypothetical situations: “Broken promise”, “Gossiping”, “Ignoring request for help”, “Late for meeting”, “Lost book”, “Lost temper”, “Made negative comments”, “Not inviting to an event”, and “Spilled coffee”. The full description of each of these scenarios can be found in Appendix 1. Each scenario comprised two different versions to account for different relationship types between the transgressor and victim: either *close* or *distant* relationships. For example, for the offence of “negligence”, one of the following versions of the scenario was displayed to a participant: “You lost a book you borrowed from your *new flat mate*” (distant relationship); or: “You lost a book you borrowed from your *elder sister*” (close relationship). We randomly assigned (within participants) each of the nine scenarios to be either the close or distant version. Thus, each participant read and evaluated nine scenarios, some of which described a transgression against a close other, while others described a transgression against a distant other.

We asked participants to indicate their responses to the following five questions for each scenario:

- a) the likelihood that they would apologize: “How likely are you to apologize to the other person for what you did to them in the following scenarios?” (0 = *very unlikely* ... 100 = *very likely*);
- b) how upset the victim would be: “How upset do you think the other person would be by what you did to them in the following scenarios?” (0 = *not upset at all* ... 100 = *very upset*);

- c) the extent to which the transgression will pose a threat to the relationship: “To what extent do you think that what you did to the other person in the following scenarios would pose a threat to the relationship you share with them?” (0 = *would not pose any threat to the relationship* ... 100 = *would pose an extreme threat to the relationship*);
- d) the extent to which the transgressor will be motivated to maintain the relationship: “To what extent would you be motivated to maintain your relationship with the other person?” (0 = *not at all*... 100 = *very*);
- e) the extent to which the victim would move on in the absence of an apology: “Imagine that you did NOT apologize to the other person for what you did to them in the following scenarios. How likely do you think the other person would move on or let their negative feelings go if you did not apologize to them?” (0 = *very unlikely* ... 100 = *very likely*).

After responding to all nine scenarios, participants indicated their gender, age, race, highest educational qualification, whether they ever lived abroad, and strength of religiosity.

Analysis strategy. First, we examined if differences exist in the likelihood to apologize among Americans and Indians for close and distant others by using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for each of the nine scenarios in R version 4.1.1 (2021-08-10). We then conducted correlation analysis in R to identify the variables that have significant correlations with the likelihood to apologize. Specifically, we sought to examine which variables (“upset”, “threat”, “maintain”, “move on”) are significantly associated with the likelihood to apologize for (i) the full sample, (ii) only US sample, and (iii) only India sample.

We also conducted regression analysis using Linear Mixed Models (LMM) to investigate whether (i) citizenship (of the transgressor); (ii) distance (social proximity between the transgressor and the victim); (iii) demographic indicators (age and gender of transgressor); and (iv) interaction effects (between citizenship and distance) predict the following dependent variables: (i) likelihood to apologize, (ii) likelihood that the victim will move on without an apology, (iii) and likelihood that the victim will be upset. These models are an extension of the general linear regression models since we also added random effects by controlling for Offence type and Response ID of each participant. We ran the linear mixed model analysis in R using the lme4 package. Significance in the regression models was determined using the lmerTest package in R. We applied the Satterthwaite’s method to find the degrees of freedom and the p -values for the regression models.

Results

Means and Standard deviations across all scenarios. In the final study ($N = 197$), we calculated the averages for the likelihood to apologize across all nine scenarios for the US Sample ($M_{\text{close}} = 85.9$; $SD_{\text{close}} = 19$; $M_{\text{distant}} = 83.8$; $SD_{\text{distant}} = 18.4$) and for the India sample ($M_{\text{close}} = 81.4$; $SD_{\text{close}} = 23.5$; $M_{\text{distant}} = 82.3$; $SD_{\text{distant}} = 21.2$). Table 2 illustrates the likelihood to apologize for each scenario across all nine scenarios for the US and Indian samples.

Table 2

Likelihood to apologize across the US and Indian samples

Offence	US				India			
	Close		Distant		Close		Distant	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Broken promise	92.4	14.9	91.7	13.4	84	22.8	90.4	14.8

Gossiping	81.9	24.8	73.7	27.7	74.2	26.5	74.8	25.4
Ignored request	85	20.3	78.7	26.1	83.7	20.3	82.5	21.3
Late for meeting	96.8	7.5	94.8	11.8	89.4	17.6	89.8	20.3
Lost book	90.9	15.7	96.3	8.6	82	19.8	91.9	12.9
Lost temper	86.4	26.1	89.5	16.9	81.1	26.2	86.9	17.8
Negative comments	70.2	30.4	67.7	26.9	81.1	27.4	74.4	26.2
Did not invite	71.9	25.7	63.4	29.4	67.7	26.6	57.5	33.8
Spilled coffee	97.6	5.8	98.6	4.6	89.1	24.2	92.3	17.9

Note: M = mean and SD = standard deviation

Correlation analysis. To reduce the chance of committing Type 1 errors in our analyses, we adjusted for multiple comparisons in the correlation matrix by adding a Bonferroni correction. The new threshold for significant p -value was calculated by dividing the original alpha-value ($\alpha_{\text{original}} = .05$) by the number of correlations conducted (10): ($\alpha_{\text{adjusted}} = .05/10 = .005$). To determine if any of the correlations is statistically significant, the p -value must be $p < .005$.

Table 3 shows the correlation matrix for study variables across the full sample of US and Indian participants. There was a significant positive association between the likelihood to apologize and the expectation of how upset the victim would be ($r(1773) = 0.37, p < .001$). Further, there was a positive correlation between the likelihood to apologize and the motivation of the transgressor to maintain the relationship ($r(1773) = 0.37, p < .001$). Interestingly, the likelihood to apologize was not significantly correlated with the expectation of victim forgiveness without an apology and to the transgressor's expectation that the offence would pose a threat to the relationship, $p > .10$.

Table 3*Correlations for study variables across the full sample (US and Indian participants combined)*

Variable	Apology	Upset	Threat	Maintain
Apology				
Upset	0.37***			
Threat	0.01	0.42***		
Maintain	0.37***	0.22***	-0.13***	
Move on	0.04	-0.22***	-0.47***	0.18***

Note: *** $p < .001$.

Table 4 and Table 5 show the correlations for study variables across the US and Indian samples, respectively. There was a significant correlation between the likelihood to apologize and the expectation that the victim will be upset because of the offence in both the American ($r(918) = 0.34, p < .001$) and the Indian ($r(855) = 0.41, p < .001$) samples. Further there was also a significant positive association between the likelihood to apologize and the transgressor's expectation of maintaining the relationship with the victim in both the American ($r(918) = 0.41, p < .001$) and the Indian ($r(855) = 0.35, p < .001$) samples. All other correlations between the likelihood to apologize and other variables in the US sample and the Indian sample did not reach significance, $p > .010$.

Table 4*Correlations for study variables across the US sample*

Variable	Apology	Upset	Threat	Maintain
Apology				
Upset	0.34***			
Threat	-0.04	0.48***		
Maintain	0.41***	0.25***	-0.13***	
Move on	0.08*	-0.31***	-0.58***	0.19***

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

Table 5*Correlations for study variables across the India sample*

Variable	Apology	Upset	Threat	Maintain
Apology				
Upset	0.41***			
Threat	0.05	0.37***		
Maintain	0.35***	0.19***	-0.12***	
Move on	0.00	-0.12***	-0.37***	0.17***

Note: *** $p < .001$.

Overall, while there were some minor differences in the correlations between variables across the two samples, both populations displayed consistently strong correlations between the willingness to apologize and (i) how upset they thought the victim would be, and (ii) how

motivated they would be to maintain their relationship with the victim. In addition, we found consistently weak and non-significant correlations between the willingness to apologize and the other measures (i.e., threat to relationship and victim moving on without apology).

Regression analysis. The dependent variables in our regression analysis included: (i) the transgressor’s likelihood to apologize; (ii) the transgressor’s expectation of the victim moving on without an apology; and (iii) the transgressor’s expectation that the victim will be upset because of the transgression. We conducted Linear Mixed Models regression analysis by controlling for random effects relating to the Response ID and Offence. The independent variables that we included in our regression analysis are as follows: citizenship, distance, interaction effects between citizenship and distance, and demographic identifiers of the transgressor (gender and age).

Table 6

LMM Regression models for likelihood of the transgressor apologizing for the offence

	Dependent Variable			
	Likelihood to Apologize			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Citizenship: United States	3.03* (1.82)	4.49** (2.05)	5.49*** (2.10)	4.34* (2.22)
Distance: Distant		0.17 (1.37)	0.25 (1.37)	0.21 (1.37)
Interaction: US * Distant		-2.91 (1.89)	-2.98 (1.90)	-2.97 (1.90)
Gender: Male			-3.77** (1.88)	-3.73** (1.88)
Age				0.14 (0.09)
Constant	81.79*** (3.55)	81.71*** (3.62)	82.90*** (3.66)	78.40*** (4.64)

Observations	1,773	1,773	1,764	1,764
Log Likelihood	-7,876.9	-7,872.2	-7,830.2	-7,830.4
Akaike Inf. Crit.	15,763.7	15,758.4	15,676.4	15,678.8
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	15,791.1	15,796.8	15,720.2	15,728.1

Note: * $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

The regression analysis showed that the main effect between the likelihood to apologize and the citizenship of the participant was marginally significant, $\beta = 3.03$, $SE = 1.82$, $t(195) = 1.67$, $p = .098$. This means that Americans were 3.03% more likely to apologize than Indians. This can be seen in model (1) in Table 6. Further, as can be seen in models (2), (3) and (4) in Table 6, we found no significant interaction effects between the country of the transgressor and the distance, with or without adding age and gender as control variables.

The main effect between the likelihood to apologize and the citizenship of the participant was significant when we controlled for distance and the interaction between country and distance, $\beta = 4.49$, $SE = 2.05$, $t(304.26) = 2.18$, $p = .030$. This means that Americans were 4.49% more likely to apologize than Indians when we also included the main effect of distance and the interaction term between citizenship and distance as potential predictors. When we also controlled for gender, in addition to controlling for the distance and interaction effects, the main effect of the participant was even stronger, $\beta = 5.49$, $SE = 2.10$, $t(298.75) = 2.61$, $p = .009$. This means that when we held differences in gender constant, while also holding distance and interaction effects constant, Americans were 5.49% more likely to apologize than Indians. This can be seen in model (3) in Table 6. Model (4) in Table 6 shows that when we also controlled for age, while also adding the previous control variables to the model, the main effect between the likelihood to apologize and the citizenship of the participant was rendered marginally significant, $\beta = 4.34$, $SE = 2.22$,

$t(283.70) = 1.96, p = .051$. This means that Americans were 4.34% more likely to apologize than Indians when we held age, gender, distance, and interaction effects constant.

We used the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) to test how well each regression model fits the data set without over-fitting it. According to Table 6, compared with models (1), (2) and (4), model (3) had the lowest AIC score of 15676.4. This indicated that out of the four regression models, the best-fit model was model (3), which examines the main effects between the likelihood to apologize and the country of the transgressor while controlling for the distance, gender and the interaction effects between citizenship and distance. Thus, according to the best-fitting model, Americans were 5.49% more likely to apologize than Indians.

Table 7

LMM Regression models for transgressor's beliefs that the victim will move on without an apology

	Dependent Variable			
	Likelihood that the victim moves on without apology			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Citizenship: United States	0.93 (2.51)	-0.46 (2.79)	-2.06 (2.85)	-3.91 (3.01)
Distance: Distant		-20.38*** (1.74)	-20.47*** (1.74)	-20.52*** (1.74)
Interaction: US * Distant		2.99 (2.40)	3.31 (2.41)	3.33 (2.41)
Gender: Male			5.73** (2.59)	5.79** (2.58)
Age				0.23* (0.12)
Constant	59.43*** (4.05)	69.54*** (4.15)	67.71*** (4.23)	60.45*** (5.76)

Observations	1,773	1,773	1,764	1,764
Log Likelihood	-8,422	-8,303.7	-8,258.8	-8,258.2
Akaike Inf. Crit.	16,854	16,621.5	16,533.5	16,534.4
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	16,881.4	16,659.9	16,577.3	16,583.7

Note: * $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

Table 7 shows that the main effect of the citizenship of the transgressor on the likelihood of the victim moving on without an apology was not significant in all four regression models, $p > .10$. Further the interaction between country and distance was not significant in models (2), (3), and (4), $p > .10$. Despite these results, we noted that expectations about victim's forgiveness without an apology significantly depended on social closeness, $p < .001$, as can be seen in models (2), (3) and (4) in Table 7.

Table 8

LMM Regression models for likelihood that the victim will be upset because of the transgression

	Regression Results			
	Dependent Variable			
	Victim is upset			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Citizenship: United States	-1.57 (1.98)	-1.04 (2.20)	0.21 (2.25)	-1.95 (2.35)
Distance: Distant		0.57 (1.40)	0.65 (1.40)	0.60 (1.40)
Interaction: US * Distant		-1.07 (1.94)	-1.26 (1.95)	-1.25 (1.94)
Gender: Male			-4.66** (2.03)	-4.59** (2.00)
Age				0.27***

				(0.10)
Constant	74.41*** (3.05)	74.13*** (3.13)	75.61*** (3.19)	67.11*** (4.40)
Observations	1,773	1,773	1,764	1,764
Log Likelihood	-7,927.1	-7,924.5	-7,880.5	-7,878.1
Akaike Inf. Crit.	15,864.3	15,863	15,777	15,774.1
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	15,891.7	15,901.4	15,820.8	15,823.4

Note: * $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

All four regression models in table 8 indicate that significant main effects were not observed between the likelihood of the victim being upset and the transgressor's country, $p > .10$. In addition, the regression analysis did not show significant interaction effects between country and distance, as can be seen in models (2), (3) and (4) in Table 8, $p > .10$. Despite these results, we noted that expectations about the likelihood of the victim being upset significantly depended on both the age of the transgressor, as can be seen in model (4) in Table 8, and it also depended on the gender of the transgressor as can be seen in models (3) and (4) in Table 8.

Discussion

Overall, we detected significant differences in the likelihood to apologize between Indians and Americans across a range of hypothetical scenarios: Americans were 5.5% more likely to apologize than Indians. Participants from both countries apologized in majority of the hypothetical scenarios. Both countries had relatively high averages in the likelihood to apologize for their offence across all nine scenarios: While Americans were 85.9% likely to apologize to close others and 83.8% likely to apologize to distant others for their offence, Indians were 81.4%

likely to apologize to close others and 82.3% likely to apologize to distant others for their offence. Interestingly, although we found that Americans were 5.5% more likely than Indians to apologize, participants from both countries did not report significant differences in their expectation that the victim will move on without an apology.

In addition, we found a significant gender effect: males were found to be 3.77% less likely to apologize than females, regardless of the citizenship of the transgressor. Our findings were consistent with previous literature that traces the likelihood of apologizing for an offence to the gender of the transgressor. Schumann & Ross (2010) maintain that women tend to apologize for their offences more than men. Previous studies also find that women tend to be more forgiving than men (Miller et al., 2008). Ho (2019) argues that the gender of the transgressor may also influence cross-cultural differences in forgiveness. This supports our findings that differences in the gender of the transgressor contributed to cross-cultural differences in expectations of the victim's forgiveness. Further we found that cross-cultural differences in the transgressor's expectations of the victim moving on marginally depended on the age of the transgressor. In contrast, differences in the average age of the transgressor did not explain the main difference in the likelihood to apologize between both the countries.

We found that the transgressor's belief that the victim will move on in the absence of an apology greatly depended on the social closeness between the transgressor and victim. This finding supports previous studies that indicate differences in the propensity to forgive based on the social proximity between the transgressor and victim (Strelan, 2020; Green et al, 2019; Clark & Mills, 1979; Finkel & Rusbult, 2008; Rai & Fiske, 2011). Different social relationships are associated with specific obligations and expectations (Rai & Fiske, 2011). Green et, al (2019) posit that forgiveness may vary for the same offence based on whether the offence takes place in

a family or a workplace setting: people give greater importance to forgiveness when the offence involves close others (such as family and friends) compared to distant others (such as workplace colleague). Interestingly however, we did not observe cross-cultural differences in the likelihood to apologize based on the social proximity between the victim and transgressor.

Across the full sample of Americans and Indians, the likelihood to apologize was found to be positively associated with (i) the transgressor's expectation of how upset the victim will be in response to the offence, and (ii) the transgressor's motivation to maintain their relationship with the victim. According to the Theory of Dyadic Morality, the perceived harm, norm violations, and the negative affect arising from any situation influences whether a situation is considered morally acceptable (Schein & Gray, 2018). This theory also recognizes that there may be cultural variations in perceptions of harm associated with an offence (Schein & Gray, 2018). This suggests that varying perceptions of harm may underlie possible cross-cultural differences in the transgressor's decision to offer an apology. However, our regression analysis did not reveal significant differences in the perception of harm among Indians and Americans. We also found that there were no significant cross-cultural differences in the expectations that the victim will be upset.

Limitations of the current study. Since convenience sampling to recruit the Indian participants might bias the collected data, the results we obtained might not generalize to representative populations. The Indian sample in our study is not representative of the general Indian population: the convenience sample was younger (mean age was 31.5 years), had more female participants (the sample comprised 32.6% male and 67.4% female participants), and was more highly educated (28.4% had a bachelor's degree, 60% had a master's degree, and 6.3% had a doctoral degree) than the Indian average. We speculate that younger, educated Indians might

have more similar norms to US participants than older, less educated Indians, who were not represented in the current study. This implies that real cultural differences in apologizing might be greater than observed in the present study. A limitation of this study therefore is that our Indian sample may not capture the cultural heterogeneity and diversity in the population.

Another methodological limitation of our study is that we used hypothetical scenarios to assess human behavior. We collected behavioral responses in a computer-administered survey, instead of conducting lab or field-based studies. This means we collected anticipatory responses that may not accurately capture how participants behave in real life settings when faced with such circumstances. Another challenge that online surveys face is that participants tend to respond to questions based on their expectations of socially desirable behavior. Social desirability bias is the tendency to overreport more desirable attitudes and behaviors (e.g., apologizing) and to underreport socially undesirable attitudes and behaviors (Latkin et al, 2017). Through their responses, people may have wanted to deliberately project themselves in a manner (i.e., apologize for their offence) that would help them maintain a positive self-concept, please an audience, or avoid embarrassment (Latkin et al, 2017). These limitations may partly explain the lack of large differences in apologies and expectations of the victim's forgiveness without an apology among Americans and Indians.

Future directions. Most cross-cultural studies investigate differences between individualistic and collectivistic worldviews (Sandage et al, 2020; Ho & Fung, 2011; Hook et al., 2009). However, Worthington and Wade (2020) note that this broad framework may be inadequate to capture variations in behavior and beliefs surrounding apologies and forgiveness within individualistic and collectivist societies. Compared to Western societies, the context of the offence seems to matter more in non-Western cultures (Worthington & Wade, 2020). This means that to

understand cultural differences within non-Western societies, studies need to consider variations in group expectations, norms of solidarity and the need to maintain harmony within the group (Worthington & Wade, 2020). A study by Lu (2022) highlights the stark differences in the propensity to negotiate salaries between South Asians and East Asians: while East Asians avoided negotiating their salaries, South Asians were found to be more assertive in a similar situation (in line with their Western counterparts). Lu (2022) traces these differences to cultural distinctions. While face cultures (East Asians) discourage retaliation in situations of interpersonal conflict, assertiveness is valued in response to such situations in honor cultures (South Asians) and in dignity cultures (Western societies like America) (Leung & Cohen, 2011; Aslani et al 2013; Brett, 2018; Yao et al 2017). We speculate that cultural differences of this nature may also be reflected in how people respond to offences. Future studies should consider investigating such differences within Asian cultures: for instance, finding out whether there are differences in the likelihood to apologize and expectations of forgiveness among South and East Asians.

In addition, our findings reveal that there is a large deviation in the likelihood to apologize within each country: the standard deviation for the likelihood to apologize across all nine scenarios for the US Sample was 19 % for close others and 18.4 % for distant others, and the standard deviation for the India sample was 23.5% for close others and 21.2% for distant others. This means that the standard deviation of the likelihood to apologize across all scenarios for each country was around 20%. Relative to this, the 5.5% difference between both countries in the likelihood to apologize seems relatively small. This suggests that there might be much larger differences in the likelihood to apologize *within* both cultures, rather than *across* both cultures. Future research needs to investigate such possible variations within the same culture.

Conclusion

When a transgressor commits an offence that harms another individual, the transgressor may attempt to make amends by offering an apology to the victim. The transgressor may sometimes expect the victim to move on without an apology. Such expectations may influence the decision of the transgressor to offer an apology. Our exploratory study presents a cross-cultural comparison among Americans and Indians to investigate whether there are differences in the likelihood to apologize for the same type of transgression(s), and if so, what factors influence such differences. In this study, we displayed a set of nine hypothetical scenarios to the participants, who were then asked to imagine themselves as transgressors. We investigated whether cross-cultural differences exist in the transgressor's likelihood to apologize after committing the same transgression(s). We also examined the transgressor's expectations of the victim's response to each transgression (victim moving on without an apology; victim being upset because of the transgression) and the transgressor's beliefs about the relationship with the victim after the offence (offence posing a threat to the relationship; transgressor's motivation to maintain the relationship with the victim).

In our study, we detected a significant difference between Americans and Indians in the likelihood of apologizing: Americans were 5.5% more likely to apologize than Indians. Participants from both countries had on average a relatively high likelihood to apologize across all scenarios. However, we found a non-significant difference among the two samples in the expectations that the victim will move on without an apology. We also investigated whether apologies, beliefs about the victim moving on in the absence of an apology, and beliefs about the victim being upset (for both the American and Indian samples) were influenced by potential predictors such as the demographic identifiers of the transgressor (age and gender), distance

between the transgressor and victim, citizenship of the transgressor and the interaction effects of citizenship and distance. We found a significant gender effect: males were found to be 3.77% less likely to apologize than women, regardless of the citizenship of the transgressor. However, we did not observe cross-cultural differences in the likelihood to apologize based on the distance between the victim and transgressor. We also found a positive association between the likelihood to apologize and the expectation that the victim will be upset among both the American and Indian participants, but no cross-cultural differences in the transgressor's beliefs about how upset the victim will be.

Previous literature points to the need to investigate "Eastern" cultures independently (Lu, 2022). Although most cross-cultural studies adopt the dichotomous framework of individualistic and collectivist cultures, such a classification overlooks nuanced distinctions within "Western" and "Eastern" cultures that are each assumed to be largely monolithic. Future cross-cultural studies should recognize these cultural distinctions within Western and Eastern societies.

Since we recruited Indian participants using convenience sampling, the sample is not representative of the population. A limitation of our study is that the Indian sample does not represent the heterogeneity in socio-cultural norms within India. Norms surrounding apologizing and forgiving may vary among different cultures within India. In fact, the standard deviation of 20% for the likelihood to apologize across all scenarios within the Indian and American samples hints at the possible variations within each culture. Relative to the standard deviation, the 5.5% difference between both countries in the likelihood to apologize seems relatively small. This suggests that there may be larger variations in apologies *within* both cultures rather than *across* both cultures. Investigating these variations in how people respond to offences will be an important step in informing future research on social communication and conflict resolution.

Today's globalized world presents ample opportunity for cooperation and conflict in the workplace and beyond. To understand how to effectively manage and mitigate interpersonal conflict, it is useful to investigate such differences, specifically in understudied cultures.

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Appendix 1

Scenarios:

LOST BOOK

- 1(a) You lost a book you borrowed from your new flat mate.
- 1(b) You lost a book you borrowed from your elder sister.

IGNORING REQUEST FOR HELP

- 2(a) You forgot to reply to your neighbor's message asking for your help.
- 2(b) You forgot to reply to your younger brother's message asking for your help.

LATE FOR MEETING

- 3(a) You are late for a meeting with your classmate, and you keep them waiting for you for an hour.
- 3(b) You are late for a meeting with your best friend, and you keep them waiting for you for an hour.

SPILLED COFFEE

- 4(a) You spilled coffee all over your new flat mate's laptop.
- 4(b) You spilled coffee all over your elder brother's laptop.

LOST TEMPER

- 5(a) You lose your temper and yell at your new neighbor because you have a stressful day.
- 5(b) You lose your temper and yell at your mother because you have a stressful day.

BROKEN PROMISE

- 6(a) You promised to help your new colleague, but you pulled out of the commitment at the last moment.
- 6(b) You promised to help your father, but you pulled out of the commitment at the last moment.

MADE NEGATIVE COMMENTS

7(a) You make negative comments about your new flat mate in front of others.

7(b) You make negative comments about your younger brother in front of others.

GOSSIPING

8(a) Your new classmate learns that you have been gossiping about them behind their back.

8(b) Your friend learns that you have been gossiping about them behind their back.

NOT INVITING TO AN EVENT

9(a) Your new colleague finds out that you did not invite them to an event you are organizing.

9(b) Your cousin finds out that you did not invite them to an event you are organizing.

Questions:

1. How likely are you to apologize to the other person for what you did to them in the following scenarios? (0: very unlikely / almost never to apologize... 100 very likely / almost always to apologize)
 - a. Scenario #1
 - b. Scenario #2
 - c. Etc.

2. How upset do you think the other person would be by what you did to them in the following scenarios? (0: not upset at all ... 100: very upset)
 - a. Scenario #1
 - b. Scenario #2
 - c. Etc.

3. To what extent do you think that what you did to the other person in the following scenarios would pose a threat to the relationship you share with them? (0: would not pose any threat to the relationship ... 100: would pose an extreme threat to the relationship)
 - a. Scenario #1
 - b. Scenario #2
 - c. Etc.

4. To what extent would you be motivated to maintain your relationship with the other person? (0: Not at all... 100: Very)
 - a. Scenario #1
 - b. Scenario #2
 - c. Etc.

5. Imagine that you did NOT apologize to the other person for what you did to them in the following scenarios.

How likely do you think the other person would move on / let their negative feelings go if you did not apologize to them? (0: very unlikely / almost never to move on ... 100: very likely / almost always to move on)

- a. Scenario #1
- b. Scenario #2
- c. Etc.

Demographic questions:

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Another identity not listed
- Prefer not to answer

What is your age?

What is your race/ethnicity?

- White
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin
- Middle Eastern or North African
- Others (please specify)
- Prefer not to answer

What is your highest educational qualification?

- No education
- Elementary
- High school
- Some college
- Bachelors or equivalent
- Masters or equivalent
- Doctoral or equivalent

- Other (Please specify)
- Prefer not to answer

How important is religion in your life? (0: Not at all... 5: Very)

Have you ever lived abroad?