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# Apology versus defense: Antecedents and consequences☆

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**Abstract**

Participants imagined themselves in face-threatening predicaments in two studies that examined the reproach and evaluation phases of predicament management. In Study 1, participants gave accounts of their behavior after receiving hypothetical reproaches that were mild/moderate or severe. Results showed that reproach severity influenced perpetrator accounts in opposite ways for females and males. Male perpetrators became more defensive under severe reproach, whereas females became less defensive. Expectations for a future relationship were more negative under severe reproach, and this was more pronounced when the victim was an acquaintance rather than a friend. Individuals high in Self-Determination were less defensive under mild/moderate reproach, but not under severe reproach. In Study 2, participants gave evaluations after receiving hypothetical accounts that varied in responsibility-taking. Results showed that greater responsibility-taking led to more positive victim evaluations and better expected future relationships. The advantage of responsibility-taking was especially pronounced when the perpetrator was a friend, suggesting that friends are forgiven more than acquaintances when they take responsibility and apologize, but not if they fail to do so. Results are interpreted in terms of reciprocal facework and thresholds for face threat.


According to Erving Goffman (1955), humans have much emotion invested in socially-defined worth or "face." Consequently, we have dual face-maintenance motivations—a defensive orientation for saving our own face, and a protective orientation toward saving the face of others. Goffman (1955) claimed that willingness to perform and help others perform facework is the hallmark of socialization. Socialization notwithstanding, the reciprocal maintenance of face sometimes goes awry: One person fails to observe facework norms, a predicament occurs, and the faces of both perpetrator and victim are threatened. Restorative facework must be performed to restore the spoiled identities of the participants (Cupach & Metts, 1994; Goffman, 1955, 1959).

## Phases of predicament management

The process of predicament management is said to involve three phases—reproach, account, and evaluation (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985; Schonbach, 1990). During reproach, the victim challenges the social acceptability of the event; during the account, the perpetrator provides an explanation; during evaluation, the victim assesses the account and may honor it, thereby re-establishing equilibrium, or further rebuke the perpetrator, so that the disruption remains or intensifies.

The reciprocity that is inherent in facework norms should be evidenced as mutuality across phases and connections between phases. In other words, reproach should influence the account, which in turn should influence evaluation. Past empirical work, however, has focused on accounting alone. There has been much less attention to evaluation, little to reciprocity, and almost none to reproach. Given the interdependence of the phases and participants in predicament management, facework performed (or not) by someone in one phase should have important implications for subsequent facework by the other person. The purpose of the current studies was to examine more closely the reproach

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and evaluation phases of predicament management. Study 1 examined the effects of several aspects of reproach on accounting. Study 2 examined the effects of the account phase on subsequent evaluation.

## Defensive facework and reproach

Although norms prescribe mutual facework, there is evidence that defensive motivation dominates when own face threat is great. For example, when they are highly blameworthy, perpetrators provide relatively less facework for the victim, defending their own faces instead (Gonzales, Manning, & Haugen, 1992; Hodgins, Liebeskind, & Schwartz, 1996b). The face threat inherent in high blameworthiness apparently increases the priority of own face repair over victim face repair and relationship maintenance. Face needs for the self and others seem to compete, and when own face threat increases above some threshold of tolerance, defensive motivation operates.

We propose that another factor that could influence perpetrator face threat, beyond blameworthiness, is victim reproach. Reproach is inherently face-threatening because the validity of the perpetrator's behavior is challenged, bringing his or her social worth into question. However, reproach may convey varying levels of regard for the perpetrator. The threat implicit in reproach may thus be heightened or diminished by the victim's choice of reproach strategies. When victims deliver scathing reproaches, perpetrators may experience face threat beyond the taint of their own ill behavior. Consequently, they may be less able to offer accounts that mitigate the face threat to victims because of the increased and competing need to restore their own faces. An apology that might have been given freely by a perpetrator willing to acknowledge ineptitude is more difficult after being labelled a cad and a louse. Alternatively, a reproach that communicates faith in the perpetrator's integrity may mitigate the wrongdoer's face enough to allow reciprocal facework.

Essentially, we are suggesting that victim reproaches can be seen as containing facework for perpetrators. The facework offered or denied in the opening rebuke is one influence on the well-being of the perpetrator's face, determining in part which of the dual facework motivations predominates. Under severe reproach, the defensive orientation may take precedence, leading to self-protective accounting in an effort to re-establish self-worth. Conversely, a gentle rebuke should enable the perpetrator to respond from the protective orientation, offer mitigation for the victim's face threat, and provide the best hope for reconciliation.

Consistent with this symbolic interactionist view, we expected severe reproach to lead to perpetrator face threat and elicit a defensive orientation, resulting in self-protective accounting. Although there are few empirical investigations of reproach, the studies that are available support this hypothesis. For example, aggravating reproach was associated with aggravating accounts in episodes recalled by American college students (Cody & McLaughlin, 1985, Studies 1 and 2). Consistent with this, German teachers, high school students, and college students gave defensive accounts in response to severe reproach (Schonbach, 1990, pp. 121–127). Research thus suggests that severe reproach is face-threatening and results in accounts that defend the perpetrator's own face.

The reproach phase studies just cited are methodologically limited, however. For example, the Cody and McLaughlin (1985) studies were retrospective, so causal inference is not possible. And although Schonbach's (1990) studies were experimental, they included reproach conditions intended to derogate the perpetrator's sense of control and self-esteem, in order to test specific theoretical questions. No manipulation check was provided to demonstrate that the derogation actually reflected reproach severity, rather than specific threats to control and/or esteem. Thus, there is a need for sound experimental research on the effects of reproach.

Although we expected that severe reproach would lead to defensive accounting, we also expected that socially skilled perpetrators would understand that severe reproach could be a sign of future negative consequences for the relationship. Thus, receiving a severe reproach should lead to pessimism about the future relationship with the victim. In summary, we expected that facework performed by the victim in an initial reproach would be an important determinant of perpetrators' accounting and their predictions about a future relationship with the victim. A mild or moderate reproach should establish a tone of cooperative respect and minimize perpetrator face threat, thereby allowing the perpetrator to perform reciprocal facework. In contrast, perpetrators who receive severe reproaches should be less able to provide facework because of their own competing face needs, despite understanding the probable relationship consequences. And perpetrators who receive a severe reproach should expect their future relationship with the victim to be at risk.

## Other influences on face threat

Although reproach severity should increase defensiveness, we expected that individual differences also would be important. That is, some people respond defensively at even the suggestion of their imperfection, whereas others remain calm under substantial criticism. We think of individual differences as reflecting "thresholds" for face threat, or the readiness to behave defensively. Two factors were investigated that we expected to

correlate with defensiveness under reproach—motivational orientation and gender.

*General causality motivation orientation*

We expected that individual differences in general causality motivation orientation (Deci & Ryan, 1985a,b, 2002) would be an important predictor of responses to reproach. This construct is described in terms of autonomy, control, and impersonal orientations. An autonomy orientation refers to the tendency to initiate behavior out of choices based on an awareness of one's needs, feelings, and integrated goals. Empirically, autonomy is associated positively with self-evaluation, self-awareness, self-actualization, and ego development (Deci & Ryan, 1985b); consistency among attitudes, traits, and behaviors (Koestner, Bernieri, & Zuckerman, 1992); and the absence of self-serving biases (Knee & Zuckerman, 1996). A control orientation describes the tendency to seek out external controls and experience events as pressures that determine behavior and feelings. In past research, control has been related to a lack of self-awareness (Deci & Ryan, 1985b) and inconsistency among attitudes, traits, and behaviors (Koestner et al., 1992). An impersonal orientation refers to the general tendency to view desired outcomes as unattainable and to experience little intentionality. Our study focused on intentional behavior and self-determination, so only autonomy and control orientations are relevant, and impersonal orientation will not be discussed further.

According to Deci and Ryan (1985b, 2002), all humans have both autonomy and control motivation orientations. Individual differences in the degree of self-determination in motivation and behavior are a function of differing strengths of these two orientations. The highest levels of self-determination occur under high autonomy and low control orientations. All other combinations of autonomy and control orientations (high–high, low–low, and low–high) represent lower levels of self-determination.

Past research has shown self-determination in motivation to be an important predictor of interpersonal defensiveness versus openness (for a review, see Hodgins & Knee, 2002). For example, in diary records of ongoing social interaction, autonomy was associated with openness, honesty, and enjoyment of interaction (Hodgins, Koestner, & Duncan, 1996a), whereas control orientation was associated with defensiveness. Consistent with this, autonomy predicts accepting responsibility in close relationships (Patrick, Knee, & Neighbors, 2003), and using relationship-maintaining coping strategies (Knee, Patrick, Vietor, Nanayakkara, & Neighbors, 2002), whereas control orientation predicts the use of avoidant coping (Knee et al., 2002). A similar relation between motivation and defense is seen in attributions: People high on autonomy and low on control orientation do not show the self-serving bias, which is one type of cognitive defensiveness (Knee & Zuckerman, 1996). Finally, and most relevant here, autonomous perpetrators are less defensive than others in accounting. They offer more mitigation for victims' face threat and are less deceptive relative to control-oriented or impersonal perpetrators (Hodgins et al., 1996b).

Based on these findings, we hypothesized that high self-determination in motivation is associated with a higher threshold for face threat. Thus, self-determination was expected to predict responses to reproach, with high self-determination (high autonomy and low control orientations) negatively related to defensiveness.

*Gender differences*

Past accounting research shows robust gender differences, with males providing less mitigation than females (e.g., Baxter, 1984; Cupach, Metts, & Hazleton, 1986; Gonzales, Pederson, Manning, & Wetter, 1990). This has been interpreted as greater male defensiveness (Schonbach, 1990) and a lower threshold for face threat among males (Hodgins et al., 1996b). If males have a lower threshold, then they should be less tolerant of the threat implicit in severe reproach, and thus respond more defensively to severe reproach relative to females. The only empirical support for this prediction appears in a Schonbach (1990) study. He found that after severe reproach from a male teacher, German boys gave more defensive accounts, whereas girls became less defensive (pp. 134–135, APS IV). It is not clear from the design of that study, however, whether severe reproach from a same-gender versus opposite-gender teacher influenced defensiveness, or whether it was just a gender difference in defensiveness. Furthermore, the results were not replicated in two other samples (Schonbach, 1990), so the source of this gender difference remains uncertain, and thus requires further investigation. Given the lack of research on reproach, we relied on research showing greater use of aggravation by males during accounting, and our belief that male defensiveness represents a lower threshold for threat. We therefore expected that defensiveness to severe reproach would be more pronounced among males than females.

## Relationship closeness and facework

We expected that relationship closeness would attenuate facework norms and motivate facework directed at maintaining friendship (cf. Goffman, 1955). Consistent with this, research shows that past relationship investments are an important predictor of commitment (e.g., Drigotas, Safstrom, & Gentilia, 1999; Lin & Rusbult, 1995; Lydon, Pierce, & O'Regan, 1997). A similar prediction could be made on the basis of a communal versus

exchange relationship distinction (Clark & Grote, 1998; Clark & Mills, 1993). That is, communal relationships should motivate greater accounting effort than exchange relationships. Other research also is consistent with our hypothesis. For example, individuals are more willing to accept unequal outcomes (Morgan & Sawyer, 1967) and less integrative solutions (Thompson, 1998) in negotiations with closer others, are less influenced by preference functions when negotiating with friends (Northcraft, Preston, Neale, Kim, & Thomas-Hunt, 1998), use more polite tactics when making face-threatening statements in closer relationships (Baxter, 1984), perform more facework when delivering face-threatening requests in intimate relationships (Lim & Bowers, 1991), and provide more mitigation in accounts to friends than acquaintances (Hodgins et al., 1996b).

In contrast, less circumspect facework may be required when there is little social distance (i.e., greater closeness) between participants because informal sociolinguistic rules are used (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Scott & Lyman, 1968). Only one study has shown this effect (Hamilton & Hagiwara, 1992), however, and its design confounded predicament severity with relationship closeness. As a result, it was not possible to know which variable caused the resultant decrease in facework. The soundest evidence thus indicates that greater accounting effort is used in closer relationships, reflecting stronger underlying facework norms. The effect of closeness and reproach on accounting has never been examined, but we expected that the effect of closeness on accounting might extend to reproach. Perpetrators thus were expected to show greater tolerance of severe reproach from friends than acquaintances.

## Overview and hypotheses

Study 1 was designed to examine the effect of victim reproach on perpetrator accounts. Mild or moderate reproaches contain some facework for perpetrators, whereas severe reproaches fail to honor perpetrator face needs and add further threat. Thus, we expected wrongdoers to respond to mild or moderate reproach with reciprocal facework, but to respond defensively (with less facework) to severe reproach. Reciprocal facework is evidenced by longer accounts, more frequent and complex mitigating elements, and fewer and less complex aggravating elements.

We also expected reproach severity to produce more defensiveness among perpetrators who were low in self-determination, and among those who were male, because these two variables are probably associated with lower thresholds for face threat. In contrast, greater motivation to maintain closer relationships should lead perpetrators to attenuate their defensiveness in predicaments with friends compared to acquaintances.

Beyond accounting defensiveness, we also expected reproach to influence perpetrators' expectations about future relationships. To the extent that perpetrators use the tone and severity of reproach to gauge a victim's feelings and attitudes, they should use that information to predict their future relationship with the victim. Thus, socially astute perpetrators should be pessimistic about future relationships after a severe reproach, compared to a mild or moderate reproach.

## Study 1

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

Eighty-five undergraduates (42 women, 43 men), aged 17–19 participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

#### *Materials*

*Predicament questionnaire*. The predicament questionnaire contained four hypothetical scenarios, each describing a predicament caused by the participant with a person of the same gender and containing that person's reproach. The scenarios, adopted from Gonzales et al. (1992), included situations in which the perpetrator was overhead gossiping, turned another person's paper in late, lost a computer disk, and had an accident in a borrowed car. Relationship closeness was varied so that each scenario had one version in which the victim was a friend, and another in which the victim was an acquaintance.

Each scenario also had three versions corresponding to different levels of reproach severity. Mild reproaches involved acknowledgement of the predicament, a statement of faith (e.g., "I don't believe you would hurt me intentionally"), and a polite request for information. Moderate reproaches also included an expression of distress (e.g., "I am really upset...two letter grades is a big difference!"). Severe reproaches included acknowledgement of the predicament, harsh blame (e.g., "It is totally inconsiderate of you to do this to someone else's property!!), and a decidedly impolite request (e.g., "Would you MIND telling me what happened!?").

In order to provide a manipulation check, participants responded on 9-point scales to questions about reproach severity (1 = very mild, 9 = very severe) and relationship closeness (1 = not at all close, 9 = very close) in the scenarios.

*Future outcome questionnaire*. This questionnaire included four questions about the future relationship between the perpetrator and the victim (Gonzales et al., 1992), each with a 9-point (1–9) response scale. Items included how much the relationship would suffer, how much the perpetrator's image would suffer, how much

the victim would hold the perpetrator responsible, and how angry the victim would be. Responses were summed to create an Expected Future Relationship variable (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$).

*General causality orientations questionnaire (GCOS).* The GCOS (Deci & Ryan, 1985a) consists of three subscales measuring motivational orientation (autonomy, control, and impersonal). Impersonal orientation is not relevant to the current study and thus is not discussed further. We used the expanded 17-vignette version of this measure (see Ryan, 1989). Each vignette describes a situation and has two items, one for autonomy and one for control. Participants used 7-point (1–7) scales to rate the likelihood of responding in each of the two ways. Responses were then summed, resulting in scores representing the strength of autonomy and control motivational orientations.

The autonomy and control subscales have been unrelated in past research (Deci & Ryan, 1985b) and were uncorrelated in our sample, $r = .12$. The subscales have shown good internal reliability ($\alpha$s = .75–.90) and test–retest reliability ($r$'s = .75–.85) in the past (Blustein, 1988; Deci & Ryan, 1985b; Vallerand, Blais, LaCouture, & Deci, 1987). Internal consistencies in this study were .84 and .70 for the autonomy and control subscales, respectively.

On the basis of standardized scores, participants were divided into four groups representing each combination of low and high GCOS autonomy and control orientations—high–low, high–high, low–low, and low–high. This procedure produced groups of 22, 22, 20, and 21 individuals in the high–low, high–high, low–low, and low–high categories, respectively. Past research (Knee & Zuckerman, 1996, 1998) has shown that individuals who are highly self-determining (i.e., high autonomy and low control motivational orientation) are less defensive than individuals who are lower on self-determination (i.e., all other combinations of high and low autonomy and control orientations). Thus, we refer to the high-low group as highly self-determined, and compared it to the other three groups (combined) to examine the effect of self-determination on accounting.

*Procedure*

Participants were randomly assigned to conditions and run in small groups. Each participant read four scenarios, each representing one level of reproach severity (mild, moderate, or severe). Two of these scenarios described the victim as a friend and two described the victim as an acquaintance. The closeness variable was counterbalanced within reproach severity; we administered the friend and acquaintance versions of each scenario an equal number of times at each reproach severity level. Two orders of presentation for closeness (F, A, F, A versus A, F, A, F) were used and these were counterbalanced within each reproach severity level. The four scenarios appeared in a constant order.[1]

Instructions for the Predicament Questionnaire explained that we were interested in what people say during predicaments. Participants imagined themselves in each situation with a same-gender victim and wrote as if speaking directly to the victim. They wrote accounts and completed the Future Outcome Questionnaire for each scenario before continuing to the next scenario. Participants then completed the manipulation check, the GCOS, and a Thematic Apperception Test (McClelland, 1986), which is not relevant to this study and will not be discussed further. Finally participants were debriefed and thanked for their help.

*Coding procedure*

We used a taxonomy of perpetrator reactions to code accounts (Schonbach, 1990, modified by Gonzales et al., 1992, Appendix B; Hodgins et al., 1996b, Footnote 2). The taxonomy has four general categories (concessions, excuses, justifications, and refusals), each of which subsumes several more specific categories. There are ten concession categories (e.g., explicit acknowledgement of own responsibility, offer of restitution), six excuse categories (e.g., appeal to own human shortcomings, appeal to own effort during event), seven justification categories (e.g., minimization of damage, appeal to the role of victim in the event), and nine refusal categories (e.g., unrestricted attribution of guilt to others, denial of self as agent of mishap).

Accounts were coded by two judges who were trained with pilot accounts and were unaware of the hypotheses. Following previous practice with the taxonomy (Gonzales et al., 1992; Hodgins et al., 1996b; Schonbach, 1990), judges worked independently to divide each account into elements. Elements were defined as verbal phrases with discrete meaning, regardless of grammar and punctuation. Judges then assigned a code to each element independently. Because they divided accounts into elements independently, judges sometimes derived different numbers of elements for accounts. Consequently, common methods of assessing reliability that require each judge to rate the same number of elements (e.g., Cohen's $\kappa$; Siegel & Castellan, 1988, pp. 284–291) could not be applied to these data.

[1] In this study, participants reacted somewhat differently to the four scenarios. Because the scenarios appeared in a constant order, we cannot know whether the scenario content or order caused these effects. In future studies, counterbalancing for scenario order would be desirable. However, there were no significant interactions of scenario with reproach severity, which was the main variable of interest. We thus decided to collapse across the four scenarios to calculate the number and complexity of concessions, excuses, justifications, and refusals.

Following previous practice, interjudge reliability thus was estimated according to Holsti's concordance formula (North, Holsti, Zaninovich, & Zinnes, 1963, p. 49)

$$C = 2 \times \text{number identical categories assigned} \,/(\text{number categories coded } J_1 + \text{number categories coded } J_2).$$

This calculation takes into account whether judges divided the account into elements similarly (see denominator of formula) and whether they used an identical code for each element (see numerator). Lack of agreement on either case results in lower reliability. Codes were considered identical if both judges used the same category. Concordance ranges from 0 (no agreement) to 1.00 (perfect agreement). In this study, mean concordance was .86, .88, .84, .88 for scenarios 1–4, respectively, and .86 across scenarios. Concordance was 1.00 for 51% of accounts and zero for less than 1%.[2] Differences between judges were resolved through discussion to produce common divisions of accounts into element and codes for use as dependent variables. The number of elements in the accounts ranged from 1 to 11 ($M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.40$).

According to past theoretical models (McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983b; McLaughlin, Cody, & Rosenstein, 1983a; Schonbach, 1990), concessions, excuses, justifications, and refusals can be arranged along a mitigation-aggravation continuum. Concessions are the most mitigating for the victim's face threat (but aggravating for the perpetrator's), whereas refusals are the most aggravating for the victim (although they repair the perpetrator's face threat). Much past research supports this model (Gonzales, 1992; Gonzales, Haugen, & Manning, 1994; McLaughlin et al., 1983a; Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989), showing that concessions are the most effective at reducing victims' anger, excuses are less somewhat less effective, justifications even less effective, and refusals are the least effective of all. Following this model and previous practice (e.g., Hodgins et al., 1996b) we thus combined the four taxonomy categories by calculating the number of mitigating (concession and excuse) and aggravating (justification and refusal) elements.

We recognize that (1) various elements might provide different degrees of mitigation and aggravation, (2) the four element types probably represent an interval rather than ordinal scale, and (3) the four elements might not combine in a linear fashion.[3] However, we were interested in relative rather than absolute differences between mitigating and aggravating accounts. It seems safe to assume that two mitigating elements provide more facework than only one.

## Results

### Data analytic strategy

Analyses of variance were performed with the between-subjects variables of reproach severity (mild/moderate or severe), self-determination (low or high), and gender, and the within-subjects variables of element type (mitigating and aggravating) and relationship (friend and acquaintance). Dependent variables included the number of elements used, the complexity of elements, and expected future relationship outcomes. We also calculated another independent variable, based on our expectation from a previous study (Hodgins et al., 1996b), that people who use aggravation do not understand the consequences of failing to provide facework. Specifically, we calculated a "Used Aggravation" variable to distinguish participants who did and did not use aggravation. This variable was only used to analyze expected future relationship outcomes.

### Manipulation checks

The manipulation check revealed that mild and moderate reproaches were rated similarly ($M = 5.34$, 5.65) and significantly lower than severe reproaches ($M = 6.73$). Thus, the original three levels of approach were collapsed into two, with mild/moderate reproaches representing lower severity. The resulting analysis showed that mild/moderate reproaches ($M = 5.50$) were rated significantly lower than severe reproaches ($M = 6.73$) across scenarios, $F(1, 81) = 14.72$, $p < .0001$, $r = .39$.[4] Furthermore, friends were rated significantly closer than acquaintances ($M$s = 6.67, 5.73)

[2] Like Cohen's $\kappa$, effective interrater reliabilities (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1984, pp. 162–166) correct for chance agreement between coders. When effective interrater reliabilities were calculated as an alternative to the Holsti's concordance, the results also showed high reliability (.93, .88, .87, and .92 for concessions, excuses, justifications, and refusals, respectively).

[3] Classic simulated sampling studies suggest that the parametric statistics of $F$ and $t$ test are robust even when the assumptions are violated (e.g., Boneau, 1960; Scheffe', 1959), making them distribution-free tests in practice. In a computer-simulation study, Zimmerman and Zumbo (1989) compared nonparametric tests on data transformed to ranks with parametric tests on the original measures. They showed that the two tests gave identical results for various distributions and sample sizes, and concluded that parametric statistics can be used with ranked (i.e., ordinal) data. In this study, the numbers of mitigating and aggravating elements were thus used as variables in analyses of variance.

[4] An estimate of effect size, the Pearson $r$, was computed as

$$r = \sqrt{\frac{F(1, \_)}{F(1, \_) + df_{\text{error}}}} \text{(Rosenthal \& Rosnow, 1984)}.$$

The magnitude of the effect is indicated by $r^2$, an estimate of the variance accounted for. According to Cohen and Cohen (1983, p. 61) $r$s of .10, .30, and .50 correspond to small, medium, and large effects, respectively.

Table 1
Means and standard deviations for number of elements (Study 1)

| | | Mitigating | | | | Aggravating | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Friend | | Acquaintance | | Friend | | Acquaintance | |
| | | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| *Mild/moderate reproach* | | | | | | | | | |
| Low Self-Determination | *M* | 3.13 | 3.91 | 3.45 | 3.59 | .75 | .46 | .53 | .59 |
| | *SD* | 1.12 | 1.71 | 1.15 | 1.09 | .99 | .46 | .66 | .81 |
| High Self-Determination | *M* | 4.63 | 4.83 | 4.69 | 5.17 | .06 | .33 | .13 | .25 |
| | *SD* | 1.51 | 1.57 | 1.41 | 1.44 | .18 | .41 | .23 | .61 |
| *Severe reproach* | | | | | | | | | |
| Low Self-Determination | *M* | 5.00 | 3.50 | 4.56 | 3.50 | .22 | 1.04 | .56 | .75 |
| | *SD* | 2.08 | 1.54 | 1.26 | .98 | .26 | 1.79 | .53 | .89 |
| High Self-Determination | *M* | 4.20 | 3.17 | 5.30 | 2.83 | .30 | .50 | .10 | .50 |
| | *SD* | 1.15 | 1.26 | .76 | 1.26 | .45 | .87 | .22 | .87 |

across scenarios, $F(1, 81) = 15.87$, $p < .0001$, $r = .40$. No other main effect or interaction was significant.

*Accounting*

*Number of elements.* There was clear evidence (see Tables 1 and 2) for a protective orientation on the type of element used. As expected, perpetrators used mitigation ($M = 4.09$) more frequently than aggravation ($M = .44$; see the Element Type main effect). This is consistent with much past research showing that perpetrators take responsibility for wrongdoing more than they deny it. However, in accordance with predictions, the protective orientation was more pronounced for highly self-determined individuals, who showed more frequent use of mitigation ($M = 4.35$) and less frequent use of aggravation ($M = .27$), compared to less self-determined individuals ($M$s = 3.83 and .61; see the Element Type × Self-Determination interaction). This two-way interaction was further moderated by Reproach Severity, such that the greater preference for mitigating accounts among self-determined individuals was less pronounced for severe reproach ($M$s = 3.88, .35 for mitigating and aggravating) than for mild/moderate reproach ($M$s = 4.83, .19; for those low in Self-Determination, $M = 4.14$, .64 for severe reproach, and 3.52, .58 for mild/moderate reproach). Although it was not anticipated, this effect suggests that the low defensiveness among highly self-determined individuals attenuates under severe reproach. Although highly self-determined individuals have a higher threshold for face threat compared to less self-determined individuals, they also can become defensive under severe reproach.

In addition, there were gender differences in accounting in the predicted direction of higher male defensiveness. Females used more mitigation ($M = 4.37$) and less aggravation ($M = .33$) than did males ($M$s = 3.81 and .55; see the Element Type × Gender interaction), and this effect was further moderated by Severity. Specifically, females were *less* defensive under severe reproach than under mild/moderate reproach: They responded to severe reproach by increasing the number of mitigating and decreasing the number of aggravating elements ($M$s = 4.76, .29) relative to mild/moderate reproach ($M$s = 3.97, .37). In contrast, males were *more* defensive under severe reproach: They attended more to their own faces by decreasing mitigation and increasing aggravation for the victim's face ($M$s = 3.25, .70) relative to mild/moderate reproach ($M$s = 4.38, .41). Tests of the simple effects showed that the Severity × Element Type interaction was significant in opposite directions for females, $F(1, 38) = 4.24$, $p < .05$, $r = .32$, and for males $F(1, 39) = 6.92$, $p < .01$, $r = .39$.

In contrast to previous work, there was no evidence that closeness increased perpetrator effort.[5] There were two effects that did not include the Element Type variable and thus reflected only the total number of elements used (account length). First, although not predicted, individuals high on Self-Determination gave relatively shorter accounts under severe ($M = 4.23$) than under mild/moderate reproach ($M = 5.02$), whereas individuals low on Self-Determination gave relatively longer accounts under severe ($M = 4.78$) than under mild/moderate reproach ($M = 4.10$; see the Severity × Self-Determination interaction). Account length has been interpreted as an index of accounting effort, with shorter accounts reflecting the lower effort seen under defense (see Gonzales et al., 1990, 1992; Hodgins et al., 1996b). In past research, this interpretation was supported because the dependent variable of length showed the same pattern of relations with the independent variables as did the number of mitigating and aggravating elements.

[5] Hodgins et al. (1996b) found that friends provided greater mitigation for friends than acquaintances. The difference in results may involve the inclusion of reproach severity in our research, or some unidentified research parameter. A full understanding of accounting to friends awaits further investigation.

Table 2
Results of analyses of variance on the number of elements (Study 1)

| | *df* | *F* | Effect size |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Between subjects effects* | | | |
| Severity | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Self-Determination | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Severity × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | 4.11* | .23 |
| Severity × Gender | 1, 77 | 4.55* | .24 |
| Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Severity × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| *Within subjects effects* | | | |
| Element Type | 1, 77 | 464.11*** | .93 |
| Relationship | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Relationship | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Severity | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | 6.49** | .28 |
| Element Type × Gender | 1, 77 | 5.27* | .25 |
| Relationship × Severity | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | 1.17 | |
| Relationship × Gender | 1, 77 | 1.42 | |
| Element Type × Relationship × Severity | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Relationship × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Relationship × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Severity × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | 6.06** | .27 |
| Element Type × Severity × Gender | 1, 77 | 11.31*** | .36 |
| Element Type × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Severity × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Severity × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Relationship × Severity × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Relationship × Severity × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Relationship × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Severity × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Severity × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | 1.23 | |
| Relationship × Element Type × Severity × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | 3.63+ | .21 |

*$p < .05$.
**$p < .01$.
***$p < .001$.
+$p < .10$.

Interpreting account length as effort does not seem to fit the current interaction very well, however. Instead, we suggest that highly self-determined individuals respond to severe reproach by withdrawing, thus providing shorter accounts, rather than attacking. This interpretation is supported by the means for the significant 3-way interaction with Element Type reported earlier. Specifically, under severe reproach, highly self-determined individuals decreased the number of mitigating elements substantially, while only very slightly increasing the number of aggravating elements. In contrast, individuals low on self-determination increased both mitigation and aggravation substantially under severe, relative to mild/moderate reproach, suggesting that they were quite engaged under severe reproach, indeed, perhaps ready to do battle. This effect requires replication, however, given this post hoc interpretation.

Second, females gave relatively longer accounts under severe ($M = 5.06$) than under mild/moderate reproach ($M = 4.34$), whereas males gave relatively shorter accounts under severe ($M = 3.94$) than under mild/moderate reproach ($M = 4.78$; see the Severity × Gender interaction). Given the pattern of mitigating and aggravating elements in the three-way interaction with Element Type reported earlier, the shorter length of males' accounts here is most parsimoniously interpreted as defensiveness, consistent with our predictions about gender.

*Complexity*. Account complexity (see Tables 3 and 4) can be conceptualized as creative accounting effort. It requires more resourcefulness to provide three different elements (e.g., I'm sorry; I was careless because I was tired. Please allow me to pay for damages) than to repeat one three times (e.g., I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I am really sorry). Complexity was defined as the percentage of available categories used (see Gonzales et al., 1992) and was calculated separately for mitigating and aggravating elements. In the current study, judges used

Table 3
Means and standard deviations for element complexity (Study 1)

| | | Mitigating | | | | Aggravating | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Friend | | Acquaintance | | Friend | | Acquaintance | |
| | | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| *Mild/moderate reproach* | | | | | | | | | |
| Low Self-Determination | *M* | 20.39 | 23.78 | 21.92 | 21.85 | 3.67 | 2.58 | 2.50 | 3.03 |
| | *SD* | 6.50 | 8.45 | 6.13 | 5.62 | 3.88 | 2.51 | 3.03 | 3.55 |
| High Self-Determination | *M* | 28.37 | 26.92 | 29.81 | 30.13 | .42 | 1.67 | .83 | 1.11 |
| | *SD* | 8.46 | 7.69 | 6.42 | 8.22 | 1.18 | 1.83 | 1.54 | 2.72 |
| *Severe reproach* | | | | | | | | | |
| Low Self-Determination | *M* | 27.78 | 21.15 | 25.21 | 23.40 | 1.48 | 4.44 | 2.59 | 3.89 |
| | *SD* | 9.38 | 9.49 | 6.11 | 5.30 | 1.76 | 4.34 | 2.22 | 4.46 |
| High Self-Determination | *M* | 26.92 | 20.51 | 30.00 | 20.51 | 1.33 | 3.33 | .67 | 3.33 |
| | *SD* | 9.02 | 8.88 | 3.22 | 9.68 | 1.83 | 5.77 | 1.49 | 5.77 |

Table 4
Results of analyses of variance on element complexity (Study 1)

| | *df* | *F* | Effect size (*r*) |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Between subjects effects* | | | |
| Severity | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Self-Determination | 1, 77 | 1.37 | |
| Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Severity × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | 2.72 | .18 |
| Severity × Gender | 1, 77 | 1.79 | .15 |
| Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Severity × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| *Within subjects effects* | | | |
| Element Type | 1, 77 | 672.68*** | .90 |
| Relationship | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Relationship | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Severity | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | 7.89** | .30 |
| Element Type × Gender | 1, 77 | 5.27* | .25 |
| Relationship × Severity | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | 1.13 | |
| Relationship × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Relationship × Severity | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Relationship × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Relationship × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Severity × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | 4.90* | .24 |
| Element Type × Severity × Gender | 1, 77 | 6.12** | .27 |
| Element Type × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | 1.07 | |
| Relationship × Severity × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Severity × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Relationship × Severity × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Relationship × Severity × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Relationship × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Element Type × Severity × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Severity × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | 1.25 | |
| Relationship × Element Type × Severity × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | 2.68 | .18 |

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

only 13 (10 concession and 3 excuse) of the 16 mitigating categories in the taxonomy; and they used only 15 (7 justification and 8 refusal) of the 16 aggravating categories in the taxonomy. We calculated complexity scores as a percentage of the total number of mitigating and aggravating codes used by our judges (thus omitting

taxonomy codes not used in our study). Hence, an individual who used 5 of the 13 mitigating codes and 1 of the 15 aggravating codes received complexity scores of 38.46 and 6.67, respectively.

The results for complexity mirror those of the number of elements used. Perpetrators used significantly greater complexity in mitigation ($M = 24.92$) than aggravation ($M = 2.31$; see the Element Type main effect). This occurred partly because the greater overall use of mitigation resulted in a higher percentage of available codes being used for mitigation than for aggravation. But more importantly, the greater complexity of mitigation was more pronounced for highly self-determining individuals ($M$s = 26.65 and 1.59 for mitigation and aggravation, respectively) than for less self-determining ones ($M$s = 23.19 and 3.02; see the Element Type × Self-Determination interaction). This is consistent with our predictions and lends further support to the hypothesis that self-determination is associated with a higher threshold for defensiveness. This two-way interaction was further modified by an interaction with Severity, showing that the greater complexity of mitigation among highly self-determining individuals was more pronounced under mild/moderate reproach ($M$s = 28.81, 1.01) than under severe reproach ($M$s = 24.49, 2.17). For individuals low in self-determination, means were 21.98 and 2.94 for mild/moderate reproach, and 24.39 and 3.10 for severe reproach.

Consistent with the hypothesized greater defense of males, complexity also showed gender differences. Females used more complex mitigation ($M = 26.30$) and less complex aggravation ($M = 1.69$) than did males ($M$s = 23.53 and 2.93; see the Element Type × Gender interaction). In terms of defense, females responded to severe reproach with more complex mitigation ($M = 27.48$) and less complex aggravation ($M = 1.52$) than they did to mild/moderate reproach ($M$s = 25.12 and 1.85). In contrast, males attended more to their own faces and less to the victims' faces by using less complex mitigation (21.39) and more complex aggravation ($M = 3.75$) when they were severely reproached than when they received mild/moderate reproaches ($M$s = 25.67 and 2.10; see the Element Type × Severity × Gender interaction).

*Expected future relationship*

*Independent variables*. The results for expected future relationship are shown in Tables 5 and 6. Wrongdoers who received severe reproach made more pessimistic future predictions ($M = 3.78$) than did those who received mild/moderate reproaches ($M = 4.37$; see the Severity main effect). Perpetrators apparently understand that a severe reproach bodes ill regarding the victim's opinion of them. Interestingly, there was no evidence that males understood this less than did females (the Severity × Gender interaction was not significant). Hence, although males were more defensive in accounting after severe reproach, they were not less aware of the relationship peril.

Although not predicted, there also was a main effect of Self-Determination, such that participants high in self-determination made more pessimistic future relationship predictions ($M = 3.77$) than did those low on self-determination ($M = 4.38$). This relative difference between low and high self-determination individuals did not interact with Severity ($F < 1$). Thus, it simply indicates that highly self-determined individuals expected worse future relationships than those low in self-determination when predicaments occurred, regardless of the victim's reproach. It is not possible to tell from this result whether high or low self-determination individuals are more accurate at relationship prediction—all we know is that highly self-determined individuals are more pessimistic.

Although there was no main effect of Relationship, perpetrators combined relationship closeness and

Table 5
Means and standard deviations for expected future outcomes (Study 1)

| | | Did not use aggravation | | | | Used aggravation | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Friend | | Acquaintance | | Friend | | Acquaintance | |
| | | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| *Mild/moderate reproach* | | | | | | | | | |
| Low Self-Determination | *M* | 4.25 | 3.96 | 4.04 | 4.29 | 5.01 | 4.47 | 4.91 | 4.91 |
| | *SD* | .84 | 2.10 | 1.07 | 1.75 | 1.11 | .98 | .78 | 1.20 |
| High Self-Determination | *M* | 3.66 | 3.81 | 3.94 | 3.81 | 4.06 | 4.19 | 4.75 | 4.63 |
| | *SD* | 1.32 | 1.50 | 1.42 | 2.03 | .80 | .79 | 1.24 | 1.16 |
| *Severe reproach* | | | | | | | | | |
| Low Self-Determination | *M* | 4.25 | 3.81 | 3.75 | 3.31 | 3.98 | 4.44 | 4.19 | 4.09 |
| | *SD* | .43 | 1.15 | 1.00 | .27 | 1.07 | 1.01 | 1.19 | 1.40 |
| High Self-Determination | *M* | 3.31 | 3.25 | 3.63 | 3.25 | 3.88 | 4.88 | 2.25 | 4.25 |
| | *SD* | .27 | .00 | .88 | .53 | 1.15 | .00 | .82 | .00 |

*Note*. Higher numbers indicate more positive expected future outcome.

Table 6
Results of analyses of variance on expected future outcome (Study 1)

| | *df* | *F* | Effect size (*r*) |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Between subjects effects* | | | |
| Severity | 1, 77 | 5.60* | .26 |
| Self-Determination | 1, 77 | 6.01** | .27 |
| Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Severity × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Severity × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Severity × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| *Within subjects effects* | | | |
| Relationship | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Aggravation | 1, 69 | 3.67+ | .22 |
| Relationship × Aggravation | 1, 69 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Severity | 1, 77 | 3.99* | .22 |
| Relationship × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Aggravation × Severity | 1, 69 | <1 | |
| Aggravation × Self-Determination | 1, 69 | <1 | |
| Aggravation × Gender | 1, 69 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Severity × Self-Determination | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Severity × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Aggravation × Severity | 1, 69 | 1.01 | |
| Relationship × Aggravation × Self-Determination | 1, 69 | 1.03 | |
| Relationship × Aggravation × Gender | 1, 69 | <1 | |
| Aggravation × Severity × Self-Determination | 1, 69 | <1 | |
| Aggravation × Severity × Gender | 1, 69 | 1.36 | |
| Aggravation × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 69 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Aggravation × Severity × Self-Determination | 1, 69 | 2.15 | |
| Relationship × Aggravation × Severity × Gender | 1, 69 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Aggravation × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 69 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Severity × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 77 | 1.82 | |
| Aggravation × Severity × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 69 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Element Type × Severity × Self-Determination × Gender | 1, 69 | <1 | |

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
+ $p < .10$.

severity in estimating future outcomes (see the Relationship × Severity interaction). The relationship damage foreseen after severe reproach was more pronounced when the victim was an acquaintance ($M = 3.60$) than a friend ($M = 3.96$), whereas under mild/moderate reproach, the direction was reversed—worse relationships were expected with acquaintances ($M = 4.49$) than with friends ($M = 4.25$). The perpetrators apparently believed that friendship would buffer and preserve their relationship, despite their failure to provide greater facework for friends.

*The use of aggravation.* Just over two-thirds of the perpetrators (69.4%) used aggravation at least once. We calculated a categorical variable to reflect this use (1 = did not use, 2 = used) and included it in an analysis of variance. We expected that wrongdoers who added insult to injury with face-threatening accounts would be egocentrically oblivious to the consequences. This was true, although only marginally significant ($p < .06$). Perhaps those who used aggravation expected more positive futures ($N = 59$, $M = 4.30$) than did those who did not use aggravation ($N = 26$, $M = 3.77$; see the Aggravation main effect).

We also examined whether expectations of future relationships were predicted by the *amount* of aggravation those 59 participants used. Preliminary analyses indicated that neither gender nor any two-way interaction added to the multiple *r*. Therefore, hierarchical regression analysis was performed using Severity, Self-Determination, and the Number of Aggravating Elements as predictors, and Expected Future Relationship as the criterion. Together, the predictors produced a total $r = .482$, $r^2 = .232$, $F(3, 55) = 5.54$, $p < .01$. The number of aggravating elements added significantly to the equation ($r^2$ change $= .056$, $F = 4.04$, $p < .05$). As shown by a positive standardized $\beta$ coefficient (.24), greater use of aggravation predicted significantly more positive future relationship expectations.

These findings show that an unrealistic understanding of relationship processes accompanies the use of

conflict-escalating accounting and that greater use of such accounting is associated with less understanding. Those who fail to follow what Goffman (1955, p. 216) referred to as facework "traffic rules" may not even understand the rules. We speculate that individuals with a low threshold for face threat are chronically self-protective. This defensive interpersonal stance interferes with processing information and acquiring social skills, including foresight of relational consequences. Alternatively, those who use aggravation may anticipate its impact, but later reduce their dissonance by reinterpreting the situation in a less damaging light. Either process precludes an understanding of the other person's perspective.

### *Discussion*

#### *Accounting and motivational orientation*

The results for the GCOS were consistent with past studies and with our hypothesis that self-determination is associated with less interpersonal defensiveness. High self-determination (high autonomy and low control orientations) related negatively to the amount and complexity of defense in accounting. However, this relationship was less pronounced under severe reproach than under low and moderate reproach, suggesting that under severe face threat, highly self-determining individuals do become defensive. It appears that the defensive response of highly self-determined people is to withdraw, by giving shorter accounts, rather than to attack the victim (by using more aggravating elements).

This pattern of results supports our claim that self-determination is associated with a higher threshold for face threat. We think that this occurs because individuals who are lower on self-determination are motivated by factors other than internally integrated needs and goals. Their external perceived locus of causality precludes the possibility of experiencing trust in their own self-regulation. This lack of security leaves highly control-oriented individuals vulnerable to experiencing threat readily, and makes them quick to defend against it. In contrast, perpetrators who are highly self-determined regulate their own responses with an awareness of the other person's needs when they receive reproaches that contain facework (mild or moderate reproaches). They become defensive only under severe reproach.

#### *Accounting and gender differences*

The results of Study 1 showed a profound gender difference in responses to reproach, one that has received little or no previous attention. Males showed the predicted defensive reciprocation under severe reproach, and took less responsibility when victims gave harsh rebukes rather than mild and moderate ones. Although we expected females to be less defensive, their responses actually showed the reverse pattern: Under severe reproach, females were more likely not to reciprocate conflict-escalating reproaches, but to reply with de-escalating facework, as if operating from the protective orientation (Goffman, 1955). Together, the results supported our hypothesis that males have a lower threshold for face threat.

It is important to recall that this gender difference, like all behavioral gender differences, was relative and not absolute. The defensiveness of males and females overlapped considerably, as evidenced by the number of aggravating elements used (males, range = 0–16; females, range = 0–11). The gender difference nonetheless was substantial enough to produce a medium effect size, and simple effects in opposite directions for males and females. Given the considerable practical importance of small and medium effects in real life outcomes (e.g., see Eagly, 1995; Prentice & Miller, 1992), this relative gender difference probably has real and notable relational consequences.

#### *Accounting and relationship closeness*

Although perpetrators did not offer greater mitigation to friends, ironically, they used closeness to predict future relationships. Perpetrators apparently took severe reproach from friends with a grain of salt and expected brighter future relationships than with acquaintances. Past investments were used to predict that friendships would survive, despite the failure of perpetrators to increase mitigation to friends. It is not clear, however, that victims discount conflict in a similar manner when they consider future relationships. Perpetrators' optimism about their friends' forgiveness may represent an egocentric perspective, which, according to Schonbach (1990) is highly characteristic of humans in predicament management. One purpose of Study 2 was to examine victims' evaluations of accounts from perpetrators who were friends and acquaintances.

### *Victim evaluation*

We hypothesized that perpetrator facework (or the lack of it) in accounting influences victims' evaluations of perpetrators. Past research shows that apologies are considered the most helpful remedial move (Holtgraves, 1989, Study 3), and the most appropriate method for coping with embarrassment (Cupach et al., 1986). Furthermore, apology is expected—offenders who do not apologize are derogated by onlookers (Ungar, 1981).

Other account types may also be effective for managing conflict. For example, excuses sometimes reduce responsibility attributions (Riordan, Marlin, & Kellogg, 1983b; Wood & Mitchell, 1981), especially "good" excuses involving external and uncontrollable factors (Weiner, Amirkan, Folkes, & Verette, 1987). Excuses sometimes work against perpetrators, however. Students and politicians who make excuses are viewed more negatively (Folkes & Morgenstern, 1981), as are confederates with

poor excuses (Weiner et al., 1987). Justifications may decrease the perception of wrongdoing, but they also lead to more negative predictions about future behavior than do excuses (Riordan et al., 1983b). At least one study found that denials produced the most positive wrongdoer evaluations; hence, observers sometimes believe denials (Riordan, Marlin, & Gidwani, 1983a).

From the perpetrator's perspective, apologies are most acceptable if the goal is to maintain the relationship (Hupka, Jung, & Silverthorn, 1987). Interestingly, however, there is a gender difference in the acceptability of responses when the goal is to terminate a relationship. Females continue to view apologies as best, but males view justifications as most acceptable.

Of course, the best indicator of the effect of accounts (and of most relevance to Study 2) is their impact on victim responses. McLaughlin et al. (1983a) found that victims honor excuses, retreat after concessions and justifications, and take issue with, reject, or reinstate their reproaches after refusals. Compared to those who do not receive apologies, victims who receive apologies feel better, have more favorable impressions of the wrongdoer and are less likely to aggress against the offender (Ohbuchi et al., 1989) and more likely to help her or him (Gonzales, 1992). Finally, victims who receive concessionary accounts respond with fewer negative comments, a greater number of positive comments, less sarcasm, a more positive overall tone, and more positive evaluations than do victims who receive aggravating accounts (Gonzales et al., 1994).

Taken together, these studies suggest that apology during predicaments is viewed favorably. Past research, however, has not addressed reactions to accounts by friends and acquaintances. If facework norms differ by relationship, then greater caring should be expected from friends. We hypothesized that if perpetrators who are friends fail to provide facework, then that norm violation would result in harsher evaluation of friends than acquaintances.

Reliable gender differences in accounting raise the question of whether they occur in victims' evaluations as well. Schonbach (1990) thought they would, and found some evidence that male victims were less forgiving. In contrast, Hunter and McClelland (1991) found no gender differences in the acceptability of accounts for sexual harassment. We thus decided to examine any gender differences in accounts.

In summary, Study 2 examined the effects of amount of responsibility taken, relationship closeness, and gender on victim evaluations of accounts. We expected victims to respond more favorably to perpetrators who took more responsibility for wrongdoing. We expected victims who received aggravating accounts to experience continued face threat, and thus derogate the perpetrator and view their relationship as damaged. Furthermore, we expected victims to hold friends to higher facework standards than acquaintances, and to respond more negatively to friends who failed to apologize, compared to acquaintances.

## Study 2

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

Ninety-six undergraduates (48 females, 48 males), aged 17–20, participated in partial fulfillment of a course requirement.

#### *Materials*

*Predicament questionnaire*. The predicament questionnaire contained the four situations from Study 1, modified so that participants were victims who had received an account. Accounts were varied to produce three levels of responsibility-taking—concessions, excuses, and refusals. Concessions contained acknowledgement of full responsibility and extensive apology; excuses acknowledged responsibility, but contained many attempts to explain it away; refusals offered denials of responsibility and no apology. Relationship closeness was varied by describing the perpetrator as either a friend or an acquaintance. Relative status also was manipulated, but is not relevant to the current study. At the end of each account, participants were asked, "What do you say to the other person?"

*Future outcome questionnaire*. Participants responded on 9-point (1–9) scales to four items about their future relationship, including expected relationship change, image of the perpetrator, responsibility of the perpetrator, and own anger level. Responses were summed to create an Expected Future Outcome variable ($\alpha = .72$).

*Manipulation checks*. For each scenario, participants responded on 9-point (1–9) scales about perpetrator responsibility-taking and relationship closeness.

#### *Procedure*

Participants were randomly assigned to conditions and run in small groups. Each participant read four scenarios, all representing one level of responsibility-taking (concessions, excuses, and refusals). The closeness and status variables were crossed so that each participant read one scenario for each of four combinations (friend-high, friend-low, acquaintance-high, and acquaintance-low). Each combination appeared an equal number of times for each scenario. The four scenarios appeared in a constant order and the closeness-status combinations were counterbalanced so that each scenario appeared an equal number of times in every position of the order (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th). Instructions and other procedures were identical to Study 1, except that debriefing was done individually.

*Coding of responses*

All responses were coded by two judges, using a taxonomy for the reactions of opponents (Schonbach, 1990). The taxonomy has four general categories (comments on accounts, the failure event (or predicament), the perpetrator's personality, and the relationship). Each category contains positive, negative, and neutral comments. Neutral and uncodable comments represented less than 1% of all comments, and hence were eliminated. Our predictions were about evaluation positivity rather than the four categories, so the proportions of positive and negative comments for each participant were used as a repeated measure. This procedure allowed us to examine comment positivity while controlling for response length. Examples of positive comments are positive reactions to an explanation given by the perpetrator, and positive comments about the perpetrator's conduct during the event. Examples of negative comments are criticism of the perpetrator's behavior, and unfavorable comments on enduring characteristics of the perpetrator.

Two judges, trained with pilot accounts, worked independently to code all of the responses. They were unaware of the experimental conditions for the materials they read, and only one judge knew the hypotheses. Judges used the original taxonomy without the labels of positive, negative, and neutral categories. They read each evaluation, divided it into elements, and then assigned a code to each element. Mean judge concordance, calculated using the Holsti formula, was .70; concordance was 1.00 for 44% of evaluations and zero for less than 1%. Disagreements between judges again were resolved through discussion.

## Results

*Data analytic strategy*

Analyses of variance were performed with the between-subjects variables of gender and account type (concessions, excuses, and refusals), and the within-subjects variables of closeness (friend and acquaintance) and comment positivity (positive and negative). Dependent variables included the number of comments, comment complexity, and expected future relationship. Planned linear contrasts were performed on effects that included account type, which had 3 levels and thus 2 degrees of freedom. Specifically, contrast weights of +1, 0, and −1 were assigned to test the prediction that victims respond more favorably to concessions than to excuses, and more positively to excuses than to refusals. The degrees of freedom differed across analyses because one participant failed to complete the closeness rating manipulation check, and two did not complete all of the Future Outcome ratings.

*Manipulation check*

There was a significant effect of account type on ratings of responsibility-taking, with refusals ($M = 2.63$) rated lower than excuses ($M = 4.64$), which were rated lower than concessions ($M = 7.39$), linear contrast $F(1, 90) = 119.8$, $p < .001$, $r = .76$. There also was a significant effect of relationship on ratings of closeness, with acquaintances ($M = 4.63$) rated lower than friends ($M = 6.23$), $F(1, 89) = 61.92$, $p < .001$, $r = .64$. No other main effects or interactions were significant.

*Number of comments (see Tables 7 and 8)*

The results for number of comments are shown in Tables 7 and 8. There was an effect of gender on response length—female victims made significantly more comments ($M = 2.62$) than did males ($M = 2.30$; see the Gender main effect). Overall, victims made almost twice as many negative comments ($M = 1.61$) as positive comments ($M = .85$; see the Positivity main effect). This is very different from perpetrators' behavior in accounting, and shows that the roles of perpetrator and victim are quite distinct. Victims provide less facework and are perfectly willingly to give face-threatening evaluations. If reciprocity occurs, however, it should lead to more positive evaluations of perpetrators who

Table 7
Means and standard deviations for number of comments (Study 2)

| | | Concessions | | Excuses | | Refusals | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Friend | Acquaintance | Friend | Acquaintance | Friend | Acquaintance |
| *Males* | | | | | | | |
| Positive Comments | *M* | 1.47 | 1.13 | .56 | .59 | .28 | .41 |
| | *SD* | .95 | .61 | .56 | .51 | .45 | .52 |
| Negative Comments | *M* | .83 | 1.23 | 1.94 | 1.59 | 1.91 | 1.84 |
| | *SD* | .70 | 1.00 | .93 | .78 | .90 | .72 |
| *Females* | | | | | | | |
| Positive Comments | *M* | 1.85 | 1.53 | .73 | .65 | .42 | .53 |
| | *SD* | .95 | .48 | .60 | .72 | .60 | .61 |
| Negative Comments | *M* | .85 | 1.09 | 1.62 | 1.88 | 2.31 | 2.25 |
| | *SD* | .75 | .97 | .71 | .77 | .77 | .69 |

Table 8
Results of analyses of variance on the number of comments (Study 2)

| | *df* | *F* | Effect size (*r*) |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Between subjects effects* | | | |
| Account Type | 2, 90 | <1 | |
| Gender | 1, 90 | 5.68* | .24 |
| Account Type × Gender | 2, 90 | <1 | |
| *Within subjects effects* | | | |
| Relationship | 1, 90 | <1 | |
| Positivity | 1, 90 | 73.72*** | .67 |
| Relationship × Positivity | 1, 90 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Account Type | 2, 90 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Gender | 1, 90 | <1 | |
| Positivity × Account Type | 1, 90 | 100.02*** | .73 |
| Positivity × Gender | 1, 90 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Positivity × Account Type | 1, 90 | 3.95* | .21 |
| Relationship × Positivity × Gender | 1, 90 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Account Type × Gender | 2, 90 | <1 | |
| Positivity × Account Type × Gender | 2, 90 | <1.5 | |
| Relationship × Positivity × Account Type × Gender | 2, 90 | <1 | |

* $p < .05$.
*** $p < .001$.

take greater responsibility. This was confirmed: The tendency for a greater number of negative comments was reduced under greater responsibility-taking ($M$s = 2.08 and .41 for negative and positive comments under refusals, $M$s = 1.76 and .63 under excuses, and $M$s = 1.00 and 1.50 under concessions; see the Positivity × Account Type interaction). As predicted, this two-way interaction was modified by a three-way interaction with Relationship. Specifically, the decreased negativity in the evaluation of perpetrators who took responsibility was especially pronounced for friends ($M$s = 2.11 and .35 for negative and positive under refusals, 1.78 and .65 under excuses, and .84 and 1.66 under concessions) compared to acquaintances ($M$s = 2.05 and .47 under refusals, 1.74 and .62 under excuses, and 1.16 and 1.33 under concessions). Hence, friends were evaluated more positively than acquaintances, but only if they took responsibility for their behavior.

*Complexity of comments (see Tables 9 and 10)*

Complexity (see Tables 9 and 10) was defined as the percentage of the available categories of positive ($N = 6$) and negative comments ($N = 7$) that were used. Females provided more complex evaluations ($M = 16.05$) than did males ($M = 14.24$; see the Gender main effect). Negative comments showed greater complexity ($M = 18.85$) than did positive comments ($M = 11.44$; see the Positivity main effect). More importantly, the greater complexity of negative comments was largest under refusals ($M$s = 24.57 and 6.31 for negative and positive), reduced under excuses ($M$s = 19.76 and 8.61), and reversed under concessions ($M$s = 12.22 and 19.40; see the Positivity × Account Type interaction). There was a trend for this two-way interaction to be modified by Relationship. Although this trend was not significant ($p < .11$), the decreased negativity in the complexity of comments was especially pronounced for friends.

Table 9
Means and standard deviations for comment complexity (Study 2)

| | | Concessions | | Excuses | | Refusals | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Friend | Acquaintance | Friend | Acquaintance | Friend | Acquaintance |
| *Males* | | | | | | | |
| Positive Comments | *M* | 18.89 | 15.56 | 7.35 | 7.84 | 4.69 | 5.73 |
| | *SD* | 11.56 | 6.95 | 6.51 | 6.23 | 7.43 | 6.61 |
| Negative Comments | *M* | 10.95 | 15.24 | 21.85 | 17.65 | 23.66 | 21.43 |
| | *SD* | 10.05 | 11.73 | 8.92 | 6.74 | 10.34 | 6.90 |
| *Females* | | | | | | | |
| Positive Comments | *M* | 23.53 | 19.61 | 10.90 | 8.33 | 6.94 | 7.87 |
| | *SD* | 11.87 | 7.18 | 7.89 | 7.61 | 10.00 | 8.32 |
| Negative Comments | *M* | 10.50 | 12.18 | 19.23 | 20.33 | 25.79 | 27.38 |
| | *SD* | 8.79 | 9.37 | 6.77 | 7.63 | 8.88 | 8.22 |

Table 10
Results of analyses of variance on comment complexity (Study 2)

| | *df* | *F* | Effect size (*r*) |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Effect* | | | |
| Account Type | 2, 90 | <1 .7 | |
| Gender | 1, 90 | 5.94* | .25 |
| Account Type × Gender | 2, 90 | <1 | |
| *Within subjects effects* | | | |
| Relationship | 1, 90 | <1 | |
| Positivity | 1, 90 | 47.95*** | .59 |
| Relationship × Positivity | 1, 90 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Account Type | 2, 90 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Gender | 1, 90 | <1 | |
| Positivity × Account Type | 1, 90 | 96.48*** | .72 |
| Positivity × Gender | 1, 90 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Positivity × Account Type | 1, 90 | 2.71 | .17 |
| Relationship × Positivity × Gender | 1, 90 | <1 | |
| Relationship × Account Type × Gender | 2, 90 | <1 | |
| Positivity × Account Type × Gender | 2, 90 | <1.5 | |
| Relationship × Positivity × Account Type × Gender | 2, 90 | <1 | |

* $p < .05$.
*** $p < .001$.

*Expected future relationship*

The results for this variable are shown in Tables 11 and 12. Victims who received accounts with concessions foresaw more positive future relationships ($M = 3.94$) than did those who received excuses ($M = 3.55$), who in turn expected more positive futures than victims who received refusals ($M = 3.16$; see the Account Type main effect). Victims also expected better relationships with friends ($M = 3.71$) than acquaintances ($M = 3.40$) (see Relationship main effect). However, the expectation for positive relationships with friends depended on how friends accounted for their misdeeds (see the Relationship × Account Type interaction). Concessions from friends elicited the most positive future expectations ($M = 4.19$), excuses from friends elicited worse expectations ($M = 3.80$), and refusals from friends resulted in the worst expected relationships ($M = 3.13$). In comparison, the expected future relationships for

Table 11
Means and standard deviations for expected future relationship (Study 2)

| | | Concessions | | Excuses | | Refusals | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Friend | Acquaintance | Friend | Acquaintance | Friend | Acquaintance |
| Males | *M* | 4.07 | 3.70 | 3.45 | 3.36 | 3.26 | 3.44 |
| | *SD* | .87 | .72 | .98 | .90 | .95 | 1.03 |
| Females | *M* | 4.31 | 3.68 | 4.15 | 3.24 | 3.01 | 2.95 |
| | *SD* | .96 | .80 | .76 | .59 | .68 | 1.05 |

Table 12
Results of analyses of variance on expected future relationship (Study 2)

| Effect | *df* | *F* | Effect size (*r*) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Account Type | 1, 88 | 18.90*** | .42 |
| Gender | 1, 88 | <1 | |
| Account Type × Gender | 2, 88 | <2.1 | |
| Relationship | 1, 88 | 7.64** | .28 |
| Relationship × Account Type | 1, 88 | 4.12* | .21 |
| Relationship × Gender | 1, 88 | 3.52+ | .20 |
| Relationship × Account Type × Gender | 2, 88 | <1 | |

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.
*** $p < .001$.
+ $p < .10$.

acquaintances were less affected by account type ($M$s = 3.69 for concessions, 3.30 for excuses, and 3.19 for refusals).

There was a marginally significant effect that was not predicted: The expectation for more positive future relationships with friends was more pronounced for females ($M$s = 3.82 and 3.29 for friends and acquaintances) than for males ($M$s = 3.59 and 3.50; see the Relationship × Gender interaction). Females used previous relationship status to predict future relationship, independent of the type of account received, more than did males.

## General discussion

The complexity of facework processes is striking when results are considered across several phases. For example, we hypothesized that different norms are used with close others. This was not supported in our study of the effects of reproach on accounts, but it was supported in our study of the interface between accounts and evaluations. Hence, there is evidence for different norms for friends and acquaintances, but whether those norms influence behavior depends on other factors, including which phase is considered and whether one is the perpetrator or the victim.

A further complication involves gender differences. Males responded more defensively to severe reproach than did females (Study 1), but this gender difference was not mirrored in the forgiveness phase (Study 2). There was thus no evidence of different requirements for apology by males and females—they responded in similar ways to apology with forgiveness, and to defensiveness with censure, despite males' weaker facework. As with friendship norms, then, gender differences depend on which phase is considered and whether one is the perpetrator or the victim.

One implication of the studies considered together is the potential negative snowball effect across phases, especially in predicaments with males. A victim who fails to consider the face needs of a male perpetrator and delivers a severe reproach is likely to receive an aggravating account, which will elicit a harsh evaluation and lead to foundering. In contrast, male perpetrators who receive mild or moderate reproaches (and female perpetrators who receive any type of reproach) are more likely to provide mitigating accounts, which repair the victim's face, de-escalate conflict, and gain forgiveness. Hence, at each phase, one person's lack of facework for the other escalates conflict and decreases the likelihood of forgiveness, an outcome that is especially likely if males are involved.

Study 2 showed unambiguously that defensive accounting has grave relational consequences, especially in friendship. These consequences are consistent with research on the use of self-protection in intimate relationships. For example, defensiveness and withdrawal predict longitudinal deterioration in marital satisfaction (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). The behavior of females in Study 1, therefore, was highly adaptive for relationship maintenance. Indeed, apology offered by the person responsible for a predicament represents the best hope for repair. We suspect that the reason perpetrators sometimes do not perform facework is that their faces are just too compromised.

Do these results from same-gender interactions generalize to mixed-gender conflicts? We suspect that they do. The underlying processes of predicament management should be similar in mixed- and same-gender dyads, because perpetrators of either gender who apologize to victims of either gender should be more likely forgiven than perpetrators of either gender who defend themselves. Of course, different outcomes may occur as a result of gender differences in accounting. Conflict might abate more quickly with female perpetrators in mixed-gender dyads than with male perpetrators in mixed-gender dyads or in male dyads. However, the genders appear to have similar apology expectations as victims, so the processes by which predicaments resolve or escalate should be similar in same- and mixed-gender dyads.

It is curious to note that past explanations of gender differences in predicaments have focused on explaining females' greater tendency to apologize (e.g., Gonzales et al., 1990; Hodgins et al., 1996b; Schonbach, 1990). We have failed to ask why males take less responsibility. As noted elsewhere (Eagly, Wood, & Fishbaugh, 1981; Hall, 1987; Schur, 1984), when only female behavior is explained to interpret gender differences, the underlying (sexist) assumption is that male behavior is "normal" and female behavior is deviant (requiring explanation).

Beyond defensiveness, our studies point to another source of a negative snowball effect in predicaments, namely an egocentric bias in evaluating the consequences of conflict. In Study 1, perpetrators did not offer greater mitigation to friends, but expected better future relationships with them anyway. From the perspective of victims, however (Study 2), positive relationships with friends *depend upon* perpetrators taking responsibility in accounting. Friends are forgiven more than acquaintances when they take responsibility for wrongdoing, but friends are judged more harshly when they account defensively. Friends thus are held to a higher standard of apology and restorative facework. Together the findings thus identify a source of potential misunderstanding. To the extent that perpetrators fail to appreciate higher facework norms for friends, they may not adequately mitigate threats to the faces of their friends. The discrepant perspectives of perpetrators and victims may well contribute to conflict escalation.

Additional evidence for egocentricity was seen in the expectations of perpetrators who justified their behavior

and refused responsibility, aggravating the victim's face threat. These perpetrators anticipated positive future relationships compared to perpetrators who did not use aggravation. Ironically, the amount of aggravation used was related to the degree of relationship optimism among aggravators. The fact that the optimistic expectations of aggravators are unfounded became clear in Study 2. Thus, those who use aggravation apparently lack awareness of the perspective of others.

### *Limitations*

A possible criticism of the current studies is that responses to the scenario methodology may not reflect actual behavior in real life. To the extent that hypothetical questionnaires lack realism, we believe that participant responses might be less defensive than in real life. Thus, our results probably underestimate the use of own face-saving tactics. There is no compelling reason to believe that the scenario methodology could spuriously cause specific relationships among variables. It is more likely that an artificial methodology would fail to find effects that truly exist in predicaments. Nonetheless, the undermining effect of artificiality may not be linear or systematic, so the criticism is well-founded. Future studies could eliminate this weakness by staging realistic predicaments that still allow variables to be manipulated (for good examples, see Gonzales, 1992; Gonzales et al., 1990).

Another flaw might have been a lack of strength in our manipulation of relationship closeness. Although the manipulation checks were significant for both studies, friends and acquaintances differed by only .88 points and 1.6 points on 9-point scales, in Studies 1 and 2, respectively. Thus, the lack of effect for friendship on accounting in Study 1 might have reflected a weak manipulation. The manipulation of relationship closeness in Study 1 was salient enough, however, to produce an effect of friendship on future relationship expectations. Perhaps a stronger manipulation of relationship closeness is necessary to influence accounting rather than future outcome expectations. We have no reason to expect this, however, and so questions about the effect of relationship closeness on conflict management remain for future research.

An advantage of our experimental method was that it allowed us to manipulate the variables and make causal inferences about their effects. Thus, we can conclude that severe reproach *causes* more defensive accounting, especially among males and individuals low on self-determination (Study 1). Similarly, taking responsibility for wrong-doing *causes* victims to evaluate perpetrators more positively, especially when the perpetrator is a friend (Study 2). The studies thus contribute further understanding of the little-examined reproach and evaluation phases of predicament management.

### *Future research*

As always, questions remain for future research. In particular, a clear understanding of the effect of relationship on behavior in all phases of predicament management still is lacking. The role of relationship in conflict management is important theoretically and for the quality of everyday life.

Snyder (1985) suggests that explanations provide solace and act as an "amazing grace" during psychological predicaments. Similarly, Tavuchis (1991) maintains that apology has the almost miraculous ability to reconcile people as if an event had not occurred, although he notes that this transformation requires overcoming resistance to apology. We propose that in situations requiring apology according to shared social norms (as in our scenarios), whether people apologize or defend is a function of their thresholds for threat. Thus, intrapersonal processes related to threat versus security are central to an understanding of interpersonal behavior during predicaments. The present studies provide new evidence for some important antecedents and consequences of the balance that is struck (or not struck) between caring for one's own and another's face needs.

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