News reporting in the West and the East: content analysis of attribution style in American and Japanese newspapers

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News reporting in the West and the East:
Content analysis of attribution style in American and Japanese newspapers

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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This is to certify that the master's thesis of

Takayuki Nagaoka

has met the thesis requirements of Iowa State University

Signatures have been redacted for privacy
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

When comparing Japanese communication style to American, one Japanese manager said, “The Japanese probably never will become gabby. We’re a homogeneous people and don’t have to speak as much as you do here. When we say one word, we understand 10, but here you have to say 10 to understand one” (Kennedy & Everest, 1991, p. 52).

This anecdote shows how messages may be sent and received differently across cultures, specifically between those of the United States and Japan. In societies like that of the United States, people may be more likely to have many interactions over relatively short intervals, so a particular message is direct and explicit, with its meaning reflected literally in its words. On the other hand, in Japanese society people seem more likely to develop close personal relationships and share knowledge over longer periods, so a given message may convey its meaning within a particular contextual or interpersonal relationship while its literal interpretation may be indirect and ambiguous. While Americans are likely to be attentive to verbal cues, Japanese tend to be sensitive to nonverbal and contextual cues, such as vocal tone, facial expression, or social relationship (Ishii, Reyes, & Kitayama, 2003).

People, of course, tend to see the world based on the experience in their own cultures. For example, judgment on what is good parenting or what is bad behavior in a guest is quite dependent upon the culture in which activity occurs. For those who have been exposed to American culture only, conversation among Japanese people may be seen as “nothing is spoken.” In contrast, those who have been embedded only in Japanese culture might regard Americans as “chatterboxes.” In many parts of the world, people have increasingly come into contact with others from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Some travel on vacation to visit
historical sites, some seek higher-education opportunities in other countries, while others may engage in overseas business with members of different cultures. As interact more with others from different countries, they become increasingly aware of variations in human behavior across cultures.

Since Commodore Matthew C. Perry first arrived at Uraga, Japan, and asked to open trade negotiations with the U.S. in 1853, Japan and the United States have had a historically close relationship. One of the most important schemata for comparing these two countries is a difference in cultural orientation, i.e., individualism in the U.S. and collectivism in Japan (Triandis, 1988). Individualism and collectivism refer to patterns of social relationship between an individual and a group. Although people in any given society tend to have both individualist and collectivist characteristics to some degree, individualism is prevalent in industrialized Western societies such as the U.S., and collectivism is predominant in East Asian societies such as Japan (Hofstede, 1984). In individualistic societies, individuals tend to be independent of one another. In contrast, individuals in collectivistic societies tend to be interdependent and mutually supportive (Hofstede, 1984). These salient variations in cultural orientation have many consequences to factors of human psychology such as emotion, motivation and cognition. The causes of positive or negative feelings, motivational factors leading people to certain behavior, and the logic used to explain social events and behavior may depend upon such cultural diversities as individualism in the U.S. and collectivism in Japan.
Mass Media and Causal Explanation

Mass media play a major role in providing the means for people to observe events and why they happen in the world. People learn of current events regarding business, politics, sports, etc. through news media, such as the television, radio, or newspapers. Such news media may report not only facts but also a causal explanation of events (Hilton, Mathes & Trabasso, 1992). The news media report not only what events occurred but also perceived reasons why they occurred, which can significantly affect our perception of what is happening in our daily lives. Because of this, it is important to see how news media work, so that we may gain insights into know how we perceive what is going on around the world.

Mass media exert a particularly strong influence on the public in such media-rich countries as the U.S. and Japan. While the U.S. publishes almost three times as many newspapers as any other developed country and approximately ten times as many as does Japan, the newspaper circulation per capita in Japan is twice that of the U.S. and much greater than that of any other country in the world. In those places, the mass media are undoubtedly among the important information providers for the public, in addition to the availability of other information sources such as interpersonal communication within the family, school, and workplace environments.

Statement of Purpose

Newspapers present causal explanations of social events and behavior, but there are reasons to suspect that all the causal explanation styles are not universal in the world. As mentioned earlier, cultural variations in human psychology affect the way in which people explain events and behavior in society. Much research has shown that while behavior is often
considered as reflecting personality traits and other internal factors in the Western societies, it is not likely to occur in East Asian societies; people in East Asian countries are likely to attribute behavior to properties of the situation rather than properties of the actor (Miller, 1984; Morris & Peng, 1994). Thus, this study will examine and compare news stories to find out cultural differences in attribution patterns between American and Japanese newspapers.

Although past research has shown the tendencies for people in the Western cultures to stress dispositional factors in making inferences about human behavior, while people in East Asian cultures tend to emphasize situational factors when explaining others’ behavior, only a few studies focusing on such cultural tendencies in mass media contents have been found. Considering the strong influence of news media on public opinion in contemporary society, it is important to determine whether such cultural differences exist in the contents of mass media.

This study hopes to make contributions to cross-cultural studies in examining psychological influences on mass media content. As Schwartz (1981) argued, culture has tended to be ignored in most part of psychological research. He mentioned that, “To many psychologists, culture has always seemed a vague concept with which they cannot come to grips... Culture is an obstacle in their quest for universal human nature, to be filtered out where encountered or ignored as ‘content’ where what is wanted is process and structure” (p. 8). Cross-cultural studies are concerned with comparing the generality of an existing universal model in various cultural contexts. The findings will seek to confirm that a universal model is capable of generalization to other social environments or to identify other important concepts in its model and culture (Bond, 1983). Thus, this study aims to advance
our understandings of how culture may be reflected in mass media coverage which may vary across countries in the world.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background

It is a human psychological tendency that people try to seek the causes and meanings of social events and others’ behavior (Heider, 1958). We try to judge why people behave as they do in order to understand, predict, and control the world around us. The cognitive processes have been studied within social psychology, known as attribution theory.

Attribution theory is concerned with how people explain events and behavior that they encounter in society (Hewstone, 1983). Heider (1958) was the first to propose how people think about others’ behavior. He argued that people attributed the responsibility for action to the person who took action, that is, an actor. For example, if a man yawns in the street, people would regard him as being bored, tired, or indifferent. Heider believed that people strive for stable and fixed properties with which to understand unstable and temporal behavior or events in our world. It is the dispositional properties “that ‘dispose’ objects and events to manifest themselves in certain ways under certain conditions” (Heider, 1958, p.80). For example, when one finds sand on a desk, he or she may try to determine why it is there, e.g., did it come from a crack in the ceiling that originated from weakness of the wall? It is a fundamental activity to relate the changing and variable events (i.e. sand on the desk) to stable properties (i.e. cracks and weakness), which makes the world stable, predictable, and controllable.

In addition to dispositional properties, another dimension should be taken into account to understand events and behavior of others: situational factors. The most influential idea that Heider proposed is that of two broad classes of attribution: dispositional (internal)
attributions and situational (external) attributions. Dispositional attributions refer to explaining the causes of an action by an actor's dispositions such as personality traits, ability, or motivation. In contrast, situational attributions assign causality to the situation or context in which an actor exists (Heider, 1958). For instance, if a student obtained F on an exam, some would ascribe the cause to dispositional factors, such as the student’s inability or effortlessness, and others would attribute it to situational factors, such as exam difficulty.

**Correspondence Bias**

In Western social psychology, much research has been devoted to advance the traditional generalization that people tend to conclude that a person’s behavior corresponds to his or her personal dispositions called *correspondence bias* (Gilbert & Malone, 1995) or *fundamental attribution error* (Ross, 1977). In other words, when people are making attributions about behavior, they tend to overestimate the extent to which the behavior is caused by dispositions and underestimate the role of the situation in causing the behavior. So many researchers have found evidence of correspondence bias that it has become "a staple of modern social psychology" (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999, p. 47).

One may ask, however, is the tendency of dispositional attribution applicable to all the people in the world? Growing cross-cultural studies have suggested that this generalization was not applicable in all places of the world, and that significant attribution style variation exists across cultures in which people are socialized (Bond, 1983). Most of the studies conducted in North America have attempted to demonstrate that people's behavior resulted from their dispositions (Ross, 1977). However, other research had indicated that the correspondence bias was not universal; East Asians are more likely to explain causes of
events and behavior with reference to situational factors than are the Westerners (Miller, 1984; Morris & Peng, 1994). Thus, it seems that cultural differences should be taken into account in determining how people make attributions. This study will outline how Western societies and East Asian societies differ in their self-perceptions, and then will review cross-cultural research suggesting that attribution styles are different between the West and East Asia.

Culture

Although there is no standard definition of culture, some researchers have described it as “a set of human made objective and subjective elements that in the past have (a) increased the probability of survival, (b) resulted in satisfaction for the participants in a ecological niche, and thus (c) become shared among those who communicate with each other because they had a common language and lived the same time-place,” which was accepted as a definition of culture in this study (Triandis, Kurowski, Tecktiel, & Chan, 1993, p.219).

Culture is a significant factor when examining people’s behavior (Kitayama & Miyamoto, 2000). Culture largely influences the way people behave in the environment in which they are socialized and the way people behave forms the culture. Culture also embodies a pattern of psychological processes such as individual feelings, motivation, and causal explanations. In turn, the culture in which people have a particular attribution style should be represented in social contexts such as mass media (Kitayama & Miyamoto, 2000).
Independent and Interdependent Self-Construal

Before examining people's attribution style, it is important to note that self-construal that can influence how behavior varies between Western cultures and East Asian cultures. Markus and Kitayama (1991) proposed that people have different views of the self called independent and interdependent self-construal, and that this variation in self-construal may influence how people make attributions in social life.

Self-construal refers to how people see the relationship between themselves and others in society (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). People in the U.S. and other countries with roots in Western Europe, called individualistic societies, tend to view themselves as relatively unique, autonomous, and independent of one another, a view called "independent self-construal" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The person is thus seen as separate from society and sets in working toward his or her own personal goals. For example, the goal that American parents overwhelmingly stress is to make their children independent—both socially and economically. Self-reliance is the primary emphasis that American parents place to socialize their children.

By contrast, people in East Asian countries, often called collectivistic societies, view themselves as related, connected, and interdependent upon others, a condition called "interdependent self-construal" (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Such a person maintains a much closer relationship with families, relatives, friends, and work groups, and seeks to meet the expectations of the others in order to maintain harmony. Children are expected to understand and act on a strong sense of responsibility toward family, groups, and communities. Self-worth or self-esteem is not considered the main motivation for a person to
achieve his or her goals. Instead, people emphasize the performance of self-sacrifice that maintains social links and bonds.

The contrasts in self-construal between individualistic society and collectivistic society are reflected in linguistic practices (Kondo, 1990). There are a variety of personal pronouns in Japanese whose usage depends upon the person with whom you are talking. In English, the first personal singular pronoun is "I" and it is generally used in virtually any context from political discussion to casual conversation with friends. In contrast, the Japanese first singular pronoun "watashi" can be used in a formal situation; "boku" is used by males and "atashi" is used by females of any age in an appropriate informal conversation. The pronoun "ore" is often used by males, especially in casual chat among friends.

While there are several pronouns used to signify oneself in Japanese, they are rarely used in natural conversation. In English, the speaker virtually always uses a pronoun (for example "I") emphasizing the agent who acts in any situation. That is, the self is always believed to be a whole and bounded subject in any conversation from workplace through personal home. On the other hand, the Japanese speaker usually omits pronouns in conversation. For example, "I am a student" is translated into "Gakusei desu," which literally means "Student exists" in English. In this way, the Japanese language reflects the idea that a person defines him/herself in terms of his or her relationship with others and his or her role in social settings.

Analytic and Holistic View of the World

The cultural variations of the self can be traced to the systems of thought that correspond with social and philosophical contexts in each society (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, &
Norenzayan, 2001). The salient idea for individualistic societies, that a person is regarded as an independent and autonomous unit, is rooted in the analytic world view of ancient Greek philosophy, and the prominent theme for collectivistic societies, a person is considered as part of social groups such as family, workgroup, and school, originated in East Asian Confucian philosophy and Buddhist beliefs.

From the Western perspective of the world, causality is seen as unidirectional, i.e., a particular event is perceived by a specific certain cause. Ancient Greeks emphasized an analytic view of the world, one in which people are detached from social context and environment and tend to focus on a particular object in the field. In ancient Greek tradition, the individual was a stable and primal entity apart from situation and the responsibility for behavior was seen to reside in his or her own personal properties. This analytic view of the world is fundamental to contemporary Western thinking style. In contrast, the East Asian view sees the world in which every element is connected and related with each other, focusing on the field in such a way that an event or behavior is not seen as being separate from situation. Thus, causality is always seen as multidirectional and a complex of contradictory factors. This holistic view of the world has been maintained in modern East Asian societies.

Relevant Studies to Culture and Attribution Style

Cross-cultural studies have found that dispositional attributions are more salient for Westerners, whereas situational attributions are more prominent for East Asians. Miller (1984) studied patterns of social explanations between Hindu Indians and Americans and found that Americans explained behavior in terms of personality traits, whereas Hindu
Indians explained in terms of situational factors, such as social roles and the relationship with others.

In her study, subjects were exposed to two prosocial behaviors and two deviant behaviors that someone they knew exhibited recently and asked to explain why the person behaved that way. Miller coded the explanations in relation to the agent’s dispositional factors, to the situational factors, and to acts or occurrences. She found that, on average, 40% of explanations offered by Americans were referred to general dispositions that the agents had, whereas less than 20% of explanations mentioned by Hindu Indians were related to general dispositions.

Americans emphasized dispositional factors in explaining another person’s behavior. For example, American subjects saw a deviant behavior (an agent took an idea away from someone else) in terms of his personality: “He was just a very self-absorbed person. He was interested only in himself” (p. 967). On the other hand, Hindu Indians explained a comparable deviant behavior in terms of situational factors, such as socioeconomic position, “The man is unemployed. He is not in a position to give that money,” social roles, “She was his student. She would not have the power to do it (publish it) by herself,” and interpersonal relationships, “He has many enemies” (p. 968).

**Attribution in Natural Setting**

This study aims to reveal cultural divergence in attribution style in newspaper accounts of social events. Unlike laboratory experiments, newspapers are considered as a natural setting in which explanations for real-life events and behavior in society are provided (Lee et al., 1996; Morris & Peng, 1994). A typical laboratory experiment is accompanied
with controlled settings; subjects are often asked to get involved with artificial tasks within a limited time period and to report their thoughts on fixed choices or scales. In newspaper articles, however, unsolicited and spontaneous attributions are made in natural contexts (Lau & Russell, 1980).

Culture and Attribution Style in Newspapers

There have been several studies focusing on cultural differences in causal attributions made in press coverage. In their empirical study, Morris and Peng (1994) revealed that the causal attribution patterns differed between Western cultures and East Asian cultures and these differences were reflected in mass media coverage. They hypothesized that American newspaper would attribute the causes of murders to personal dispositions and Chinese newspaper would ascribe the causes of murders to situational factors.

Morris and Peng analyzed the articles reporting two murder cases in the American newspaper (The New York Times) and the Chinese newspaper (World Journal). They chose two 1991 murder cases for their analysis. The first was one in which a Chinese physics student in the University of Iowa killed his academic advisor, several other students, passersby, and then himself. The second was one in which an Irish-American postal worker killed his supervisor, other workers, passersby, and then himself. Morris and Peng collected every article reporting the murders between November 1 and December 31, 1991 from each newspaper. They then sorted the articles according to the coding method of Miller’s study (1984).

As predicted, they found enough evidence to show that the American newspaper attributed the causes of murder to the murderer’s personal dispositions (e.g., “very bad
temper,” or “man was mentally unstable,” etc.) and the Chinese newspaper emphasized situational factors (e.g., “did not get along with his advisor,” or “murder can be traced to the availability of guns,” etc.) in explaining the crimes.

A similar demonstration by Lee, Hallahan, and Herzog (1996) showed different attribution styles that reflected the differing cultural orientation of American newspapers and Hong Kong newspapers. They selected three newspapers from the U.S. (Los Angeles Times, The Boston Globe, and The New York Times) and one newspaper from Hong Kong (South China Morning Post), and examined the two different domains of sports and editorials. As with the study by Morris and Peng (1994), they selected articles that were written about similar topics both in the U.S. and Hong Kong to ensure comparability. For example, they collected articles that covered soccer, which was a common sport that was regularly reported in both countries. In the editorial domain, they chose issues on refugees (Haitian refugees in the U.S.; Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong), environment (e.g., air pollution, water shortages), and international conflicts (e.g., cruelties in East Timor, warfare in the Middle East). The results showed evidence supporting their hypothesis that attribution style found in American newspapers was dispositional and that in Hong Kong newspaper was situational.

Additionally, Menon, Morris, Chiu, and Hong (1999) discovered similar differences in causal attribution patterns in articles reporting business scandals. They focused on two U.S. and Japanese business scandals. In each case, a mid-level manager was involved with multimillion-dollar losses in the company. They collected articles (in the New York Times and the Asahi Shimbun) regarding the scandals and examined which attributions for the scandals were either to individual factors (Mozer and Leeson, and Iguchi and Hamanaka) or to organizational factors (Salomon Brothers and Barings in the U.S., and Daiwa Bank and
Sumitomo Bank in Japan). Each scandal could be attributed to an individual responsibility, and it could also be seen as lack of organizational management. As found in the results, Menon et al. demonstrated that American newspapers were more likely to offer explanations involving individual dispositions ("Salomon’s errant cowboy" who "attacked his work as aggressively as he hit tennis ball"), whereas Japanese newspapers were more likely to emphasize group responsibility ("somebody in Sumitomo should have recognized the fictitious trading since documents are checked every day").

Nature of News

For the purpose of the study, three types of crimes were selected so that attribution patterns could be examined in three different contexts: adult crime, youth crime, and media scandal.

Crime events were the focus in this study for several reasons. People try to understand why unusual events happen and seek explanations from the news media. Weiner (1985) found that more attributions are made to negative or unexpected outcomes rather than positive or expected outcomes in written materials such as newspapers. Additional explanations are often given for causes of unwanted, negative social events such as crime.

People rely heavily on the news media for explaining social problems, and the media coverage often determines how these problems are interpreted or understood. A study by Dorfman and Schiraldi (2001) showed that news reports about crime have increased while actual crime rates have decreased. For example, while television crime coverage rose up 83% from 1990 to 1998, real crime rate fell 20% from 1990 to 1998. Due to recent dominant coverage of crime in the news media, people consider that there are more criminal acts than
exist in reality. Additionally, 76% of the public said that they depended upon reports and images in the news media, exceeding by far the number of people who said that they learned about crime from interpersonal information (22%).

In Morris and Peng’s study (1994), the predominant subject in the news story was an adult murderer, a Chinese physics student or an American postal worker. Considering the structure of the events, the causes are most likely to be attributed to the individual murderer. Although an adult is considered to be fully responsible for his or her deviant behavior, the Chinese newspaper explained the crime in terms of situational and relational factors while the American newspaper explained it in terms of the murderer’s personality.

Compared to adults, young people are likely to be held less responsible for their delinquency. Such behavior can be related to and explained by societal factors such as school, family, gun control, or failure of social service agencies. Pfeffer, Cole, and Dada (1998) examined cultural differences between British and Nigerian adolescents in explaining youth crime. British children were inclined to attribute the causes of youth crime to dispositional factors (e.g., personal goals; fun or drugs), while Nigerian children more frequently attributed the causes to situational factors (e.g., poverty or poor home training). According to Hofstede’s (1991) individualism and collectivism dimension, many African societies are identified as collectivistic cultures, similar to East Asian societies.

Finally, the study by Menon et al. (1999) on reports of business scandal crime considered both an individual and a group as the subjects of the story (e.g., Iguchi at Daiwa Bank or Mozer at Salomon Brothers). In cases where this theme could be applied (either a person or an organization), American newspapers made dispositional attributions, and in contrast, Japanese newspaper made situational attributions.
By examining different types of themes, it would be easier to identify the cultural impact of attribution styles that are represented in news coverage. For example, when a Japanese newspaper makes references to situational and contextual factors to explain the causes of a murder for which an adult criminal is responsible, it is likely to be a strong reflection of East Asian cultural orientation, i.e., collectivism or interdependent self-construal. By contrast, when an American newspaper makes dispositional attributions in news reports in which a young person is involved, it would show the Western individualism and independent self-construal.

Research Question and Hypotheses

As Miller (1984) suggested, Americans are more likely to explain behavior in terms of dispositional factors such as personality traits, whereas Hindu Indians are inclined to explain others' behavior in terms of situational factors such as social roles and interpersonal relationships. The study compares attribution patterns between American and Japanese newspapers and examines whether different cultural characteristics exist in attribution patterns between these two cultures. Based on the discussion thus far, the present study asks the following research question:

RQ: Is there a cultural difference in causal attribution patterns represented by American and Japanese newspapers?

The research question may be addressed through a number of hypotheses. Morris and Peng (1994) analyzed the causal explanation styles of two murder cases in an American newspaper and a Chinese newspaper and found that the American newspaper emphasized negative dispositional factors of the murderers to explain their causes. In contrast, the
Chinese newspaper explained the causes in terms of situational and contextual factors. Thus, it is predicted that American newspapers would make more dispositional attributions and Japanese newspapers would make more situational attributions in news articles about adult crime, leading to the following formal hypotheses:

H1a: In news articles on adult crime, attributions in American newspapers will be more dispositional than Japanese newspapers.

H1b: In news articles on adult crime, attributions in Japanese newspapers will be more situational than American newspapers.

Second, this study attempted to determine whether there is a cultural difference in attribution style between American and Japanese newspapers in the youth crime news category. It is expected that American newspaper would make more dispositional attributions and Japanese newspapers would make more situational attributions in news articles on youth crime. The hypotheses are thus stated as follows:

H2a: In news articles on youth crime, attributions in American newspapers will be more dispositional than Japanese newspapers.

H2b: In news articles on youth crime, attributions in Japanese newspapers will be more situational than American newspapers.

Third, this study also aimed to examine cultural differences in attribution style between American and Japanese newspapers in media scandals. The study proposes that American newspapers would make more dispositional attributions and Japanese newspapers would make more situational attributions in news articles about media scandals. The formal hypotheses are stated as follows:
H3a: In news articles on media scandals, attributions in American newspapers will be more dispositional than Japanese newspapers.

H3b: In news articles on media scandals, attributions in Japanese newspapers will be more situational than American newspapers.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study is to compare attribution styles of American and Japanese newspapers that are national in scope and have large circulation in each country and are, therefore, likely to have a significant role in providing the public with explanations for causes of social events and behavior.

Content Analysis

A content analysis was employed as the methodology for the study to examine attribution patterns in newspaper articles in the U.S. and Japan. Content analysis is a popular research technique in mass media studies and is useful for determining the trends and patterns of the media content. Berelson (1952) defined content analysis as "a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson, 1952, p. 18). As Stempel (1981) describes these concepts in more detail, content analysis is "objective" in that definitions and procedures for classifying variables are established so precisely that other persons will make the same decisions. By "systematic," he means that all the content being analyzed is selected and coded using the same proper guidelines. Content analysis is also "quantitative" because it allows researchers to report numerical values and frequencies, creating precise statistical results.

Newspaper Selection

This content analysis is limited to news coverage in the leading American newspaper, the New York Times, and the most prestigious newspaper in Japan, the Yomiuri Shimbun. Both newspapers are elite newspapers in terms of quality and readership, and represent the
most influential newspapers in each country. The New York Times was selected for its prominence and completeness of its national and international coverage compared to other American newspapers. According to ABC Publisher’s Statement, the New York Times national weekday circulation was 1,118,565 and its Sunday circulation was 1,676,885 as of September 2003. The Yomiuri Shimbun is one of the most popular national newspapers, distributed and read throughout Japan. It has had the largest circulation of any Japanese newspaper since the mid-1970s, and it is the world’s only newspaper that has a total daily circulation in excess of 10 million copies. According to the Japan Audit Bureau of Circulations, the morning edition of Yomiuri Shimbun had a total circulation of 10,040,018 copies as of November 2003. Like the Yomiuri Shimbun, the New York Times comes close to what may be considered a national newspaper in the U.S., since it is read throughout the country and frequently sets an agenda or provides articles for newspapers in other cities.

Event Selection

This study selected two events in each category (adult crime, youth crime, and media scandal) occurring in the U.S. and Japan over the past five years. Each category has two similar sets of events in order to ensure comparability.

Adult Crime. To test Hypotheses 1a and 1b, the study selected two crimes committed by American and Japanese adult murderers. Murder cases were selected because more attributions were expected in negative or unexpected outcomes rather than positive or expected outcomes (Weiner, 1885).

Snipers killed ten people and injured three others in and around the Washington, D.C. area, stretching across the Baltimore to Washington Metropolitan Area. The sniper attacks began on October 2, 2002, and ended on October 24, 2002, when John Allen Muhammad, 42, and Lee Boyd Malvo, 17, were arrested at a highway rest area.


A knife-wielding man, Mamoru Takuma, 37, intruded into an elementary school Friday morning in Osaka, Japan, and stabbed eight children to death and wounded 15 others, including two teachers, before he was subdued on June 8, 2001. Although he had a history of mental illness, the Osaka District Court judged that he was responsible for his actions and sentenced him to death on August 28, 2003. The killings shook a nation and a debate about security in schools was sparked across the country.

Youth Crime. To test Hypotheses 2a and 2b, the study selected two youth crimes that yielded intensive coverage both in American and Japanese newspapers.

U.S.: Columbine High School Shooting

Two students killed 12 classmates and a teacher at a local high school in Denver, Colorado on April 21, 1999. Dylan Klebold, 17, and Eric Harris, 18, were known as the “Trench Coat Mafia” who often wore dark trench coats with swastikas and adhered to German Nazi Hitler and his slogans. After the rampage, they had gunfights against the police and killed themselves in the end. The incident was the most tragic school-based killings in
American history and the media provided extensive coverage of debate on possible contributing factors such as gun control, race, video game, and adolescent mentality around the U.S.

Japan: A Teenage Boy Bus hijacking in Saga, Japan

A 17-year-old boy armed with a knife hijacked a bus on a highway in northern Kyusyu, Japan, on May 3, 2000. He stabbed three of the passengers, one of whom later died from massive bleeding from multiple stab wounds. After hijacking the bus for 15 hours with 21 passengers on board, a special police troop raided the bus and arrested him.

*Media Scandal.* To test Hypotheses 3a and 3b, this study selected two comparable scandals involved with manipulation of mass media content by an American reporter and a Japanese television producer in 2003. The two media scandals were selected to find out what causal attributions were more common.


The New York Times former reporter Jayson Blair, 27, faked stories and quotes, plagiarized stories from other publications and filled fake expense reports to make it appear he was traveling on assignment when he was actually at his home in Brooklyn, New York.

Japan: *NTV* Producer Ratings Manipulation Scandal

A former producer, Masafumi Ando, 41, at the *Nippon Television Network* bribed viewers in order to boost the ratings of his programs. Ando was accused of offering ratings
monitors cash or gift certificates if they agreed to watch his programs, shown between March 2000 and October 2003.

**Sampling and Procedure**

The researcher sampled every article in each newspaper about the event during the first two weeks after the paper reported the criminal arrested (see Appendix A). In addition to the researcher, another graduate student with bilingual capability (English and Japanese), who was kept unaware of the hypotheses, first extracted the relevant statements regarding causes of the event from each article and sorted them into the categories. The coding scheme was constructed using Miller’s (1984) study and Morris and Peng’s study (1994). Causal references were sorted into either dispositional factors or situational factors: Dispositional factors were defined in terms of an agent’s stable dispositions throughout the situation and situational factors were defined as the factors tied to a particular situation. For the purpose of this study, an attribution reference was defined as “any statement in which an outcome is indicated as having happened, or being present, because of some identified event or condition.” More specifically, it is described as “any statement about what a criminal has or has not done, can or cannot do, and what has or has not be done, or should or should not be done in the situation in a reference to the causes of the event.” The list of variables and their definitions is found in Appendices B and C.

**Intercoder Reliability**

The researcher and another coder had a training session to discuss the coding scheme and procedure in English and practiced coding by using several sample articles not included
in the study. The training continued until both researcher and another coder agreed on the procedure and definitions of variables for coding. An intercoder reliability test was conducted to ensure that the two coders, working independently, reached similar decisions on a given material. Intercoder reliability was calculated using Holst’s method (1969). The percentage of agreement between the two coders across all 1920 items was established at 92.1%, which seemed sufficiently high for the present study. Reliability was also assessed at dispositional (DISPOSIT) and situational (SITUATIO) item levels using Pearson correlation coefficient between the coders and between articles. Since these two variables were coded at the ratio level, reliability can be assessed in the covariation of the two sets of coder scores (Neuendorf, 2002). The results of the tests showed satisfactory reliability levels on average for the dispositional variable ($r = .84$), and the situational variable ($r = .94$), and for American articles ($r = .86$), and Japanese articles ($r = .93$).
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

This chapter presents the results of the content analysis described above. First, the descriptive data are presented, and then the results of hypotheses tests are shown with tables and figures.

Table 1 shows the frequency of articles about each event in the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun. Of all sample articles that appeared during the first two weeks in which the criminal(s) was(were) arrested, the articles that are not relevant to the events were eliminated (e.g., Letter to the Editor, Week in Review, Corrections, etc.). As a result, there were 46 articles on the sniper attack in Washington D.C., 43 articles on the Columbine shootings, and 5 articles on the Jayson Blair scandal for the NY Times. There were 75 articles on the school killer in Osaka elementary school, 53 articles on the bus hijacking in Saga, and 18 articles on the NTV Scandal for the Yomiuri Shimbun.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adult Murder Case</td>
<td>Sniper in Washington</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(U.S.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Killer in Osaka</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Violent Crime</td>
<td>Columbine Shooting</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(U.S.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bus Hijacking in Saga</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(JPN)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media Scandal</td>
<td>Jayson Blair (U.S.)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NTV (JPN)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The content analysis resulted in a total of 94 stories in the New York Times and 146 stories in the Yomiuri Shimbun. Every article in both newspapers was coded using the coding scheme. In the New York Times, a total of 97 dispositional and 44 situational
attribution references were found in the American adult crime category (the Sniper Attack), 45 dispositional and 105 situational attribution references were found in the American youth crime (Columbine shooting), and 1 dispositional and 23 situational attribution references were found in the American media scandal (Jayson Blair scandal). In the Yomiuri Shimbun, 63 dispositional and 58 situational attribution references were found in the Japanese adult crime (i.e. School killer in Osaka), 38 dispositional and 96 situational attribution references were found in the Japanese youth crime (Bus hijacking in Saga), and 6 dispositional and 34 situational attribution references were found in the Japanese media scandal (NTV scandal) (Table 2).

Table 2
Number of Attribution References for News Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>USA (n = 94)</th>
<th>JAPAN (n = 146)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DISPOSIT</td>
<td>SITUATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADULT (00)</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YOUTH (01)</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDIA (02)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>DISPOSIT</td>
<td>SITUATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>107</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypotheses Testing

The numbers of attributions per article were calculated and transformed into proportions of dispositional or situational attributions to total attributions per article. The data were analyzed using several statistical tests for testing the three sets of hypotheses.

H1a: In news articles on adult murder cases, attributions in American newspapers will be more dispositional than in Japanese newspapers.

H1b: In news articles on adult murder cases, attributions in Japanese newspapers...
will be more situational than in American newspapers.

Hypothesis 1a predicted that American newspaper would make more dispositional attributions in news articles on adult crime, whereas Japanese newspaper would make more situational attributions in news articles on adult crime. Independent samples t-tests were used to compare the mean proportions of attribution references in adult crime between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun. As Tables 3 and 4 show, the results indicated a significant difference in the mean proportions of dispositional attributions between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun. The New York Times made more references to dispositional factors than did the Yomiuri Shimbun. However, no significant difference was found for situational attributions between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun. Thus, hypothesis 1a was supported, but hypothesis 1b was not supported.

Table 3
Proportions of attribution references in adult crimes between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dispositional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYTimes</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>.460</td>
<td>.468</td>
<td>.069</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yomiuri</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>.295</td>
<td>.438</td>
<td>.050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYTimes</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>.192</td>
<td>.352</td>
<td>.051</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yomiuri</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>.224</td>
<td>.397</td>
<td>.045</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4
Difference in proportions of attribution references in adult crimes between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (One-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dispositional</td>
<td>1.920</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.029†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational</td>
<td>-.466</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>.321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† Significant at the .05 level.
H2a: In news articles on youth crimes, attributions in American newspapers will be more dispositional than in Japanese newspapers.

H2b: In news articles on youth crimes, attributions in Japanese newspapers will be more situational than in American newspapers.

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to determine significant differences in the mean proportions of attribution references in youth crime between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun. The results (Tables 5 and 6) showed no significant difference in mean proportions of dispositional attributions between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun. Thus, hypothesis 2a was not supported. The difference in the proportions of situational attributions between the two newspapers was significant. However, the New York Times was more situational than the Yomiuri Shimbun as opposed to hypothesis 2b. Thus, hypothesis 2b was not supported.

Table 5
Proportions of attribution references in youth crimes between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dispositional</td>
<td>NYTimes</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>.250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yomiuri</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>.211</td>
<td>.372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational</td>
<td>NYTimes</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>.498</td>
<td>.431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yomiuri</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>.335</td>
<td>.442</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6
Difference in proportions of attribution references in youth crimes between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (One-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dispositional</td>
<td>-.918</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>.180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational</td>
<td>1.815</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>.036†</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† Significant at the .05 level.

H3a: In news articles on media scandals, attributions in American newspapers will be more dispositional than in Japanese newspapers.

H3b: In news articles on media scandals, attributions in Japanese newspapers will be more situational than in American newspapers.

To test third sets of hypotheses 3a and 3b, the mean proportions of dispositional attributions between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun were compared using independent samples t-tests. As shown in Tables 7 and 8, there was no significant difference in situational attributions. However, a marginally significant difference was found between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun in dispositional attributions on media scandals, which indicates that the Yomiuri Shimbun made more dispositional attributions in covering the media scandal than the New York Times. Since the sample sizes of both American and Japanese media scandals were not sufficient, the results were considered less valid than the two sets of data presented above.
Table 7
Proportions of attribution references in media scandals between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dispositional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYTimes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yomiuri</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.166</td>
<td>.347</td>
<td>.081</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYTimes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.766</td>
<td>.434</td>
<td>.194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yomiuri</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.500</td>
<td>.488</td>
<td>.115</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8
Difference in proportions of attribution references in media scandals between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (One-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dispositional</td>
<td>-1.507</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situational</td>
<td>1.180</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>.138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Post-hoc Analyses

Further statistical analyses and qualitative examination of the articles were conducted to examine how the relationship between culture and news categories influences attribution styles in both newspapers.

Interactions. A 2 (culture: American vs. Japanese) × 3 (category: adult crime, youth crime, media scandal) analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted using dispositional attribution reference as the dependent variable. As can be seen in Table 6a, there was a marginally significant interaction between culture and category, indicating that both newspapers made more dispositional attributions in adult crime than in youth crime and media scandals. However, the drop-off of the NY Times in making dispositional attributions among categories was sharper than that of Yomiuri Shimbun (Figure 1). Although the
Yomiuri Shimbun was less dispositional than the New York Times in adult crime, the drop-off of the Yomiuri Shimbun was not as sharp among categories as the New York Times.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differences among news categories on proportions of dispositional attributions for the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sum of Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture x Category</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the .05 level

Figure 1.

Mean proportions of dispositional attributions per article by news category.

A 2 (culture) × 3 (category) ANOVA for situational attributions revealed that there was no interaction between culture and category. Table 6b shows, however, that there was a significant main effect of category. Figure 2 illustrates that both newspapers made more situational attributions in media scandals than in youth crime and adult crime. There was also
a marginally significant main effect of culture, indicating that the New York Times made more situational attributions than the Yomiuri Shimbun.

Table 10
Difference among news categories on proportions of situational attributions for the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td>2.766</td>
<td>.098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>3.848</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.924</td>
<td>11.232</td>
<td>.000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture × Category</td>
<td>.653</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.327</td>
<td>1.906</td>
<td>.151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Significant at the .05 level

Figure 2.
Mean proportions of situational attributions per article by news category.

Within-culture Comparisons. To examine attributional trends within each culture, the ratio of dispositional to situational attributions in each category was compared. For the comparison, the differences between the two types of attributions were calculated by subtracting situational from dispositional attribution counts, where it is assumed that the sampling distribution is normally distributed with a mean of zero. For the New York Times,
no significant evidence was found to reject the null hypothesis that the mean differences between the two attributions equal zero, indicating that the New York Times was not more dispositional than situational or vice versa (adult crime, $z = 1.15, ns$; youth crime, $z = -1.34, ns$). There was significance in media scandal ($z = -4.4, p < .05$), indicating that the NY Times was more situational than dispositional in the category. However, the result was not considered valid because the sample size was not large enough (Figure 3).

**Figure 3.**
Mean proportions of dispositional and situational attributions of NY Times by category

For the Yomiuri Shimbun, there was no evidence to reject the null hypothesis that the mean differences between two attributions equal zero, indicating that the Yomiuri Shimbun did not adhere to either type of attributions in any category (adult crime, $z = 0.06, ns$; youth crime, $z = -1.09, ns$; media scandal, $z = -1.55, ns$) (Figure 4).
Figure 4. Mean proportions of dispositional and situational attributions of Yomiuri Shimbun by category

Qualitative Examination. A qualitative examination of the coverage might help us understand how the two newspapers depicted the events in their articles in greater depth. As the test result of hypothesis 1a showed, the New York Times gave greater weight to dispositional factors than did the Yomiuri Shimbun in explaining adult crime. The emphasis on dispositional references in the American newspaper may be seen in several accounts of the sniper attack in Washington, D.C. One New York Times article, for example, referred to personality traits of the criminal as possible causes: “But his [Muhammad’s] temper, she said in various court papers, became so explosive, his behavior so violent, that she [ex-wife] dreaded the day he would go too far with her or one of the children.” Some other articles speculated Muhammad’s attitudes, “... anti-American attitudes, inspired by last year’s attacks on Sept. 11, may have played a part in the shootings,” and his religious briefs, “a rapid and bizarre change in religious briefs, especially the delusion of being God, is not rare
among serial killers and others who commit violent crimes” as possible links to his deviant behavior.

Both newspapers made apparently more situational attributions in explaining youth crime than adult crime (Figure 2). In both cultures, it seems clear that situational factors have stronger influence upon young adolescents’ behavior than those of adults. However, a qualitative examination of newspaper accounts of the youth crime stories showed cultural diversity in what kind of situational factors are considered most prominent in deviant behavior of young adolescents. In the New York Times, the young boys who committed the crime were described as two unique individuals and the external factors were seen as driving them into the crime. On the other hand, the Yomiuri Shimbun depicted the boy as an unstable individual and explained the factors that influenced the development of the boy’s personality.

While the New York Times brought up the availability of guns, computer video games, and fellow group (called “Trench Coat Mafia”) members into discussion on possible causes of the young boys’ behavior at the Columbine high school in Colorado, the Yomiuri Shimbun focused on the impact of ties with family and school on the high school boy who hijacked the highway bus in Japan. For example, the New York Times referred to the availability of guns: “one of the earliest lessons of childhood in America is that it is normal, at least in some circumstances, to reach for a gun,” the American subculture, “the group [the trench coat mafia] has been described as devoted to dark, Gothic music and culture, computer video games with names like Doom, and all things German, including Hitler. . . . ,” and the relationships with fellow group, “. . . the young men’s hatred appears in part to have been a grotesque extension of a long-running feud that members of the trench coat mafia had with more popular cliques at the school, known as jocks and preps.” On the other hand, the
Yomiuri Shimbun emphasized the role of parents, teachers and school in shaping young people's personalities. It stated, for example, "adult men lost their power of guiding their children," "children are too much dependent on their mothers," "teachers are not taking good care of every single kid in classroom," and "children are embedded with studying due to problems with Japanese educational system." The next chapter offers a more detailed discussion of the results of the study.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

This study attempted to draw research attention to the role of culture in mass media by comparing attribution styles presented in American and Japanese newspapers.

Hypothesis 1a was supported. Hypothesis 1a predicted that American newspapers would be more dispositional than Japanese newspapers in explaining the causes of adult crimes. The result showed a significant difference in dispositional attributions between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun, which indicates that American newspapers are more likely to make dispositional attributions than Japanese newspapers when explaining the adult crime news. Consistent with the past studies, this study found that American newspapers reflected their culturally specific attribution style: Americans tend to focus more on personal dispositions when making attributions for social events than East Asians.

Hypothesis 1b stated that Japanese newspapers would be more situational than American newspapers in explaining the causes of adult crime. No significant difference was found in situational attributions between the two newspapers. One possible explanation for this might be that the specific event selected for the Japanese adult crime was not appropriate for the study. The Japanese criminal was suspected to be mentally disordered when he stabbed children to death in a Japanese elementary school. The Yomiuri Shimbun quoted the history of his mental problems in explaining his murder and reported that he had taken ten times of his daily dose of tranquilizers before attacking the children, making him to hallucinate. While the Yomiuri Shimbun referred to problems with interpersonal relationships with his ex-wife and his father, dispositional attributions were much more often counted for the crime due to doubts of his mental stability.
The statistical analysis did not show support for hypotheses 2a and 2b. Hypothesis 2a stated that American newspapers would be more dispositional than Japanese newspapers in accounts of youth crime. The New York Times did not differ from the Yomiuri Shimbun in making dispositional attributions when explaining why the young adolescents committed murders. While the New York Times referred to the characters and personal beliefs which could drive the young boys to kill several other students in a high school in Colorado, they provided further intensive explanations for situational factors. Specifically, the newspaper quoted excessive violence in movies, TV programs, online games, and availability of guns, as factors that can influence personality formation. As did the New York Times in the Columbine case, the Yomiuri Shimbun made a few dispositional attributions in explaining what caused the young boy to hijack a bus and kill some other passengers. A possible reason for this may be that external influences are considered stronger for young adolescents who have less stable sense of identity than adults. In fact, the Yomiuri Shimbun reported the boy’s interpersonal relationships with his family and other classmates in junior high school as possible causes for his action. Contrary to hypothesis 2b, the New York Times was more situational than the Yomiuri Shimbun. The New York Times may have attributed the responsibility to external causes rather than to the two boys because they killed themselves at the end of the massacre.

For media scandal stories, results did not indicate clear distinctions in either dispositional or situational attributions between the New York Times and the Yomiuri Shimbun. Hypotheses 3a and 3b predicted that American newspapers would be more dispositional than Japanese newspapers in accounts of media scandals, whereas Japanese newspapers will be situational than its counterpart. As mentioned earlier, the sample articles
examined for this category were not sufficient to find reliable evidence, yielding only a few attribution references in both American and Japanese crimes. However, the limited amount of data suggests that the causal explanations were focused on situational factors rather than dispositional factors in both newspapers. This might indicate that in organizational crime, such as media scandal, newspapers tend to refer to organizational flaws instead of individual faults.

*Globalization and Crime News*

The present study examined attribution styles in two newspapers from different cultural backgrounds. Somewhat surprisingly, the results did not indicate as sharp cultural contrast between them as predicted. One possible explanation for this may be that as information technology has been developing at a phenomenal rate in modern society, cultural boundaries might have become more blurred. The transitions from adoption of the telephone, radio, and the television, to computers, cellular phones, and the Internet have changed our lives. The more ideas travel from place to place with advanced communication technologies, the more various cultures have mingled. During the 150 years of U.S.-Japan relations, the Japanese have been influenced by American culture to a great degree and Americans have absorbed some aspects of Japanese culture as well. Thus, the globalization of mass media and the wide spread of communication technologies may have contributed to a more homogeneous media content.

Another explanation for the failure to confirm the hypotheses may be the news reporting of crime. Although the causes of crime discussed in news stories are culturally specific, there would be similarities in methods of reporting social problems such as poverty,
Journalists have the responsibility to provide audiences with an accurate picture, whether reporting personal factors of an individual or offering situational aspects of the incident. They look at what the criminal has done in the past, predicting the present and future behavior, and clinical history to evaluate what was wrong with the criminal. In addition to those internal factors, they may take external factors into account, including the information on family history, availability of weapons, and interpersonal relationships with others. Thus, these journalistic methodologies may extend beyond cultural boundaries in the world.

**Implications for Cross-cultural Diversity in Media**

The results of the study did not reveal clear cultural differences in attribution styles of the two newspapers. However, no one would dispute that there is variety in cultures around the world.

**Consequences of FAE.** As the results showed, American newspapers tend to emphasize dispositional factors of an individual more often than Japanese newspapers when explaining the causes of crime committed by adult. One implication of the finding is cultural diversity in interpreting adult crime news. Americans tend to see behavior as an outcome of the actor’s personal dispositions and are not likely to assume inconsistency in the actor’s behavior under different conditions (called “Fundamental Attribution Error” as discussed in Chapter 2). Thus, if a newspaper reports an adult murder case in a local town, Americans would possibly attribute the causes to the murderer’s personal properties (e.g., personality
problems or mental illness) and think that the murderer would act the same way in the future as well as in the past.

On the other hand, although the results of the present study did not support this, prior research has revealed that East Asians would be less subject to FAE. They have a tendency to look for situational factors and see the actor’s behavior as unstable and related to other environmental factors. If East Asians learn the same news as Americans, East Asians would possibly attribute the causes to some external factors (e.g., interpersonal relationships or roles in social groups) and anticipate the possible differences in the murderer’s behavior in different contexts.

Judgments of Contradictory Propositions. Additional findings of the study showed that both newspapers did not adhere to one side of two attribution styles in all categories (with an exception for the American media scandal) and consistently reported the events using two types of attributions. However, several past studies have shown that there are differences in interpreting contradictory arguments between the Western and East Asian cultures. Peng and Nisbett (1999) have found that, when presented with two opposing propositions, Americans tended to favor one of the two propositions and reject the other one. East Asians, in contrast, tended to accept both propositions.

In their study, Peng and Nisbett (1999) provided participants with two apparently contradictory research findings and asked them to rate how much each of the findings was plausible. For example, the research finding A was: “A social psychologist studied young adults and asserted that those who feel close to their families have more satisfying social relationships.” The research finding B was: “A developmental psychologist studied
adolescent children and asserted that those children who were less dependent on their parents and had weaker family ties were generally more mature.”

A group of participants read one of the two findings (A or B) and the other group read both findings (A and B). American participants who read both findings showed a greater degree of plausibility on the one side of two findings than did the participants who read only one finding. Chinese participants, on the other hand, considered the two opposing findings to be equally plausible, that is, they looked for the intermediated point of the two opposing assertions.

Peng and Nisbett’s study suggested that Americans and East Asians use different strategies to resolve problems. Americans are inclined to adhere to the one side of two contradictory ideas, whereas East Asians are inclined to accept both opposing ways and try to find a compromising point. The tendency shown in this study may be seen as part of the idea, “analytic and holistic view of the world,” as was discussed in Chapter 2. Americans are prone to focus on a particular object and detach it from the field (Nisbett et al. 2001). They also prefer to use rules and categories to understand the object’s behavior and avoid inconsistency across situations. By contrast, East Asians have a strong belief in the influence of social contexts on the object’s behavior and try to see everything in relation to other external factors (Nisbett et al. 2001).

Those findings suggest that there may be cultural differences in interpreting the opposing information in news media contents. The present study revealed that both newspapers were not inclined to stick to only one type of attributions and provided audiences with both possible causes (i.e., dispositional and situational) of the events. It is important to examine how audiences from different cultural backgrounds interpret the information by the
news media. When presented with the articles reporting the sniper attack in D.C. area, as the previous studies have shown, American readers might be prone to adhere to personal dispositions of John Muhammad as causes of his crime, whereas Japanese readers might embrace both types of attributions and try to find an intermediated point of view for the causes of crime.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, only one newspaper was used for sampling articles for each country, the NY Times for the U.S. and the Yomiuri Shimbun for Japan, limiting the generalizability of the study. Both papers are leading media outlets in their countries, however, they are among many other newspapers in their own countries and may be inclined to a particular political thought. A more diverse group of sample newspapers could be more representative of the national news media.

Another limitation is the event selection. As discussed above, some events selected may not have been appropriate for the study. The crime in the Japanese elementary school, which was categorized as the Japanese adult crime, was not comparable to the American adult crime in that the Japanese criminal was mentally ill. For the youth crime category, the two events may not be comparable because the American young criminals were dead at the crime scene, which might have brought a moderate view of the criminals themselves.

Another limitation of the study was the method of extracting attribution references from the articles. Since newspapers do not explicitly state the causes of social events like crime, there were difficulties in finding all the possible causes of events.
Future Research

A future study may examine cultural difference in a larger and more diverse sample of newspapers from the U.S. and Japan. Unlike national newspapers, smaller regional newspapers serve local towns, focusing more often on local communities and organizations. Since crime tends to inherently be local phenomena, there may be differences in their coverage of crime news between national and regional newspapers. In addition to national newspapers, several other regional newspapers can also be included in the sample in a future study.

Although the current study dealt with the negative social events, positive events, such as coverage of prize winner or a sport team victory, can be added to the sample events of the study. More dispositional attributions might be made for prize winning news and more situational attributions might be made for the sport team news. This might contribute to reveal the difference in how the news media differ in attributing the causes of positive events from those of negative events in society.

The purpose of the present study was to demonstrate cultural difference in attribution styles in newspapers in the U.S. and Japan. Although the study was done to answer the question of whether there is cultural difference in contents of news media, no information for the influence of news media on audiences was provided. It will also be interesting to see how the audiences from those countries respond to the media news coverage. Thus, it would be beneficial to conduct a content analysis to examine how media present information and also carry out experiments to reveal how audiences cognitively react to media content.
## APPENDIX A. TIME FRAME AND KEYWORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Time Frame Searched</th>
<th>Keywords Searched</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sniper attack in Washington (USA)</td>
<td>October 25 2002 to November 7 2002</td>
<td>Sniper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osaka School Tragedy (Japan)</td>
<td>June 9 2001 to June 22 2001</td>
<td>Takuma &amp; Mamoru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbine Shooting (USA)</td>
<td>April 21 1999 to May 4 1999</td>
<td>Columbine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus hijacking in Saga (Japan)</td>
<td>May 4 2000 to May 17 2000</td>
<td>Saga &amp; Bus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jayson Blair scandal (USA)</td>
<td>May 11 2003 to May 24 2003</td>
<td>Jayson &amp; Blair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NTV scandal (Japan)</td>
<td>October 25 2003 to November 7 2003</td>
<td>NTV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B. CODING BOOK

Instruction: Code the following variables for each newspaper article. Input the numerical value in the blank on the coding sheet.

IDNO: Indicate an unique identification number for each article. The numbers begin with 001 and the consecutive numbers follow through 240. No article can be assigned the same ID number.

PAPER: Report the name of the newspaper. The New York Times is assigned for 00 and the Yomiuri Shimbun is assigned for 01.

[The New York Times = 00]
[The Yomiuri Shimbun = 01]

ARTDATE: Report the date, month, and year of the article.

[dd/mm/yy]

SECTION: Indicate the section of the article. General news is assigned for 00 and editorial is assigned for 01.

[General news = 00]
[Editorial = 01]

LENGTH: Indicate the length of the article. Word count of each article should be described as numerical value.

[numerical]

CULTURE: Indicate the culture of the article. American culture is assigned for 00 and Japanese culture is assigned for 01.

[American = 00]
[Japanese = 01]

CATEGORY: Indicate the category of the article. Adult crime is assigned for 00, youth crime is assigned for 01, and media scandal is assigned for 02.

[Adult Crime = 00]
[Youth Crime = 01]
[Media Scandal = 02]
DISPOSIT: Identify how many causal references to dispositional factors in the article. The number of causal references should be described as numerical value.

[numerical]

SITUATIO: Identify how many causal references to situational factors in the article. The number of causal references should be described as numerical value.

[numerical]

Remember that a causal reference is defined as: “Any statement in which an outcome is indicated as having happened, or being present, because of some identified event or condition.” More specifically, it is described as “Any statement about what a criminal has or has not done, can or cannot do, and what has or has not been done, or what should or should not be done in the situation where the event happened.”
APPENDIX C. CODING SCHEME

Dispositional and situational factors are defined as follows:

I. Disposition: Dispositional factors are defined as agent’s stable dispositions across situation.

   Personality trait: Tendency, nature, character, etc.
   (e.g., A is a good girl; She helps everybody; He is a rowdy.)
   Value, Attitude: General values, attitudes, opinions, religious beliefs, etc.
   (e.g., A’s basic purpose in life is to help people.)
   General capability, Knowledge: Skills, capabilities, proficiencies, etc.
   (e.g., A knew what he was doing on the computer.)
   Physical characteristics: Physical characteristics, external dress, appearances.
   (e.g., A is not thin; A is always neatly dressed.)
   Chronic Disease
   (e.g., He is suffered from asthma.)
   Long-standing Goal
   (e.g., He wanted to be a doctor.)
   Habit
   (e.g., It was fun for him.)

II. Situation: Situational factors are defined as the factors tied to a particular situation.

   Temporal/spatial/social location

   1. Time
   (e.g., A’s mother was not with him that day.)

   2. Place: Stress at workplace, or discomfort in an environment, etc.
   (e.g., He lives in the suburbs; A was frustrated at school.)

   3. Social Context: Relationship, social role, institutional requirement, and group norm.
   (e.g., A is a friend of mine; He was supposed to help them; She felt that she owed them something.)

   Aspects of persons other than agent
   (e.g., P is too proud; P likes cars; P was upset.)

   Impersonal aspects of context
   (e.g., The neighborhood was dirty; It was lucky; The sidewalk was covered with ice.)
REFERENCES


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