Face and Facework: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Managing Politeness Norms in the United States and Korea

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This study compares U.S. Americans' (n = 222) and Koreans' (n = 202) perceptions of and management strategies toward potentially impolite situations. The results show that cultural norms significantly determine the perception of the situation and that Koreans are more likely to resort to confrontation across situations than are U.S. Americans. Additionally, individual face needs, situational factors, and culture, as well as interactions, are important predictors of individuals' management strategies in potentially impolite situations. Practical implications for intercultural communication are discussed.

When a friend fails to keep a promise to get together, would you ignore the issue or confront the friend for an explanation? An individual's reaction to other interactants in a potential social predicament involves various factors, primarily individual preference and the nature of the situation (Michel & Shoda, 1995). Culture influences both how the situation is interpreted and what a generally acceptable reaction is—that is, a particular characteristic of a given type of reaction may be more important in one culture than in another. Moreover, the way situational characteristics influence individuals' preferences for a type of reaction differs among cultures. This approach to examining cultural similarities and differences in people's reactions to potential predicaments focuses on disunity variability, which characterizes the way relationships among constructs vary across different cultures (Levine, Park, & Kim, 2007).

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Date submitted: 2011–05–21

People cope with undesirable social situations through a wide range of management strategies—apology, humor, excuses, and escape, to name a few (McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; Metts & Cupach, 1989). However, the use of any specific strategy is contingent on an individual first choosing whether to confront or avoid the other person or people (Sillars & Wilmot, 1994). The current study focuses on the two general tendencies of management strategies—the extent to which an individual would avoid or confront—in potentially social norm breach situations across different cultures.

Individual Characteristics

An individual's patterned trend of dealing with social predicaments can directly influence the choice to avoid or confront in a situation. The concepts of face and face needs contribute to understanding general tendencies of avoidance and confrontation. Brown and Levinson (1987) define face as "the public self-image that every member of a society wants to claim for himself/herself" (p. 61) and explicate two types of face needs: positive face and negative face. Individuals want the appreciation and approval of others (i.e., positive face) and also want to be unimpeded and free from imposition (i.e., negative face). Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of positive and negative politeness refers to linguistic devices used to satisfy positive and negative face needs. Speech acts are the reification of politeness, exemplifying social interactants' innate desire to look positive and be free from imposition. As social interactions often involve more than one individual and everyone is assumed to have face, all involved parties' positive and negative face needs are relevant. Ting-Toomey (1988, 2005) builds on Brown and Levinson's (1987) face with the notion of the agent of face, distinguishing between the need to protect one's own face and the need to respect others'.

This study juxtaposes Brown and Levinson's face need content with Ting-Toomey's face need agent and delineates four types of face needs. Self positive face (SPF) reflects concern for approval and appreciation of one's personal self-image, while other positive face (OPF) points to one's concern for approval and appreciation of another person's image. Self negative face (SNF) pertains to the need to protect one's own freedom; other negative face (ONF) refers to one's need to not inhibit others' freedom to act. These four types of face can be understood as general characteristics of individuals, whose needs and desires are exemplified through speech acts and nonverbal cues. For example, a person who is highly concerned with SPF will generally communicate by seeking compliments and approval from others to maintain his or her positive image. Conversely, when that positive image is at stake, such a person is more likely to display negative emotions and address the threat to his or her positive face accordingly.

In interaction with others, individuals may need to engage in facework, which Goffman (1967) refers to as strategies individuals use to meet their own or others' desired face needs. One general category of strategies for managing interaction includes avoidance of further interaction or escape from the situation. By ignoring the undesirable situation and pretending nothing serious has happened, individuals may be able to mitigate negative consequences (McLaughlin et al., 1983). For example, changing the topic of conversation can disinvite further attention to the undesirable situation. Another general tendency in managing social predicaments is the strategy of confronting those who may be responsible for the potentially troubling situation. This strategic category helps one reclaim desired face at

the expense of the offender's (Goffman, 1967). Such a confrontation might take the form of a negative comment toward the offender or a demand for an apology.

The current study investigates how the four types of face needs relate to strategies of avoidance and confrontation. That is, we ask which of the types—SPF, OPF, SNF, and ONF—relate to avoidance or confrontation. It is logical to suppose that people with a strong need to protect OPF are disinclined to make other people feel bad and thus have a strong preference for avoidance, whereas individuals with a strong need to protect SNF strongly prefer confrontation as a way to prevent similar undesirable situations in the future. But because we do not have strong theoretical base for specific predictions of the relationship between each face need type and preference for avoidance and confrontation, we pose our research questions as follows:

RQ 1:   Which of the four types of face need will be related to avoidance?

RQ 2:   Which of the four types of face need will be related to confrontation?

Culture significantly influences individuals' face needs in general and the strategies they use to manage these face needs. Previous studies have examined cultural similarities and differences in face needs and facework strategies (e.g., Brew & Cairns, 2004; Cupach & Imahori, 1993; Edelmann et al., 1987; Holtgraves & Yang, 1992; Hwang, Francesco, & Kessler, 2003; Imahori & Cupach, 1994; Merkin, 2006; Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey et al., 1991). Referring to face negotiation theory, Ting-Toomey (1988, 2005) claims that people from individualistic cultures have stronger independent self-construal and therefore focus more on self-oriented face needs; individuals in collectivistic cultures, on the other hand, have a stronger interdependent self-construal and consequently are more concerned with other-oriented face needs. Merkin (2006) found that when managing embarrassing situations, participants from Hong Kong and Japan were more likely to use harmonious facework, whereas U.S. Americans were more likely to use aggressive facework. However, cultural differences regarding face needs and facework are not consistent. For example, Oetzel et al. (2001) examined face needs and conflict strategies in both collectivistic and individualistic cultures, and although overall the findings support the face negotiation theory, some results were unexpected: among the four national cultures investigated, China surpassed the United States, Germany, and Japan in self-oriented face needs. Other studies reveal similarities between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Hwang, Francesco, and Kessler (2003) examined students' feedback-seeking in Hong Kong, Singapore, and the United States and found that in all three cultures, fear of losing face is the reason for not asking questions in the classroom. Cupach and Imahori's (1993) research on embarrassment coping strategies also revealed that both Japanese and Americans ranked "avoidance" as the most frequently used strategy.

The findings of cross-cultural research on face needs and facework suggest that in social interactions, facework can operate in culture-specific ways—that is, it is useful to investigate whether the necessity of a certain face need and preference for a certain facework strategy are greater in one culture than in another. One approach that may resolve inconsistencies in cross-cultural communication research is to treat culture as a moderator that can influence how face needs relate to various facework strategies. For example, Park and Guan (2009) examined Chinese and Americans' apology behavior across twelve

different situations and found that Americans are more likely to apologize for having threatened ONF needs, whereas Chinese are more likely to apologize for threatening OPF needs. Ambady, Koo, Lee, and Rosenthal's (1996) exploration of similarities and differences between politeness strategies in United States and Korean culture shows that both Americans and Koreans tend to use strategies of affiliation with peers and of circumspection with someone in power. However, Koreans deploy significantly more other-oriented politeness strategies toward a superior than toward either a peer or a subordinate, whereas Americans tend to use other-oriented strategies consistently in all three types of relationships. In other words, Korean culture directs more attention to interpersonal and relational cues (e.g., hierarchical differentials between the communicators) than American culture does, and this differential emphasis leads to the variation in politeness strategies.

RQ 3:   Will the two cultures under investigation (Korean and U.S. American) differ in the ways each type of face relates to avoidance and confrontation?

Situational Characteristics

In addition to individual differences, specific situations may also influence behavior (Michel & Shoda, 1995). An individual's choice to avoid or confront in a given situation also depends on factors outside the individuals. Cupach and Metts (1994) discovered that the nature of an embarrassing situation is associated with the specific coping strategy. More specifically, people are more likely to address a social misstep by justifying it, whereas an excuse is more often the strategy sought in a situation caused by unintentional error. The reaction to a face-threatening situation also relates closely to the negative valence of the incident. Hodgins, Liebeskind, and Schwartz (1996) examined how situational factors such as the relational closeness between the offender and victim influenced the offender's remedial account, finding that mitigating strategies are much more frequent in friend relationships than between acquaintances and also more frequent with high-status victims than low-status victims.

From among numerous kinds of social interactions, we chose to focus on two particular types of incidents: breaking social engagements, and failing to use certain forms of address in conversation with another person. These two situations were selected because they are commonplace in daily communication within and across different cultures, and because exploration of management strategy in these situations is relatively limited. Our findings can contribute significantly to knowledge of cultural differences, thus helping to avoid misunderstanding and misattribution due to cultural differences. Norms of daily communication activities are internalized through socialization; having reached adulthood, individuals rarely question the assumptions underlying the norms (Brislin, 1981). Because different cultures do not necessarily perceive these two situations (breaking a social engagement promise and failing to use a certain form of address) in the same way, the particular types of incidents can generate completely different reactions from social interactants of different cultural backgrounds. Uncovering important cultural differences in these situations enhances our intercultural communication competence.

Breaking a Social Engagement Promise

Engaging in social activities together is one of the most important strategies for maintaining friendship (Messman, Canary, & Hause, 2000). Such activities often require planning and execution of the plan. Yet the expectations for ensuring implementation of an agreed-upon social activity plan differ across cultures. Stewart and Bennett (1991) claim that in U.S. American culture, friendship is characterized by common interests, spontaneity, and informality. In other cultures, by contrast, it is interdependence and obligations that define social relations. For example, researchers found that when presented with a moral dilemma between keeping and breaking a promise, Chinese adolescent participants were more concerned about relational harmony, whereas their Icelandic counterparts stressed self-interest (Keller, Edelstein, Schmid, Fang, & Fang, 1998). This indicates that in individualistic cultures, social obligations tend to be less important than individuals' wants and needs, especially when they are in conflict. But in collectivistic cultures, where relations with others fundamentally define the concept of self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), fulfillment of others' needs and wants is essential to achieving social and relational harmony and therefore is strongly emphasized. Lee (1994) asserts that the Korean word *cheong*, which refers to the melding of individual identity into a collective, demonstrates the importance of mutual dependence between individuals and in-group members such as friends and family in Korean culture. Gudykunst, Yoon, and Nishida (1987) provide empirical evidence that in-group members' relational ties are stronger in Korean culture than in U.S. American culture. Cultural differences engender different norms in maintaining relational harmony and varying emphases on the importance of fulfilling social responsibility. Thus, violation of such norms is viewed differently across cultures. Particularly in cultures where mutual responsibility and obligations govern social relationships, one is expected to prioritize the collective's needs and wants over one's own. Failure to do so is perceived negatively. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1:   Compared to Americans, Koreans will consider the breaking of a social engagement less polite.

Failing to Use Honorifics

Addressing one another in socially appropriate forms is a common communicative act in a variety of cultures. However, how the appropriate form is defined and operates is culture-specific. In a hierarchical culture such as the Korean, where factors such as age, socioeconomic status, title, and even occupation structure social relations (Hwang, 1990), the manner of address is an important means of demonstrating hierarchical differences. In Korean culture, correct use of honorifics (i.e., pronouns, verb forms, and distancing markers) acknowledging the addressee's hierarchical status relative to oneself is an essential component of polite address (Scott, 1990). An individualistic culture such as that in the United States prefers equality in social relations (Stewart & Bennett, 1991); therefore, generally speaking, factors such as age, socioeconomic status, title, or occupation do not entirely determine the manner of communication. On the contrary, Americans strive to address each other in a relatively consistent way, demonstrating the fundamental concept of equality (Stewart & Bennett, 1991). For example, although a CEO holds the most power in a company, in the United States it is not uncommon for an employee to address the CEO by his or her first name when they know each other. In Korean culture, however, this is rather rare because it violates the structured hierarchy. Indeed, the underlying cultural assumption of

hierarchy means that failing to address someone in the format accorded to his or her social hierarchical status is likely to be regarded as a breach of social norms. Hence we propose a second hypothesis:

H 2:   *Koreans will consider addressing an older person informally (i.e., not using honorifics) less polite than will Americans.*

Although research has shown cultural differences in how individual face needs and situational factors affect individuals' facework strategies separately, it remains unclear how individual differences in face needs, situational characteristics, and culture altogether influence one's avoidance or confrontation. Therefore, we pose the following research questions:

RQ 4:   *Will Koreans and Americans differ in the extent to which they would avoid and confront in situations where a promise is not kept or where honorifics are not properly used?*

RQ 5:   *Will situational characteristics affect cultural differences in how face needs are related to avoidance and confrontation?*

Method

Participants

Participants were 222 undergraduates (age $M = 20.81$, $SD = 2.86$, 68% women) at a large Midwestern university in the United States and 202 undergraduates (age $M = 22.05$, $SD = 2.73$, 72% women) in Korea. The United States sample was 82.65% European American, 6.12% African American, 4.08% Hispanic, 1.02% Asian American, 3.06% mixed, and 3.06% unidentified. Korean participants were all ethnically Korean.

Instrument

The questionnaire was produced in both English and Korean. To ensure equivalence in meaning, the English and Korean versions of the questionnaire were compared using various methods, such as back-translation and inspection by speakers fluent in both languages. Participants completed the questionnaire in their native languages. All measures used a 5-point Likert scale response format (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). The first section of the questionnaire included measurement items for face needs. Then, a vignette was presented. The second section of the questionnaire included measurement items for politeness and for intended uses of avoidance and confrontation concerning each situation depicted in the vignette.

Face Needs

The four types of face need were measured before the participants read the scenario. The items concerned the individual's general tendency, across situations, toward each of the following aspects: self positive face, self negative face, other positive face, other negative face. We developed the face need

measurement items based on Ting-Toomey and Oetzel's (2001) face scale and Brown and Levinson's (1987) delineation of positive and negative faces. We modified Ting-Toomey and Oetzel's scale because the original scale differentiated only the target person's face (i.e., self-face and other-face) without differentiating the content of face (i.e., positive face and negative face). Each item of Ting-Toomey and Oetzel's scale initially was separated into either positive or negative face need categories. Then, the wordings of the items were modified to emphasize either positive face need or negative face need. Measurement testing data from previous studies (e.g., Park & Guan, 2006, 2009) provided additional information on preparing the items.

SPF need was measured with 5 items (e.g., "It is important for me to look good in front of other people" and "Maintaining a positive image is important to me."). Reliabilities (Cronbach's α) were .82 in the United States and .85 in Korea. SNF need was measured with 5 items (e.g., "My boundaries should be respected" and "I want other people to stay out of my business."). Reliabilities were .82 in the United States and .70 in Korea. OPF need was measured with 3 items (e.g., "Helping others maintain a positive image of themselves is important to me."). Reliabilities were .76 in the United States and .69 in Korea. ONF need was measured with 4 items (e.g., "I try not to interfere in other people's personal matters" and "It is important to me not to tell others how to behave."). Reliabilities were .71 in the United States and .68 in Korea.

For the four types of face need, a CFA showed that a four-factor solution (Non-Normed Fit Index [NNFI] = .92, Comparative Fit Index [CFI] = .93, Incremental Fit Index [IFI] = .93) was superior to a one-factor solution (NNFI = .73, CFI = .76, IFI = .76), $\Delta\chi$ = 1215.56, p < .001, which did not differentiate self face versus other face and positive face versus negative face. The four-factor solution was also superior to a two-factor solution (NNFI = .76, CFI = .79, IFI = .79), $\Delta\chi$ = 1008.52, p < .001, which differentiated only self-face need and other-face need. The four-factor solution was also superior to a two-factor solution (NNFI = .86, CFI = .88, IFI = .88), $\Delta\chi$ = 252.86, p < .001, which differentiated only positive-face need and negative-face need. For testing cross-cultural equality of the four-factor structure, CFA yielded an acceptable fit (NNFI = .91, CFI = .92, IFI = .92), indicating that the item-factor structure invariance was reasonable across the two cultural groups.

Situations

Two vignettes were prepared, one depicting a situation in which a person does not keep a social engagement with a classmate, and the other depicting a situation in which a younger person addresses an elder informally (i.e., fails to use the appropriate honorifics). Participants were asked to read a vignette, imagine themselves in the situation as vividly as they could, and use the scales to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with each statement. Korean versions of the vignettes used Korean names such as Ju-Hyun and Jung-Won, and English versions used names such as Alex and C.J. The names in the questionnaire were gender-neutral to prevent participants from reacting according to gender considerations. The English versions of the vignettes are presented below.

Situation One (promise): Alex is a classmate of yours. One day, you tell Alex about a nice restaurant you went to, and recommend eating there. Alex says, "Let's go there

tomorrow." You agree to meet at 7 pm at the restaurant. The next day, Alex tells you, "I don't want to go out because the weather is too hot. Let's go there another time instead."

Situation Two (honorifics): C.J. and you go to the same university. C.J. is a freshman and you are a junior. Because C.J. had a job for a while before he/she entered university, C.J. is about 3~4 years older than you. Although C.J. is two years behind you in the college education, you tell him/her to treat you equal and communicate with you casually. Then, C.J. immediately calls you just by your first name and talks to you very informally.

Politeness

Although Brown and Levinson (1987) assumed that speech acts threaten only one type of face at a time, Wilson, Kim, and Meischke (1991) argue that one speech act can threaten both types of face. For example, when the character in the depicted vignette says "I don't want to go out tonight. Let's go to the restaurant another time," the hearer might experience a sense of disapproval of the agreed-upon plan and, at the same time, feel that his or her schedule is disrupted. The hearer might also interpret it as indicating his or her insignificance to the speaker and the speaker's lack of respect for his or her time. Thus, the threatened type of face is an empirical question. The current study instead measures participants' perceptions of global politeness to examine the participants' overall interpretation of the situations. Six items characterize Alex's comment [or C.J.'s reaction] as appropriate, polite, proper, considerate, and uncalled for [recoded], and showing good manners. Reliabilities were .90 in the United States and .87 in Korea for situation one (promise), and .94 in the United States and .88 in Korea for situation two (honorifics).

Avoidance

Four items measured what individuals would do as a way of being avoidant in each situation (e.g., "After hearing what C.J. said, I would ignore the comment" and "After hearing what C.J. said, I would change the topic."). Reliabilities were .80 in the United States and .77 in Korea for situation one (promise), and .81 in the United States and .81 in Korea for situation two (honorifics).

Confrontation

Five items measured what individuals would do to confront the other person in each situation (e.g., "After hearing what C.J. said, I would confront C.J. about what C.J. said" and "After hearing what Alex said, I would demand an explanation from Alex."). Reliabilities were .89 in the United States and .93 in Korea for situation one (promise), and .95 in the United States and .90 in Korea for situation two (honorifics). Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, and correlations of the variables.

Table 1. Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations of Variables.

Situation 1 (promise) (*df* = 211)

Face need	Polite	SPF	SNF	OPF	ONF	Avoidance	Confrontation
Self Positive Face (SPF)	−.02						
Self Negative Face (SNF)	.01	.20**					
Other Positive Face (OPF)	.12*	.49***	.22**				
Other Negative Face (ONF)	.10	.21**	.40***	.23***			
Avoidance	−.05	−.21**	.07	−.09**	.12*		
Confrontation	−.34***	−.07	.17**	−.11*	−.06	.13*	
M	2.66	4.17	3.66	3.75	3.54	2.67	2.50
SD	0.86	0.53	0.60	0.61	0.67	0.76	0.95

Situation 2 (honorifics) (*df* = 206)

Face need	Polite	SPF	SNF	OPF	ONF	Avoidance	Confrontation
Self Positive Face (SPF)	.02						
Self Negative Face (SNF)	.19**	.26***					
Other Positive Face (OPF)	.16**	.55***	.32***				
Other Negative Face (ONF)	.16*	.26***	.59***	.37***			
Avoidance	−.41***	−.06	−.14*	.02	−.09		
Confrontation	−.58***	−.08	.07	−.03	.03	.51***	
M	3.16	4.22	3.62	3.74	3.50	2.64	2.22
SD	1.03	0.61	0.67	0.67	0.63	0.86	0.90

* *p* < .05, ** *p* < .01, *** *p* < .001

Results

Preliminary Analysis: General Face Needs

Americans (*M* = 3.56, *SD* = 0.57) had stronger needs for SNF than did Koreans (*M* = 3.33, *SD* = 0.52), *t* (422) = 4.38, *p* < .001, η² = .05. Americans (*M* = 4.18, *SD* = 0.52) did not differ from Koreans (*M* = 4.17, *SD* = 0.57) in their need for SPF, *t* (422) = 0.28, *p* = .78, η² = .00. Americans (*M* = 3.66, *SD* = 0.56) did not differ from Koreans as to OPF need (*M* = 3.66, *SD* = 0.54), *t* (422) =0.16, *p* = .88, η² = .00. Americans (*M* = 3.55, *SD* = 0.55) did not demonstrate a stronger need for ONF than did Koreans (*M* = 3.47, *SD* = 0.54), *t* (422) = 1.63, *p* = .10, η² = .01.

Politeness: Hypotheses 1 and 2

Hypothesis 1 predicted that compared to Americans, Koreans would consider failure to keep a social engagement less polite. A t-test showed that Koreans ($M = 2.16$, $SD = 0.62$) viewed the action depicted in situation one (promise) as significantly less polite than did Americans ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.81$), t (210) = 9.50, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .30$. The data were consistent with H1.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that Koreans would consider an action of addressing an older person informally (i.e., not using honorifics when addressing an elder) less polite than Americans would. A t-test showed that Koreans ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.78$) perceived the action depicted in situation two (honorifics) as less polite than did Americans ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.81$), t (207) = 11.90, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .41$. The data were consistent with H2.

Avoidance and Confrontation: Research Questions 1, 2, and 3

Research questions 1 and 2 asked which of the four types of face need would be related to intended uses of avoidance (RQ1) and confrontation (RQ2). Research question 3 asked whether Koreans and Americans would differ in the ways each type of face need would be related to avoidance and confrontation.

Before conducting the analyses, culture was dummy-coded, with U.S. Americans being 0 as the reference group and Koreans being 1 as the comparison group. The situation type was similarly dummy-coded, with situation one (promise) being 0 and situation two (honorifics) being 1. Each continuous predictor variable (four types of face need) was mean-centered. For testing interaction effects (i.e., second-order effects), the criterion variables (avoidance and confrontation) were regressed onto the product terms of the predictor variables (e.g., the culture dummy variable was multiplied with each of the four face needs). Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were conducted with the continuous variables and the dummy variables in the first block and the interactions of the continuous variables with the dummy variables in the second block. Multicollinearity was not a serious issue (Variance Inflation factor < 1.62), and examination of the residuals indicated no violations of assumptions.

Avoidance

The overall model for predicting avoidance was significant, F (18, 400) = 2.61, $p < .001$, $adj.R^2 = .07$. As shown in Table 2, among the first-order predictors, culture and SPF need were significant. Across situations one (promise) and two (honorifics), Koreans ($M = 2.82$, $SD = 0.81$) indicated stronger avoidance than did Americans ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.78$). SPF need was a negative predictor of avoidance. Among the predictors in the second block, the interaction term of SNF need by situation was significant. That is, SNF need was a positive predictor of intended use of avoidance for situation one (promise), $\beta = .13$, $t = 1.36$, $p = .17$, and a negative predictor of intended use of avoidance for situation two (honorifics), $\beta = -.11$, $t = -0.95$, $p = .34$. Among the predictors in the third block, none of the interaction terms was significant. There were no cultural differences in the way each face type and situation interacted with one another when affecting avoidance.

Table 2. Moderated Multiple Regression Results for Avoidance.

	B	SE	β	t	sr^2
Self Positive Face Need (SPF)	−0.25	0.08	−.18	−3.13**	.02
Self Negative Face Need (SNF)	0.00	0.07	.00	0.04	.00
Other Positive Face Need (OPF)	0.08	0.07	.06	1.10	.01
Other Negative Face Need (ONF)	0.08	0.08	.06	1.03	.01
Culture	0.34	0.08	.21	4.26***	.04
Situation	−0.11	0.08	−.01	−0.88	.00
$F (6, 412) = 4.47, p = .001, R^2 = .06$					
SPF × Culture	0.07	0.17	.03	0.44	.00
SNF × Culture	0.13	0.15	.05	0.88	.00
OPF × Culture	0.12	0.15	.05	0.82	.00
ONF × Culture	−0.01	0.16	−.00	−0.06	.00
SPF × Situation	0.28	0.17	.10	1.67	.01
SNF × Situation	−0.30	0.15	−.12	−2.03*	.01
OPF × Situation	0.06	0.15	.03	0.44	.00
ONF × Situation	−0.21	0.16	−.08	−1.30	.00
$F_{change} (8, 404) = 2.01, p = .04, R^2_{change} = .04$					
SPF × Culture × Situation	0.32	0.34	.06	0.96	.00
SNF × Culture × Situation	0.41	0.31	.08	1.33	.00
OPF × Culture × Situation	−0.01	0.30	−.00	−0.03	.00
ONF × Culture × Situation	−0.42	0.32	−.08	−1.29	.00
$F_{change} (4, 400) = 0.90, p = .46, R^2_{change} = .01$					

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$
Culture: dummy-coded with U.S. Americans = 0 and Koreans = 1
Situation: dummy-coded with situation one (promise) = 0 and situation two (honorifics) = 1

Confrontation

The overall model for predicting confrontation was significant, $F (18, 400) = 3.54, p < .001$, $adj.R^2 = .10$. As shown in Table 3, among the first-order predictors, culture, situation, and SNF need were significant. Across situations one (promise) and two (honorifics), Koreans ($M = 2.51$, $SD = 0.99$) indicated stronger confrontation than did Americans ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 0.86$). Individuals indicated stronger confrontation in situation one (promise) ($M = 2.50$, $SD = 0.95$) than in situation two (honorifics) ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 0.90$). SNF need was a positive predictor of confrontation. Among the predictors in the second block, the interaction term of SNF need by culture was significant. That is, SNF need was a stronger positive predictor of confrontation for Koreans, $β = .65$, $t = 4.63$, $p < .01$, than for Americans, $β = .19$, $t = 1.85$, $p = .06$. In the second block, the interaction term of SNF need by situation was also significant. That is, SNF need was a positive predictor of confrontation more strongly for situation one (promise), $β = .47$, $t = 3.86$, $p < .01$, than for situation two (honorifics), $β = .23$, $t = 2.03$, $p = .05$. None of the predictors in the third block was significant.

Table 3. Moderated Multiple Regression Results for Confrontation.

	B	SE	β	t	sr^2
Self Positive Face Need (SPF)	−0.16	0.09	−.10	−1.74	.01
Self Negative Face Need (SNF)	0.36	0.08	.25	4.36***	.04
Other Positive Face Need (OPF)	−0.07	0.08	−.05	−0.79	.00
Other Negative Face Need (ONF)	−0.11	0.09	−.07	−1.24	.01
Culture	0.41	0.09	.22	4.50***	.04
Situation	−0.23	0.09	−.12	−2.59**	.01
$F(6, 412) = 7.11, p < .001, R^2 = .09$					
SPF × Culture	0.11	0.19	.04	0.60	.00
SNF × Culture	0.51	0.17	.17	2.97**	.02
OPF × Culture	0.07	0.17	.02	0.40	.00
ONF × Culture	−0.04	0.18	−.01	−0.22	.00
SPF × Situation	−0.06	0.19	−.02	−0.30	.00
SNF × Situation	−0.33	0.17	−.11	−2.02*	.01
OPF × Situation	0.04	0.17	.01	0.24	.00
ONF × Situation	0.22	0.18	.07	1.23	.00
$F_{change}(8, 404) = 2.23, p = .03, R^2_{change} = .04$					
SPF × Culture × Situation	0.36	0.38	.06	0.94	.00
SNF × Culture × Situation	0.03	0.35	.01	0.10	.00
OPF × Culture × Situation	−0.11	0.34	−.02	−0.32	.00
ONF × Culture × Situation	−0.44	0.37	−.07	−1.20	.00
$F_{change}(4, 400) = 0.61, p = .65, R^2_{change} = .01$					

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

Culture: dummy-coded with U.S. Americans = 0 and Koreans = 1

Situation: dummy-coded with situation one (promise) = 0 and situation two (honorifics) = 1

Discussion

This research compared and contrasted people's management strategies of potential social norm breaches in Korean and American cultures. Both individual level of face needs and particular situational characteristics contribute to understanding cross-cultural differences and similarities in the use of avoidance and confrontation strategies to manage situations. The results reveal that (a) cultural norms significantly determine the perception of the situation; (b) Koreans reported a greater tendency to resort to confrontation across both situations than did U.S. Americans; (c) SPF need was negatively related to intended use of avoidance facework strategy, and SNF need was positively related to intended use of confrontation facework strategy; and (d) culture and situation type were important moderators for the effect of SNF need on avoidant and confrontational facework strategies. The detailed implications of the findings are discussed below.

First, politeness manifests itself differently across cultures. The lack of honorific use among people of different ages and the relative insignificance of a friend breaking a social promise are consistent with Americans' individualistic cultural assumptions of equality and respect for one another's autonomy. In collectivistic cultures, however, self and others are perceived as fundamentally connected and relationship

harmony is valued (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier (2002) summarized: "collectivism implies life satisfaction derives from successfully carrying out social roles and obligations and avoiding failures in these domains" (p. 5). Carrying out a promise to someone means fulfilling one's obligation in a relationship, and use of honorifics corresponds to social relationships structured by distinctions based in group membership and hierarchy (Yoon, 2004). Another implication is that power distance guides attitudes and behaviors of individual members of a culture. According to Hofstede (2001), power distance refers to the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions within a given culture perceive and accept that power is distributed unequally. In Korean culture, power distance is greater than in the United States (Hofstede, 2001), and a person's failure to keep a promise or address others correctly is likely to be viewed as problematic, especially when such lapses occur between people of different power status. Failure to achieve these goals, therefore, is considered a deviation from norms and will be evaluated negatively.

Some may argue that although American culture stresses formalities less, in professional settings poeple are expected to address each other formally, with proper titles. For example, it is common for an American student to address an instructor as Dr. or Professor and to use Mr. or Ms. when addressing a future employer. It is true that U.S. and Korean cultures both have a politeness system of socially appropriate titles for address, but Korean culture places more emphasis on using specific honorifics in social interactions (Yoon, 2004). Consequently, failure to properly address someone, especially between someone of higher social status, is considered a social breach in both cultures. Cultures seldom differ from each other completely. In this study, the cultural difference lies in the significance of social norms compared to personal preference. In the vignette concerning use of honorifics, the interactant asks the participant to address him or her by first name. To American participants, this illustrates how lack of need to use honorifics can be the condition for respecting the other individual's wants. However, in Korean culture, personal preference should not trump social norms. The social interactant's request that the participant address him or her without honorific is inappropriate to start with, so complying with this personal preference is perceived as an endorsement of socially inappropriate behavior. This finding further demonstrates that while the concept of politeness might be universal, expressions of politeness are culture-specific.

Second, individuals' face needs help explain people's reactions. In both cultures, greater need to maintain a positive self-image decreases the likelihood of avoiding further interaction with the other person, whereas greater need to maintain one's own autonomy and personal boundaries increases the likelihood of confronting the other person. In other words, concern that the other person's action may disrupt their own poise motivates both Koreans and Americans to approach the other person. Both Koreans and Americans are more likely to let the other party's act go unquestioned when they are unworried about being seen in a negative light. In other words, the more concerned people are about their own face needs in general, the more likely they are to use more aggressive approaches to cope with the situation, at the expense of the other person's face. This is consistent in both cultures and in both situations. Individuals' behavior as a result of their general inclinations concerning face needs also points to the usefulness of exploring face needs as individual characteristics. Although not explored in the current study, nonverbal cues, in addition to the verbal cues, could be adopted to display communicators' concern for maintaining desirable face needs. For example, positive affect display leaves an impression of social

approval, whereas shifting eye contact from one's interactant might indicate the intent to avoid. Such communicative acts are worth exploration in future studies.

Third, situational factors and the nature of management strategies help explain the similar and different reactions in the two cultures. For both Koreans and Americans, breaking a promise prompts a stronger reaction than failing to use a certain form of address. This suggests that although the degree of importance attached to maintaining social obligations varies among cultures, violation of a prior commitment is globally frowned upon and people are less likely to exit the situation without reacting. Further, in both situations, Koreans in general are more likely than Americans to use avoidance and confrontation to handle the situation. We speculate that this is associated with the complex nature of strategies of avoidance and confrontation in real-life predicaments. As the results show, in both cultures and situations, avoidance and confrontation significantly and positively correlate with each other. This may imply participants' inclination to view the two reactions as related and possibly coexistent. In the current study, avoidance is not entirely equivalent to evasion and escape from the scene. When avoiding further interaction about the specific incident, indirect messages such as hints and sarcasm can convey confrontation.

The type of face that is threatened in each vignette may further explain the current findings. Although face type is not directly measured, the first vignette might have threatened the listener's negative face and the second vignette might have threatened the listener's positive face, particularly in the Korean sample. Therefore, people's reaction might be a function of the type of face threatened. Koreans and Americans might have responded differently to each vignette because of the different faces threatened. For example, Park and Guan (2009) found that when positive face is threatened, Chinese are more likely than Americans to offer an apology, a pattern that is reversed when negative face is threatened. Therefore, it is important for future studies to investigate the association between the type of face threatened and the facework strategies applied across different cultures.

Additionally, people's reactions in potential social predicaments are a function of interaction effects between individuals' face needs, situations, and culture. In both cultures, the function of SNF needs differs across situations. Both Korean and American individuals with stronger inclinations to protect their own negative face needs are more likely to confront the other party, and this tendency is stronger in the broken social promise situation than in the honorifics use situation. This tendency—the positive relationship between SNF and confrontation—is also much stronger among Koreans than Americans. When avoidance is the outcome, however, the specific direction of the relationship between SNF and the situation is inconclusive, given the data. We speculate that people with a high need to protect their own negative face needs might read more contextual cues from the other's behavior to determine their subsequent communicative behavior. In the promise situation, they may perceive breaking the promise as a subtle cue that the invitee does not want to go to the particular restaurant as much as the inviter does. In the honorifics situation, a higher need for self negative face could indicate one is less likely to avoid the other party. In short, the nature of the incident influences the relationship between negative face need and individuals' reactions in both cultures.

It is important to note, regarding the differing perceptions of forms of address in situations across

cultures, that Koreans learn appropriate forms of address from a very young age; using honorifics correctly is therefore a basic politeness skill in social interactions (Yoon, 2004). In Korean culture, it is impolite to use the peer-based format to address even someone only a few years one's junior or senior. A person who accedes to a personal request to forgo the normative address might experience psychological dissonance or worry about attracting negative attention from bystanders for not using the proper honorifics. Anticipation of such pressure can keep the person from violating the social norm even when he or she is asked to. This reaction could certainly cause confusion and misunderstanding in an intercultural context. When communicating with a Korean, people whose cultures place less importance on use of honorifics might be mindful of putting the Korean counterpart in a social norm dilemma. This leads to a more general practical implication of the current study, which is that intercultural communicators need to carefully examine the implicit assumptions underlying specific politeness norms so as to avoid miscommunication or misattribution in social predicaments involving breach of politeness norms.

Another important practical implication is that across the two situations and the two cultures, people are more likely to report avoidance than confrontation as a probable response to a given situation. This finding is consistent with research on embarrassment, which suggests that avoidance is the most frequent coping strategy (Metts & Cupach, 1989). When avoidance occurs, it might be worthwhile for an interactant to pay particular attention to an auditor's lack of response, because in some situations lack of response can be a subtle cue that offense is taken. After all, maintaining a harmonious social relationship requires effort from both parties. Since people generally tend to avoid unpleasant social norm violations, a social actor who notices an avoidant response, particularly in an intercultural communication setting, should not rely completely on his or her own politeness norms but interpret the situation more sensitively and critically. It may be necessary to seek more information, attempt to offer an explanation, or even remedy the potentially threatened face, given a lack of response.

Lastly, our findings provide further insights into recent theoretical developments in interpersonal communication. Conversational constraints theory, developed by Kim (2005), helps explain face needs and cultural norms at individual and cultural levels. This theory explains how and why certain conversational strategies differ across various cultures and what effects these differences can have. Behaviors that are preferred in some cultures can be offensive in others, as the customs, rules, and norms of one culture or another influence perception. The results of the current study show that cultural norms significantly determine the perception of the situation. Across situations one (promise) and two (honorifics), Koreans considered the situations less polite than Americans did. Kim (2005) argues that the particular behaviors each cultural group defines as polite differ substantially. Similarly, in situations where people's conceptions of effectiveness and social appropriateness differ, "the problem is not the ability to effectively or appropriately communicate, but how to communicate effectively and appropriately across cultures" (p. 97). In collectivistic and high power-distance country such as Korea, keeping social promises and using honorifics among people of different ages are more socially appropriate norms than in the United States. Our findings also indicate that a higher need to maintain a positive self-image reduces the likelihood of avoiding further interaction with the other person in both cultures. This finding may link to willingness to risk incurring disapproval for violating cultural constraints on one's own conversation and consideration for others' feelings (OPF). These constraints are consistent with Brown and Levinson's (1987) notion of desire to save one's own positive face (SPF) and to save the other person's positive face

(OPF). By avoiding possible face-threatening situations, individuals in turn attempt to behave in ways that avoid devaluation by others and also consider the other's feelings as they relate to the speaker's perceived obligation.

Limitations and Future Directions

One of the major drawbacks of the current study is the use of a single vignette in each type of potential politeness norm violation situation, which limits the generalizability of the findings. Multiple vignettes depicting similar types of incidents would come closer to fully capturing the impact of situational characteristics on facework strategies. Additionally, the current study tests only one type of interpersonal relationship, namely, stranger-acquaintance. Because the nature of a relationship and intimacy level are determinants of relational expectations, it is possible that the absence of depth in the contemplated relationships decreases confrontational facework. In other words, when individuals do not anticipate further relationship development, they may be less motivated to engage in facework to address their face needs. Studies examining more intimate relationships, such as between close friends, will improve understanding in this area: Would Americans would change their relational expectations under such circumstances, and thus consider incidents of unfulfilled social responsibilities more impolite? The current study also focuses only on interpersonal relationships on social settings. It would be interesting to examine the same social norms in organizational settings where formal interaction etiquette is expected in both cultures. Another limitation is that the study examined only two types of management strategies: avoidance and confrontation. Alternative facework might also be relevant and deserves attention in future studies.

As a cross-cultural comparative study, the current research demonstrates culture-specific expectations and behaviors associated with politeness norms. At the same time, the cultures display similarities in general perceptions of the situations. Face and face-related concepts explain individuals' management strategies in those situations. The findings of studies on intracultural actors' facework form a basis from which to explore management strategies in intercultural dyads where behavioral norms of politeness differ.

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