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# Dispositional Determinant of Anger at Norm Violations: Does It Reflect an Individual's Selective Responsibility for Needs?

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Theoretical research implies that individual differences in the tendency to expect others to respond to an individual's needs (communal orientation) leads individuals to expect others to take responsibility for their own needs (RN); however, this has not been examined empirically. On the basis of the assumption that anger is a signal indicating a violation of social norms, we examined whether the perceived violation of RN would mediate the association between communal orientation and anger when a close other failed to respond to a need. In a role-taking study, Japanese students were asked to read a series of scenarios in which the other person, who was either a romantic partner or a mere acquaintance, did not respond to participant's needs. Thereafter, they were asked to rate the intensity of anger and the perceived violation of RN. Moderated mediation analysis indicated that the mediation was only present when the close other failed to respond to the participant's needs, implying that individuals high in communal orientation selectively expect others to take RN.

**Key words:** anger, communal orientation, norm violation

## Introduction

Research on emotions has repeatedly emphasized that angry feelings cause a deterioration of relationships and damage psychological well-being. However, certain researchers have argued that anger involves highly social elements such as motivation to punish others (e.g., Haidt, 2003; Hoffman, 2000; Montada & Schneider, 1989). This approach assumes that there are implicit rules referring to relational norms that people must follow in social interactions, and anger arises when they perceive the other person to have violated such rules (Uehara, Funaki, & Ohbuchi, 2011). Further, it has been assumed that relational norms differ across relationships, and thus while a negative behavior occurring in one relationship may arouse anger, it may not elicit anger in a different relationship. Assuming that anger is a signal indicating a violation of relational norms, we attempted in the current study to examine the effects of personality disposition in the signaling function of anger.

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### *Anger and Communal Orientation*

What types of relational norms are signified by anger? According to anger signal theory (Uehara et al., 2011), a predominant relational norm guiding social interactions is to take on responsibility for a partner's needs (responsibility for needs: RN) (Clark & Chrisman, 1994; Clark & Mills, 1993; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). It is assumed that there are different types of relationships that vary in the degree of RN, although each relationship is regulated by RN to a certain extent. The exchange norm (regulating behaviors according to equity rules, such as give and take) is dominant in not-close relationships with lower RN, whereas the communal norm (an obligation to care for the partner's welfare and well-being) is dominant in close relationships with higher RN. According to this perspective, Uehara and his colleagues assumed that individuals in a close relationship expect their partner to accept or affiliate to their needs, because they feel that their partner should share their sense of RN. On the basis of this assumption, Uehara et al. (2011) provided participants in a role-taking study with scenarios depicting the other as responding or not responding to a protagonist's needs, and then asked them to rate the degree of anger. The study revealed that participants reported more anger when a romantic partner did not respond to their needs than when a mere acquaintance did not respond to them, suggesting that individuals in close relationships expect one another to accept RN and that anger plays a signaling role indicating a violation of the norm.

However, there are individual differences in the dispositional tendency to feel a sense of RN, which Clark and her colleagues label as "communal orientation." Individuals high in communal orientation respond to a partner's needs more positively and are willing to help if the partner has a problem (Clark, Ouellette, Powell, & Milberg, 1987). This disposition is measured by items such as "I often go out of my way to help another person," or "I believe people should go out of their way to be helpful." Moreover, individuals who score high on communal orientation also feel that their partner should take their own needs into consideration. For instance, it was found that respondents who scored high on the communal orientation scale helped more frequently when the other participant was feeling sorrowful (Clark et al., 1987, Study 1) and were more active in attempting to communicate and express their emotional needs (Clark & Finkel, 2005). In addition, they may feel displeased when their needs have been refused. This aspect of the communal orientation is measured by items such as "It bothers me when other people neglect my needs," or "When I have a need that others ignore, I am hurt."

As mentioned above, communal orientation refers to the expectation that others should pay greater attention and respond to one's own needs. If this failed to occur, it would be perceived as a violation of RN, resulting in feelings of anger. In other words, for individuals high in communal orientation the perceived violation of RN is hypothesized to be a key cognitive mediator causing anger.

### *Communal Orientation and Selective Expectation for RN*

According to our assumption, individuals high in communal orientation are those who have unmitigated expectations for RN, expecting almost all others to respond to their needs, though this point has not yet been fully developed.

A study by Clark and Finkel (2005) suggested that individuals who score highly for communal orientation have selective expectations of how others should respond to their needs. The authors examined the effects of relationship type and communal orientation on the willingness to express emotions toward others, and found that participants who scored high on a communal orientation scale reported more willingness to express fear and anxiety in close relationships than in not-close relationships. We interpreted this to mean that individuals high in communal orientation were aware that close others were likely to make an effort to respond to their partner's fear or anxiety; therefore, they varied in their willingness to express these emotions depending on the closeness of the relationship. In other words, the finding implies that individuals high in communal orientation are selective in the expectation that others will respond to their needs.

However, Clark et al. (1987, Study 1) suggest that the general expectation of RN among individuals high in communal orientation is not selective. Their study revealed that participants who scored high on a communal orientation scale provided help more often even when the other person showing sadness was a stranger (a confederate). This result suggests that individuals high in communal orientation are likely to regard even not-close relationships as communal, and feel obligated to give a favorable response even when not-close others have a problem. This suggests that high communal orientation individuals expect others to respond to their needs with a non-selective expectation, regardless of whether the others are close.

The purpose of the present study was to examine whether the expectation of other's RN in individuals high in communal orientation is selective or non-selective. If individuals high in communal orientation selectively demand that only others who are likely to accept RN, they may perceive a violation of RN and feel anger only when a close other does not respond to their needs. However, if the expectation of RN is non-selective, then a perceived violation of RN may mediate the relationship between communal orientation and anger, regardless of the closeness of the relationship.

### *The Current Research*

To examine the hypotheses below, we conducted a role-taking study in which participants were presented with hypothetical scenarios where in the other did not respond to participant's needs. The scenarios included episodes depicting four specified social needs; respect, praise, sympathy, and love. The scenarios were varied across two types of relationships. Participants were randomly assigned to a close condition (a romantic partner) or a not-close condition (a mere acquaintance). Immediately after reading each scenario, they were asked to assess the intensity of anger they would experience and assess the extent to which the partner violated the RN. After rating these items, they completed the 14-item Communal Orientation Scale.

### *Predictions*

Assuming that anger signifies the violation of a relational norm, we attempted to examine whether individuals high in communal orientation are selective or non-selective in their expectation of another's RN. The selective expectation for RN has been less examined in the literature. Thus, we formulated two contrasting hypotheses: that the association between communal orientation and anger would be mediated by the perceived violation of RN only in the close condition (Hypothesis A); and that the mediation would be observed in both the close and not-close conditions (Hypothesis B). If individuals high in communal orientation expect only others who are likely to care to take RN selectively, Hypothesis A would be supported. If not, Hypothesis B would be supported.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Fifty-one Japanese undergraduates (25 men and 26 women, with an average age of 20.39;  $SD = 1.61$ ) at a private university participated and received partial course credit in a psychology class. They were asked to complete a questionnaire entitled "*Psychological Survey of Interpersonal Relationships*" during a class session.

### *Procedures and Scenarios*

Assuming that an individual has needs for social rewards in social interactions, we created scenarios in which another person did not respond to individual's needs. We developed four basic scenarios in which a protagonist desires respect, praise, sympathy, or love from others (Buss, 1986; Foa, Converse, Tornblom, & Foa, 1993; Foa & Foa, 1974). In the respect scenario, the protagonist was called by the wrong name and he/she expected the other to correct it. In the praise scenario, the protagonist received a good grade for a presentation in a seminar, and thus he/she expected the other to praise it. In the sympathy scenario, the protagonist lost his/her treasured pet, and he/she expected the other person to comfort him/her. In the love scenario, the protagonist saw the other person talking to a person whom he/she disliked, so he/she expected the other not to become familiar with the person. These scenarios were the same as those used in the study of Uehara et al. (2011).

Further, two versions were developed for each scenario. In the close version, the other who did not respond to the participant's needs was described as a romantic partner. In the not-close version, the other was described as a mere acquaintance. Each participant was randomly assigned into each of the two versions and given the four scenarios in each version. The protagonist in the scenarios was labeled "you," and participants were instructed to read the scenarios as though they were the protagonist. The order of presentation of the scenarios was randomly varied.

## Materials

After reading each scenario, the participants were asked to rate the episodes in terms of the following scales.

*Angry feelings.* To assess the level of angry feelings, we used a checklist including nine adjectives developed by Batson, Kennedy, Nord, Stocks, Fleming, Marzette, Lishner, Hayes, Kolchinsky, and Zerger (2007) and O'Mara, Jackson, Batson, and Gaertner (2011). Participants were asked to indicate how strongly they felt *irritated, angry, upset, annoyed, offended, outraged, mad, perturbed, or frustrated* when reading each episode by rating each emotion on a six-point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very strongly*).

*The perceived violation of RN.* To measure the perceived violation of RN, we originally developed four items: "The partner should not be unconcerned with what you want him or her to do," "If the partner cannot respond to what you want, he or she should feel sorry," "The partner should be concerned that he or she has not paid attention to what you want him or her to do," and "If the partner cannot respond to what you want, he or she should feel sorry." Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they perceived that the partner had violated the RN by rating on the six-point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 5 (*definitely*).

*Manipulation check: The perception of RN.* To check whether relationship manipulation reflected the degree of RN, we constructed an original item: "Before this episode, the protagonist (you) and the other have cared for one another." Participants were asked to rate their relationships on the six-point scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 5 (*definitely*).

*Communal Orientation Scale.* After completing the above scales regarding the four scenarios, participants were presented with the Communal Orientation Scale developed by Clark et al. (1987), a 14-item measure designed to assess the tendency to prioritize their responsiveness to their partner's needs and expect the same on the part of their partners. Sample responses are "It bothers me when other people neglect my needs," "I expect people I know to be responsive to my needs and feelings," or "When people get emotionally upset, I tend to avoid them (reverse scored)." Participants were asked to indicate how characteristic each item was of themselves by rating them on the six-point scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

## Results

It should be noted that since there were missing values involved,  $N$  was smaller than 51 in certain analyses.

### *Scale Analysis*

To check the internal consistency of the nine-item anger scale and the four-item perceived violation of RN scale, we calculated Cronbach's alpha separately for each scenario. Alphas of the anger scale were .97 for the respect scenario, .97 for the praise scenario, .98 for the sympathy scenario, and .97 for the love scenario. Alphas of the perceived violation of RN were .93 for the respect scenario, .94 for the praise scenario, .95 for the sympathy scenario, and .95 for the love scenario. The results indicate that the reliability of these scales reached a satisfactory level. We then computed the scale scores for each scenario by averaging the item scores.

We also calculated Cronbach's for the 14-item communal orientation scale, which was .57. Although the scale did not reach an acceptable level of reliability, we computed the communal orientation scores by averaging the item scores. In certain analyses, we divided participants into two groups using a median split (median = 2.93): the  $n$  of the high communal orientation group was 27 and that of the low communal orientation group was 24.

### *Effectiveness of Relationship Manipulation*

To check the effectiveness of the relationship manipulation, we conducted a 2 (relationship type)  $\times$  2 (communal orientation)  $\times$  4 (scenarios) analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the perception of RN across the four scenarios. Relationship type and communal orientation (discrete variable) were between-participant variables and scenario (respect, praise, sympathy, and love) was a within-participant variable. There was a main effect for relationship type,  $F(1, 47) = 6.53, p < .05, \eta^2 = .12$ : participants in the close condition rated higher on the perception of RN ( $M = 1.29$  on the 0-5 scale) than did participants in the not-close condition ( $M = 0.55$ ), indicating that our relationship manipulation reflected the difference in RN. There were no other significant effects.

Because only the expected difference between the close and not-close conditions was significant, we concluded that the relationship manipulation was effective.

### *Effects of Relationship Type and Communal Orientation on Perceived Violation of RN*

To examine the effects of relationship type and communal orientation, we created a perceived violation of RN index by averaging item scores across scenarios. We then conducted a hierarchical regression analysis using the forced entry method. In Model 1, we entered into the regression equation the relationship type and the communal orientation (continuous variable) as independent variables and the perceived violation of RN as a dependent variable. Relationship type was coded 0 (*not-close condition*) and 1 (*close condition*). In Model 2, we added to the equation a two-way interaction term of relationship type and communal orientation. To suppress multi-collinearity caused by possible correlations between the independent variables, before conducting the regression, we standardized the scores of all the variables within each participant. Because gender (*male* = -1 and *female* = 1) had no significant effect in any analysis, we excluded gender from the analyses.

The results showed that communal orientation significantly increased angry feelings in both Models 1 and 2:  $b = 0.58$ ,  $t(45) = 3.89$ ,  $p < .001$ , and  $b = 0.56$ ,  $t(44) = 3.58$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively. But in Model 2, the effect of the interaction was not significant,  $b = 0.05$ ,  $|t| < 1.00$ , and a change in variance accounted for ( $R^2$ ) was also not significant with a two-way interaction term between relationship type and communal orientation added:  $\Delta R^2 = .00$ ,  $p > .76$ .

### *Effects of Relationship Type and Communal Orientation on Anger*

We created an anger index by averaging item scores across scenarios and performed the same procedure for the anger index as for the perceived violation of RN. This analysis revealed that only communal orientation significantly increased angry feelings in both Models 1 and 2:  $b = 0.61$ ,  $t(46) = 3.79$ ,  $p < .001$  and  $b = 0.62$ ,  $t(45) = 3.57$ ,  $p < .001$ , respectively. However, in Model 2, the effect of the two-way interaction of relationship type and communal orientation was not significant:  $b = -0.03$ ,  $|t| < 1.00$ , and the change in  $R^2$  was also not significant,  $\Delta R^2 = .00$ ,  $p > .88$ .

### *Mediating Effect of the Perceived Violation of RN*

We predicted that communal orientation would generate the perceived RN violation, which in turn would increase anger. To test whether this model was moderated by the relationship type, we conducted a moderated mediation analysis (Preacher, Rucker, & Hayes, 2007, Model 2) with communal orientation as the independent variable, relationship type as the moderator, and perceived violation of RN as the mediator. In this analysis, communal orientation was a continuous variable. Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of measures in each condition are shown in Tables 1 and 2. As shown in Figure 1, the mediating effect on the association between communal orientation and anger was significant only in the close condition ( $z = 2.97$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but not in the not-close condition ( $z = 1.54$ ,  $p > .12$ ). These results indicate that the perceived violation of RN played a significant positive role in feelings of anger when the close other did not respond to the participant's needs but not when the not-close other did not respond. Moreover, in the close condition, the bootstrapping technique (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) with 10,000 resamples produced a 99% confidence interval for the indirect effect that ranged from 0.28 to 1.76, and thus did not include zero. It is concluded that the perceived violation of RN mediated the association between communal orientation and angry feelings in the close condition. On the basis of the guideline recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986), unstandardized  $b$  coefficients and errors were calculated (Figure 1).

## **Discussion**

In the context of anger signal theory, the present study examined whether the expectation of another's RN in individuals high in communal orientation is selective or non-selective. We attempted to test a psychological model in which the perceived violation of RN mediates



**Table 1** Means, standard deviations, and correlations of measures in the close condition

Measures	M	SD	Correlations		
			1.	2.	3.
1. Communal orientation	2.97	0.67	–	.61**	.59**
2. Perceived violation of RN	1.52	1.20		–	.88***
3. Angry feelings	2.14	1.19			–

Note. *n* ranged from 22 to 25, depending on missing data. Communal orientation was measured by averaging responses (0-5 scale) to the 14 items (e.g., *I believe people should go out of their way to be helpful*). Perceived violation of RN (responsibility for needs) was measured by averaging responses (0-5 scale) to the 4 items (e.g., *The partner should not be unconcerned with what you want him or her to do*). Angry feelings were measured by averaging responses (0-5 scale) to the nine anger adjectives (e.g., *irritated, angry, offended, and outraged*).

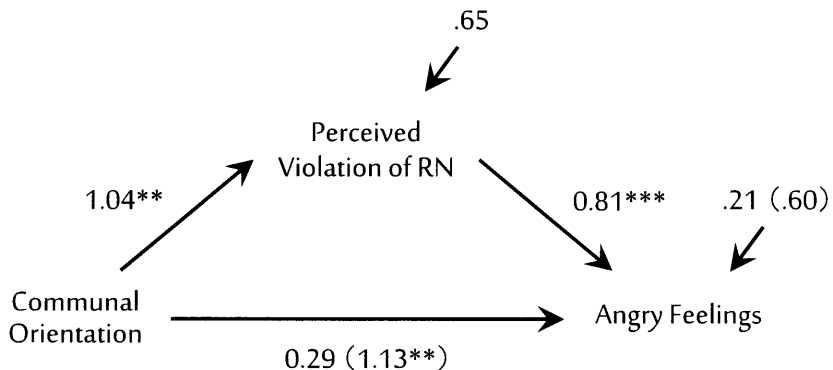
\*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

**Table 2** Means, standard deviations, and correlations of measures in the not-close condition

Measures	M	SD	Correlations		
			1.	2.	3.
1. Communal orientation	2.88	0.47	–	.37†	.39†
2. Perceived violation of RN	1.48	1.13		–	.69***
3. Angry feelings	1.94	1.37			–

Note. *n* ranged from 24 to 25, depending on missing data.

†*p* < .10. \*\*\**p* < .001.



**Figure 1.** Moderated mediation analysis of the effects of perceived violation of RN on the relationship between communal orientation and angry feelings in the close condition,  $z = 2.97, p < .01$ . Unstandardized *b* coefficients are reported. The coefficients in parentheses are *b* and error in the simple regression of angry feelings by communal orientation. The bootstrapping method (with 10,000 resamples) produced a 99% confidence interval for the indirect effect that ranged from 0.28 to 1.76. *n* = 22. \*\**p* < .01. \*\*\**p* < .001.

the association between communal orientation and angry feelings, and examine whether this model was moderated by the relationship type. For this purpose, we construed two contrasting hypotheses and tested which hypothesis was supported: that the association between communal orientation and anger would be mediated by the perceived RN violation only in the close condition (Hypothesis A); and that the mediation would be observed in both the close and the not-close conditions (Hypothesis B).

As indicated in Figure 1, the moderated mediation analysis showed that the perceived violation of RN was a significant mediator of the relationship between communal orientation and angry feelings in the close condition, but not in the not-close condition. This result supports Hypothesis A. It suggests that individuals high in communal orientation felt intense anger only toward another who was likely to care for or accept them; that is, it results demonstrate that high communal orientation individuals selectively expect others to respond to their needs.

What do selective-RN expectations mean for individuals high in communal orientation? Although it is difficult to answer this question directly from the results of the present study, a tentative explanation seems possible: that selective expectation of RN serves as a means of avoiding certain risks for high communal orientation individuals. The expression of such an expectation carries a risk of disclosing one's personal information to others. For example, the disclosed personal information might be exploited or an individual expecting another's RN might be regarded as immature. The present results imply that individuals high in communal orientation reduce the risk by selecting others who are responsive to their needs. If this is correct, it appears that the selective RN expectation has an adaptive function.

However, a selective RN expectation may not always be functional, and it occasionally may generate certain maladaptive consequences. The expression of RN communicates one's wish to become close to the other. If a not-close other accepts this wish, the relationship will become closer. However, our results indicate that individuals high in communal orientation refrain from strong expectations toward not-close others, suggesting that there are limited opportunities to develop intimacies with not-close others. From this perspective, it can be said that the selective expectation of RN by individuals high in communal orientation may negatively affect the development of closeness.

Although the present study indicates that individuals high in communal orientation have selective-RN expectations, caution is needed in interpreting the results because of a methodological weakness. Would the mediation be found if the "romantic partner" depicted in the scenarios was replaced with other types of close partner? It has been reported that people engaging in mutually exclusive relationships, such as romantic relationships, tend to unrealistically idealize their partners (e.g., Murray, 1999; Murray & Holmes, 1997), and a biased cognition of the partner might produce a greater expectation of RN. Therefore, the hypotheses of the present study need be re-examined in future studies by including other types of close others such as friends.

In the present study, we examined whether the perceived violation of RN mediated the

association between communal orientation and anger. The results showed that mediation was found when a close other did not respond to individual's needs, but not when a not-close other did not respond. These findings suggest that individuals high in communal orientation selectively expect others to take RN. We have discussed both adaptive and maladaptive aspects of selective expectations for RN.

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