

Weapon Ownership and the Willingness to Respond to Threats With Violence: The United States and Japan

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Abstract: *Using data collected in Tokyo and Mito, Japan, and in Charlotte, North Carolina, the impact of weapons on the willingness to use violence in a variety of defined scenarios was analyzed. The American sample was twice as likely as the Japanese sample to say they would use a weapon when confronted by a stranger, by a known acquaintance, or if someone illegally entered their homes. The major finding is that the stated willingness to use a weapon is significantly tied to whether one owned a weapon for personal safety and being male in both countries. Logistic regression shows the likelihood of responding to a threat by physical force to be twice as great in Japan and nearly eight times as great in Charlotte if the respondent owned a weapon. These data support the thesis of a weapons effect that influences one's definition of the situation.*

The United States stands out among the industrialized democracies of the world as a nation where there are more privately owned firearms, both absolutely and proportionately, than most other Western nations. Whereas a few nations such as Switzerland, Norway, and Israel, due to the special circumstances of an armed reserved militia, may proportionately rival the United States in the prevalence of small arms in households, the United States certainly exceeds other nations in the number of discretionary weapons among private citizens not associated with any national defense purpose (Kleck, 1991; Wright, Rossi, & Daly, 1983).

From official statistics, violent crimes in the United States are clearly higher per capita than in Japan (Dobrin, Wiersema, Loftin, & McDowall, 1996). At the time of the study, the American statistics indicated there were 440 assaults per 100,000. In Charlotte, North Carolina, where the American research was conducted, the rate of reported assaults was 798 per 100,000 for the same year (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1997; Garoogian, 1995; National Police Agency, 1996). This compares with an overall rate of 14/100,000 in Japan, 18.1 in Tokyo, and 11.8 in Mito. Charlotte is in the South, the region with the highest rate of violent crime in the United States, making the comparison a comparison of near extreme social and crime conditions.



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Guns have been banned in Japan since World War II, and there is a strong cultural rejection of guns in contrast to the Second Amendment right proclaimed by some groups in the United States. In Japan, however, knives and swords are readily available, and these weapons are congruent with Japanese history. It is understandable, therefore, that the weapon most often used in crime in Japan is a blade instrument, whereas a greater proportion of violent crimes in the United States involves guns.

As significant as the research is on the use of weapons in violent crimes across societies, the primary research question in this study is the role weapons play in how one approaches a threatening or conflict situation. A series of experiments by Berkowitz (1968) suggested that the mere presence of a weapon can sometimes induce people to become violent. This has been referred to as the *weapons effect* (Berkowitz, 1981); the mere availability of or possession of a weapon is seen to present a stimulus to aggressive action, especially if the individual is angry, emotionally upset, or frustrated (Robin, 1991). This phenomenon has been one of the major assumptions in arguments for gun control. Killias (1990), for example, compared homicide rates and gun ownership in 11 countries and found that the higher the rate of ownership, the higher the homicide rate. Kleck (1991) recalculated Killias' data and found the correlation between ownership and homicide to be .774 but he also discovered that countries with high gun homicide rates also had high nongun homicide rates. This suggests that the issue for discussion may not only be the availability of weapons but the willingness to use lethal violence against others.

Although the rates of violence and homicide differ significantly between the United States and Japan, non-firearm weapons are available in Japan. The data in this research allow the opportunity to assess one's willingness to use lethal force in a variety of threatening situations. The focus of this article is on the willingness to make an aggressive or physical response when given a hypothetical situation and the relationship of that willingness to physically confront an offender with ownership of a weapon for self-defense.

RESEARCH SITES AND METHODOLOGY

As part of a larger project investigating the social and cultural differences of violence in Japan and the United States, the researchers investigated the threshold of violence by having respondents react to a series of scenarios in terms of what they or the police would or should do under the circumstances. Random samples were drawn from city records in subcommunities in Tokyo and the city of Mito, Japan, and in Charlotte, North Carolina. Each of the three populations from which the samples were selected represented geographical areas of similar size.

In both the United States and Japan, a survey instrument was mailed to the sample with a response rate of 29.4% in the United States and 30.3% in the two Japanese samples. No significant differences were found between the two Japanese

samples, and they were combined. The size of the American sample in Charlotte was 442; the Japanese sample was 908.

A series of scenarios was presented to each sample, and respondents were asked to give what they believed would be their personal responses to the situations. The situations ranged in severity and threat. Respondents were also given a scenario with escalating threats and asked how they would respond at each stage.

The following situations were presented:

1. At night, someone illegally enters the place where you are living while you are alone. You cannot call the police. You can only do the following things. Which one would you do first?
 - a. use a weapon (please identify weapon)
 - b. hit the person
 - c. yell profane words at the person
 - d. try to run away
 - e. cry for help
 - f. do what the person says
 - g. other

The earlier described options were also offered for the following:

2. You are out alone at night on a street corner and someone threatens you with a knife and demands your money. You cannot call the police. You can only do the following things. Which one would you do first?
3. Someone you have had problems with in the last few weeks and to whom you owe money, suddenly shows up drunk at your home with a knife and says, "I'm going to kill you now!" You cannot call the police. You can only do the following things. Which one would you do first?

UNITED STATES AND JAPANESE RESPONSES

The expectation that one would use a weapon in response to a threat increases as the threat increases. Using a weapon is the choice of only 14% of Americans and 3.8% of Japanese when the threat is made on the street. The weapons option increases to 23.3% in the United States and 8.4% in Japan when the drunken acquaintance threatens to kill and substantially increases to 39.3% of Americans in the situation of a home invasion and increases to 14.8% in Japan under the same circumstance. The differences remain statistically significant between countries in all situations.

Two observations can be made based on the responses to the street threat and illegal entry scenarios (Numbers 1 and 2). First, the American range of options appears to be nearly always dichotomous. In the illegal entry instance, the dominant response is to either use a weapon (39.3%) or try to run away (29.3%); in response to a street threat, it is either comply (63.8%) or use a weapon (14.0%).

The Japanese appear to respond across a broader spectrum of responses to threats or see a broader range of options. They are more likely to select options other than either comply or fight; the Japanese appear to believe that there are more viable options available to them (see Table 1).

Within a cultural context, Americans may feel that running away or yelling may provoke action from the offender; offenders in the United States are also more likely to have guns, even if a knife is used as the threat. In Japan, it is less likely that an offender will have a gun. In addition, with the crime threat as large as it appears to most citizens, there is a belief that people engaging in street robbery are dangerous and need little, if any, provocation to perpetrate bodily harm. In terms of illegal entry, in America, where "a man's home is his castle," one may be less likely to run and in turn feel the need to defend his property. In Japan, property defense is seen more as a role for the police and not the obligation of the owner. Whereas the proportion of Japanese who would use a weapon in the home invasion situation increases, it is proportionately the third choice after trying to run away and cry for help. The increase in the proportion of Japanese who would call for help during a home invasion over the other scenarios may also be a function of the density of the population (help is more likely within hearing distance). In all scenarios, the Japanese are more likely to yell at the offender, a fact related, perhaps, to a lower level of anticipated harm at confronting an offender.

Being threatened at home increases the likelihood in both countries of the willingness to use weapons. In the scenario where a drunken acquaintance comes to the home with a knife threatening to kill the person, nearly a fourth (23.3%) of Americans say they would respond with a weapon, whereas 8.4% of the Japanese say they would respond in such a fashion. If only men are considered, the American response increases to 35.3% and the Japanese to 13.1%. It is interesting to note, however, that nearly the same number of respondents in both countries would do something else (other), which was frequently explained to be to try to persuade the person out of the act. The majority in both countries would make a nonphysical response.

THOSE WHO WOULD USE WEAPONS

The three general scenarios involved a threat on the street, a threat at home by a drunken acquaintance, and a threat at home by a stranger. Although the proportion saying they would use a weapon or physically respond by hitting the offender was generally lower than for other actions, it varied by location and circumstance. The use of a weapon when the threat was from a stranger at home produced the largest proportion of people willing to say they would use one in both countries; the street threat produced the fewest weapon responses in both countries.

Looking more closely at those who claim they would resort to the use of a weapon, the response to the most threatening scenario, home invasion, was used as the dependent variable. The variable was dichotomized into use a weapon and

TABLE 1
RESPONSES TO SURVEY

<i>Response to Illegal Entry</i>	<i>United States</i>	<i>Japan</i>
Use weapon	170 (39.3%)	130 (14.8%)
Hit the person	14 (3.2%)	37 (4.2%)
Yell profane words	5 (1.2%)	90 (10.2%)
Try to run away	127 (29.3%)	268 (30.4%)
Cry for help	11 (2.5%)	207 (23.5%)
Do what person says	70 (16.2%)	97 (11.0%)
Other	36 (8.3%)	52 (5.9%)
<i>N</i>	433	881
$\chi^2 = 194.62, df = 5, p < .000$		
<i>Response to Drunken Acquaintance Threatens to Kill You</i>	<i>United States</i>	<i>Japan</i>
Use weapon	100 (23.3%)	74 (8.4%)
Hit the person	36 (8.4%)	45 (5.1%)
Yell profane words	6 (1.4%)	90 (10.2%)
Try to run	134 (31.2%)	419 (47.3%)
Cry for help	19 (4.4%)	139 (15.7%)
Do what person says	35 (8.1%)	40 (4.5%)
Other	100 (23.3%)	79 (8.9%)
<i>N</i>	430	886
$\chi^2 = 183.19, df = 6, p < .000$		
<i>Response to Street Threat</i>	<i>United States</i>	<i>Japan</i>
Use a weapon	61 (14.0%)	34 (3.8%)
Hit the person	10 (2.3%)	36 (4.0%)
Yell profane words	2 (0.5%)	25 (2.8%)
Try to run away	52 (11.9%)	236 (26.3%)
Cry for help	14 (3.2%)	152 (16.9%)
Do what person says	278 (63.8%)	394 (43.9%)
Other	19 (4.4%)	21 (2.3%)
<i>N</i>	436	898

not use a weapon. Males were much more likely than females in both countries to say they would resort to the use of a weapon as their first response. American males were two to three times more likely than Japanese males to say they would use a weapon. In both countries, knowing a victim of violence and, in Japan, having been a victim was also significantly related to the willingness to use a weapon.

The survey also asked questions regarding one's fear of being robbed, hurt, or murdered and whether they were afraid of becoming a victim of a violent act. None of the specific fears were statistically related to the willingness to use a weapon in either country in the home invasion scenario, but an undifferentiated vague fear was related to the use of weapons response in Japan. In Japan, 30.1% of those moderately afraid or afraid of becoming a victim of a personal threatening or violent act indicated a willingness to use a weapon, whereas only 15.3% of those who said they were not afraid were willing to use a weapon. In the United States, 43.1% of those who were not afraid nonetheless indicated a willingness to use a weapon, and 73.8% of those afraid or moderately afraid would use a weapon. The difference is statistically significant in Japan but not in the United States.

Another variable associated with willingness to use a weapon in the home invasion situation was owning a weapon for personal safety. The survey question was phrased: "Do you own a weapon for personal safety? If yes, identify the type of weapon." Of the Americans, 40.2% ($n = 174$) said they owned a weapon for personal safety; 2.9% ($n = 26$) of the Japanese said they owned a weapon for personal safety. These data compare favorably with previous studies of personal gun ownership in the United States that have found that between 30% and 50% of American households have firearms (Colijn, Lester, & Slothouwer, 1985; Wright et al., 1983). This introduces the weapon effect as discussed by Berkowitz (1968, 1981). Owning a weapon is significantly related to the statement of willingness to use it in both countries. Two thirds of the Americans and a third of the Japanese who say they own a weapon for personal safety say they would use a weapon in the scenario of the illegal home entry.

A logistic¹ regression analysis was performed with models generated from the variables that showed a bivariate relationship to the willingness to use a weapon in the home invasion scenario. The models included: owning a weapon, being male, being younger than 30 years old, been a victim, known a victim, was afraid of becoming a victim of a violent act, and perceiving that gun violence had increased over the past 3 years. The results are shown in Table 2 for each country.

Weapons ownership significantly increases the likelihood that someone would say they would use a weapon during a home invasion in both countries. For Americans, there is a 7.8 greater likelihood someone would say they would use a weapon if someone illegally entered where they were living than if they did not own a weapon. In Japan, the increased likelihood is nearly three times (2.96). This may be related to the fact that most people who possess weapons would most likely have them at home and therefore see a greater chance of defending themselves or their property. Also, one probably would not own a weapon unless he or she felt prepared to use it.

Other factors are also significant. When all else is considered, being male increases the likelihood of weapon use in both countries, 3.5 times in the United States and 5.4 times in Japan. For the Japanese, being younger than 30 increases the likelihood 2.1 times; being younger than 30 is not significant in the United States. On

TABLE 2
LOGISTIC REGRESSION: PROBABILITIES OF
WEAPONS USE IN HOME INVASION SCENARIO

Variable	Japan			United States		
	B	SE	Exp (B)	B	SE	Exp (B)
Own a weapon	1.0863	.4329	2.96*	2.0525	.2481	7.79**
Male	1.6897	.2174	5.42**	1.2643	.2774	3.54**
Know a victim	.2410	.3902	1.27	.7441	.2691	2.10*
Younger than 30 years old	.7369	.2269	2.09**	.0809	.4583	1.08
Believe gun violence increased	.2993	.3984	1.35	-.2547	.3469	0.77
Afraid of victimization	.2710	.2194	0.76	-.0853	.2557	0.92
Been a victim	.0572	.2161	1.06	.0484	.2755	1.05

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

the other hand, knowing someone who has been a victim of a violent act increases the likelihood 2.1 times in the United States but is not significant in Japan.

In short, owning a weapon for personal safety, being male, and knowing a victim all increase the probabilities of the willingness to use a weapon in the home invasion scenario.

CHOICE OF WEAPON

In the illegal entry situation, 170 (39.3%) of the Americans who answered indicated they would use a weapon; in Japan, 130, or only 14.8%, indicated they would use a weapon. The weapon of choice is a gun for Americans (82.9%) compared with 5.0% of the Japanese. The weapon of choice for the Japanese is a blade or blunt instrument (41.3%).

OTHER THREATENING SITUATIONS AND THE WILLINGNESS TO USE VIOLENCE AS A RESPONSE

The research instrument included another set of threatening circumstances:

1. A stranger bumps into you and then yells obscene and threatening comments to you. What would be the first thing you would do?
2. A stranger begins shoving and pushing you. What would be the first thing you would do?
3. A stranger threatens you with a weapon. What would be the first thing you would do?

The possible responses ranged from do nothing to use a weapon.

The responses vary by country and are statistically significant for each of the three situations. Interestingly, the Japanese are more likely to be confrontive when verbally assaulted than Americans, but in the second scenario, where the yelling moves to physically pushing, Americans show the first inclinations toward a physical violent response to hit, threaten with a weapon, or use a weapon. By the third situation, when actually threatened with a weapon, nearly twice as many Americans (7.9%) as Japanese (4.8%) say they would threaten or use a weapon. The threshold at which respondents in each country threaten or are willing to use a weapon is discussed in detail in Friday, Yamagami, and Dussich (1999).

There are two primary differences in the responses by country. Americans tend to retreat, that is, do nothing or walk away, when first confronted, whereas the Japanese tend to be confrontive, that is, talk back or stare down the offender. The Japanese are even more likely than the Americans to respond by hitting and shoving when threatened, but Americans are more likely to threaten or use a weapon. For example, if the stranger merely yells threats, 77.4% of the Americans say they would do nothing or walk away, 36.5% of Japanese would not be so passive; 14% of Japanese would confront the offender by staring him or her down and 40.4% would confront by talking back. This compares with only 13.1% of the Americans who would confront the stranger.

If pushed or shoved, 50.1% of the Americans would still do nothing or walk away, but 59.8% of the Japanese would confront by staring down or talking back. In contrast, however, 2.6% of Americans say they would threaten or use a weapon, whereas only 0.2% of the Japanese would have this response.

When actually threatened, the response also escalates. In both countries, nearly half would get the police (47.2% in the United States and 45.8% in Japan). Of the Japanese surveyed, 28.9% would still confront the offender and 5.2% would shove or hit the offender compared with only 6.3% of Americans who would confront and 2.3% who would shove or hit. However, 7.9% of Americans would threaten or use a weapon compared with 4.8% of the Japanese.

Although these findings reflect the cultural variants in the perceived potential threat to confronting an offender, the focus of this article is on weapon ownership and the role it plays in the responses within and between the two countries. Analyzing the data by looking at weapon ownership, it is evident that a more aggressive response by weapon owners is not evident in the yelling situation but becomes more likely in the pushing/shoving situation and even clearer in the weapons threat situation. For simplicity, the responses were divided into five groups: (a) retreatist (i.e., walking away); (b) getting the police; (c) confronting (i.e., talking back or staring); (d) hit/shove; and (e) threaten or use a weapon. Cross-tabulating these responses for each scenario with weapon ownership suggests that in both countries, weapon ownership increases the chances of some physical response. Even in the first scenario where the threat is more verbal, those who say they own a weapon for personal safety appear to feel more confident that they would make a more active confronting or physical response than those who

TABLE 3
IMPACT OF WEAPON OWNERSHIP ON RESPONSE TO YELLED THREATS

<i>Stranger Yells Threats</i>	<i>United States</i>		<i>Japan</i>	
	<i>Own Weapon</i>	<i>Not Own Weapon</i>	<i>Own Weapon</i>	<i>Not Own Weapon</i>
Retreat reaction	127 (73.0%)	215 (83.3%)	11 (42.3%)	313 (36.4%)
Get police	10 (5.7%)	28 (10.9%)	1 (3.8%)	66 (7.7%)
Confront	35 (20.1%)	22 (8.5%)	12 (46.2%)	350 (40.7%)
Hit/shove	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.4%)	2 (7.7%)	12 (1.4%)
Threat/use weapon	1 (0.6%)			
<i>N</i>	174	258	26	860
	$\chi^2 = 15.922, p < .003$		$\chi^2 = 7.390, \text{ not significant}$	

TABLE 4
IMPACT OF WEAPON OWNERSHIP ON RESPONSE TO PUSH/SHOVE

<i>Stranger Pushes/Shoves</i>	<i>United States</i>		<i>Japan</i>	
	<i>Own Weapon</i>	<i>Not Own Weapon</i>	<i>Own Weapon</i>	<i>Not Own Weapon</i>
Retreat reaction	76 (43.7%)	138 (54.1%)	5 (19.2%)	133 (15.6%)
Get police	33 (19.0%)	53 (20.8%)	3 (11.5%)	117 (13.7%)
Confront	16 (9.2%)	31 (12.2%)	12 (46.2%)	514 (60.1%)
Hit/shove	40 (23.0%)	31 (12.2%)	6 (23.1%)	89 (10.4%)
Threat/use weapon	9 (5.2%)	2 (0.8%)		2 (0.2%)
<i>N</i>	174	255	26	855
	$\chi^2 = 18.357, p < .001$		$\chi^2 = 4.943, \text{ not significant}$	

TABLE 5
IMPACT OF WEAPON OWNERSHIP ON RESPONSE TO THREATS

<i>Threatens With Weapon</i>	<i>United States</i>		<i>Japan</i>	
	<i>Own Weapon</i>	<i>Not Own Weapon</i>	<i>Own Weapon</i>	<i>Not Own Weapon</i>
Retreat reaction	59 (34.3%)	96 (37.5%)	4 (15.4%)	131 (15.3%)
Get police	70 (40.7%)	132 (51.6%)	11 (42.3%)	392 (45.8%)
Talk back	12 (7.0%)	15 (5.9%)	6 (23.1%)	249 (29.1%)
Hit/shove	3 (1.7%)	7 (2.7%)	3 (11.5%)	43 (5.0%)
Threat/use weapon	28 (16.3%)	6 (2.3%)	2 (7.7%)	41 (4.8%)
<i>N</i>	172	256	26	856
	$\chi^2 = 28.648, p < .000.$		$\chi^2 = 2.872, \text{ not significant}$	

TABLE 6
LOGISTIC REGRESSION: PROBABILITIES OF PHYSICAL
RESPONSE WHEN STRANGER THREATENS WITH A WEAPON

Variable	Japan			United States		
	B	SE	Exp (B)	B	SE	Exp (B)
Own a weapon	.4908	.5257	1.63	1.3188	.3526	3.74**
Male	.8639	.2423	2.37**	.8476	.3965	2.33*
Younger than 30 years old	.5648	.2701	1.76*	.2766	.5906	1.31
Know a victim	.4091	.4405	1.50	-.0672	.3551	.93

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

do not own weapons. The differences are statistically significant in the United States but not in Japan. These responses are shown in Tables 3 through 5.

Looking specifically at the pushing and shoving situation in Table 4, if one includes the option to hit or shove back, those Americans who say they own a weapon for their personal safety are not only more likely to say they would threaten or use a weapon, they are twice as likely to say they would use physical force in the situation than those who do not own weapons (28.2% vs. 13%). Although few Japanese claim to own a weapon for their personal safety, those who do are also twice as likely (23.1% vs. 10.6%) as those who do not to indicate a physical response.

In Scenario 3, when physically threatened by the stranger, 16.3% of those Americans who say they own weapons say they would threaten or use them. Of Japanese weapon owners, 7.7% say they would use a weapon in the final situation. Although the chi-square statistic is not significant in Japan, the percentage distribution in Table 4 suggests that the relationship between weapon ownership and making a physical response is in the same direction as the American response where twice as many Japanese and Americans with weapons say they would engage in one or another of the physical responses: hit, threaten, or use a weapon.

Taking the variables that have previously been related to responding to the threat of violence with some type of physical reaction, whether hitting back or employing a weapon, a logistic regression analysis using the variables of being male, being younger than 30 years of age, knowing someone who had been a victim, and weapon ownership was performed with the dependent variable being the response to the actual stranger threat (Scenario 3). The dependent variable was dichotomized as physical response and nonphysical response. The results are shown in Table 6.

Males in both countries are two times more likely than females to respond physically, and weapons owners in Japan are nearly 1.6 times more likely than non-weapons-owners to respond physically; in the United States, weapons owners are nearly four times more likely than non-weapons-owners to physically respond. In Japan, being younger than 30 has nearly the same likelihood (1.7) of

TABLE 7
LOGISTIC REGRESSION: LIKELIHOOD OF WEAPON OWNERSHIP

Variable	Japan			United States		
	B	SE	Exp (B)	B	SE	Exp (B)
Male	1.6286	.5164	4.1***	.7834	.2367	2.2***
Know a victim	1.3061	.6136	3.7*	.1518	.2353	1.2
Been a victim	-.6332	.5273	.54	.4833	.2382	1.6*
Fear of being killed	.4627	.7465	1.6	.0607	.3556	.94
Fear of being hurt	.79772	.7042	2.2*	.4955	.3782	1.6
Fear of robbery	-1.275	.5886	.28	-.1775	.3068	.84
Believe gun violence increased	-.0806	.8115	.92	-.8212	.3074	.44
Feel afraid	-.2991	.5019	.77	-.3933	.2877	.67
Fear increased last 3 years	.2833	.4624	1.3	.6142	.2542	1.8**
Younger than 30 years old	-.0350	.5222	1.0	-.2610	.4105	.77

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

physically responding to a threat as weapon ownership. In Japan, the only likelihood that is significant is age; in the United States, both age and weapon ownership likelihoods are statistically significant.

WEAPON OWNERS

Weapon ownership appears to play an important role in a stated willingness to use physical force and threaten or use a weapon. This holds for both countries. Although the proportion of weapon owners is significantly greater in the United States, the question is raised if there are any commonalities between those who claim to own weapons for their self-defense.

Employing logistic regression with all of the previously identified variables associated with weapon use, Charlotte data indicate that four factors have more than a 1.5 times likelihood of being a weapon owner: being male, 2.2 times; fear of becoming a victim has increased over the past 3 years, 1.8 times; fear of being hurt because of a criminal act, 1.6 times; and having been a victim of a violent crime, 1.6 (see Table 7).

In Japan, weapon ownership likelihood is greater than 1.5 times under four conditions: being male, 5.1 times; knowing a victim, 3.7 times; fear of being hurt because of a criminal act, 2.22 times; and fear of being killed, 1.6 times (see Table 7).

Two factors are common across the two cultures for those who say they own weapons for personal safety: being male and the fear of being hurt as a result of a criminal act. Knowing a victim appears to be a reason to own a weapon in Japan, whereas increased fear levels in the United States increase the likelihood of weapon ownership.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The principal finding of this part of the research is that the stated willingness to use a weapon in scenarios where respondents were asked what they would do under the circumstances is significantly tied to whether they owned a weapon. Weapon ownership increases the likelihood of making a weapons choice and even a hitting or shoving reaction to immediate threats. It cannot be determined precisely why this is the case. Perhaps weapon ownership provides confidence in dealing with situations or it might be that having a weapon makes the choice more viable.

The weapons choice is also more likely for males and, especially in Japan, for the generation younger than 30 years of age, although being younger than 30 is not related to having a weapon. The significance of the age difference in Japan may be a factor associated with generational socialization and the experience associated with post-World War II reconstruction with its emphasis on peace, passivity, and nonaggression. The younger-than-30 generation in Japan did not have the same socialization experience and they are also a computer game generation. They have a computer socialization that has a strong violent undertone as the primary theme of many games. In the United States, there is no difference by age. There has been a more consistent socialization of males in the United States to themes of strength in the protection of honor and property across all generations including the post-World War II middle-aged men.

The findings in this research suggest that there might be an attraction to ownership of weapons associated with cultural definitions of maleness, being tough, strong, and in control and a male culturalization as to how people define situations and the social scripts as to how to respond.

Fear levels do not appear to impact the stated decision to use a weapon, but fear levels in different combinations are related to weapon ownership. Thus, whereas fear of victimization may be relatively high among both populations, as discussed in Dussich, Friday, and Yamagami (1999), the role of fear in anticipated response sets becomes significant only in relationship to the respondent's ownership of a weapon.

One cannot say what individuals would really do in actual situations, but this research indicates that there is a greater confrontive response in Japan than in the United States. This can be explained culturally in part by the fact that American experience with violence is much greater than for the Japanese and there has been a socialization regarding how to act and react with strangers. Americans have a greater distrust of confrontation situations and prefer, as the data suggest, to walk away. In Japan, on the other hand, there is no major fear associated with confrontation and the Japanese are more willing than Americans to yell and talk back to the offender. For Americans, such behavior may be a provocation for which the consequences are unpredictable.

So, although the response set is more assertive for possible cultural reasons, the major and significant difference lies in the response set of weapons owners in both countries. There is a clear tendency for weapons owners to indicate a willingness

to use or threaten to use a weapon regardless of country. This finding is consistent with the weapons effect perspective (Berkowitz, 1968). Of course, those who own weapons may have such a mindset to begin with, and this raises the question of who decides to own a weapon for their own personal safety; but, the reality is that the ownership itself plays a role in defining the situation.

The implications of this can be far reaching. The availability of weapons on the violence rate in the United States has been discussed in a number of studies and reports (Kleck, 1991; Wright et al., 1983). This study suggests that the ownership of weapons may independently act to define situations for their use. Within a completely separate context, Lumb and Friday (1997) studied the use of police force when officers were given pepper spray as a weapon to complement their traditional batons and guns. The study found that arming officers with spray actually increased the number of physical altercations between police and suspects. These data were interpreted to suggest that by having a weapon with less than deadly force, officers felt greater confidence to deal with physical threats and they, in fact, became more assertive in their approach to suspects.

The parallel finding may be applied here. Although weapons ownership is related to previous exposure to victimization and personal fear levels, weapons ownership takes on a characteristic all its own in the definition of the situation and one's response to it. Ownership has the potential of escalating the response.

These findings have another important policy implication that goes beyond the use of weapons by weapons owners. These data indicate that there is also a relationship between those who own weapons and their willingness to respond in a physical way by hitting and shoving in response to threats. It may be the personality of those who would own weapons or it might be the confidence one has in its ownership; whatever the reason, the relationship between ownership and more assertive and potentially violent responses to threats cannot be ignored. If the ownership of any weapon is a factor in one's response, the implications are even more far reaching when the weapon is a gun. Policies designed to limit weapon possession are consistent with the implications of this research.

NOTE

1. Logistic regression calculates the likelihood or expected probability (Exp B) of a particular event occurring holding constant the effects of other variables. It is a log function of the slope (B) of the regression and standard error (SE) (Bachman & Paternoster, 1997).

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