The Victim & Offender Magnitude Gap

Franciscus Peters

Master Thesis – Clinical Forensic Psychology & Victimology

S3888088
09 - 2023
Department of Psychology
University of Groningen
Examiner/Daily supervisor:
Renee Kleine Deters, MsC
2nd Examiner:
Julie Karsten, PhD

Abstract

The magnitude gap is the difference in the evaluation of the severity of a transgression between victims and offenders with victims rating transgressions as more severe. The present literature review seeks to evaluate the evidence on the validity, consequences, theoretical foundation, and mediators of the magnitude gap. Articles were obtained through databases using key-words or by using a benchmark article. A total of 21 articles were used in the review. The results showed that the victims and offenders have asymmetries in their evaluation of offender intent, severity, offender justification, and perceived consequences of a transgression. In addition, moderators showed that the magnitude gap can increase or decrease depending on the nature of the transgression, the trait hostility of the victim, and relationship quality. The articles on avengers and targets of revenge showed that seeking retribution for a transgression does not lead to a stable equilibrium for victims and offenders. An important outcome of the literature on the magnitude gap and other asymmetries is that it provides a measurable way to evaluate the differences in perspectives between victims and offenders.

Keywords: magnitude gap, victim-offender, asymmetries

The Victim & Offender Magnitude Gap

Victims and offenders have different perspectives on a transgression committed by the offender (Baumeister et al., 1990). The specific types of differences between victims and offenders on evaluations related to transgressions, within the literature, are often referred to as asymmetries (Adams & Inesi, 2016; Leunissen et al., 2013). These include but are not limited to evaluations of anger, intent, memory, severity, and guilt (Helion et al., 2019; McCarthy & Rivers, 2022; Kearns & Fincham, 2005). They are frequently evaluated through measurement scales. For example, the estimation of offender intent for a crime is evaluated by a victim on a 10-item scale and compared to the offender's intent evaluation. If they are the same, there is no asymmetry. If the victim consistently gives higher scores and the offender consistently gives lower scores or vice-versa then there is an asymmetry for that variable. Another evaluation of evidence of asymmetries includes the reporting behavior of victims and offenders in narrative form such as the level of highlighting, downplaying, exacerbating, or minimizing the consequences. These categories of behaviors are generally coded from written narratives and can be used to compare victims and offenders (Kearns & Fincham, 2005). The topic of this literature review is the magnitude gap. The magnitude gap refers to the degree of asymmetry in the evaluation of a transgression where the victim tends to evaluate the transgression as being more severe compared to the offender (Stillwell et al., 2008).

The Source Of The Magnitude Gap

There are different potential explanations for the presence of the magnitude gap. One of them is that there are differing motives that alter the way a transgression is interpreted (Baumeister et al., 1990). A person may be motivated to see a situation in a certain way to avoid responsibility, which could lead to emphasizing certain factors that remove their responsibility and underestimating factors that add to their responsibility. A phenomenon that

is closely related is the fundamental attribution error. This is a tendency for people to overestimate dispositional (i.e. personality traits) factors and underestimate situational factors when judging another person's behavior compared to evaluating one's own behavior (Jones & Nisbet, 1987). For an offender, motives can include preserving self-image or reducing culpability. It is not just offenders who display inaccuracies in their accounts. There is laboratory evidence that victims can be just as inaccurate as offenders (Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997). For a victim, motives can include a higher restitution or more sympathy.

Another explanation for the magnitude gap is a difference in recall of the transgression. During the post-apartheid trials in South-Africa there were major differences in what offenders were able to recall compared to victims. Offenders were given a major incentive, getting out of prison, by responding truthfully and sharing all the details they could recall. This would remove the likelihood of deceptive strategies such as malingering. However, offenders were still unable to recall many of the things that victims did remember in detail, showing a difference in recall between offenders and victims that does not seem to be based on motivation (Kraft, 2009). The differences in recall could be due to differences in the encoding of information during the crime. Memories are affected by emotion, with emotional events leading to a greater degree of recall (Levine & Edelstein, 2009). This is relevant because there could be differences between victims and offenders at the moment of the crime. In the previous example for the post-apartheid trials, the offenders may be less likely to experience intense emotionality compared to victims since their behavior was more routine to them. The victims would encode more details due to the higher level of emotions experienced and recall more details later. In a similar way, it is also possible that offenders do not register the transgression as being a transgression and thus not putting any weight to the situation (Kolivas & Gross, 2007), therefore remembering less details due to a lack of negative emotionality compared to victims.

The Consequences Of The Magnitude Gap

A potential consequence of the magnitude gap is the inability to come to an agreement on how to resolve an issue. Equity theory proposes that people have a motivation to seek equity when it comes to power and resources in relationships (Stillwell et al., 2008). Therefore, a victim would be likely to demand a certain amount of recompense relative to the perceived harm done (Wagstaff & Preece, 1997). However, based on the magnitude gap, the victim could perceive the crime as more severe than the offender and will therefore demand retribution that the offender sees as excessive, thus making it difficult for a stable level of equity to be reached for both the victim and offender. As such, the magnitude gap would act as a contributor to a cycle in which the victim consistently seeks and exacts revenge in excess of the offender's expectations (Ent & Parton, 2020). It would be useful to find out whether there is evidence to confirm whether the magnitude gap causes an inability for equity to be reached in the relationship between victims and offenders.

The Current Review

It would be useful to review the ways in which the magnitude gap, and other asymmetries, are being studied by researchers. This allows for an evaluation of the magnitude gap itself and its external validity. More information about the theory that best explains the magnitude gap would also be useful. As explained before, potential explanations are differences in motives or differences in recall. This has important implications in how to address the magnitude gap in areas such as mediation. People tend to believe that their subjective evaluations are accurate and are surprised when the accounts of other people differ from theirs (Pronin et al., 2004). One finding suggests that objective mediators, those who try to stick closely to the facts, cause both parties in their mediation to become suspicious of the

mediator favoring the other side (Lord & Taylor, 2009). Therefore, mediators need to know how to best address the source of the differentiation.

In order to better understand the magnitude gap, it would also be useful to look at various types of asymmetries and evaluate their relationship with the magnitude gap. There is evidence of asymmetries between victims and offenders with regard to memory, the justification, and perceived consequences of the crime (Ent & Parton, 2020; Kraft, 2009). There is further evidence for differences in emotional needs, evaluations of intentionality, and expectations for recompense between victims and offenders (Shnabel et al., 2008; Leunissen et al., 2013). By recognizing the various factors contributing or reducing the magnitude gap, it would give more insight to the phenomenon of the magnitude gap.

The first aim of this systematic literature review is to review the evidence for the magnitude gap to gain better insight into its validity, its theoretical foundation, its relationship with other asymmetries, and its moderators. A second aim is to evaluate to what degree the magnitude gap prevents equity restoration between victims and offenders. The second aim is orientated towards a potential consequence of the magnitude gap.

Methods

Eligibility Criteria

There are several ways by which the magnitude gap can be evaluated, which means the information sources need to be inclusive of those items. The magnitude gap is the degree of asymmetry of the evaluation of severity that tends towards the victim viewing the act as more severe (Stillwell et al., 2008). Therefore, evaluations of differences (or lack thereof) in severity of transgressions provide a direct way to evaluate the magnitude gap. In addition, other asymmetries such as intent asymmetry, offender justification asymmetry, and perceived consequences of the act are related to severity. The evaluation of intent has a significant

relationship with severity and people evaluate an event as more severe when there is a higher level of intent (Helion et al., 2020). The level of perceived justification on the part of the offender also shares a relationship with the evaluation of severity of the act, with a higher level of perceived justification of the offender leading to a lower rating for severity (Shimada et al., 2015). The evaluation of consequences is also related to the estimation of severity of the act (Feeney & Hill, 1998).

There are further selection criteria to determine which articles are suitable for review. The eligibility criteria for the articles are peer reviewed, no dissertations, a comparison needs to be made between victims and offenders, and the comparison variable needs to be related to severity of the transgression. This literature review interprets victims and offenders very broadly. Studies are included if they include a visualization of being a victim or being an offender. Despite the limits this method places on external validity, it still offers a way of comparison between victims and offenders. The offender can be seen as an agent of infringement so terms such as perpetrator and transgressor are also valid. The offending act does not have to be a criminal act.

Information Sources

Two ways of identifying articles were used. The first involved a benchmark article, Baumeister et al., (1990), which is widely cited in the literature on asymmetries between victims and offenders. Google Scholar has an option of viewing articles that have used this article in their list of references. A benefit of this method is that it is not limited by the search terms utilized during a specific time period. Victim-offender asymmetries is a term that gets used frequently within the past decade, but not before that time period (Adams & Inesi, 2016; McCarthy et al., 2022a). The second search strategy was to find articles by utilizing a key-word approach through databases. The search terms involved identifying key words and synonyms related to the research question and utilizing those in psychology databases. The

databases used were Psycinfo and Proquest psychology database. The article search range has no starting date and lasts until the beginning of 2023.

Search Strategy & Selection

The steps to finding relevant articles for this systematic literature review are as follows: 1) Identification, 2) Screening evaluation, 3) Eligibility evaluation. The keywords used for the databases were ("victims") AND ("offenders" or "transgressors" or "perpetrators") AND "accounts" or "perspectives") AND ("intent" or "guilt" or "consequences" or "severity") OR ("asymmetry" or "divergence") AND ("Victims") AND ("offender" or "transgressor" or "perpetrator"). Further selection criteria used in the databases were the requirement of peer-reviewal and being published as an academic journal. For the benchmark article method and the database method, articles were selected manually by looking at the title first for a mention of victim/offender (or synonym) perspectives and then checking the abstracts. For the final selection, the full study was looked at and an evaluation was made whether it was valid for use in the review. For this stage, articles had to show a relevance to differences with respect to the severity of crime. For example, certain asymmetries such as desire for forgiveness were excluded if the article did not cover more. The review was carried out by 1 person.
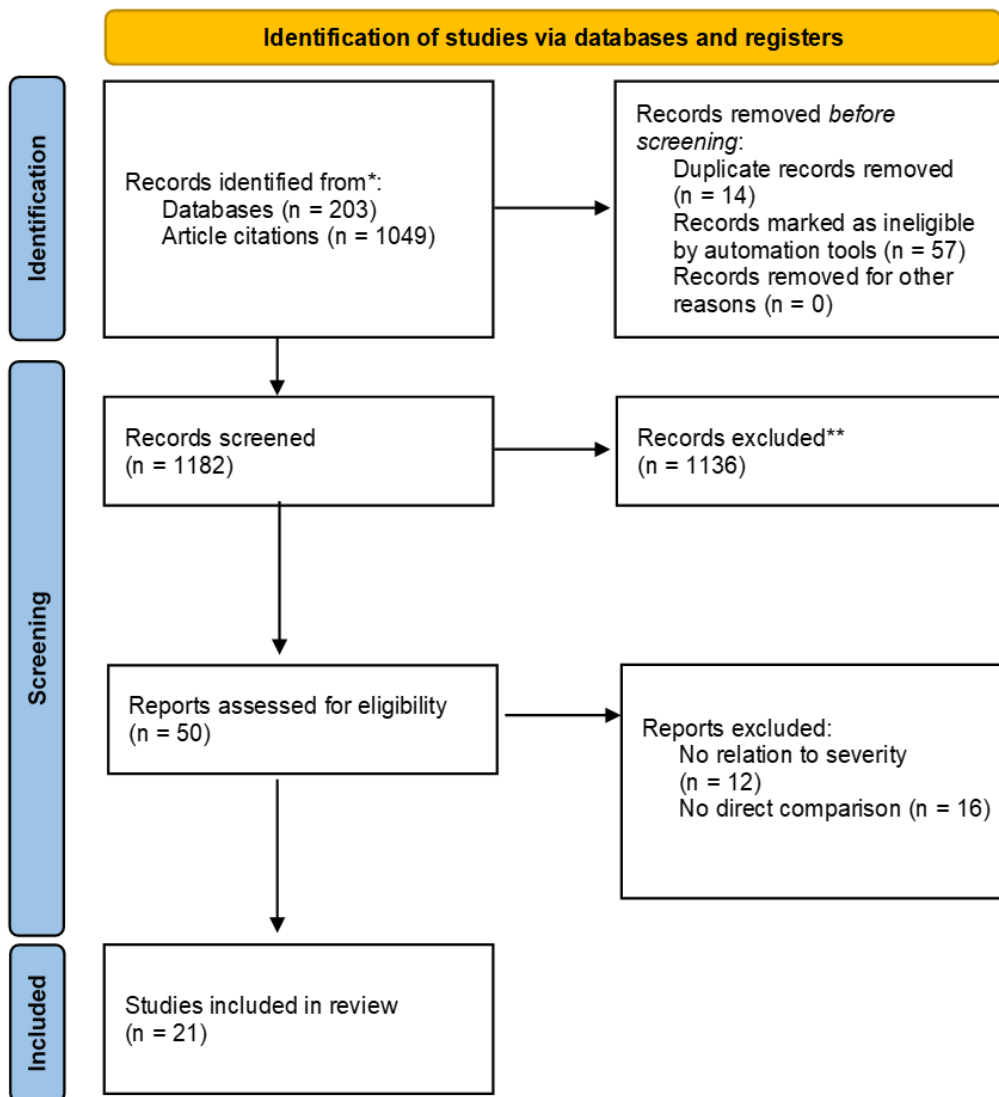
Data Collection Process

The data of interest is related to the methodology, the mediators/moderators influencing the magnitude gap, associations between asymmetries, and evidence related to the theoretical explanation for the magnitude gap. In addition, information related to vengeance is important to answer the second research question. In order to evaluate whether the magnitude gap prevents equity restoration, studies on avengers and targets of revenge are useful since they can yield a comparison of severity asymmetry between two acts. The data items for the methodology section involved describing the methods used by the study. The data items for

the mediators/moderators and the associated asymmetries are effect size measures such as

correlations and significance tests. A summary of the articles is compiled in a chart (See table

1) mentioning the author, the method, the population characteristics, and the relevant results.

Figure 1

Figure 1

Identification of studies via databases and registers

| Identification | Records identified from*:
Databases (n = 203)
Article citations (n = 1049) | Records removed *before screening*:
    Duplicate records removed (n = 14)
    Records marked as ineligible by automation tools (n = 57)
    Records removed for other reasons (n = 0) |

Records screened (n = 1182) → Records excluded** (n = 1136)

Reports assessed for eligibility (n = 50) → Reports excluded:
    No relation to severity (n = 12)
    No direct comparison (n = 16)

Studies included in review (n = 21)

From: Page MJ, McKenzie JE, Bossuyt PM, Boutron I, Hoffmann TC, Mulrow CD, et al. The PRISMA 2020 statement: an updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71

Results

Table 1

Summary of articles

Article	Population	Method	Main Results
Adams & Inesi, (2016) Study 1 - 4	Study 1: N = 98, M= 33.73, 34 Female Study 2: N = 179, M = 27.01, 119 Female. Study 3: N = 119, M = 33.09, 37 Female. Study 4: 32, M = 24.9, 28 Female	Study 1 was a micronarrative study with measures on intentionality. Study 2 was a diary study with daily measures (from study 1) about victimization and transgression events. Study 3 was a scenario visualization with the same measure. Study 4 was a manipulation involving dyads where 1 participant had the opportunity to force another participant to do an unenjoyable survey. The same measures were used	For all 4 studies, victims reported a higher level of intended harm by the transgressors compared to the transgressor perspective
Baumeister, et al., (1990)	N = 63 (58 offender stories, 55 victim stories)	Micronarrative study, within subject (each subject a offender and victim story), content analysis through 2 coders	The accounts of victims revealed more negative consequences and more remaining anger. The accounts of offenders had more denial of negative consequences, and attributed their behavior to uncontrollable circumstances (lower intent). offender accounts reflected a higher level of justification for the transgressions.
Catellani & Milesi, (2001)	Study 1: N = 80, 40 Females.	Scenario visualization for a rape case, pretending to explain the facts (after reading the case) to a judge. Content analysis on the focus related to counterfactuals of either the offender/target, the activity, and the controllability.	Victim accounts tended to express counterfactuals with regard to the controllability of offender but not for their own controllability. offender accounts expressed more counterfactuals related to uncontrollability when they evaluated themselves.
Feeney & Hill, (2006)	107 heterosexual couples, 62 married, 45 dating	Partners would seperately answer questionnaires that were standardized or event based. The event questionnaires evaluated 4 recent events: a male perpetrated, female perpetrated, male-enacted supportive event, and female enacted supportive event. The sequence of questionnaires was randomized. The partners also selected specific events, which were recorded in interaction diaries	The study found significant role-related effects in most dependent variables, except for immediate distress in victims. The main effects of role were observed in highlighting, downplaying, contrition, attributed malice, remorse, and effect on the victim, with consistent self-serving biases observed. However, contrary to predictions, offenders perceived more negative effects on victims' well-being compared to victims' own reports.
Helion et al., (2020) Study 1 – 3, 5	Study 1: N = 100 Study 2: N = 250, Study 3: N = 100	Scenario visualization	For study 1, participants recalled more transgressions in which they were in the victim group. For study 2, participants recalled more sensory details as well as more transgressions for the victim group as well as a significantly more negative evaluation of the transgression.
Kearns & Fincham (2005)	N = 117, 55 Female, M = 19.65, 61% Caucasian, 9% African American, 21% Asian	Micronarrative, within subject, content analysis by two coders, and questionnaires	offenders were more likely to include details that reduced the severity of their transgressions. Victims were more likely to exaggerate the severity. Offender and victim accounts did not differ in the type of transgressions reported.
Kowalski et al., (2003)	N = 245, 149 Female	Participants were randomly assigned to write narratives about one of seven aversive behaviors from both a victim and offender perspective. Questionnaires followed	The results take the differences of different types of behavior (lying, betrayal etc.,) and compare the victim and offender perspectives. The perceptions of aversiveness gap was worse (and significant) for betrayal, lying, teasing, and arrogance. This implies a greater severity distinction for these categories of transgression. The victim evaluation always evaluates them as worse compared to the offender.
Kowalski, (2000)	N = 72, Mean age was 22.4 (18-44) with 96% being caucasian, and 55 Female	Micronarrative, within subject, content analysis by two coders, and questionnaires	The offender narratives of teasing evaluated their teasing behavior as more humorous compared to the victim narrative evaluations. The offenders also viewed themselves more favorably compared to the victims.

Krahé & Berger, (2013)	N = 2149 University Students	Questionnaire	The reporting of victimization rates for the university students far exceeded the reported perpetration rates. 19.5% to 13.2% for Men. 35.9 to 7.6 for Women.
Leary et al., (1998)	N= 168, 84 Female	Micronarrative method: Participants were split into 2 groups. Writing a victimization experience or a perpetration experience, followed by questionnaires.	offenders were more likely to say that the incidents were accidental, with less intent, with more blame on the victim (so done out of revenge), compared to victim accounts.
McCarthy & rivers (2022)	Study 1: N = 104, 49 Female, M = 19.41. Study 2: N = 552, 182 Female, M = 37.47	Study 1: Micronarrative procedure starting with a hostility subscale, with the narratives being coded for severity and questionnaires were asked after writing the narratives. Study 2: Scenario visualization, with the same questionnaires being asked as in the first study. The scenario was from Adams & Inesi, (2016).	Trait hostility failed to show an impact on the difference of evaluation of severity between victims and offenders for the first study. The second study did find an impact of trait hostility leading to a larger asymmetry with victim evaluations of offender acts being evaluated as worse.
McCarthy et al., (2022a)	N = 1371, 701 Female, M = 42.11, 76% White, 9% Asian, 8% African American	Study 1: Scenario Visualization: Participants were divided into a 2x2 condition in which one condition primed blameworthiness and the other condition was victim-offender perspective taking. Study 2: Micronarrative: The same 2x2 split occured as in study 1. The same questionnaires evaluating the results	Study 1: victim perspective taking, compared to offender perspective taking, led to a higher evaluation on offender intent to harm however no perspective differences on actual harm done (consequence). Study 2: The victim group reported a higher degree of intent and actual harm done compared to the offender group. Priming blameworthiness did not have an impact on the results for both studies. Both studies found a higher offender perceived justification.
McCarthy et al., (2022b)	N = 408, M = 29.13, 45% Female	Participants completed a survey consisting of scales unrelated to the study's hypotheses, followed by recalling and answering questions about instances of intentional harm as offenders, victims, and witnesses. They rated the severity, intention, and justification of the behaviors. Demographic information was collected, and participants were debriefed at the end.	Victim and witness memories had higher ratings of severity. offender memories rated less intent to harm and harm done to victims. offender memories reflected a greater level of justification compared to victim and witness memories
Mikula et al., (1998)	Study 1: N = 102, (51 couples), Study 2: N = 88 (44 Pairs), Study 3: N = 80 (40 couples)	Study 1: The first partner was asked to describe two incidents: one in which they were unjustly treated by their partner, and one in which they treated their partner unjustly. The second partner would be introduced to the incidents and mention 2 incidents themselves, which the first partner would hear. After each incident report, participants responded to questionaires related to injustice, cause, justified, intention, and satisfaction of the relationship. Study 2: Replication with friends. Study 3: Replication with incidents being written down for a fuller story.	For all three studies, the victims reported a higher level of unjustness and attributed more offender causality and intent. Perceived justification by offenders was higher for all three studies. A high relationship quality implied that the incidents were viewed by victims as less unjustly and with less intent from the offender side.
Shimada et al., (2015)	217 US nationals (127 Female), 251 Japanese nationals (110 Female)	Micronarrative procedure: Half the participants gave a response of account giving (offender) and half gave a response of account receiving (victim). Questionnaires followed . An online coding software was used to categorize responses.	Severity was rated much higher when the act was perceived to be unjustified. The article found differences in ratings for severity between Japanese and American respondents for categories of social infractions.
Stillwell & Baumeister, (1997)	Study 1: N = 50, 29 Female. Study 2: N = 30, 13 Female. Study 3: N =87, 58 Female	Study 1: Scenario visualization with 3 groups: Victim, offender, and control. Study 2: Scenario visualization with a three-five day period between reading the scenario and recalling the information (to measure longevity of differences. Study 3: A repeat of the first study with control for demand characteristics	Study 1: The offender and victim stories both contained more distortions compared to the control group. The content analysis revealed that victim accounts had more aggravating details compared with offender accounts and the control group. offenders engaged more in omission and mitigation. Study 2: The same pattern of victim aggravation and offender mitigation occurred. Study 3: There was no evidence that demand characteristics had an impact on the outcome of the previous 2 studies.

Takaku et al., (2010)	N = 159 (138 Japanese, 121 American) cross-national study	Scenario visualization	The main finding showed that cultural scores did not correlate significantly with any of the dependent variables showing no impact of culture on the level of asymmetries between victims and offenders.
Zechmeister & Romero, (2002)	N = 122, predominantly Caucasian, 60.7% Female, convenience sample of friends and family of students	Micronarrative procedure: Participants were asked to describe an incident that was forgiven or not forgiven from a victim or offender perspective. The incidents were coded.	Pearson product–moment correlation signifies effect sizes of the presence or absence of the inclusion of a variable in a narrative. Offender's describe offender accounts as having more mitigating circumstances compared to victims describing offender intentions (44.2% vs. 19.8%). Offenders also saw their behavior as being justified more often compared to victims.

Frequently Used Methodologies

The articles in the review had re-occurring methods for the studies that were conducted. In order to better understand the results, it would help to clarify what these methods look like. The two most commonly used methods used micronarratives and scenarios/vignettes. The former, first utilized for offender-victim differentiation by Baumeister et al., (1990), involves participants being asked to recall an incident in which they were either the victim or an offender and to write a short account of it. Then, the first way of collecting results is by having coders evaluate the micronarrative (for example in Zechmeister and Romero, (2002) or in Kowalski et al., (2000)), where coders evaluated offense severity and blameworthiness. The second way is by conducting questionnaires after writing about the events to evaluate offender and victim perspectives (occurs for almost all studies with micronarratives). Another method frequently employed is scenario visualization. The scenario method utilizes a story/vignette that goes over an example of a transgression occurring between a victim and an offender. Participants are asked to evaluate the transgression from the perspective of the victim or the offender and are then asked questions. It is possible that the same story, though slightly modified, may be used across studies.

Evaluation Of Asymmetries

There is direct evidence for differences in severity asymmetry measures tending to victims giving higher transgression severity ratings, providing support for the presence of the magnitude gap. The micronarrative method shows a consistent pattern of evidence confirming the magnitude gap (Baumeister et al., 1990; McCarthy et al. 2022a; McCarthy et al., 2022b). Content analysis of the micronarratives showed a consistent effect as well (Kearns & Fincham, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2003). The scenario visualization method failed to show a consistent pattern for measuring severity. There are some studies that showed an asymmetry in severity tending towards the victim with the victim rating the transgression as more severe (McCarthy & Rivers, 2022; Helion et al., 2020). However, one study using scenario visualization failed to show this finding (McCarthy, et al., 2022a).

The asymmetry in the evaluation of offender intent is relevant because it shares a mediating relationship with severity (Helion et al., 2020). The intent evaluation is done by having victims and offenders give an assessment of whether a transgression was done deliberately (Adams & Inesi, 2016). The intent asymmetry measures show a consistent pattern in victims having a higher evaluation of offender intent compared to offenders themselves (Adams & Inesi, 2016; Baumeister et al., 1990; Leary et al., 1998; McCarthy et al., 2022a; Mikula et al., 1998). These results hold for a variety of measures including diary studies, micronarratives, and scenario visualization. Perceived justification asymmetry tended towards offenders reporting a higher justification for their actions compared to victims evaluating offender justification. (Baumeister et al., 1990; Mikula et al., 1998; McCarthy et al., 2022b; Shimada et al., 2015). A study also found no impact of nationality on measures of asymmetries such as justification (Takaku et al., 2010).

The perceived consequences of offender actions as evaluated by questionnaires showed mixed results. In one evaluation using couples, the offenders estimated more negative consequences from their action to the victim compared to the victim perspective (Feeney &

Hill, 1998). This may be due to partners having more access to each other and therefore being more aware of the negative repercussions compared to non-couples. Another scenario visualization study showed that, despite the presence of an intent asymmetry, there was no difference in the evaluation of actual harm done (McCarthy et al., 2022a). However, micronarrative procedure did manage to find that victims gave a higher rating of actual harm done compared to offenders (McCarthy et al., 2022a). Therefore, the methodology seems to have an impact on whether there is an asymmetry in the evaluation of consequences and scenario visualization may not lead to the same evaluation of consequences as micronarratives.

Moderators

Several variables were tested in the literature that have an impact on victim-offender severity asymmetry. Some transgressions were found to lead to a larger asymmetry in severity. These were betrayal, lying, teasing, and arrogance. They were likely to cause a larger gap in asymmetry in comparison to impropriety, and dependency (reassurance-seeking) (Kowalski et al., 2003). There was mixed evidence of trait hostility of the victim having an impact on an altered evaluation of the severity of the offense. This is based on a scenario visualization study showing a larger severity asymmetry due to victims with higher trait hostility evaluating offender acts as worse (McCarthy & Rivers, 2021). However, a micronarrative procedure did not show an impact of trait hostility of the victim on severity asymmetry (McCarthy & Rivers, 2021). Another moderator investigated was relationship quality between couples. Couples with a high relationship quality experienced a lowered discrepancy between the evaluation of severity within the relationship (Mikula et al., 1998). The sample used in this study on couples also showed that the sample had an above average relationship quality.

Table 2

Summary of revenge-based articles

Article	Population	Method	Main Results
Stillwell et al., (2008) studies 1, 2	Study 1: N = 83, M = 22.96, Study 2: N = 60, M = 23.3	Micronarrative method: An account of being an avenger and an account of being a target. For study 2, the micronarrative method was employed but with participants being asked to write about an incident where they committed a revenge act and a time where they withheld a revenge act.	Avengers were more likely to rate their avengement as a way to restore equity compared to targets. Both the target and avenger tended to see themselves as the victim. For study 2, there were higher levels of current anger for the non-revenge authors compared to the revenge author.
Elshout et al., 2017	N = 148	Micronarrative method: Avenger, target of revenge, and independent raters	The severity of the acts was rated differently. Avengers thought the original offense against them was worse compared to the revenge act. Targets of avengement thought the opposite, that the original offense was not as severe. Independent raters viewed the revenge acts described as being equal in severity.
Ent & Parton, 2019) studies 1, 2	Study 1: N = 66, 56 Female, M = 18.9. Study 2: N = 146, 75 Female, M = 36.2.	Study 1: Participants were asked to write an autobiographical narrative about a time where they hurt someone or when they themselves were hurt. Counterbalanced design. After each narrative, questions were asked. Study 2: The same instructions as study 1 but with 3 narratives from each perspective for a total of 6	Study 1 and 2 showed that a victim was less likely to report that a transgression against them was motivated by revenge.

Revenge Asymmetries

Three articles were found that compared avenger perspectives and the targets of avengers. The results help to illustrate asymmetries for both the initial act and the revenge act. A difference in targets of revenge and avenger personal narratives in the evaluation of the extent to which the offender was motivated by revenge was found (Ent & Parton, 2019). The target of revenge accounts showed lower scores in the evaluation of the act being motivated by revenge compared to avenger accounts with a small-medium effect size ($d = 0.45$ for study 1, $d = 0.36$ for study 2). Therefore, there is evidence that a target of revenge is less likely to evaluate the revenge act against them as being motivated by revenge. The second article shows that the targets of revenge evaluate their offense against the avenger as less severe compared to the avenger evaluation (Elshout et al., 2017). In addition, targets of revenge evaluate the act of revenge as more severe compared to the avenger. The targets of revenge evaluate the act of revenge as being more severe than the act of original offence. These findings show that a contribution to the magnitude gap exists for both the original offense and the act of vengeance. The third article showed that avengers were likely to see their actions as

being able to restore justice and equity (Stillwell et al., 2008). However, the target of revenge did not perceive that the balance had been restored and viewed themselves as the victim of excessive retribution (Stillwell et al., 2008). Remaining levels of anger of the avenger towards the target of revenge were found to be reduced after a revenge act had taken place (Stillwell et al., 2008). This implies a stabilization in the level of equity.

Discussion

This literature review set out to review the evidence for the magnitude gap to assess its validity, its relationship with other asymmetries, its theoretical foundation, its potential moderators and to find out whether the magnitude gap prevents equity restoration. The validity can be evaluated through the direct examination of different asymmetries and the evaluation of methodology. For severity asymmetry, there is clear evidence that victims evaluate the severity of transgressions as worse compared to offenders, thereby forming a magnitude gap. In addition, the evaluation of severity is related to the perceived intent and justification of the offender, with a higher perceived offender intent and a lower perceived offender justification of the transgression by the victim compared to the offender. This shows that the evaluation of the severity of a transgression is not only related to a sum of total damage being done, but is also related to other characteristics, including but perhaps not limited to whether the damage was done due to a reasonable cause or if the transgression was committed deliberately. The primary way in which the findings on the asymmetries differed was through the method used to obtain the results.

The micronarrative and scenario visualization methods were the most commonly used methods to evaluate asymmetries between offenders and victims. The benefit of utilizing micronarratives was that it permits subjective expression of events through the narration of personal events (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Given that the micronarratives record real

events, the external validity is high. However, the method also presents issues. One such issue was having no way of verifying whether the transgressions that the victims and offenders were reporting were of a similar nature. The victim reports may use transgressions that are worse in nature or where the blameworthiness is easier to attribute compared to the offender narrative.

It is also possible to verify the types of transgressions reported in narrative studies through the use of coders who categorize the types of transgressions and determine whether they are similar for offenders and victims (Kearns & Fincham, (2005). This would be a way to improve the micronarrative design. In order to overcome the issue of the micronarrative method, the scenario method, which keeps the interpreted transgression stable, can be used. For example, a scenario developed by Leunissen et al., (2013), involving the breaking of a mug by a colleague, was used in study 3 of Adams & Inesi, (2016) and McCarthy et al., (2022). This has the benefit of providing a stable way of presenting a scenario. However, McCarthy et al., (2022) did fail to show a finding of a perspective difference on actual harm done in a study with a large sample size (n = 1371). As such, the issue with this particular method may be that the specific vignette/story is not able to induce a manipulation that leads to a difference in outcome. Therefore, having well-tested standardized scenarios is vital when using this method.

Another issue of the scenario visualization method may be the inability to create an environment that reflects a real transgression. Since this method requires participants to visualize someone else's experience of a crime, the manipulation may not be strong enough to induce the same effects compared to a real transgression. There is evidence of differences in the answering of questionnaires in terms of self-representation between high-stake and low-stake situations (Niessen et al., 2017). It seems doubtful that visualizing another's transgression, which in a real setting could be interpreted as high stakes, confers the same

experience of high stakes. There are ways of overcoming issues with the two previously described methods through the utilization of different methods. A novel approach would be to create a unique environment in which a real transgression occurs. Adams & Inesi, (2016) study 4, demonstrates this: by having two (real) participants perform a task in which one participant has the option to do a beneficial activity at the cost of another participant who would have to do an unenjoyable activity. The study showed an asymmetry occurred where the victim who had to partake in the unenjoyable activity evaluated offender intent of the transgression as higher (Adams & Inesi, 2016).

There is a lack of studies on the magnitude gap in non-western cultures. One study of nationality, between the United States and Japan, showed no impact of cultural differences in the reporting behavior of victims and offenders in the evaluation of transgressions (Takaku, 2003). However, since limited evidence shows that culture may play an impact on the rating of severity of certain transgressions (Shimada et al., 2015), and different types of transgressions have a larger magnitude gap (Kowalski et al., 2003), it is possible that the magnitude gap differs for certain acts between cultures.

Theoretical Foundation

There were two main theoretical approaches in the literature that could explain the magnitude gap: differing motives for the transgression or differences in encoding of information related to the transgression. The scenario/vignette method does show that asymmetries can emerge from perspective-taking by participants, which points to motivation playing a role when people are exposed to the same level of information. However, there are issues with the motivation-based explanation. The fifth study of Helion et al., (2020) tested whether memories differed between justified and unjustified acts. The theoretical reason from the article is that a higher justification of transgressions has previously been shown to lead to

less threat to the self-concept (Helion et al., 2020). Therefore, there is less motivation to alter the interpretation of the memory on the part of offenders due to less self-protecting motivation. The study used a story vignette method with a justification manipulation for both offender and victim events (Helion et al., 2020). The study failed to show that transgression justifiability led to a lower fluency of recall but did show an effect of transgression justification on evaluating the event as more negative. Therefore, memories were not altered due to motivational influences. This would be counterevidence to the theory that motivation plays a part in creating asymmetries in perspectives on crime. In addition, the earlier mentioned case of offenders in South Africa during the post-apartheid trials being unable to recall many of the things that have occurred despite having a high motivation to do so also suggests that motivation at time of recall does not play a major role in memory accuracy (Kraft, 2009). It may also be the case that both encoding and motivation play a role. One argument made for asymmetries being dependent upon differences in motivation is that the words used in narratives of victims and offenders differ (Kearns & Fincham, 2005). However, there could be a difference in encoding of memories as well that leads to a difference in narrative descriptions. For example, an offender would have more access to mitigating reasons for their behavior which a victim would never get to learn about.

Another way to evaluate theories is to compare them with existing models of revenge. There is a proposed model which suggests that revenge is an adaptive mechanism in order to impose retaliatory costs on an offender to avoid future transgressions (McCullough et al., 2013). This model would explain why the evaluation of intent plays a role in evaluating the severity of actions. If a transgression is committed by an offender with a low intent to do so, it would not be as necessary to impose retaliatory costs since it would not alter the incentive for future transgressions. In addition, according to the model, the motive-based explanation of

asymmetry would make less sense since deviations in the interpretation of reality hinder the ability to determine the actual severity of a transgression.

Equity restoration

The articles on avengers and targets of revenge explore potential consequences of the magnitude gap. There is evidence that seeking equity plays an important part in offender motivation, such as reduced anger levels after taking revenge and a belief by the avengers that justice can be restored through vengeance (Stillwell et al., 2008). However, acts of vengeance do not create equity for both parties (Elshout et al., 2017). It is possible that the avenger seeks an amount of revenge somewhat equal to the severity of the offence done against them. However, due to the magnitude gap being established by the original offense, this will be done in excess of what the target of revenge expects as fair. In addition, the act of vengeance will also be able to create its own magnitude gap (Elshout et al., 2017). The evaluation of avenger motivation showed that targets of revenge are less likely to view an offending act as an act of revenge (Ent & Parton, 2019). This lack of awareness could be explained by an unawareness of previous perpetration. This is illustrated by the massive discrepancy between reported victimization rates and perpetration rates in crime (Krahé & Berger, 2013). With the combination of excessive retribution and the creation of an additional magnitude gap, the equilibrium point of the avenger and the target of revenge may be pushed apart even further through the act of vengeance. However, a limitation of this interpretation is that very few studies have been done to confirm this finding.

Limitations and Future Research

A primary limitation of the literature review is limited generalizability to criminal cases. There is evidence that more significant transgressions in a relationship leads to a higher magnitude gap (Kowalski et al., 2003). Therefore, the size of the magnitude gap would likely

be larger. The literature is well-developed in establishing asymmetries and their associations as well as the variety of methods used to evaluate those asymmetries. A potential avenue of future research would be to conduct experiments with criminal populations. In addition, another avenue of research would be to focus on reducing the magnitude gap and other asymmetries through interventions. This would lead to a greater understanding of the magnitude gap as well as improve mediation practices.

Conclusion

An important contribution that the study of the magnitude gap and various asymmetries add to the forensic literature is a way of evaluating differences between victims and offenders in their perspectives. It provides a good way to explain reciprocal violence in a way that is measurable which allows for the development of theories that seek to explain vengeance and justice.

References

Adams, G. S., & Inesi, M. E. (2016). Impediments to forgiveness: victim and transgressor attributions of intent and guilt. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 111*(6), 866–881.

Baumeister, R. F., Stillwell, A., & Wotman, S. R. (1990). Victim and offender accounts of interpersonal conflict: autobiographical narratives about anger. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59(5), 994–1005.

Catellani, P., & Milesi, P. (2001). Counterfactuals and roles: mock victims' and offenders' accounts of judicial cases. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 31*(3), 247–264. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.39

Elshout, M., Nelissen, R. M. A., & van Beest, I. (2017). Your act is worse than mine: perception bias in revenge situations. *Aggressive Behavior, 43*(6), 553–557. https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21713

Ent, M. R., & Parton, D. M. (2020). "I avenge; others aggress": a victim-offender asymmetry in judging whether a transgression was motivated by revenge. *Psychological Reports*, *123*(4), 1355–1364. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294119841846

Feeney, J. A., & Hill, A. (2006). Victim-offender differences in reports of hurtful events. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 23*(4), 587–608. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407506065985

Helion, C., Helzer, E. G., Kim, S., & Pizarro, D. A. (2019). Asymmetric memory for harming versus being harmed. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General,* (2019). https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000691

Jones, E. E., & Nisbett, R. E. (1987). The actor and the observer: Divergent perceptions of

the causes of behavior. In E. E. Jones, D. E. Kanouse, H. H. Kelley, R. E. Nisbett, S.

Valins, & B. Weiner (Eds.), *Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior* (pp. 79–

94). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Kearns, J. N., & Fincham, F. D. (2005). Victim and offender accounts of interpersonal

transgressions self-serving or relationship-serving biases? *Personality & social

psychology bulletin, 31*(3), 321–333. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167204271594

Kolivas, E. D., & Gross, A. M. (2007). Assessing sexual aggression: Addressing the gap

between rape victimization and perpetration prevalence rates. *Aggression and Violent

Behavior*, 12, 315–328. doi: 10.1016/j.avb.2006.10.002

Kowalski, R. M. (2000). "I was Only Kidding!": Victims' and offenders' Perceptions of

Teasing. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 26*(2), 231–241.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167200264009

Kowalski, R. M., Walker, S., Wilkinson, R., Queen, A., & Sharpe, B. (2003). Lying,

cheating, complaining, and other aversive interpersonal behaviors: a narrative

examination of the darker side of relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal

Relationships, 20*(4), 471–490. https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075030204003

Kraft, R.N. (2009). The magnitude gap: Revealing differences in recall between victims

and offenders. *Applied Memory*. 147-166

Krahé, B., & Berger, A. (2013). Men and women as offenders and victims of sexual

aggression in heterosexual and same-sex encounters: a study of first-year college

students in germany. *Aggressive Behavior, 39*(5), 391–404.

https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.21482

Leary, M. R., Springer, C., Negel, L., Ansell, E., & Evans, K. (1998). The causes,

phenomenology, and consequences of hurt feelings. *Journal of Personality and Social

Psychology, 74*(5), 1225–1237. https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.74.5.1225

Leunissen, J. M., De Cremer, D., Reinders-Folmer, C. P., & van Dijke, M. (2013). The

apology mismatch: asymmetries between victim's need for apologies and offender's

willingness to apologize. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 49*(3), 315–324.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.12.0055

Levine, L. J., & Edelstein, R. S. (2009). Emotion and memory narrowing: A review and goal-

relevance approach. *Cognition and Emotion*, 23(5), 833-875.

https://doi.org/10.1080/02699930902738863

Lord, C. G., & Taylor, C. A. (2009). Biased assimilation: effects of assumptions and

expectations on the interpretation of new evidence. *Social and Personality Psychology

Compass*, *3*(5), 827–841. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2009.00203.x

McCarthy, R. J., & Rivers, A. K. (2022). Does Trait Hostility Moderate the Asymmetry in

Victim-offender Perceptions of Aggressive Behaviors? *Psychological Reports, 125*(2),

703–722. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294120984123

McCarthy R. J., Rivers A. K., Jensen A. P., Pawirosetiko J. S., Erickson J. M. (2022). Is the

victim-offender asymmetry stronger in situations where blame is being assigned?

Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 101(2022), 104333.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2022.104333

McCarthy, R. J., Jensen, A. P., Wilson, J. P., & Rivers, A. K. (2022). offenders', Victims',

and Witnesses' Folk Explanations of Aggressive Behaviors. *Psychological Reports,*

0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/00332941221123781

McCullough, M., Kurzban, R., & Tabak, B. (2013). Cognitive systems for revenge and

forgiveness. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 36*(1), 1-15.

doi:10.1017/S0140525X11002160

Mikula, G., Athenstaedt, U., Heschgl, S., & Heimgartner, A. (1998). Does it only depend on

the point of view? perspective-related differences in justice evaluations of negative

incidents in personal relationships. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 28*(6),

931–962. https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-0992(1998110)28:6<931::AID-

EJSP904>3.0.CO;2-5

Pronin, E., Gilovich., T, & Ross, L. (2004). Objectivity in the eye of the beholder: Divergent

perceptions of bias in self versus others. *Psychological review. 111. 781-99.*

Shimada T., Thameling C. L., Takai J. (2015). Everyday experiences of account-giving from

victims' and offenders' perspectives: A comparison of U.S. American and Japanese

students' perceptions. *Intercultural Communication Studies, 24,* 82-102.

Shnabel, N., Nadler, A., Canetti-Nisim, D., & Ullrich, J. (2008). The role of acceptance and

empowerment in promoting reconciliation from the perspective of the needs-based

model. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, *2*(1), 159–186.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-2409.2008.00014.x

Stillwell, A. M., and Baumeister, R. F. (1997). The construction of victim and offender

memories: Accuracy and distortion in role-based accounts. *Personality and Social*

Psychology Bulletin, 23, 1157-1172.

Stillwell, A. M., Baumeister, R. F., & Del Priore, R. E. (2008). We're all victims

here: toward a psychology of revenge. *Basic and Applied Social*

Psychology, 30(3), 253–263. https://doi.org/10.1080/01973530802375094

Takaku, S., Green, J. D., & Ohbuchi, K. I. (2010). Cross-national examination of

the offender-victim account estimation bias as a function of different types of

accounts. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 13*(4), 274–285.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-839X.2010.01319.x

Wagstaff, G. F., & Preece, D. (1997). Is overpunishment fairer than underpunishment?

Perceptions of deviations from equity. *Psychology, Crime and Law*, *3*(4), 261-274.

Zechmeister, J. S., & Romero, C. (2002). Victim and offender accounts of

interpersonal conflict: autobiographical narratives of forgiveness and unforgiveness.

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 82(4), 675–86.