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When apologies work: How matching apology components to victims' self-construals facilitates forgiveness

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ABSTRACT

Apologies are useful social tools that can act as catalysts in the resolution of conflict and inspire forgiveness. Yet as numerous real-world blunders attest, apologies are not always effective. Whereas many lead to forgiveness and reconciliation, others simply fall on deaf ears. Despite the fact that apologies differ in their effectiveness, most research has focused on apologies as dichotomous phenomena wherein a victim either (a) receives an apology or (b) does not. Psychological research has yet to elucidate which *components* of apologies are most effective, and for *whom*. The present research begins to address this gap by testing the theory that perpetrators' apologies are most likely to inspire victim forgiveness when their components align with victims' self-construals. Regression and hierarchical linear modeling analyses from two studies support the primary hypotheses. As predicted, victims reacted most positively to apologies that were congruent with their self-construals.

Introduction

Conflict is a ubiquitous social phenomenon that transcends people, cultures, and contexts (De Dreu & Gelfand, 2009). Although conflict is inevitable, the question of how conflict is managed holds critical implications for its consequences. In a world of global opportunities and global threats, the way conflict is managed can have such diverse consequences as escalation and war or forgiveness and peace. Fortunately, a sizable literature in social psychology and organizational behavior has developed to understand and explain the conditions under which conflict leads to destructive versus productive outcomes (De Dreu, 2006; De Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1997; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Peterson & Behfar, 2003).

One factor that has been argued to play a vital role in how conflict is managed by offenders is apology (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989; Sitkin & Bies, 1993). In the introduction to his landmark book *On Apology*, psychiatrist Aaron Lazare opens by referring to apology as "One of the most profound human interactions" (Lazare, 2004, p. 1). On a national scale, apologies have helped to heal the wounds of the Holocaust, the Nanking Massacre, and many other atrocities (Brooks, 1999). Among individuals, apologies have helped to repair countless relationships and restore harmony (Scher & Darley, 1997; Tavuchis, 1991). Within organizational contexts, apologies can be used to resolve interpersonal disputes, improve customer experiences, and enhance leader effectiveness (Liao, 2007; Tomlinson, Dineen, & Lewicki, 2004; Tucker, Turner, Barling, Reid, & Elving, 2006). Nonetheless, scholars and laypeople alike have recognized the potential for apologies to fail. Apologies have been referred to as "Highly risky strategies... [that] can make a bad situation worse" (Kellogg, 2007, p. 21). Empirical research similarly supports the idea that apologies are not always effective (Skarlicki, Folger, & Gee, 2004), drawing attention to the question, "Why is it that some apologies succeed whereas others fall on deaf ears?".

Central to the question of why some apologies succeed where others fail is a recognition that all apologies are not created equal. Rather, apologies can contain different sets of elements – referred to here as *components* – that may affect how victims react to them. For instance, some apologies might focus on the compensation of a victim while others might focus on showing empathy. Apology components have received theoretical attention in Sociology (Tavuchis, 1991), Law (Wagatsuma & Rosett, 1986), and Psychiatry (Lazare, 2004), yet with few exceptions (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Santelli, Struthers, & Eaton, 2009; Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Forster, & Montada, 2004) they have received scant empirical attention in Psychology. Rather, research in Psychology has traditionally examined apology as a strictly dichotomous phenomenon wherein a victim either (a) receives an apology or (b) does not. For instance, Brown, Wohl, and Exline (2008) examined apology effectiveness by assigning participants to "apology" versus "no apology" conditions. Similarly, Liao (2007) tested for the presence of apology following a customer service failure by asking respondents if an apology was or was not received (see also Frantz & Bennigson,

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2005; McCullough et al., 1998; Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Struthers, Eaton, Santelli, Uchiyama, & Shirvani, 2008; Tomlinson et al., 2004). In these and other studies, the prototypical methodology is to contrast a simple "I'm sorry" against a "no apology" condition, rather than to consider the implications of the specific apology components that victims receive. This tendency to dichotomize is systemic not only for apologies but also for justifications, denials, and related social accounts. For instance, in their meta-analysis on the effectiveness of justifications versus excuses, Shaw, Wild, and Colquitt (2003) model the contexts surrounding social accounts, but do not codify or model the content of the accounts themselves. Thus, dichotomization appears to transcend research on social accounts.

The literature's limited conceptualization of apologies as dichotomous is problematic for a number of reasons. First, this conceptualization is too broad and atheoretical to allow for a precise understanding of why apologies work. Second, a dichotomous view fails to consider the fact that apologies are offered to specific victims who likely differ in terms of what they expect to hear, and thus does not integrate victim psychological states into the apology process. Third, the dichotomous approach to apology limits the specificity with which apology interventions can be recommended in response to conflict. A consideration of apology components, for instance, could allow managers, conflict mediators, spouses, parents, and other offenders to target their apologies with meaningful statements such as expressions of empathy or acknowledgments of violated norms.

In examining the psychology of apology components, the current research focuses on the integral role of victims' self-construals in the link between apologies and forgiveness. Briefly defined, self-construal relates to how individuals perceive their relationships with other people. Recent conceptualizations of self-construal have described a tripartite model, consisting of the independent, relational, and collective selves (Kashima et al., 1995). Self-construal has been implicated in a wide range of cognitions, emotions, and behaviors (e.g. Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Cross, Gore, & Morris, 2003; Cross & Madson, 1997; Johnson & Chang, 2006; Johnson, Selenta, & Lord, 2006). It has also recently been shown to affect perceptions of interpersonal conflict (Gelfand et al., 2001). However, its implications for perceptions of and reactions to apologies have yet to be examined. Forgiveness is examined as a key outcome variable for both its ubiquity in the apology literature and its implications for important individual and interpersonal outcomes such as well-being (Bono, McCullough, & Root, 2008), stress (Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001), and helping behavior (Karremans, Van Lange, & Holland, 2005).

The general proposition of this paper, discussed at length below, is that forgiveness will be enhanced when offenders' apologies are consistent with victims' self-views. Specifically, it is hypothesized that victims who emphasize the independent, relational, and collective self-construals will be most likely to forgive their offenders following *offers of compensation, expressions of empathy*, and *acknowledgments of violated rules/norms*, respectively. Two studies have been conducted to test these hypotheses. In Study 1, a direct assessment technique is used to examine the relationship between self-construal and participants' perceptions of what constitutes a "good apology." In Study 2, a policy capturing methodology is used to confirm and extend the findings from Study 1 using hierarchical linear modeling analyses.

Apology components

Apology components have received only scattered empirical consideration within Psychology (e.g. Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Schmitt et al., 2004). However, they have received greater attention from a number of theorists throughout the humanities and social sciences (Avruch & Wang, 2005; Cunningham, 2004; Goffman, 1967; Govier & Verwoerd, 2002; James, 2006; Lazare, 2004; Scher & Darley, 1997; Tavuchis, 1991). Across such fields as Law, Sociology, and Psychiatry, scholars have focused on three apology components that are particularly relevant to the current research: offers of compensation, expressions of empathy, and acknowledgments of violated rules/norms. Despite considerable consensus regarding these components across fields, few attempts have been made to integrate the relevant research. To this end, a review of these components is presented in detail below.

Apologies as *offers of compensation* are focused on the restoration of equity through exchange. That is, they are focused on correcting the balance of a relationship through some type of action, either specific or general. For instance, offenders can offer to provide their victims with specific, tangible goods (e.g. "[I] could go and see if I can get you another..."; Schmitt et al., 2004, p. 470) or offer more generally to take whatever action is needed (e.g. "If there is any way I can make it up to you please let me know."; Scher & Darley, 1997, p. 132). In many qualitative studies from Law, Sociology, and Psychology, compensation is mentioned as a vital component of the apology process (Goffman, 1967; Lazare, 2004; O'Hara & Yarn, 2002; Schlenker & Darby, 1981; Wagatsuma & Rosett, 1986). A number of quantitative studies support this claim. Offers of compensation have been shown to relate to victims' impressions of their offenders, impressions of the conflict, and emotional states (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Conlon & Murray, 1996; Scher & Darley, 1997; Schmitt et al., 2004). The importance of offers of compensation can be summed up by Bishop Desmund Tutu, who once noted that "If you take my pen and say you are sorry, but don't give me the pen back, nothing has happened" (Tutu, 2004). The importance of offers of compensation can be extended to organizational contexts as well, where compensation is frequently offered as a form of apology to alleviate the negative effects of organizational injustice (Okimoto & Tyler, 2007). It should be noted that although offers of compensation prototypically reference tangible goods, socio-emotional compensation presents a parallel opportunity for the restoration of equity. For instance, an employee who apologizes for subversive behavior during a meeting could offer to show overt respect for a boss at the next meeting. Thus, compensation can reference either tangible or more emotionally driven compensatory offers.

While offers of compensation focus on equity and exchange, *expressions of empathy* focus on relational issues. They demonstrate offenders' recognition of and concern for their victims' suffering, both socio-emotionally and cognitively (cf. Davis, 1983). From a socio-emotional perspective, offenders might demonstrate empathy by expressing warmth toward their victims or compassion for their suffering. From a cognitive perspective, offenders might display an understanding of the victim's point of view or the consequences of the offense for the victim's well-being. As with offers of compensation, research on expressions of empathy can be found in Sociology (Goffman, 1967), Psychology (Lazare, 2004; Schlenker & Darby, 1981), and many other fields (Cohen, 1999; Tavuchis, 1991; Wagatsuma & Rosett, 1986). Recent advances in management theory have likewise emphasized the importance of expressing empathy for employees, noting how relationality can help to ease conflict and facilitate cooperation (Gelfand, Major, Raver, Nishii, & O'Brien, 2006). Schmitt et al. (2004) empirically linked expressions of empathy to victims' perceptions of their perpetrators, and operationalized the component through the phrase "I feel really sorry for what I have done. I know how you feel now" (p. 469). Kotani (2002) provided additional theoretical support for this component by emphasizing its integral role in non-Western contexts. The significance of expressions of empathy was recently evidenced during the trial of a Catholic Bishop for charges of abuse. The plaintiffs were awarded $23.4 million dollars, but demanded that the

settlement be stalled pending a direct apology. The Bishop expressed "with very profound and deep compassion" empathy for the "immense suffering" that he had caused, after which the plaintiffs dropped their monetary request (Blaney & Dooley, 1998, p. 15).

Whereas offers of compensation and expressions of empathy are focused on the victim–offender dyad, *acknowledgments of violated rules/norms* expand the scope of an apology to the group context. In essence, this component involves a recognition that interpersonal behavior is bound by rules and norms, either implicit or explicit, that must be followed. For instance, during an apology for the mistreatment of civilians, a soldier offered the following reference to the rules and norms of her group: "I failed my duties. I failed my mission to protect and defend... I let down every single soldier that serves today" (Stevenson, 2005, p. 23). Thus, acknowledgments of violated rules/norms may be particularly important within organizational and group contexts wherein strong behavioral norms are prevalent. On a broader level, acknowledgments of violated rules/norms can also reference peoples' duties as members of an entire society or culture. According to Wagatsuma and Rosett (1986), "The act of apologizing can be significant for its own sake as an acknowledgment of the authority of the hierarchical structure upon which social harmony is based" (p. 473). Tavuchis (1991) expands upon the logic of this component by conceptualizing apologies as vital to the social order, which "depends... on some measure of commitment to norms dealing with standards of behavior and institutional arrangements" (p. 12). Insomuch as an apology references the social order, it "directs attention to rules and meta-rules, that is, rules about rules" (p. 13). These acknowledgments are at once socio-emotional and cognitive, entailing a recognition that a rule was broken and an appeal to the negative emotional impact of the breach. Cross-cultural theory suggests that acknowledgments of violated rules/norms might be particularly important to many non-Western cultures and subgroups, which have been shown to weigh social rules and norms more heavily than Western cultures (Gelfand et al., 2001; Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Apology through the lens of the self

Given the inherent value of each of the above-mentioned apology components, it stands to reason that each component will exhibit a positive effect on forgiveness. Yet previous research has nonetheless failed to move beyond a conceptualization of apologies as dichotomous. One purpose of the current research, then, is to examine the direct effects of apology components on victim forgiveness. Moreover, it is argued that people can differ in their reactions to otherwise identical stimuli, such as apologies that include the same components. Thus, apologies might also exhibit contingent effects, influenced by victim individual differences. One individual difference that is likely to affect victims' reactions to specific apology components is *self-construal*.

Converging evidence in the psychological literature suggests that the self can act as a powerful regulator of individuals' behavior, influencing how information is perceived, processed, and acted upon (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). When specific attitudes or beliefs are particularly central to the self, individuals tend to interpret the world through the lens of these views and pay particular attention to information that is consistent with them (Markus, Smith, & Moreland, 1985). Recent research has suggested a tripartite model of the self, consisting of the independent, relational, and collective selves (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Cross & Madson, 1997; Johnson et al., 2006; Kashima et al., 1995). Whereas the independent self-construal involves a conceptualization of the self as a unique and autonomous entity, the relational and collective self-construals emphasize close interpersonal relationships and group categorizations, respectively.

Self-construals have been shown to influence a wide range of individual perceptions, processes, and outcomes including general well-being, reactions to injustice, motivations for goal pursuit, social comparison processes, leader perceptions, and even aesthetic preferences (Cross et al., 2003; Gore & Cross, 2006; Guimond et al., 2007; Holmvall & Bobocel, 2008; Johnson et al., 2006; Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, De Cremer, & Hogg, 2004; Zhang, Feick, & Price, 2006). Gelfand et al. (2001) have furthermore directly demonstrated that self-construal impacts victims' perceptions of otherwise identical conflict episodes. Nonetheless, research has yet to elucidate how self-construal might impact apology perceptions and thus the process of forgiveness. To this end, it is hypothesized that apologies will be most effective when they are congruent with victims' self-construals – that is, when they contain components that align with victims' most central attitudes and beliefs. This hypothesis is consistent with the tenants of self-verification theory, which emphasize individuals' preferences for information that is consistent with and verifies their own self-conceptualizations (Swann, 1987). When apologies are aligned with victims' self-construals, they verify victims' beliefs about interpersonal interactions and the types of apologies that must be offered in the pursuit of forgiveness.

In the sections below, the tripartite model of self-construal is reviewed, and it is proposed that (a) individuals who emphasize the independent self will react most positively to apologies that include offers of compensation, (b) individuals who emphasize the relational self will react most positively to apologies that include expressions of empathy, and (c) individuals who emphasize the collective self will react most positively to apologies that include acknowledgments of violated rules/norms. Whereas apology components that are congruent with victims' self-construals should strongly impact participants' reactions to apologies, apology components that are incongruent with the self should "fall on deaf ears" and exhibit weaker effects.

The independent self-construal and offers of compensation

Victims who possess strong independent self-construals view themselves as unique and autonomous entities who are "separated from others" (Cross & Madson, 1997, p. 7). They are highly concerned with their personal rights and entitlements, generally pursue self-relevant goals, and view their relationships as exchange-oriented (Bresnahan, Levine, & Chiu, 2004). In their actions, independent people tend to treat relationships as exchange-oriented, wherein they expect to receive specific benefits from what they provide others (Bresnahan et al., 2004; Downie, Koestner, Horberg, & Haga, 2006; Hara & Kim, 2004). Thus, when interacting with others, people with independent self-construals demonstrate a focus on competition over cooperation, exchange over communality, rights over duties, and individual achievement over group consensus (Shtyenberg, Gelfand, & Kim, 2007; Wagner, 1995).

As a consequence of their beliefs and attitudes about the self, individuals with strong independent self-construals are likely to focus on issues related to their autonomy, individuality, and entitlements following an offense. They should be less concerned with offenders' expressions of empathy and more concerned with apologies that address what the offender will do to restore equity to the relationship. More than other apology components, *offers of compensation* are closely aligned with these concerns and should therefore be particularly effective. Offers of compensation emphasize the importance of re-establishing equity and restoring what the victim lost, be it physical or emotional. They establish the legitimacy of the victim's claims and, in doing so, allow the victim to feel that he or she has "won" the moral competition between them, providing information that is congruent with the victim's conceptualization of interpersonal relationships as competition-based

(Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Previous research supports this hypothesis. Ohbuchi, Fukushima, and Tedeschi (1999) found that Americans, who generally emphasize the independent self-construal, tend to focus on the restoration of fairness following an offense. Wagatsuma and Rosett (1986) similarly noted that Americans are likely to "consider that paying the damages or accepting punishment ends further responsibility and that there is no need for personal contrition" in law contexts (p. 462). The importance of compensation to the independent self is further evidenced in the organizational literature, which shows that the independent self is related to a strong concern over the just distribution of resources (i.e. distributive justice; Johnson et al., 2006). Relatedly, Mattila and Patterson (2004) found that highly independent people were more likely to react positively to compensation following a service failure than less independent people.

H1: Individuals who emphasize the independent self-construal will react most positively to apologies that include offers of compensation.

The relational self-construal and expressions of empathy

In contrast to the independent self-construal, victims with highly relational self-construals conceptualize themselves as fundamentally connected to other people (Cross & Madson, 1997). They do not view themselves as separate from others, but rather as linked to and defined by their relationships. In both perception and action, highly relational people focus on the quality of their relationships and direct their actions toward maintaining and developing such relationships (Gelfand et al., 2006). For example, recent research has demonstrated the predictive validity of the relational self for information disclosure among roommates, in turn leading to higher levels of dyadic intimacy (Gore, Cross, & Morris, 2006). Furthermore, the relational self has been shown to correlate with relational motivations for goal pursuit (Gore & Cross, 2006), elaborate cognitive networks for interpersonal relationships (Cross, Morris, & Gore, 2002), and the accuracy of individuals' perceptions of their friends' values and beliefs (Cross & Morris, 2003). In sum, these findings point to the integral role of relationships in the lives of highly relational people. They are highly attentive to relational cues, deeply concerned with the status of their relationships, and motivated to act in ways that foster them.

More than offers of compensation or acknowledgments of violated rules/norms, *expressions of empathy* should be particularly efficacious in eliciting forgiveness from victims that emphasize the relational self. Such expressions are highly relational, insomuch as they address the emotional state of the victim and imply a cognitive understanding of the victim's perspective. They suggest feelings of closeness, interdependence, and interpersonal relatedness, all of which are important when the relational self-construal is strong (Cross & Madson, 1997). Recent research furthermore suggests that empathy entails a literal embodiment of others' emotional experiences, highlighting the other-oriented nature of empathic experience (Niedenthal, Barsalou, Winkielman, Karuth-Gruber, & Ric, 2005; Niedenthal, Winkielman, Mondillon, & Vermeulen, 2009). Johnson et al. (2006) provide some support for the idea that relational people value expressions of empathic concern and understanding. In their study, interpersonal justice – which reflects an emotional concern for others – was found to be particularly important when the relational self was strong. Fu, Watkins, and Hui (2004) provide further evidence for the importance of expressions of empathy among relational people in a cross-cultural setting. Specifically, they found that "other-oriented" variables, such as relationship orientation, were more predictive of forgiveness than self-oriented variables, such as self-esteem, in the highly relational country of China.

H2: Individuals who emphasize the relational self-construal will react most positively to apologies that include expressions of empathy.

The collective self-construal and acknowledgments of violated rules/norms

Whereas the relational self focuses on close, personalized, and generally dyadic relationships, the collective self is focused on a broader, more impersonal identification with groups and social categories (Brewer & Gardner, 1996). When the collective self-construal is dominant the salience of one's group identity is enhanced, shifting the conceptualization of the self from "I" to "we" (Gardner, Gabriel, & Hochschild, 2002). In interpreting external behavior, group differences become highly salient, as do the rules that guide these groups, including group duties, norms, and commitments (Johnson & Chang, 2006; Marx, Stapel, & Muller, 2005). Thus, individuals with strong collective self-construals are likely to pay particularly close attention to offenses against the group and violations against group expectations. In their behavior, people with highly collective self-construals exhibit a strong bias toward their own groups, act in ways that demonstrate a commitment to the group, and focus on confirming the positive qualities of the group. For instance, they might defend the morality of a group member's actions, work toward solving a group problem, or extol the virtues of the group to outsiders.

For the collective self, acknowledgments of violated rules/norms should be vital. Above and beyond offers of compensation or expressions of empathy, acknowledgments of violated rules/norms shift the focus of an apology from the victim–offender dyad to the broader social context in which the violation is embedded. Acknowledgments of violated rules/norms demonstrate an understanding of the importance of the norms and rules that define victims' groups. They further establish a belief in the legitimacy of the group's expectations and a concern for the emotional implications of violating those expectations, as in the case of the soldier who acknowledged that she should not have violated the norms and expectations of the military group to which she belonged.

H3: Individuals who emphasize the collective self-construal will react most positively to apologies that include acknowledgments of violated rules/norms.

Taken together, the hypotheses presented above form a model wherein victims' emphasized self-construals determine which apology components will be reacted to most positively. These hypotheses are tested across two studies. In Study 1, a direct assessment technique is utilized to provide preliminary evidence for the hypotheses. In Study 2, the findings from Study 1 are expanded by (a) examining the effects of apology components within the context of an interpersonal conflict and (b) measuring the direct relationship between apology components and victims' forgiveness of their offenders. Furthermore, Study 2 examines whether apology effectiveness varies according to the situational context in which it is embedded. As with all conflict management strategies, apologies do not occur in a vacuum but rather can occur across an array of contexts. As these contexts change, so too might the effectiveness of an apology. One key situational factor shown to impact a wide range of conflict outcomes is harm severity (Boon & Sulsky, 1997; Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Thus, a final goal for Study 2 is to examine the impact of harm severity on apology and self-construal dynamics.

Study 1

Participants and procedure

Participants were 175 undergraduate students (73.1% women, 26.9% men) at a large Mid-Atlantic University who participated in the study in exchange for course credit. The average age of participants was 19.7. The study itself was completed across two sessions. In the first session, participants completed a self-report measure of self-construal along with basic demographic information. In the second session, participants completed the primary apology measure. The two sessions were completed an average of 29 days apart. The distance between sessions exhibited no associations with any of the study's variables, nor any interactions with the study's primary findings.

Apology component scale development

A literature review identified no preexisting scales that tap into the specific components of apologies. Therefore, the authors developed a set of items for this purpose. Initial item generation was conducted on the basis of a content analysis of the apology literature. From this initial pool of approximately 30 items, 15 were identified via discussion between the authors as most representative of the core of each apology component. To ensure that these items indeed tapped into their intended constructs a group of five graduate students, blind to the hypotheses, were asked to conduct a Q-sort of the items based upon a provided set of definitions of each apology component. The students displayed 100% agreement in assigning the items to the appropriate apology components.

With each apology item, participants were asked to express their agreement or disagreement that a good apology should include a specific component. The offers of compensation scale includes items such as "In general, a good apology should include an offer to compensate me for what happened" and "In general, a good apology should include a suggestion that he/she reimburse me in some way." Representative items from the expressions of empathy scale include "In general, a good apology should include true sympathy for me" and "In general, a good apology should include an expression of great concern for my suffering." Sample items from the acknowledgments of violated rules/norms scale include "In general, a good apology should include an acknowledgement that he/she violated an important group rule" and "In general, a good apology should include an acknowledgement that he/she didn't live up to group standards." All apology components were measured with 5-item scales (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*).

To confirm the distinctiveness of the three apology scales, exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted via a maximum likelihood procedure (Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, & Strahan, 1999). Results supported the three component model, as evidenced by high loadings on each item's theoretically relevant factor and low cross-loadings. An exception was one item from the compensation scale, which was deleted. The final 14-item scale thus included five items each for the empathy and acknowledgment scales and four items for the compensation scale. Individual items and their loadings are presented in Table 1. The final three scales yielded coefficient alphas of .81 for the compensation scale, .85 for the empathy scale, and .92 for the rules/norms scale.

Self-construal

Self-construal was measured with the Levels of Self-Concept Scale (LSCS; Selenta & Lord, 2005), designed to measure individual differences in the chronic accessibilities of the independent, relational, and collective self-construals. Each self-construal was assessed with five items (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 5 = *Strongly Agree*). Respective examples of items from the independent, relational, and collective subscales include "I have a strong need to know how I stand in comparison to my classmates or coworkers," "Caring deeply about another person such as a close friend or relative is very important to me," and "I feel great pride when my team or work group does well, even if I'm not the main reason for success." Alphas for the scales were .77, .67, and .63, respectively, consistent with previous studies (Johnson & Chang, 2006; Johnson et al., 2006).

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 2 presents means, standard deviations, and correlations for the primary study variables. Mean ratings of offers of compensation, expressions of empathy, and acknowledgments of violated rules/norms as indicative of "good apologies" were all above the scale midpoint, indicating that participants seemed, on average, to recognize each apology component as indicative of a good apology. For offers of compensation, $M = 3.59$, $t(174) = 13.26$, $p < .001$. For expressions of empathy, $M = 4.39$, $t(174) = 31.91$, $p < .001$. For acknowledgment of a violated rule/norm, $M = 3.86$, $t(174) = 13.57$, $p < .001$. Moreover, correlations among the three scales were modest (.15–.31) providing further evidence for the distinctiveness of the three focal components.

Hierarchical regression

Hypotheses 1–3 were tested via hierarchical regression. Gender, which has been shown to relate to both individuals' self-construals (Cross & Madson, 1997) and reactions to offenses (Tomlinson et al., 2004), was controlled for in all analyses. All theorized relationships were tested by regressing the individual apology components on gender (Step 1) and the three self-construals (Step 2).

To test hypothesis 1, the offers of compensation scale were regressed on gender and the three self-construals. A significant effect for the independent self was theorized. In support of the hypothesis, there was a significant effect of the independent self-construal on the belief that a good apology should include an offer of compensation, $\beta = .19$, $p < .05$. Next, to test hypothesis 2, the expressions of empathy scale were regressed on gender (Step 1) and the three self-construals (Step 2). As predicted, the relational self-construal was related to the belief that an expression of empathy is indicative of a good apology, $\beta = .32$, $p < .01$. Finally, hypothesis 3 was tested by regressing the acknowledgment of a violated rule/norm scale on gender (Step 1) and the three self-construals (Step 2). As predicted, the collective self-construal was related to the belief that an acknowledgment of a violated rule/norm is indicative of a good apology, $\beta = .25$, $p < .01$. In each case, only the relevant self-construal exhibited a significant effect. The relational and collective self-construals did not predict reactions to offers of compensation, the independent and collective self-construals did not predict reactions to expressions of empathy, and the independent and relational self-construals did not predict reactions to acknowledgments of violated rules/norms. Thus, Study 1 provided clear evidence that the perceived importance of different apology components is directly related to victims' self-construals (see Table 3).

Study 1 discussion

Taken together, the findings from Study 1 provide initial support for the theorized link between self-construal and apology

Table 1
Exploratory factor analysis for apology component items, Study 1.

Items	Factor		
In general, a good apology should include...	Compensation	Empathy	Rule/norm
1 ...an offer to compensate me for what happened	**.785**	−.006	.191
2 ...an offer to help me recover my damages	**.672**	.014	.079
3 ...an offer to do something specific to make up for what happened	**.614**	.133	.124
4 ...a suggestion that he/she reimburse me in some way	**.741**	.032	.115
5 ...an expression of great concern for my suffering	.049	**.823**	.088
6 ...a show of empathy toward me	−.044	**.710**	.009
7 ...an indication that he/she truly cares about how I feel	−.073	**.712**	.139
8 ...an expression of tenderness toward me	.117	**.669**	.176
9 ...true sympathy for me	.218	**.661**	.128
10 ...a verbal recognition that he/she failed to act as a good group member	.051	.144	**.745**
11 ...an admission that he/she did not live up to the standards of the group	.128	.094	**.931**
12 ...an acknowledgment that he/she violated an important group rule	.162	.118	**.838**
13 ...a show of concern for breaking an important social norm	.163	.102	**.716**
14 ...an acknowledgment that he/she didn't live up to group standards	.179	.126	**.804**
Eigenvalue	1.75	2.27	4.24
% Variance explained	12.51	16.21	30.28

Note. Boldface values indicate which factors the items load on. Procedure was maximum likelihood estimation with varimax rotation.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations, Study 1.

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Gender[a]	1.73	.44	–						
2. Independent self	3.37	.83	−.07	(.77)					
3. Relational self	4.58	.44	.05	−.09	(.67)				
4. Collective self	4.15	.53	.21**	−.05	.28**	(.63)			
5. Compensation	3.59	.74	.08	.18*	.01	.13	(.81)		
6. Empathy	4.39	.57	.11	−.06	.36**	.20**	.15	(.85)	
7. Rule/norm	3.86	.84	.14	−.06	.07	.27**	.31**	.27**	(.92)

Note. $N = 175$.
[a] Male = 1, female = 2.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

Table 3
Hierarchical regression analyses – perceptions of a good apology, Study 1.

Step and independent variables	Compensation			Empathy			Rule/norm		
	β	Total R^2	ΔR^2	β	Total R^2	ΔR^2	β	Total R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1									
Gender	.08			.11			.14		
		.006			.011			.019	
Step 2									
Independent self	.19*			−.02			−.05		
Relational self	−.01			.32**			−.01		
Collective self	.12			.10			.25**		
		.055	.049		.144	.133		.083	.064

Note. $N = 175$.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

components. Each apology component was seen, on average, as indicative of a good apology. Scale correlations and factor analysis confirmed that each component was seen as distinct. In line with the primary hypotheses, apology components were most likely to be seen as effective when they were tightly aligned with participants' self-construals. Standardized betas for analyses regressing apology component perceptions on congruent self-construals were all significant, ranging from .19 to .32. On the other hand, standardized betas for analyses regressing apology component perceptions on incongruent self-construals were all non-significant, ranging from −.01 to .12. Empirically, these findings highlight the divergent validity of the focal apology components and their relationships to victim self-construals. Theoretically, the findings demonstrate the importance of examining apologies beyond the yes/no dichotomies that have dominated the literature.

Despite the findings from Study 1, some questions remain. First, it is not known if individuals' perceptions of what should be included in a "good apology" are indicative of victims' reactions to apology components following conflict. Relatedly, the implications of these perceptions for conflict outcomes such as forgiveness remain untested. In Study 2, these concerns were addressed by examining the impact of apology components and self-construal on forgiveness. Hierarchical linear modeling was used to isolate the cross-level effects of self-construal on the relationship between apology content and forgiveness. Forgiveness was examined as a construct of principle interest to conflict management scholars

(e.g. Aquino, Grover, Goldman, & Folger, 2003; McCullough et al., 1998) that has been shown to predict a range of important outcomes including interpersonal reconciliation (Fincham, Beach, & Davila, 2007), self-esteem (Karremans, Van Lange, Ouwerkerk, & Kluwer, 2003), and physical health (Witvliet et al., 2001) to name a few.

In examining the interactive effects of apology components and self-construal on apology effectiveness, an important question is how the situational context might bound these effects. One key situational construct is harm severity. A wide range of studies have demonstrated the importance of harm severity for conflict outcomes (Boon & Sulsky, 1997; Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004; Fincham, Jackson, & Beach, 2005; Frantz & Bennigson, 2005; Fukuno & Ohbuchi, 1998; Itoi, Ohbuchi, & Fukuno, 1996; Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Data from these and other studies indicate several competing hypotheses for the current research.

One hypothesis is that harm severity will *strengthen* the impact of a well-tailored apology on forgiveness, resulting in a three-way interaction between harm severity, apology, and self-construal such that harm severity strengthens the effects of the two-way apology/self-construal interactions. According to this hypothesis, the antecedents of forgiveness are strongest under conditions of severe harm because severity strengthens the need for and relevance of actions that promote forgiveness (Pronk, Karremans, Overbeek, Vermulst, & Wigboldus, 2010). A mild offense such as being late for a meeting is less likely to foster negative victim reactions than a severe offense such as violence, and thus may lessen the perceived need for a conflict intervention like apology. Consistent with this idea, harm severity has been found to predict victims' expectations that an apology will be offered (McLaughlin, Cody, & O'Hair, 1983; Ohbuchi et al., 1989) and to strengthen the positive effect of apology on emotional alleviation (Fukuno & Ohbuchi, 1998). A competing hypothesis, however, is that harm severity will *weaken* the impact of self-construal and apology components on forgiveness, resulting in a three-way interaction between harm severity, apology, and self-construal such that harm severity weakens the effects of the two-way apology/self-construal interactions. According to this hypothesis, harm severity lessens the effectiveness of apologies by eliciting negative feelings that are too strong, thus leading victims to rebuke all efforts at reconciliation (Schlenker, 1985; Schoenbach, 1990). Consistent with this hypothesis, previous research has demonstrated that when victims' pre-apology impressions of their offenders are highly negative, apologies are ineffective (Struthers et al., 2008). A final possibility, however, is that harm severity might exert a *null* effect on apology effectiveness, resulting in two-way apology/self-construal interactions that are not moderated by harm severity. Given the centrality of the self in the regulation of emotions, cognitions, and behavior across a range of social contexts (e.g. Cross & Madson, 1997; Markus & Kitayama, 1991), the interactive effects of apology components and the self on victim forgiveness may prove to be consistent across levels of harm severity. To test these competing hypotheses, Study 2 therefore examines the interactive effects of apologies and self-construal across three levels of harm severity.

Study 2

Study 2 utilized a policy capturing methodology – an application of Brunswik's approach to studying human decision making that uses statistics to quantitatively describe "the relations between someone's judgment and the information... used to make that judgment" (Stewart, 1988, p. 41). Previous research has utilized policy capturing to explore decision patterns related to a range of organizational phenomena, including job performance ratings (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002), reputation perceptions (Cable & Graham, 2000), revenge (Tripp, Bies, & Aquino, 2002), job choice (Judge & Bretz, 1992), fairness perceptions (Hemingway & Conte, 2003), employee selection (Graves & Karren, 1992), and conflict resolution (Tomlinson et al., 2004). In a typical policy capturing study, the experimenter presents participants with a series of profiles that manipulate a focal set of variables and measure the impact of these manipulations on an outcome of interest. The current study applied this methodology by manipulating apology components across a series of conflict scenarios and measuring the impact of the apology components on participants' forgiveness ratings.

With policy capturing, it is also possible to explore between-subject differences in policy profiles (e.g. Rotundo & Sackett, 2002). In this study, four such variables were explored. First, to test the primary hypotheses, the independent, relational, and collective self-construals were measured as individual differences. Second, harm severity was manipulated between subjects to test the robustness of self-construal's effects. Thus, the current study allowed for a simultaneous examination of the effects of self-construal and harm severity on individuals' weightings of specific apology components in their forgiveness decisions.

Participants and procedure

One hundred and seventy-one undergraduate students from a large Mid-Atlantic University participated in the primary study in exchange for course credit (75.4% women, 24.6% men). The study was conducted across two sessions, with participants filling out the self-construal measure in session one and the policy capturing experiment in session two. Participants' average age was 20.2. The two sessions were completed an average of 15 days apart. As with Study 1, the distance between sessions exhibited no associations with any of the study's variables, nor any interactions with the study's primary findings.

Policy capturing design

Upon entering the lab, participants first read some background information regarding their relationship with a friend. The primary purposes of the background information were to (a) establish the participant's relationship with the friend and (b) detail the context of the situation in which the conflict occurred. The information was consistent across participants and included the following:

> *Pat lives down the hall from you in your dorm here at Local University. You see each other frequently, and are in the same co-ed fraternity. You've gone to many parties and events together and often eat at the same table in the dining halls. Recently, the two of you were working next to each other in the library when Pat asked to borrow your laptop to quickly write up an assignment. You agreed. Later, Pat reached for a disk to save the project.*

After reading the background information, the participants read 10 conflict scenarios that manipulated the apologies that were given following the conflict. The conflict event was based upon Gonzales, Manning, and Haugen's (1992) "disk" conflict scenario, as published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, wherein the offender uses a disk that causes the victim's computer to crash. All three apology components were fully crossed in a full factorial design, allowing for the examination of the independent effects of each component. Two repeat scenarios were also included to allow for reliability analysis.

Harm severity was manipulated between subjects, and so was consistent across scenarios for each participant. In the mild condition, participants were told that they lost "a small amount of work" that would take 1 h to re-enter. In the control condition, the

severity of harm was not detailed. In the severe condition, participants were told that they lost "a significant portion of work", would need several weeks to re-enter it, and received low grades on several important assignments as a result. After each scenario, participants were asked to rate their forgiveness of the offender.

A sample scenario, including all three apology components and a mild severity condition, is listed below. Each component is listed in brackets after it appears.

> *Pat hurriedly grabbed the wrong disk, marked "do not use", from a pile on the table. It had a virus on it, and when Pat inserted the disk into your laptop, the laptop crashed. You lost a small amount of schoolwork, which will take you an hour to re-enter.* [mild harm]
>
> *Upon realizing what happened, Pat said* "Sorry". *Pat then expressed concern for your suffering, saying* "I feel sick to my stomach thinking about how upset you must be over this." [expression of empathy] *Then, Pat admitted to not being a good group member, saying* "I've let the whole group down. I've failed in my duties to our fraternity and the campus community." [acknowledgment of violated rule/norm] *Lastly, Pat suggested the possibility of compensating you by saying* "I can find someone to fix the computer for you." [offer of compensation]

Measures

Forgiveness

Forgiveness was measured using two items adapted from the 19-Item Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Scale, selected on the basis of brevity and face validity (TRIM-19; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002; McCullough et al., 1998). The first item was "Given this situation, I would forgive Pat." The second item was "Given this situation, I would trust Pat in the future." The items were combined to form an overall measure of forgiveness, $\alpha = .84$.

Self-construal

As in Study 1, self-construal was measured with the LSCS (Selenta & Lord, 2005). Alphas for the independent, relational, and collective self-construals in this study were .79, .71, and .62, respectively, consistent with previous research (Johnson & Chang, 2006; Johnson et al., 2006).

Manipulation check for apology components

Following previous policy capturing research (Rotundo & Sackett, 2002), each apology component was rated for its distributional equivalence to ensure that the components tapped into their underlying constructs with equal strength, but did not overlap with the other components' constructs. At the end of the study, participants were asked to rate the degree to which each apology manipulation represented an offer of compensation, an expression of empathy, and an acknowledgment of a violated rule/norm (1 = *Not At All*, 7 = *Completely*). Each component was rated similarly in terms of its strength. For the offer of compensation, $M = 6.17$; for the expression of empathy, $M = 6.19$; for the acknowledgment of a violated rule/norm, $M = 6.30$. A series of *t*-tests confirmed that each manipulation tapped into its intended construct more than the other components' constructs.

Manipulation check for severity

Subjective offense severity was assessed with four items (1 = *Not At All*, 7 = *Completely*; $\alpha = .93$). An example item is "How severe were the consequences of Pat's transgression against you?" The results supported the effectiveness of the severity manipulation, with participants indicating subjective levels of severity of 3.20, 4.32, and 5.19 for mild, unspecified, and severe harm, respectively. A series of *t*-tests confirmed significant differences in severity perceptions across manipulations.

Results

The reliability of participants' forgiveness ratings was assessed via the two repeat profile pairs, which yielded reliability coefficients of .91 and .92, respectively. All remaining analyses were computed via hierarchical linear modeling, with Level 2 defined as between-person and Level 1 as within-person. The Level 2 correlation matrix is provided in Table 4; the Level 1 correlation matrix is provided in Table 5.

Level 1 analysis

As initial evidence for the value of different apology components in eliciting forgiveness, the amount of within-person variance in the sample at Level 1 was examined (i.e. the amount of variance accounted for by the apology manipulation; Hofmann, Griffin, & Gavin, 2000). The calculated effect size indicated that the Level 1 predictors (offers of compensation, expressions of empathy, and acknowledgments of violated rules/norms) accounted for 59.8% of the variance in forgiveness. To assess the amount of variance specifically accounted for by each apology component, a full Level 1 equation was then computed by simultaneously regressing forgiveness on all three apology components. For offers of compensation, $\beta = .36$, $p < .01$. For expressions of empathy, $\beta = .22$, $p < .01$. For acknowledgment of a violated rule/norm, $\beta = .16$, $p < .01$. These results indicate that all three apology components significantly and positively affected victims' forgiveness, consistent with previous theory and research (e.g. Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Schmitt et al., 2004).

Cross-level analysis

To assess the interactive effects of self-construal and apologies on forgiveness, a slopes-as-outcomes approach was developed. In slopes-as-outcomes models, a Level 2 variable is hypothesized to moderate the effects of a set of Level 1 variables on a given outcome of interest. In the current research, the independent, relational, and collective self-construals at Level 2 were hypothesized to moderate the effects of the three apology components on forgiveness at Level 1. Three separate models were built and tested. In each model, forgiveness was regressed on all three apology components at Level 1, with gender (as a control) and one of the three self-construals entered at Level 2. In each model, a significant moderating effect of self-construal (e.g. the independent self) on the relationship between the theoretically relevant apology component (e.g. an offer of compensation) and forgiveness should be observed (see Table 6).

Consistent with the findings from the direct assessment study, support was found for each primary hypothesis. In model 1, victim independent self-construal was entered along with gender at Level 2 and each apology component at Level 1. As predicted, victim independent self-construal significantly predicted the effect of offenders' offers of compensation on victim forgiveness $\gamma = .15$, $t(168) = 2.01$, $p < .05$. In model 2, victim relational self-construal was entered along with gender at Level 2 and each apology component at Level 1. Consistent with hypothesis 2, victim relational self-construal predicted the impact of offenders' expressions of empathy on victim forgiveness, $\gamma = .20$, $t(168) = 2.17$, $p < .05$. Finally, in model 3, the collective self-construal was entered along with gender at Level 2, and the apology components were again entered at Level 1. Consistent with hypothesis 3, victim collective self-construal significantly predicted the effect of offenders'

Table 4
Level 2 descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations, Study 2.

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender[a]	1.75	.43	–					
2. Independent self	3.10	.77	−.07	(.79)				
3. Relational self	4.43	.47	.20*	−.12	(.71)			
4. Collective self	3.98	.53	.26**	.03	.48**	(.62)		
5. Harm severity[b]	2.00	.83	−.03	.02	.16*	.11	–	
6. Forgiveness	4.51	1.09	−.07	−.01	−.03	−.15*	−.43**	(.84)

Note. $N = 171$.
[a] Male = 1, female = 2.
[b] Mild harm = 1, control condition = 2, severe harm = 3.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

Table 5
Level 1 descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations, Study 2.

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender[a]	1.75	.43	–								
2. Independent self	3.10	.77	−.07**	(.79)							
3. Relational self	4.43	.47	.20**	−.12**	(.71)						
4. Collective self	3.98	.52	.26**	.03	.48**	(.62)					
5. Compensation[b]	.50	.50	.00	.00	.00	.00	–				
6. Empathy[b]	.50	.50	.00	.00	.00	.00	.20**	–			
7. Rule/norm[b]	.50	.50	.00	.00	.00	.00	−.20**	−.20**	–		
8. Harm severity[c]	2.00	.82	−.03	.02	.16**	.11*	.00	.00	.00	–	
9. Forgiveness	4.51	1.49	−.05*	−.01	−.03	−.11**	.37**	.27**	.05	−.31**	(.84)

Note. $N = 1710$.
[a] Male = 1, female = 2.
[b] 0 = cue not included, 1 = cue included.
[c] Mild harm = 1, control condition = 2, severe harm = 3.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

Table 6
Hierarchical linear modeling analyses – forgiveness, Study 2.[a]

Variable	Coefficient	*SE*	*t*
Slopes-as-outcomes model for independent self-construal			
Intercept	−.018	.109	−.16
Compensation	.152*	.075	2.01
Empathy	.029	.055	.52
Rule/norm	.073	.059	1.23
Slopes-as-outcomes model for relational self-construal			
Intercept	−.049	.183	−.27
Compensation	.060	.128	.47
Empathy	.199*	.091	2.17
Rule/norm	.230*	.098	2.35
Slopes-as-outcomes model for collective self-construal			
Intercept	−.297	.164	−1.81
Compensation	.113	.116	.98
Empathy	.084	.084	1.01
Rule/norm	.184*	.089	2.07

Note. $N = 171$. Degrees of freedom for all results = 168.
[a] All results are controlling for gender.
* $p < .05$.

acknowledgments of violated rules/norms on victim forgiveness, $\gamma = .18$, $t(168) = 2.07$, $p < .05$. No anomalous effects were found, with the exception of the relationship between the relational self-construal and acknowledgment of a violated rule/norm, which was significant $p < .05$. In sum, these results indicate that victims' forgiveness ratings are determined not only by the content of the apologies that they receive, but also by the degree that these apologies are congruent with their self-construals. Thus, there may be no one "best" apology. Rather, the results indicate that forgiveness is maximized when offenders' apologies are tailored to individual victims' self-construals. These findings are illustrated in Figs. 1–3, which show the interactive effects of self-construal at Level 2 and apologies at Level 1 on forgiveness. These graphs were produced in HLM, which allows for the visual depiction of such cross-level effects (e.g. Loi, Yang, & Diefendorff, 2009).

A final set of analyses were conducted to test the impact of harm severity on the moderating role of self-construal. Specifically, three models tested for potential three-way interactions between harm severity, victims' self-construals, and apology components. In each model, harm severity and a focal self-construal were entered at Level 2 along with the interaction term (with gender as a control), and all three apology components were entered at Level 1. Across all three models, the three-way interaction was non-significant, indicating that harm severity neither accentuates nor mitigates the relationship between self-construal and apology component weightings. It should be noted that harm severity did, however, exhibit a direct negative correlation with forgiveness across participants, $r(171) = -.43$, $p < .01$ (see Table 4). Thus, while the relationship between forgiveness and harm severity in this study is consistent with previous research, the data do not indicate any three-way interaction between harm severity, self-construal, and apology, suggesting that the role of the self in the apology process is not bound by harm severity.

General discussion

As a method of conflict resolution, apologies have perhaps never been as popular as they are today. In 2007, *The New York Times* alone published over 500 articles on apology, covering every topic from Southwest Airline's "Chief Apology Officer", who mails 20,000 apology letters to dissatisfied customers each year, to Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richard's demand that a Swedish newspaper apologize for its poor review of one of his concerts (Bailey, 2007;

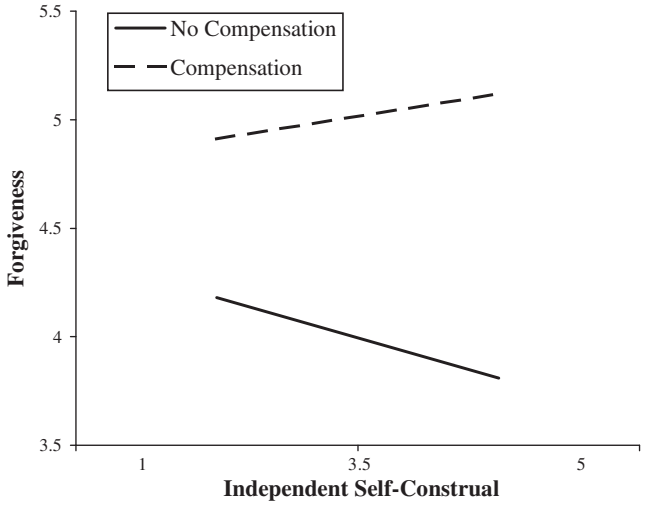

Fig. 1. Moderating effect of the independent self-construal on the relation between offers of compensation and forgiveness.

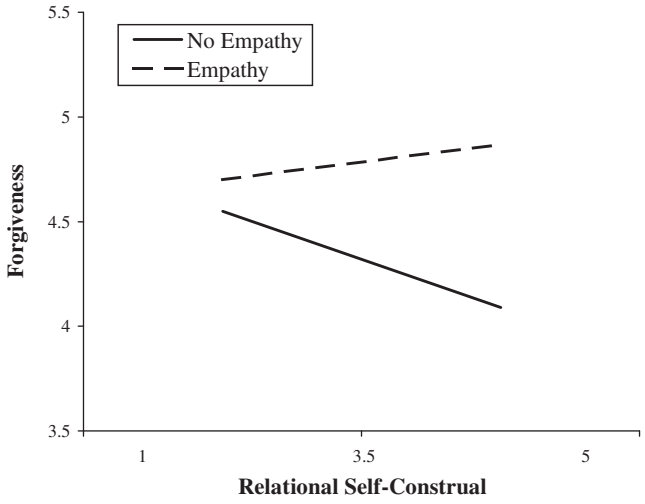

Fig. 2. Moderating effect of the relational self-construal on the relation between expressions of empathy and forgiveness.

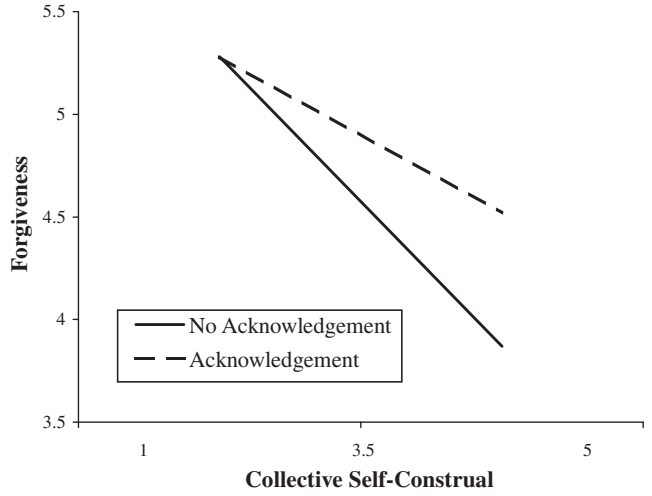

Fig. 3. Moderating effect of the collective self-construal on the relation between acknowledgments of violated rules/norms and forgiveness.

"Keith Richards," 2007). Indeed, apologies have become popular enough to move at least one scholar to refer to the modern era as "The Age of Apology" (Brooks, 1999). Despite the many potential benefits of apologies, it is clear that people are not always satisfied with the apologies they receive. For instance, while some Muslims accepted Pope Benedict's apology for his critical comments of their faith in 2006, others denounced it for not constituting a "full apology" (Cooperman, 2006). In China, Mattel executives received widespread criticism for their apology following a recall of toys deemed dangerous for their lead content ("Plenty of Blame," 2007).

Inherent in these examples is a recognition that apologies must include *the specific components that the victim needs to hear* to be truly effective. By ignoring the specific components of apologies, researchers risk an oversimplified understanding of the apology process. Should it be inferred that the phrase "I'm sorry, I feel so upset about what happened" is analogous to a simple "I'm sorry"? What if an apologetic CEO, following an accounting scandal, also offers to compensate stakeholders monetarily? Will all victims respond to these apologies uniformly? In theory, the content of an apology should influence how effective it is, and who it is most effective for. The purpose of this paper, therefore, was to move beyond the basic question of if an apology has been offered and ask "Which components of apologies are most effective, and for whom?"

In Study 1, the relationship between self-construal and apology perceptions was examined via direct assessment. Factor analysis provided strong evidence for the distinctiveness of the three focal apology components, while a series of regressions confirmed the primary hypotheses. In Study 2, results from a policy capturing experiment converged with the findings from Study 1. Each self-construal was shown to strengthen the effect of its congruent apology component on victim forgiveness. An exception was the finding that the relational self-construal strengthens the effect of acknowledgments of violated rules/norms in Study 2. One reason for this effect may be that such acknowledgments highlight feelings of empathy and closeness to others within group contexts, where rules and norms are mutually shared and emphasized. More generally, the results align with a long history of research showing that people prefer information that is consistent with and verifies their own self-views (e.g. Swann, 1987). In Study 2, the impact of harm severity was also tested. Competing evidence was presented to suggest that harm severity may strengthen, mitigate, or exert a null effect on the impact of apologies and self-construal on forgiveness. Harm severity was not found to exhibit any significant moderating effect, thus providing evidence to suggest that the interactive effects of apologies and self-construal are robust.

Practical implications

To date, the tendency to treat apologies as dichotomous has hampered scholars' ability to offer practical advice on how to best apologize to victims. The present research addresses this shortcoming by offering a more precise account of how apologies should be structured. Independently, all three examined apology components exhibited significant and positive effects on victim forgiveness. These findings suggest that detailed apologies with multiple components are in general more likely to touch upon what is important to a victim than brief, perfunctory apologies. Offenders should therefore offer apologies with multiple components whenever possible. However, apologies also exhibited effects that hinged upon victim self-construals. Victims with relational self-construals, for example, were particularly forgiving following expressions of empathy. Thus, there is also a clear need for offenders to "consider their audience" when offering apologies. This need to meta-cognize about what a victim is looking for in an apology is

particularly important when victims' and offenders' worldviews diverge. It may simply not occur to an offender with a strong independent self-construal that an acknowledgment of a violated social norm could matter to a victim. A consideration of what victims want to hear may facilitate such considerations.

Once offered, it is important to note that apologies can be expected to exert wide-ranging effects beyond forgiveness. Intrapersonally, research on the affective consequences of forgiveness suggests that employees who receive effective apologies will experience greater satisfaction and positive affect at work, less negative emotionality (e.g. anger), and greater self-esteem (Karremans et al., 2003). Apology effectiveness can also be expected to predict relationship repair and thus relationship quality. For instance, Aquino, Tripp, and Bies (2006) demonstrated a strong positive correlation between forgiveness and relationship repair among coworkers at a public utility company. As a corollary to the impact of apologies on relationship repair, apologies may likewise facilitate interpersonal trust (Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004; Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009) with concomitant implications for OCBs, job performance (Colquitt, Scott, & LePine, 2007), and cooperation (De Cremer & Tyler, 2007). Beyond the victim–offender dyad, there is lastly evidence that forgiveness produces important prosocial spillover effects (Karremans et al., 2005), suggesting an impact on a broader array of prosocial work behaviors such as persistence and interpersonal helping (Grant, 2007).

Theoretical implications and future directions

Individuals possess a broad repertoire of self-construals. However, classic social cognition research suggests that these varying conceptualizations of the self will only impact individuals' cognitions, emotions, and behaviors when made accessible through either chronic or temporary mechanisms (Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984; Markus & Wurf, 1987). The self is made chronically accessible through the consistent utilization of a given self-construal across time and situations. The self is made temporarily accessible through strong situational contexts that overwhelm individual differences and thus "impinge on an individual and temporarily increase accessibility of self-knowledge" (Gelfand et al., 2006, p. 429; Kihlstrom & Cantor, 1984). Trends in how the self is made chronically and temporarily accessible highlight multiple directions for future inquires into when certain types of apologies will be preferred over others. The collective self-construal, for instance, is most chronically accessible in non-Western cultures (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Thus, cross-cultural scholars may predict that acknowledgments of violated rules and norms will be particularly important among non-Westerners. Similarly, close relational contexts have been shown to strengthen the temporary accessibility of the relational self (Hogg & Hains, 1996; McGuire, 1984). Thus, relationship scholars may predict that expressions of empathy will be particularly important among close friends and family members. As suggested by an anonymous reviewer, proactive offenders could even improve an apology's effectiveness by making a given self-construal temporarily accessible to a victim *before* apologizing. For example, an offender could emphasize relationship closeness and subsequently offer an expression of empathy.

Beyond apologies, another critical question for future research is how the self impacts victims' reactions to the content of excuses, justifications, and denials. As with apology research, much of the research on other social accounts has almost unilaterally focused on yes/no dichotomies (Shaw et al., 2003) and would benefit from an examination of how content influences their effectiveness. Consider the example of justifications which are characterized by their focus on the moral legitimacy of negative events (Shaw et al., 2003; Sitkin & Bies, 1993). Presumably, justifications differ in the types of moral justifications offered. An offender seeking to justify tardiness at work might relay a personal code of ethics (e.g. I don't think I need to come to work on time as long as I get my work done), while another might convey a group norm (e.g. no one at this organization arrives at exactly 9 am). Depending on a manager's self-construal, these justifications might prove differentially effective.

More generally, this research contributes to a growing literature that shows that the self is relevant to all stages of the conflict resolution process from perceptions of and reactions to conflict events themselves to perceptions of and reactions to apologies and accounts. In a cross-cultural sample, Gelfand et al. (2001) found that victims from an independent culture (the United States) were particularly concerned about infringements to the self during conflict while victims from a collectivist culture (Japan) were particularly concerned about duty violations (see also Flynn, 2005). Although the literature converges to emphasize the centrality of the self both in how conflict is perceived and in how repair tactics are assessed, future research is needed to more fully explore these dynamics. For instance, does self-construal predict victim preferences for structural versus attributional repair tactics (Dirks, Lewicki, & Zaheer, 2009)? Relatedly, does the collective self-construal predict a preference for apologies that emphasize ritualistic repair (Ren & Gray, 2009)?

Limitations

The present research is not without its limitations. Most notable is the current research's focus on hypothetical rather than real-world apologies and conflict events. All methodologies contain inherent flaws (McGrath, Martin, & Kulka, 1982), and the methods used here are no exception. In the presented studies, priority was given to the goals of precision, control, and consistency. However, these priorities were emphasized at some expense to generalizability. It is therefore important to apply the results presented here to real-world events with caution. To better understand how contexts might impact apology and self-construal dynamics, both the relational and the situational contexts must be considered. Future research, for example, should examine the impact of relationship closeness as a moderator of the effects presented in this paper (e.g. Fincham, 2000; Karremans & Van Lange, 2004; McCullough et al., 1998). Likewise, apology and self-construal dynamics may also depend upon whether an offense was an integrity versus competence violation (Kim et al., 2004) or the perceived intentionality of the offense (Struthers et al., 2008). Given that the offense in Study 2 was an unintentional competence violation, further research is needed to explore apology and self-construal dynamics following intentional, integrity violations. As a final note on apology components, it is important for future apology scales to expand upon the presented conceptualizations of offers of compensation, expressions of empathy, and acknowledgments of violated rules/norms to include both cognitive and affective content.

The current research was likewise silent to the psychological mechanisms that mediate the found effects. Within the context of research on real-world apologies, one potential mediating mechanism is affect. Affective reactions to offenses may explain why certain apologies only work when tailored to victims' self-construals. For instance, victims with relational self-construals may exhibit anger due to a perceived lack of sympathy and thus require expressions of empathy to mitigate their rage. Future research is needed to explore such affective processes. Despite these limitations, there is reason to be optimistic about the applicability of the present findings to varied real-world contexts. First, care was taken to demonstrate the robustness of the current findings across three levels of harm severity – a key source of variation in conflict perceptions in real-world settings. Second, the operationalizations of apologies and forgiveness were consistent with

conceptualizations of the constructs in real-world settings. Indeed, the theory itself was derived from the real-world observations of scholars from multiple fields. As noted by Locke (1986), theory that is well-grounded and supported via laboratory methods is likely to apply to real-world contexts as well. Nonetheless, future research on apology components and forgiveness would benefit from the use of methodologies that demonstrate the applicability of the presented theory to real-world events.

Conclusion

Across people, cultures, and time, conflict is ubiquitous, making effective avenues for conflict resolution especially vital. However, anecdotal evidence on the potential dangers of apology highlights the importance of examining exactly when apologies are most likely to be effective. By integrating theories of self-construal and apology, the current study has shown how the tailoring of apologies to individuals' self-construals can result in increased victim forgiveness.

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