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Evaluations of Apologies: The Effects of Apology Sincerity and Acceptance Motivation

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EVALUATIONS OF APOLOGIES: THE EFFECTS OF APOLOGY SINCERITY AND
ACCEPTANCE MOTIVATION

A Dissertation submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University

In partial fulfillment of
the requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Psychology

Department of Psychology

by
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ABSTRACT

EVALUATIONS OF APOLOGIES: THE EFFECTS OF APOLOGY SINCERITY AND ACCEPTANCE MOTIVATION

Ida Hatcher

The present study examined the effects of apology sincerity and acceptance motivation on the facilitation of forgiveness of a transgression. Eighty-five undergraduates (26 males, 59 females) were randomly assigned to an Accepted Apology or a Rejected Apology condition. Participants wrote a detailed description of a situation in which they had experienced a transgression, the transgressor apologized, and they decided to accept or reject the apology. After completing their written descriptions, participants responded to a series of questions about the incident including their relationship with the transgressor, the time elapsed between the transgression and apology, the method of communication used to issue the apology, what was said during the apology and how serious they initially perceived the transgression to be. To assess apology sincerity, participants were asked to evaluate whether the transgressors: (1) acknowledged what they did was wrong, (2) accepted responsibility for their action, (3) made attempts to atone for the wrongs they had committed, and (4) gave assurances that transgressions would not happen again. To assess the consequences of the transgressions, the participants evaluated the current status of their relationships with their transgressors as well as the extent to which they had completely forgiven their transgressors. Finally, participants wrote a detailed description of their reason for accepting or rejecting the apologies offered by their transgressors. These apology acceptance and apology rejection decisions were coded as either "intrinsically motivated" or "extrinsically motivated" decisions. Four hypotheses were examined. It was predicted that: (1) accepted apologies would be significantly more likely to be characterized as sincere than rejected apologies, (2) sincere apologies would be associated with higher levels of forgiveness than

ABSTRACT (cont.)

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insincere apologies, (3) decisions to accept an apology based on "internal" motivations would be associated with higher levels of forgiveness than decisions to accept an apology based on "external" motivations, and finally (4) the highest levels of forgiveness would be reported in those situations where sincere apologies were given to persons with "internal" motivations for acceptance. The results provided support for Hypothesis 1, but failed to provide support for Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4.

INTRODUCTION

In the course of human interaction, it is inevitable that people will make mistakes and, either intentionally or unintentionally, harm other people. When this happens, the issues of forgiveness and apology predictably arise. Forgiveness and apology are constructs that can be thought of as occurring on multiple levels, with multiple causes and multiple implications. In particular, the act of offering an apology can be thought of as either "internally" or "externally" motivated, as can the act of accepting or rejecting an apology. The purpose of the present study is to examine these constructs with a focus on clinical applications; specifically, the impact an apology can have in terms of facilitating forgiveness with a focus on two primary aspects of apologies that facilitate forgiveness: level of sincerity and acceptance motivation.

A review of the literature will examine three major constructs: forgiveness, apology, and transgression. The first construct of interest in the present study is forgiveness and the review of the literature includes a discussion of the following: (a) how forgiveness is generally defined, (b) the potential benefits of forgiveness, (c) the theory that forgiveness represents an aspect of human nature, and (d) factors relevant to the decision to forgive.

Forgiveness

Definition of Forgiveness. Forgiveness is generally defined as ceasing to feel resentment, anger, or indignation related to a transgression. Wade and Worthington (2005) have defined forgiveness as ..."a process that leads to the reduction of unforgiveness (bitterness, anger, etc.) and promotion of positive regard (love, compassion, or simply, sympathy and pity) for the offender" (p. 161). Worthington (2005) further defined forgiveness as ..."decreasing and eventually eliminating unforgiveness by replacing the negative with positive and eventually building to a net positive forgiveness experience" (p. 560). Researchers have also made the distinction that the definition of forgiveness may vary with focus of study; that those studying

transgression by strangers or non-continuing relationships define forgiveness merely by the reduction of negative emotions, while those researchers who focus on transgressions by people who are in ongoing relationships include the positive aspects of forgiveness in their definitions (Worthington, 2005). Since the present study examines the effects of apology on forgiveness, including the impact the transgression had on the relationship between the transgressor and victim in an ongoing relationship, the definition by Worthington (2005) that addresses the negative and positive aspects of the forgiveness experience, will be utilized.

Potential Benefits of Forgiveness. When examining the potential benefits of forgiveness, research has shown that forgiveness is negatively correlated to depression, stress, anxiety, and hostility (Webb, Colburn, Heisler, Call, & Chickerling, 2008) and that it can have a positive impact on general health (Worthington, Witvielt, Pietrini, & Miller, 2007). Forgiveness can also result in the offended person experiencing a sense of regained power, a more positive outlook, more energy, less stress, and increased self-esteem (Webb, et al., 2008; Worthington, et al., 2007; Worthington, Kurusu, Collins, Berry, Ripley, & Baier, 2000). Worthington, et al. (2007) also identify one component of forgiveness as “decisional forgiveness” which entails the deliberate intention to respond differently to the transgressor and reduce unforgiving behavior. A study conducted by Williamson and Gonzales (2007) found that the forgiveness experience can result in ..."relief from psychological pain, increased empathy and positive regard for offenders, the actualization of religious values, the discovery of new meaning, and movement toward reconciliation with offenders" (p. 439). While research describes many benefits of forgiveness, researchers have posited that forgiveness is an integral aspect of human nature.

Forgiveness as an aspect of human nature. In a study conducted by Clark (2005) it was noted that in societies that view humans as being pro-social and cooperative, the goal of justice

is the restoration of harmony, which is achieved through apology, forgiveness, and restitution. The author posits that there are three evolutionary psychological needs that all people share that drive the human propensity to seek and give forgiveness: acceptance, autonomy, and meaning.

Other research conducted by Luskin (2002) claims that forgiveness is a teachable and learnable skill, but acknowledges that forgiveness is a human quality that requires skills training for some. Luskin (2002) also states that in order for people to become learned in the skill of forgiveness they must be motivated to do so. Motivation will be discussed later in this paper but is a crucial component of the current study.

Factors relevant to the decision to forgive. A number of studies have examined factors related to why people choose to forgive their transgressors. One such study was conducted by a group of researchers at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (Gordon, Frousakis, Dixon, Willett, Christman, Furr, & Hellmuth, 2008). The researchers examined the role that religious orientation plays in the decision people make to forgive transgression. Their report states that those whose religious beliefs are "intrinsically oriented" are more likely to identify themselves as forgiving, while those whose religious beliefs are "extrinsically oriented" are more likely to be influenced by social pressure to forgive.

It was stated earlier that some researchers have posited that forgiveness is an aspect of human nature; that we strive through innate, internal motivation to have harmony within our relationships (Clark, 2005). Sidelinger, Frisby, and McMullen (2009) note that forgiveness may be motivated by both internal and external factors. The researchers state that transgressions in interpersonal relationships are like debts, and the cost and benefits of forgiveness are typically weighed and considered before a decision is made. The researchers suggested that the acceptance of an apology could be considered as the cancellation of that debt. The researchers add that

multiple factors, such as the length of the relationship, relationship satisfaction, closeness, and level of intimacy were positively correlated to forgiveness.

The second construct to be examined is apology and the review of the literature includes a discussion of the following: (a) what constitutes an apology, (b) the different types of apologies, (c) the potential merits and potential impacts of apologizing, and (d) perceptions of victims and transgressors in circumstances where an apology is offered.

Apologies

Apologies are an elemental construct in human interaction. They can serve the function of meeting many psychological needs, such as repairing relationships, restoring an individual's dignity, and preserving an individual's sense of what is just (Brooks, 1999; Brown, 2004; Davis 2002; Lazare, 2004). When a person enters a therapeutic relationship with issues related to transgression, being either the transgressor or the victim, the issues of apology and forgiveness typically arise as potential sources of forward progress or therapeutic intervention (Scobie & Scobie, 1998; Walton, 2005). While the apology is widely believed to be a powerful mediating factor in this process, the construct of apology can be viewed as being in the "eye of the beholder" and affected by numerous variables. Apologies can occur across a variety of social situations (i.e., interpersonal interactions, intimate relationships, employment), can be both "internally" and "externally" motivated (i.e., a need to maintain harmony in relationships, or having to live with the transgressor), can be offered to others in sincere or insincere forms, and on different levels of depth depending upon the nature of the transgression experienced.

The concept of level of apology can be illustrated as follows: if someone accidentally bumps into another in a hallway, which would generally be viewed as a low-level transgression, a quick "sorry" seems adequate to excuse the behavior. Truthfully, many people will apologize

automatically, even if they are the person being bumped into (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994). In response to such a low-level transgression, a low-level apology is usually sufficient to resolve the situation. We also tend to accept low-level apologies very quickly and without much thought (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994; Person, 2007). If the incident in question is slight or minor in nature and the offender offers a quick "sorry", the typical response might be just a quick "that's okay" or "no problem." This phenomenon can result in "undeserved forgiveness," where a transgressor is forgiven regardless of the wrong. Although undeserved forgiveness is associated more commonly with dependent relationships (Person, 2007), it also presents itself in more casual contexts. In more casual contexts, apologies such as these would appear to be commonplace and meaningless. But the dynamic changes when the context of the relationship between the transgressor and the victim is on a deeper level, rather than a casual or impersonal level.

When the context of the relationship is more personal or intimate and the transgression is more involved or harmful, apologies become more meaningful (Person, 2007; Scher & Darley, 1996). Within these contexts, apologies also become more complicated. A higher degree of difficulty in obtaining forgiveness necessitates a more efficient and a more detailed apology. Knowledge that an apology is sincere and motivated by the transgressor experiencing feelings of guilt, shame, or pity has been shown to increase the victim's likelihood of forgiving (Hareli & Eisikovits, 2006; Struthers, Eaton, Santelli, Uchiyama, & Shirvani, 2008). Research shows that the more efficient the apology, that is, the more necessary components are contained in the apology that are likely to address the psychological needs of the offended, the more likely that the transgressor will receive forgiveness (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006; Bennett & Dewberry, 1994). To thoroughly examine the scope of this issue, it is necessary to examine four aspects of

apology as related to clinical practice: (1) what constitutes an apology, (2) different types of apologies, (3) the potential merits and possible impacts of apologies, and (4) perceptions of transgressors and victims in circumstances where an apology is offered.

Definition of an Apology. The consensus of what constitutes an effective apology contains four basic criteria (Brown, 2004; Corlett, 2006; Lazare, 2004; Steiner, 2000). The first is that the apology must acknowledge that a wrong has been committed. This is one of the most crucial aspects of the apology and is typically included in most research definitions (Brown, 2004; Scher & Darley, 1996; Takaku, 2001). According to Lazare (2004), a common mistake made in apologizing is exclusion of this aspect, which can result in the apology being more destructive than no apology at all. When the wrong is not identified, or incorrectly assumed, this can result in the offended party feeling that the situation is hopeless and the relationship is further damaged by the apology; that he or she (i.e., the transgressor) just doesn't get it at all.

Second, the apology must acknowledge that the transgressor accepts responsibility for the hurtful act. This is the criterion that the insincere apology, which will be discussed later in this literature review, typically does not meet (Davis, 2002; Exline, Deshea, & Holeman, 2007; Risen & Gilovich, 2007). Accepting responsibility for the wrong committed can be as simple as stating "I know what I did was wrong" but is typically one of the most often excluded criteria of an apology (Lazare, 2004; Davis, 2002).

The third criterion for an apology to be effective is that it is necessary for the transgressor to offer to make some sort of atonement for the wrong he/she has committed. Research has shown that the level of atonement required for an effective apology is proportionate to the perceived level of wrong. For example, if you bump into someone in the hall, an apology accompanied by a smile or picking up some dropped books is typically sufficient. The offer of atonement is not

necessarily required to be spoken, as in the given example (Exline, Deshea, & Holeman, 2007; Scher & Darley, 1996).

Finally, for an apology to be considered effective there must be assurances given to the victim by the transgressor that the hurtful act will not be intentionally repeated, or that it will not happen again (Lazare, 2004). Research has shown that this criterion is not always believed and is most frequently broken, but remains a critical variable in effective apologies (Brown, 2004; Scher & Darley, 1996).

Types of Apologies. There are a number of different types of apologies (Lazare, 2004; Scher & Darley, 1996). The present study will be limited to a discussion of two apology types: sincere and insincere apologies. These are the apology types that are most likely to present in terms of interpersonal relationships (Berry & Worthington, 2001). It should be noted that this review of the literature will be limited to a discussion of the construct of apology, within the context of interpersonal relationships, which are more likely to present within a clinical setting. There are other types of apologies, such as the public apology, the political apology, and apologies that occur in criminal cases, but these types of apologies will not be discussed given that they fall outside the scope of the present study. Research shows that even if the apology rendered through litigation or prosecutions are sincere, they are typically not viewed as such (Alexander, 2006; Corlett, 2006). Many researchers have found that such apologies are often viewed as being coerced or manipulative and, thus, not sincere.

An apology is perceived as sincere if it meets the four criteria of an effective apology discussed in the previous section of the paper: acknowledgment of the hurtful act, accepting responsibility for the transgression, making efforts at atonement, and giving assurances that the hurtful act will not be repeated. The insincere apology is, quite simply, an apology lacking at

least one of the criteria of an effective apology. When a transgressor asks for forgiveness without including the components of a sincere apology, such as acknowledging responsibility, making efforts at atonement, or offering assurances, the apology is viewed as being insincere (Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Forster, & Montada, 2004; Risen & Gilovich, 2007). These views can be mediated, to some extent, by social expectations of the level of apology being equal to the level of transgression (Brooks, 1999; Lazare, 2004).

An apology can also be judged as insincere for a variety of other reasons. Some of these might be related to body language; a person may say the words, but roll their eyes as they speak, or use a sarcastic tone of voice (McCullough, 2001; Risen & Gilovich, 2007). Another reason an apology can be judged as insincere is that the transgressor may also wait for an extended period of time to apologize and the victim may interpret this as a sign of insincerity. Sometimes the apology is in the moment and when the moment passes, the effect of the apology is lost or can be interpreted as not being heartfelt (Brown, 2004; Frantz, 2005; May & Jones, 2007). An apology offered too soon after a transgression can also appear to be insincere (Brown, 2004; Frantz, 2005). Wohl and McGrath (2007) found that when transgressors waited to offer an apology, it was more likely to be viewed as sincere. Clearly, timing is an important factor when issuing an apology.

Potential Merits and Impacts of Apologizing. Research has shown that both acts of giving and accepting sincere apologies can have a variety of positive effects (Risen & Gilovich, 2007). Some of the positive effects identified have included healing relationships, conflict resolution, and improved self-esteem (Eaton, Struthers, Shomrony, & Santelli, 2007). There can also be negative effects resulting from apologizing. One potential negative effect is the potential for further injury to a relationship if the apology is judged to be insincere. Such action might be

interpreted as adding insult to injury. Similarly, if an apology is thought to be insincere, it could further escalate a conflict situation (Lazare, 2004; May & Jones, 2007). For example, if a conflict exists and one party demands a sincere apology and instead receives an insincere apology, the person may harbor deeper resentment and further escalate the conflict.

In some circumstances, an apology may not be a realistic expectation. For several reasons, giving or receiving an apology may not be possible. For example, an apology is not possible for someone who was abused in childhood by a parent who is now deceased who feels that knowing the parent was repentant would help him/her deal with the anger he/she feels (Walton, 2005). In such instances, knowledge of the potential merits and detriments of apologies becomes even more crucial in helping those involved move on. A more effective therapeutic intervention focusing on positive, internal aspects of forgiveness might be more beneficial to the client in such cases.

If an apology is rejected, it can also result in diminished self-esteem in that the persons involved may feel that they are incapable of handling conflict well or that they are, in some way, not deserving of an apology (Eaton, et al., 2007; Mullet, RiviEre, & Sastre, 2007). How a person chooses to handle conflict can be reflective of his/her world view and sense of what is fair (Alexander, 2006; Corlett, 2006).

Receiving an insincere apology may be further detrimental in that it can make a conflict situation more complicated. Receiving an insincere apology in a conflict situation creates, in itself, another conflict (Davis, 2002; Lazare, 2004). If the apology rendered is actually not an apology, or is a conditional apology, the person receiving it may find himself/herself caught in a no-win situation. If he/she rejects the insincere apology, then he/she may feel internally that he/she is not resolving the conflict and may externally be judged more negatively. However, if he/

she does accept it, then he/she may feel he/she is compromising on principle and experience diminished self-esteem or internal imbalance. This may create dissonance for those who are used to handling conflicts in an effective manner (Takaku, 2001).

Perceptions of Transgressors and Victims. Many people view offering an apology as an act of humility and also view accepting an apology as an act of forgiveness (McCullough, 2001). Some researchers have even suggested acceptance of an apology and forgiveness are inseparable constructs (Lazare, 2004; Struthers, et al., 2008). It follows that rejecting an apology could be viewed as an unforgiving act. When the apology issued is actually an insincere apology, this issue becomes more complicated. It would seem logical to assume that rejecting an insincere apology would equate to acknowledging that no apology had been given; therefore, the person rejecting it could not be judged as unforgiving. Research has shown, however, that people tend to accept apologies with apparently little regard for their level of sincerity for low level transgressions (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994; Person, 2007).

Corlett (2006) has proposed that simply issuing an apology places a moral obligation on the victim to accept the apology. Public opinion seems to support the idea that if a transgressor can humble himself or herself and extend an apology, then the victim should forgive and accept the apology (McCullough, 2001). By this standard, if a spouse offered an apology for infidelity, then his/her spouse would be morally obligated to accept the apology. This seems to defy simple common sense. If a victim of infidelity feels that he/she is not ready to accept the apology of his/her transgressor, he/she should not be judged negatively. Research has shown this is sometimes the case (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994; Davis, 2002). This case illustration provides a useful example of the possible impact of apologies on the victim. These trends indicate that there can

be just as much risk involved in rejecting an apology as in issuing one (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994).

Research has also shown that by offering an apology, a transgressor is often viewed as a person capable of admitting fault and accepting responsibility (Leenders & Brugman, 2005; McCullough, 2001). Research has also revealed that offering an apology for a hurtful act or an act of wrongdoing actually increases condoning of transgression more than not giving an apology or not explaining the transgression (Folkes & Whang, 2003). The results of prior research appear to indicate that when comparing perceptions of transgressors and victims that often perceptions of transgressors are far more lenient than perceptions of victims, especially when a victim chooses not to accept an apology.

Motivations for Offering, Accepting, or Rejecting an Apology. Relationships may be one of many motivations when examining apologies. As stated previously, there are both internal and external motivations behind the act of offering, accepting, and/or rejecting an apology. As is frequently the case in psychotherapy, people who have been wronged often feel that they are entitled to an apology and those who have transgressed frequently experience guilt that apologizing may alleviate. These feelings have both "internal" and "external" aspects and motivations (Lazare, 2004).

"Internal" motivations to offer an apology may include genuine regret over offensive or hurtful actions, a personal need to think of oneself as being able to admit fault, a desire to feel oneself as being "off the hook," or even alleviation of some other personal sense of dissonance. "External" motivations to offer an apology may include a desire to maintain a personal and/or a working relationship, to manipulate the perceptions of others to see the transgressor as being able

to admit fault, to get others to acknowledge the transgressor as being "off the hook," or to achieve conflict resolution (Lazare, 2004; Struthers, et al., 2008).

Additional "internal" motivations to accept an apology may include the following: the need to see oneself as a forgiving person, a need to have others see you as a forgiving person, a need to maintain harmony in personal relationships, a need to eliminate conflict from one's life, a need for closure, a belief that accepting an apology is the right thing to do, a genuine belief in the remorse of the transgressor, a need to see oneself as the better person, or a belief that people deserve a second chance after making a mistake.

"External" motivations to accept an apology may include the following: having to maintain a living arrangement with the transgressor, having to maintain a familial relationship with the transgressor, having frequent social contact with the transgressor, having to continue working with the transgressor, having to continue working for the transgressor, following advice from others to accept the apology, changing your perception of the event after new information is presented, receiving pressure from others to accept the apology, or receiving an ultimatum from the transgressor that the relationship will be over if the apology is rejected.

The third and final construct to be examined will be transgression and the review of the literature will include a discussion of the following: (a) what constitutes a transgression, (b) the different levels of transgression, and (c) the "internal" and "external" motivations behind the acts of offering and accepting an apology.

Transgressions

Since the type and level of transgression affect whether an apology is given and accepted, it is important to examine the literature on the construct of transgression. Much like apologies, perceptions of transgressions can also be in the eye of the beholder and frequently contribute to

issues that bring a client into therapy. As a result, aspects of the transgression are likely to be discussed in a therapeutic context to identify the steps necessary to allow the client to overcome the transgression (Scobie & Scobie, 1998; Trepper, 1986). There can be many types of transgression, such as intentional, unintentional, personal, or criminal, to name a few. There can also be many levels of transgression, such as minor, significant, social, or interpersonal. Although there can be several differences in type or depth of transgression, there are also commonalities that help to define an act as a transgression.

Definition of a Transgression. The first common feature of a transgression is an intentional violation, either of trust or of a social norm (Mullett, RiviEre, & Sastre, 2007). It is generally considered a violation of trust if the situation involves a previous relationship between the parties involved, such as an act between friends, associates, or intimates. A violation of a social norm is typically described as occurring between strangers or mere acquaintances, for example, the rude person in line, or the impatient person across the counter (Mullett, RiviEre, & Sastre, 2007). This violation can be construed as an insult to the victim's dignity. It can suggest that his/her trust was misplaced or that he/she misjudged the person as someone who shared his/her world-view of what is just. Such violations can also suggest that the playing field is not level (Lazare, 2004).

The second common feature of a transgression is the perception of harm. The act must be viewed as being hurtful to be considered a transgression. Research has shown that people will tolerate rudeness if they sympathize with the situation and therefore, do not interpret the acts as being hurtful. For example, many people do not consider it rude to hang up on a telemarketer who calls an individual at his or her home (Lazare, 2004).

The third common feature of a transgression is the perception of intentionality. People are more likely to interpret an act as a transgression if it is perceived the action was intentionally committed, whether or not there is evidence to support that perception (Mullett, et al., 2007).

Different Levels of Transgression. There are differences in the levels of transgression, just as there are differences in the levels of apology and forgiveness. For example, there is a notable difference in the level of harm involved in losing a friend's music CD versus an act of infidelity (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). The level of harm inflicted is typically proportionate to the level of difficulty in obtaining forgiveness. Bachman and Guerrero (2006) found that infidelity was considered to be a transgression that was difficult to forgive, regardless of the type of apology offered. Lazare (2004) notes that while apologizing can be an effective means of obtaining forgiveness, many people may be initially hesitant to attempt it for a variety of reasons such as: fear of rejection or other negative evaluations, fear of being viewed as weak or feeling weak, fear of showing emotion or "swallowing one's pride," or that the person offended will be unforgiving or smug.

There are also social expectations that play a factor in transgression and apology. Lazare (2004) states that transgressors frequently feel the level of transgression should equal the level of apology required to obtain forgiveness and can be motivated by a need to maintain social as well as personal relationships. It is typically this desire to maintain these relationships that brings the transgressor and the victim into a therapeutic setting. Within the atmosphere of a therapeutic intervention, the type and level of transgression can be discussed and the aspects of apology and forgiveness can be explored. It has been noted that an effective apology can have the effect of "leveling the playing field" in these relationships (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006).

Prior research has examined numerous therapeutic interventions designed to facilitate forgiveness (Berry & Worthington, 2001; Wade & Worthington, 2005; Worthington, et al., 2000). However, there is a noticeable shortage of studies that have examined the role that apology and acceptance motivation play in this process.

The Present Study

Research has shown that the level of sincerity reflected in an apology plays a significant role in apology acceptance and the facilitation of forgiveness (Brown, 2004; Lazare, 2004; Risen & Gilovich, 2007). Research has also shown that forgiveness entails decisional factors and thus, acceptance motivation could be posited to play a significant role in this process. The purpose of the current study is to examine the impact level of perceived apology sincerity and acceptance motivation play in the facilitation of forgiveness.

To the extent that the apologies described in the present study by college student participants: (a) are representative of the types of transgressions and apologies encountered in therapeutic environments, (2) provide a better understanding of the factors that contribute to perceptions of the sincerity of an apology, and (3) provide a better understanding of the motivations underlying decisions to accept or reject an apology, the results of the present study may be helpful for therapists and counselors to gain a better understanding of those aspects of apologies that can facilitate forgiveness and thus, design more effective interventions to reduce clients' reported level of distress associated with transgression. The following research hypotheses will be examined in the present study:

Hypothesis 1: The first hypothesis addresses the relationship between apology sincerity and the decision to accept or reject an apology. It was predicted that when comparing accepted and

rejected apologies, accepted apologies would be significantly more likely to be characterized as sincere (i.e., apology contains all four essential elements of "sincerity").

Hypothesis 2: Because acceptance of an apology does not automatically imply forgiveness, the second hypothesis addresses the relationship between apology sincerity and forgiveness. It was predicted that sincere apologies (i.e., apology contains all four essential elements of "sincerity") would be associated with higher levels of forgiveness than insincere apologies (i.e., apology lacks one or more of the four essential elements of "sincerity").

Hypothesis 3: The third hypothesis examines the relationship between the motivations underlying participants' decisions to accept the apologies of their transgressors (Internal vs. External) and level of forgiveness of the transgression. It was predicted decisions to accept an apology based on "internal" motivations would be associated with higher levels of forgiveness than decisions to accept an apology based on "external" motivations.

Hypothesis 4: The fourth hypothesis examined the influence of acceptance/rejection motivation (Internal vs. External) and apology sincerity (Sincere vs. Insincere) on the level of forgiveness of the transgression. It was predicted that the highest levels of forgiveness would be reported in those situations where sincere apologies were given to individuals with "internal" motivations for acceptance.

METHOD

Procedure

Participants were given an Anonymous Survey Consent form to read and were instructed to keep this form for their personal records (See Appendix A). Participants were then randomly assigned to one of two "apology type" groups. Participants in Group 1 (Accepted Apology) received the following instructions: "Think back to a time in your life when you felt that you

were wronged by another person, this person apologized to you for the wrong committed, and you accepted this apology." Participants in Group 2 (Rejected Apology) received the following instructions: "Think back to a time in your life when you felt that you were wronged by another person, this person apologized to you for the wrong committed, and you chose not to accept, or to reject this apology." After receiving their instructions, participants in both groups were asked to write a detailed description of the specific "wrong" they had experienced. Participants were instructed to not include any names or other information in their written descriptions that would make the persons involved in the "wrong" identifiable.

After completing their written descriptions of the "wrong" that they had experienced, participants in both groups were asked a series of questions that required them to: (1) define their relationship to their transgressor (i.e., spouse/partner, parent, sibling, friend, roommate, coworker, teacher, or other), (2) identify the amount of time that had elapsed between the transgression and when an apology was finally received (i.e. < 1 hour, 1 hour to 24 hours, 1 day to 1 week, 1 week to 1 month, 1 month to 1 year, > 1 year), (3) describe the method of communication used by the transgressor to convey the apology (i.e. face-to-face, phone, electronic (e.g., email, text, IM, Facebook), through another person, or other), (4) provide a detailed written description of what was said to them by their transgressor during the apology, and (5) evaluate how serious they initially perceived the wrong committed against them using a 5-point scale (1 = Not At All Serious; 5 = Extremely Serious).

To assess the "sincerity" of the apology received, participants in both groups were asked to provide responses to the following four questions: (1) did the person acknowledge that what he/she did was wrong? (2) did the person accept responsibility for his/her action? (3) did the person make attempts to make up, or atone, for the wrong committed? and (4) did the person give you

any assurances that it would not happen again? Participants used Yes or No responses when responding to these four questions.

To assess the consequences of the transgression, participants in both groups were asked to: (1) describe the current status of their relationship with their transgressor (i.e., I avoid all contact with this person, I can tolerate some social contact with this person, we still have a relationship but it's "strained", we are still fairly close but I can no longer trust him/her like I used to, the relationship has not changed, the relationship has grown a little stronger, the relationship has moved to a new, more positive level) and (2) evaluate the extent to which they have truly and completely forgiven their transgressor using a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree).

To assess the motivation underlying participants' decisions to accept or reject an apology, participants were instructed to write a detailed description of their reason for either accepting or rejecting the apology of their transgressors. Specifically, participants in Group 1 (Accepted Apology) were instructed to write a description of the reason(s) why they chose to accept the apology offered by their transgressor whereas participants in Group 2 (Rejected Apology) were instructed to write a description of the reason(s) why they chose not to accept, or to reject the apology offered by their transgressor.

Participants' written responses were coded by the researcher and a Graduate student research assistant as either "internally motivated" or "externally motivated" decisions to accept or to reject an apology. "Internally motivated" decisions included those based on the following reasons: (1) I can understand why they did it, I have done the same thing, (2) I believe/do not believe in the sincerity of the apology, (3) I can't get over what they did, I'm still hurt, (4) I can't forgive what they did, (5) I believe accepting an apology is the right thing to do, (6) I need to reduce the

conflict in my life, (7) I believe people deserve a second chance, (8) I have a need to feel like a forgiving person, (9) I need a sense of closure so that I can move on and (10) I need to have harmony in my relationships. "Externally motivated" decisions included those based upon the following reasons: (1) I am related to them, (2) I have to live with them, (3) I will have to socialize with them, (4) I have to work with them, (5) I have to work for them, (6) other people told me I should accept/reject the apology, (7) I changed my mind after receiving additional information about the transgression, (8) I was pressured by others to accept/reject the apology and (9) I was given an ultimatum to accept/reject the apology.

To assess participants' propensity to forgive others, participants in both groups were instructed to evaluate: (1) the extent to which they could forgive a person almost anything as long as they apologized using a 5-point scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree) and (2) how forgiving a person they considered themselves to be using a 5-point scale (1 = Not At All Forgiving; 5 = Extremely Forgiving).

Finally, the participants were instructed to provide demographic information identifying: (1) gender, (2) age, and (3) current class standing (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior). The Accepted Apology and Rejected Apology versions of the survey instrument appear in Appendix B. When participants had completed the survey instrument, they were debriefed and had all of their questions and concerns addressed. Participants then received their course credit and were dismissed by the researcher.

All participant responses were coded by the researcher and a Graduate student research assistant. Discrepancies in coding were discussed and remedied in an effort to establish inter-rater reliability and reduce researcher bias. Specifically, in the event of a disagreement between coders, discussion occurred until agreement could be reached as to how written responses should

be coded. The "internal" and "external" motivation categories used by the coders were those most frequently cited in the apology and forgiveness literature.

Participants

Participants were 85 undergraduate students (26 male, 59 female) enrolled in introductory psychology classes at a Mid-Atlantic University. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 53 years ($M = 22.09$ years, $SD = 6.72$ years). In exchange for participation, participants were given extra credit. All participants were treated in accordance with ethical guidelines and informed consent was obtained.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of two "apology type" conditions. Forty-four participants (13 male, 31 female) were randomly assigned to the Accepted Apology group. The Accepted Apology group contained 19 freshman, 11 sophomores, 5 juniors, and 9 seniors with an average age of 21.75 years ($SD = 6.73$ years). The remaining forty-one participants (13 male, 28 female) were randomly assigned to the Rejected Apology group. The Rejected Apology group contained 16 freshman, 10 sophomores, 4 juniors, and 11 seniors with an average age of 22.44 years ($SD = 6.86$ years).

Chi-square and independent-groups t-test analyses were conducted to examine equivalency of the Accepted Apology and Rejected Apology groups. With respect to demographics, the Accepted Apology and Rejected Apology groups were not significantly different in terms of gender composition ($\chi^2(1; N = 85) = .05, p = .83$), age ($t(83) = .47, p = .64$), or current class standing ($\chi^2(3; N = 85) = .51, p = .92$). With respect to participants' perceptions of their ability to forgive: (a) the willingness to forgive a person almost anything as long they apologize was not significantly different ($t(83) = .04, p = .97$) across the Accepted Apology ($M = 2.82, SD = 1.30$) and Rejected Apology groups ($M = 2.83, SD = 1.07$) and (b) perceptions of how forgiving a

person they considered themselves to be were not significantly different ($t(83) = -.57, p = .57$) across the Accepted Apology and Rejected Apology groups.

RESULTS

Transgression Analysis

The detailed written descriptions of the transgressions experienced by the 85 participants were analyzed and coded into 1 of 8 "themed" categories by the Principal Investigator and a Graduate student research assistant. The researcher acknowledged the potential overlap in themed categories, so the themed categories were established by strictly adhering to written responses of participants, (i.e. if they stated that they "felt betrayed" by an act of lying, the transgression was coded as betrayal). The two most common transgressions cited by the participants were lying (24.7%; $n = 21$) and betrayal (21.2%; $n = 18$) followed by rudeness/meanness (18.8%; $n = 16$), infidelity (11.8%; $n = 10$), insensitivity (10.6%; $n = 9$), false accusation (4.7%; $n = 4$), item stolen (4.7%; $n = 4$) and other (3.5%; $n = 3$) respectively. A Chi-square analysis revealed types of transgressions experienced by participants in the Accepted Apology and Rejected Apology groups were not significantly different ($\chi^2(7; N = 85) = 3.17, p = .87$).

An analysis of how serious participants initially perceived these transgressions revealed the majority of participants (75.3%; $n = 64$) initially perceived the transgressions as very serious or extremely serious. An independent-samples t-test analysis revealed there was not a significant difference ($t(83) = 1.51, p = .14$) in the initial perceived seriousness of the transgressions for the participants in the Accepted Apology ($M = 3.75; SD = 1.20$) and Rejected Apology groups ($M = 4.10; SD = .89$).

An examination of participants' relationship to their transgressors revealed that a friend (45.9%; $n = 39$) or a spouse/partner (23.5%; $n = 20$) were the most likely individuals to commit a transgression against the participants followed by a parent (8.2%; $n = 7$), sibling (8.2%; $n = 7$), roommate (8.2%; $n = 7$), teacher (2.4%; $n = 2$), other (2.4%; $n = 2$), and coworker (1.2%; $n = 1$) respectively. A Chi-square analysis revealed that participants' relationship to their transgressors in the Accepted Apology and Rejected Apology groups was not significantly different ($\chi^2(7; N = 85) = 11.48, p = .12$).

An analysis of the time that passed between the transgression and the participants receiving an apology revealed participants most frequently received their apology within a 1 day to 1 week time frame (25.9%; $n = 22$) or a 1 hour to 24 hours time frame (23.5%; $n = 20$). The remaining participants reported receiving an apology in < 1 hour (16.5%; $n = 14$), within 1 month to 1 year (15.3%; $n = 13$), within 1 week to 1 month (10.6%; $n = 9$), or > 1 year (8.2%; $n = 7$) respectively. A Chi-square analysis revealed the time it took for participants in the Accepted Apology and the Rejected Apology groups to receive an apology was not significantly different ($\chi^2(5; N = 85) = 2.10, p = .84$).

An examination of the methods used by transgressors to apologize to the participants for their actions revealed the majority of apologies were delivered in a face-to-face manner (54.1%; $n = 46$). The remaining participants reported receiving their apologies via the phone (28.2%; $n = 24$), through electronic channels such as email, text messages, IM, and Facebook (10.6%; $n = 9$), through another person (4.7%; $n = 4$), or through other methods (2.4%; $n = 2$). A Chi-square analysis revealed the method of apology used by transgressors to apologize to participants in the Accepted Apology and Rejected Apology groups was not significantly different ($\chi^2(4; N = 85) = 4.57, p = .34$).

An assessment of the impact of the transgression on the relationship between participants and their transgressors revealed the majority of participants (71.8%; $n = 61$) reported that the transgression had a negative impact on the relationship. Specifically, 22.4% ($n = 19$) no longer had any relationship with the transgressor, 20% ($n = 17$) could tolerate only brief social contact with the transgressor, 14.1% ($n = 12$) reported the relationship with the transgressor was now "strained", and 15.3% ($n = 13$) reported there was still a close relationship with the transgressor, but there was less trust in the relationship. Other participants reported the transgression had a positive impact on the relationship. Specifically, 14.1% ($n = 12$) reported the relationship was now much stronger while 1.2% ($n = 1$) reported the relationship was now slightly stronger. No change in the status of the relationship was reported by 12.9% ($n = 11$) of the participants.

A Chi-square analysis revealed a significant difference in post-transgression relationship status for participants in the Accepted Apology and Rejected Apology groups ($\chi^2(6; N = 85) = 25.08, p < .01$). While participants in the Rejected Apology group were significantly more likely to report they no longer had a relationship or contact with their transgressors, participants in the Accepted Apology group were significantly more likely to report no change in their relationship with their transgressors or their relationship had grown much stronger since the transgression.

Sincerity Analysis

For a transgressor's apology to be considered "sincere", the transgressor had to do all of the following: (1) acknowledge that what he/she did was wrong, (2) accept responsibility for his/her actions, (3) make an attempt to atone for the wrong he/she committed and (4) give the victim of the transgression an assurance that the transgression would not happen again. An analysis of participants' ratings of the apologies received from their transgressors revealed 35 participants (41.2%) had received a "sincere" apology and 50 participants (58.8%) had received an

"insincere" apology lacking at least one essential element of sincerity.

Hypothesis 1: The first hypothesis addressed the relationship between apology sincerity and the decision to accept or reject an apology. It was predicted that when comparing accepted and rejected apologies, accepted apologies would be significantly more likely to be characterized as sincere. An analysis of the 35 "sincere" apologies indicated that 25 were accepted and 10 were rejected by participants. A Chi-square analysis assessing the relationship between apology type (Accepted vs. Rejected) and apology sincerity (Sincere vs. Insincere) revealed that the accepted apologies were significantly more likely ($\chi^2(1; N = 85) = 9.21, p < .01$) than rejected apologies to be characterized as "sincere". The results provided support for Hypothesis 1.

Additional analyses were conducted on the relationships between the four individual elements of a "sincere" apology and the decision to accept or reject an apology. These analyses revealed apologies in which the transgressors acknowledged the wrongs they had committed ($\chi^2(1; N = 85) = 7.13, p = .01$), accepted responsibility for their actions ($\chi^2(1; N = 85) = 7.13, p = .01$), and made an effort to atone for the wrongs they had committed ($\chi^2(1; N = 85) = 5.09, p = .02$) were significantly more likely to be accepted than to be rejected. Interestingly, the decision to accept or reject an apology was not significantly ($\chi^2(1; N = 85) = 3.30, p = .07$) influenced by whether or not the transgressor offered an assurance that the transgression would not happen again.

Hypothesis 2: Because acceptance of an apology does not automatically imply forgiveness, the second hypothesis addressed the relationship between apology sincerity and forgiveness. It was predicted that sincere apologies would be associated with higher levels of forgiveness than insincere apologies. An independent-groups t-test analysis comparing the level of forgiveness associated with sincere and insincere apologies revealed that the level of forgiveness for sincere

apologies ($M = 3.20$; $SD = 1.49$) was not significantly different ($t(83) = .74$, $p = .46$) from the level of forgiveness associated with insincere apologies ($M = 2.96$; $SD = 1.46$). The results failed to provide support for Hypothesis 2.

Additional analyses were conducted on the relationships between the four individual elements of a "sincere" apology and the level of forgiveness. These analyses revealed apologies in which the transgressors acknowledged the wrongs they had committed ($t(83) = 1.06$, $p = .29$), accepted responsibility for their actions ($t(83) = 1.41$, $p = .16$), made an effort to atone for the wrongs they had committed ($t(83) = 1.69$, $p = .10$) or gave assurance that the transgression would not happen again in the future ($t(83) = .61$, $p = .55$) did not lead to a significantly higher level of forgiveness than apologies lacking these individual elements of "sincerity".

Acceptance/Rejection Motivation Analysis

An analysis of the reasons given by the 85 participants as to why they decided to accept or reject the apologies of their transgressors revealed that 74.1% ($n = 63$) of participants' decisions were "internally motivated" while 25.9% ($n = 22$) of participants' decisions were "externally motivated." A Chi-square analysis was conducted assessing the relationship between apology type (Accepted vs. Rejected) and acceptance/rejection motivation (Internally Motivated vs. Externally Motivated). The analysis revealed a significant difference ($\chi^2(1; N = 85) = 22.69$, $p < .01$) in the type of motivation underlying decisions to accept or reject an apology. Specifically, decisions to reject an apology were almost exclusively (97.6%; 40 out of 41 rejection decisions) based on "internal" motivations, while decisions to accept an apology were based equally on both "internal" (52.3%; 23 out of 44 acceptance decisions) and "external" motivations (47.7%; 21 out of 44 acceptance decisions).

When examining the motivations underlying participants' decisions to reject an apology, the most frequent "internally motivated" reasons cited were: (1) I do not believe the sincerity of the apology (61.0%; $n = 25$), (2) I can't get over what they did, I'm still hurt (19.5%; $n = 8$) and (3) I can't forgive what they did (14.6%; $n = 6$). One participant cited "I need to reduce the conflict in my life" as the "internally motivated" reason for rejecting an apology. Only one participant cited an "externally motivated" reason (i.e. "I have to live with them") for rejecting an apology.

When examining the motivations underlying participants' decisions to accept an apology, the most frequent "internally motivated" reasons cited were: (1) I do believe in the sincerity of the apology (22.7%; $n = 10$), (2) I need to reduce the conflict in my life (11.4%; $n = 5$) and (3) I need to have harmony in my relationships (9.1%; $n = 4$). Other "internally motivated" reasons for accepting an apology included the following : (1) I need to feel like a forgiving person (4.5%; $n = 2$), (2) I believe accepting an apology is the right thing to do (2.3%; $n = 1$) and (3) I believe all people deserve a second chance (2.3%; $n = 1$). The most frequent "externally motivated" reason cited by participants for accepting an apology was "I am related to them" (40.9%; $n = 18$). Other "externally motivated" reasons for accepting an apology included the following: (1) I have to live with them (2.3%; $n = 1$), (2) I have to socialize with them (2.3%; $n = 1$), and (3) I was given an ultimatum to accept the apology (2.3%; $n = 1$). See Table 1 for graphical display of internal and external motivations cited by participants.

Hypothesis 3: Forgiveness is often the desired goal in incidents of transgression. An examination of the motivations underlying individuals' decisions to accept or reject an apology and the influence of apology sincerity in making these apology acceptance/rejection decisions may shed some light on this process of achieving forgiveness.

The third hypothesis examined the relationship between the motivations underlying participants' decisions to accept the apologies of their transgressors (Internal vs. External) and level of forgiveness of the transgression. It was predicted decisions to accept an apology based on "internal" motivations would be associated with higher levels of forgiveness than decisions to accept an apology based on "external" motivations. An independent-groups t-test analysis comparing the level of forgiveness associated with apologies accepted on the basis of "internal" ($n = 23$) and "external" ($n = 21$) motivations was conducted. The analysis revealed that the level of forgiveness was not significantly different ($t(83) = .50, p = .62$) for acceptance decisions based on "internal" ($M = 3.83; SD = 1.19$) and "external" ($M = 4.00; SD = 1.10$) motivations. The results failed to provide support for Hypothesis 3.

Hypothesis 4: The fourth hypothesis examined the influence of acceptance/rejection motivation (Internal vs. External) and apology sincerity (Sincere vs. Insincere) on the level of forgiveness of the transgression. It was predicted that the highest levels of forgiveness would be reported in those situations where sincere apologies were given to individuals with "internal" motivations for acceptance.

A 2 (Acceptance Motivation) x 2 (Apology Sincerity) factorial ANOVA analysis was conducted with level of forgiveness as the dependent variable. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for Acceptance Motivation ($F(1,81) = 9.20, p < .01$). "Externally" motivated decisions ($M = 3.86; SD = 1.25$) resulted in significantly higher levels of forgiveness than "internally" motivated decisions ($M = 2.78; SD = 1.44$). The main effect for Apology Sincerity was not significant ($F(1,81) = .12, p = .73$). Sincere and Insincere apologies did not result in significant differences in forgiveness. Finally, the Apology Motivation x Apology Sincerity interaction was not significant ($F(1,81) = .01, p = .93$). Therefore, sincere apologies

offered to individuals with "internal" motivations for acceptance did not result in the highest levels of forgiveness (See Table 2 for conditional means and graphical display of the interaction). The results failed to provide support for Hypothesis 4.

Additional independent-samples t-test and correlational analyses were performed in an effort to identify those factors most strongly associated with achieving a high level of forgiveness for a transgression. As expected, apologies that were accepted ($M = 3.91$; $SD = 1.14$) were associated with a significantly higher level of forgiveness ($t(83) = -6.91, p < .01$) than apologies that were rejected ($M = 2.15$; $SD = 1.22$). With respect to participant gender, the level of forgiveness of the transgression was not significantly different ($t(83) = 1.04, p = .30$) for males ($M = 3.31$; $SD = 1.38$) and females ($M = 2.95$; $SD = 1.50$).

In the correlational analyses, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between level of forgiveness for the transgression and various demographic (e.g., participant age), transgression-related (e.g., seriousness of transgression; time required to receive an apology; and the current status of the relationship with the transgressor) as well as participant personality variables (e.g., ability to forgive others as long as they apologize, perception of how forgiving a person one is). Correlation coefficients were tested at the .01 level of significance. The results of the correlational analyses revealed participant age ($r = -.14, p = .21$), seriousness of transgression ($r = -.19, p = .08$), time required to receive an apology ($r = .12, p = .26$), and ability to forgive others as long as they apologize ($r = .08, p = .46$) were all not significantly related to the level of forgiveness. In contrast, the status of the current relationship with one's transgressor ($r = .47, p < .01$) and perceptions of how forgiving one is ($r = .33, p < .01$) were significantly related to level of forgiveness. The results indicate that higher levels of forgiveness were associated with relationships that had grown closer and stronger since the transgression and

with transgressions committed against individuals who describe themselves as more forgiving people.

DISCUSSION

The present study suggests that, based on the experiences of the 85 undergraduate student participants in the current study, high levels of forgiveness for transgressions are associated with: (1) apologies that are accepted, (2) apologies where the victims' acceptance/rejection decisions are based on "external" motivations, (3) apologies associated with relationships that have grown stronger since the transgression and (4) apologies received by individuals who describe themselves as more forgiving people.

A significant finding of the present study was that while decisions to reject an apology were based almost exclusively upon "internal" motivations, "internal" and "external" motivations were equally likely to be the basis for decisions to accept an apology. There are a number of possible explanations for why participants reported an overwhelming frequency of "internal" motivations for rejecting apologies. One is that they received apologies that they perceived to be insincere that they chose not to accept. Another possible explanation is that they chose not to accept the apology and, after a passage of time, justified this to themselves as being "internally motivated", regardless of their initial motivation for rejecting the apology.

When participants reported accepting an apology, they were equally likely to report their decisions as being internally or externally motivated. This may have been the result of similar factors as for those who rejected the apology they received, such as the sincerity of the apology received or modifying their justification for their decision over time. It is possible that after accepting the apology, the individual modified his/her perception of his/her motivation based on the outcome of the transgression on the status of the relationship. That is to say, with the passage

of time and a discontinued, unchanged, or improved relationship, he/she developed a justification for his/her decision that may or may not have accurately described his/her initial decision motivation.

Another significant finding of the present study involved the analyses of the relationship between the four individual sincerity elements of an apology and the decision to accept or reject an apology. These analyses revealed that apologies which contained three of the four individual sincerity elements, specifically: acknowledging the wrong committed, making an effort to atone for the wrong, and accepting responsibility for one's actions, were significantly more likely to be accepted than to be rejected. Interestingly, the 4th element of sincerity, giving assurances that the wrong would not happen again, was not significantly more likely to lead to an apology being accepted. While this finding is contradictory to other studies in the literature, participants in the current study consistently reported assurances regarding future behavior were not a significant factor in determining the perceived level of sincerity in the apologies they received. One possible explanation might be that the individual who was wronged perceived that the apology was "in the moment" and that assurances regarding future behavior were suspect. Some participant responses on the survey indicated such perceptions in that, when asked about receiving assurances that the wrong would not be repeated, they responded "we'll see" or "time will tell."

Analyses further revealed apologies containing the four individual elements of "sincerity" did not lead to significantly higher levels of forgiveness than apologies lacking these individual elements of "sincerity." As previously mentioned in the literature review, additional factors such as the emotional state of the recipient of the apology, body language of the transgressor, or aspects of the delivery of an apology such as tone of voice, may influence a person's decision to

accept or reject an apology. It appears from the results of the study that these factors were likely more influential in determining a person's decision to accept or reject an apology than the four individual elements of a "sincere" apology.

Another hypothesis of the current study examined the relationship between the motivations underlying the participants' decisions to accept the apologies of their transgressors (Internal vs. External) and level of forgiveness of the transgression. It was predicted that decisions to accept an apology based on "internal" motivations would be associated with higher levels of forgiveness than decisions to accept an apology based on "external" motivations. The results failed to provide support for this hypothesis. However, on the basis of a 5-point scale assessing the extent to which the participants had "truly and completely forgiven this person for the wrong he/she committed against me", accepted apologies resulted in fairly high levels of forgiveness regardless of whether the apologies were accepted on the basis of "internal" or "external" motivations. These findings would suggest that the acceptance of an apology would be a more significant indicator of forgiveness than the "internal" or "external" motivation of the individual to accept the apology.

Finally, it was predicted that the highest levels of forgiveness would be reported in those situations where sincere apologies were given to individuals with an "internal" motivation for acceptance. The results, however, failed to reveal a significant interaction between acceptance motivation and apology sincerity. Rather, the results revealed "externally" motivated decisions led to higher levels of forgiveness regardless of whether the apology was sincere or insincere. Therefore, sincere apologies offered to individuals with "internal" motivations for acceptance did not result in the highest levels of forgiveness.

Additional analyses were conducted to identify those factor most strongly associated with achieving a high level of forgiveness for transgression. As expected, accepted apologies were associated with a significantly higher level of forgiveness than apologies that were rejected. It should be noted that of the 41 apologies that were rejected, 40 used "internal" motivations as the basis for rejecting the apology. Only one apology rejection decision was based on an "external" motivation. Thus, it is not surprising that "external" motivations led to greater reported levels of forgiveness, since approximately half of the accepted apologies were reported as being based on "external" motivations.

Higher levels of forgiveness were also associated with the status of the current relationship with one's transgressor and how forgiving a person one perceived himself/herself to be. Higher levels of forgiveness were associated with relationships that had grown closer and stronger since the transgression and with transgressions committed against people who described themselves as more forgiving people. It should be noted, however, that since this analysis was correlational in nature, the direction of this relationship is uncertain. For instance, it may be that people who see themselves as more forgiving are more likely to forgive a transgressor. However, it is also possible that having forgiven a transgressor a person may now come to see himself/herself as a more forgiving person. Further research would be necessary to determine the true direction of this relationship.

Strengths and Limitations of the Present Study

The present study had a number of strengths, such as yielding a wide and diverse range of transgressions described by the participants that are representative of the transgressions that present in therapy situations. This implies that the findings may generalize from an exclusive college student population to a more general clinical population. The most frequently reported

transgressions were being lied to and being betrayed, followed closely by rudeness/meanness, infidelity, insensitivity, false accusation, and having something stolen - transgressions that are also commonly addressed in clinical practice.

The present study also contributes to the current body of research and literature regarding apology and forgiveness. The present study identified three significant findings that have not previously been cited in the literature which included: (1) external motivation for accepting an apology corresponding to higher levels of forgiveness, (2) the individual element of sincerity that involves providing assurances that the transgression will not happen again not being required for the apology to be perceived as sincere, and (3) the possibility that research has underestimated the impact of social aspects of apology such as body language and tone of voice on a victim's perception of the sincerity of an apology.

Additional strengths of the present study were that participants in the Accepted and Rejected Apology groups were equivalent with respect to the types of transgressions they had experienced. The apology groups were also equivalent in terms of numerous characteristics of the transgressions reported, demographic composition (age, sex, and class standing), and with respect to the personality trait of forgiveness. Furthermore, participants provided detailed descriptions of the transgressions they experienced, which allowed for accurate coding of transgressions. Utilizing multiple coders also increased the validity of the findings of the present study by reducing researcher bias.

Some limitations of the present study warrant identification, such as relying exclusively on self-report measures, which requires a retrospective recall of psychological maltreatment on the part of participants. Research has repeatedly shown the potential fallibility of memory for autobiographical events (Linton, 1982; Reisberg, 1997), and in some cases reported in this study

there had been an extensive passage of time since the event. It is also possible that reports based on “memory of the transgression” might be shaped over time by the individual’s decision to accept or reject the apology. Another possible limitation of the present study may be reflected in the researcher’s necessity to exclude 14 surveys from analysis due to missing information. This may indicate the presence of a potential weakness in the study design, format, or instructions associated with the survey instruments used in the present study. Aspects of nonverbal behavior during an apology were also not addressed in the survey utilized in the present study and therefore, the study results could reflect an underestimation of the impact of non-verbal behavior of the transgressor on the perceived sincerity of the apologies received by the participants.

Directions for Future Research

Future studies, if pursued, could focus on further exploration of the present constructs, with a greater focus on the effects of emotion, body language, and other non-verbal behavior during an apology in facilitating forgiveness. Specifically, future studies could focus on the relative contribution (as well as the interactions) of the four individual elements of a "sincere" apology and non-verbal behavior during an apology on the facilitation of forgiveness. Given the lack of results associated with apology sincerity (and the individual elements of "sincerity") found in the present study, it is likely that the non-verbal behaviors that occur during an apology (e.g., emotions, body language) play a more significant role in determinations as to whether an apology is truly "sincere." Of specific interest to researchers as well as clinicians is whether it's more important what is said during an apology, how it is said, or whether there is a combination of language and non-verbal behavior that is required to facilitate apology acceptance and ultimately forgiveness.

Future studies could also address the effect of a decision to accept or reject an apology on the accuracy of memories associated with the transgression and the content of the apology received. Such studies could reveal whether a decision to accept an apology causes individuals to "edit in" individual elements of a "sincere" apology that were not part of the actual apology experience, or whether a decision to reject an apology causes individuals to "edit out" individual elements of a "sincere" apology that were part of the actual apology experience. Such studies would be of further assistance to clinicians seeking to help their clients' process and cope with transgressions in their lives and ultimately achieve a state of forgiveness.

In summary, the present study has shown that, while transgression and its associated pain may be an inevitable aspect of the human experience, forgiveness is as well. The aftermath of transgression is likely to present in a therapy setting in the guise of fractured or strained relationships, depression, anxiety, guilt, withdrawal, or anger. As clinicians, we can better facilitate the forgiveness process by gaining a greater understanding of the mechanisms involved. The current study contributes to a greater understanding of the forgiveness process by identifying the impact that apology sincerity and acceptance motivation have regarding facilitation of the process of forgiveness, which could have significant clinical implications in terms of efforts to design more efficacious interventions to address the aftermath of transgression.

Table 1

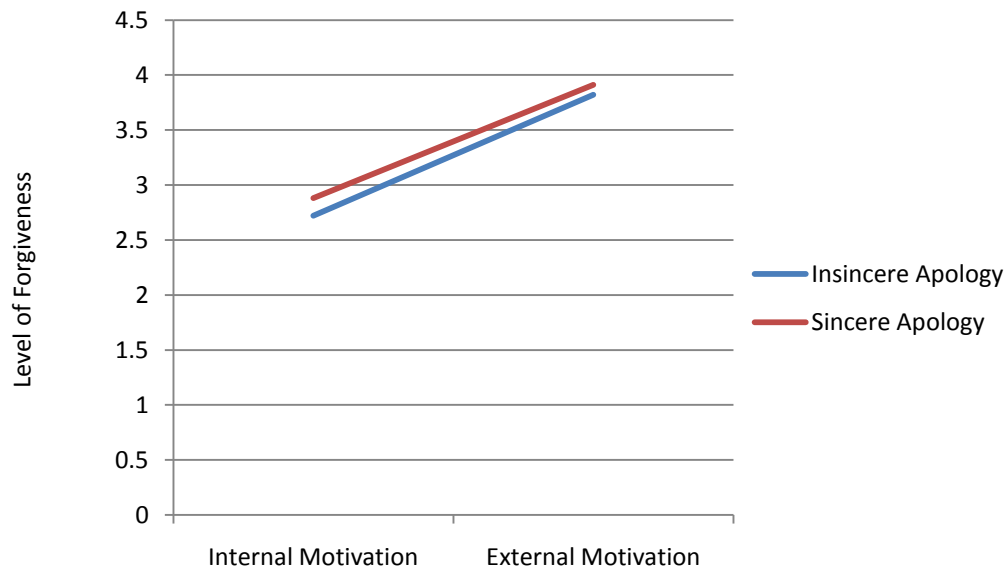
Internal and External Reasons for Apology Acceptance/Rejection Decisions

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
I'm related to them	18	21.2	21.2	21.2
I have to live with them	2	2.4	2.4	23.5
I have to socialize with them	1	1.2	1.2	24.7
I received an ultimatum	1	1.2	1.2	25.9
I believe they were/were not genuinely sorry	35	41.2	41.2	67.1
I can't get over it	8	9.4	9.4	76.5
I can't forgive what they did	6	7.1	7.1	83.5
Accepting an apology is the right thing to do	1	1.2	1.2	84.7
To reduce conflict in my life	6	7.1	7.1	91.8
I believe people deserve a second chance	1	1.2	1.2	92.9
To feel like a forgiving person	2	2.4	2.4	95.3
To have harmony in my relationships	4	4.7	4.7	100.0
Total	85	100.0	100.0	

Table 2

Influence of Acceptance Motivation and Apology Sincerity on Level of Forgiveness

	Internal Motivation	External Motivation
Insincere Apology	2.72 (1.41; $n = 39$)	3.82 (1.33; $n = 11$)
Sincere Apology	2.88 (1.51; $n = 24$)	3.91 (1.22; $n = 11$)



Appendix A

Anonymous Survey Consent Document

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled Evaluations of Apologies: Effects of Apology Sincerity and Acceptance Motivation designed to analyze the effects of apology type and acceptance motivation on forgiveness. The study is being conducted by Dr. Chris LeGrow and Ida Hatcher, M. A. from Marshall University and has been approved by the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research is being conducted as part of the dissertation requirement for Ida Hatcher.

This survey is comprised of a brief, written narrative and 23 questions. It should take you about 16 to 30 minutes to complete. Your replies will be anonymous, so do not type your name anywhere on the form. There are no known risks involved with this study. Participation is completely voluntary and there will be no penalty or loss of benefits if you choose to not participate in this research study or to withdraw. If you choose to not participate you may either return the blank survey or you may discard it. You may choose to not answer any question by simply leaving it blank. Once you complete the survey you can delete your browsing history for added confidentiality. Completing the on-line survey indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply.

If you have any questions about the study or in the event of a research related injury, you may contact Dr. Chris LeGrow at 696-2780, or Ida Hatcher at 696-2782.

If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research participant you may contact the Marshall University Office of Research Integrity at (304) 696-4303.

By completing this survey and returning it you are also confirming that you are 18 years of age or older.

Please print this page for your records.

Appendix B (cont.)

At the time of the incident, how serious did you perceive the wrong committed against you?

Check one

Not at all serious _____ Slightly serious _____ Moderately serious _____
Very serious _____ Extremely serious _____

I have truly and completely forgiven this person for the wrong he/she committed against me.

Strongly disagree _____ Disagree _____ Neither disagree or agree _____
Agree _____ Strongly Agree _____

In general, I could forgive a person almost anything as long as they apologized.

Strongly disagree _____ Disagree _____ Neither disagree or agree _____
Agree _____ Strongly Agree _____

In general, how forgiving a person do you consider yourself to be?

Not at all forgiving _____ Slightly forgiving _____ Neither unforgiving or forgiving _____
Somewhat forgiving _____ Extremely forgiving _____

Why did you choose to not accept this person's apology? (Please provide as much detail as possible) _____

Please indicate your gender. _____ Male _____ Female

Please indicate your current standing.

- _____ Freshman
- _____ Sophomore
- _____ Junior
- _____ Senior

Please indicate your age. You must be over 18 to complete the survey. _____

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