

# Forced versus Voluntary Apologies: Trust Repair as a Matter of Perceived Values

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## Abstract

Apologies are a common response to trust violations, but there are limits to the effectiveness and value of an apology for repairing trust. We develop and test a model in which the effects of forced and voluntary apologies on trust repair are mediated by the overlapping mental representations of key values. We found evidence that a voluntary apology results in higher levels of trust than when an apology is demanded by a trustor. The results further suggest that victims discern the context of the apology and have differing reactions based on why the apology occurred due to their attributions of the cause for the apology. Counter to predictions, trustors high in the tendency for interpersonal victimhood were less likely to demand an apology rather than wait to see if one emerged voluntarily. The trustor's perceived overlap with the offender and the context in which the apology is given may have ramifications on the ability to restore trust following a trust violation.

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Apologies are a customary response following an offense and are often expected due to social norms (Kellerman, 2006). Apologies have been found to be an effective strategy for interpersonal trust repair (Kim et al., 2004; Tomlinson et al., 2004). However, there are limits to the value and effectiveness of an apology (De Cremer et al., 2011). For example, a forced apology removes the opportunity for a natural impression to form from an authentic, intimate communication that is based on sincere feelings of remorse. Forced apologies can be triggered under various circumstances, such as being demanded by a superior, coerced through ostracism from a group, part of mandatory discipline, or exacted by victims themselves. While apologies can also be ordered directly by authority figures and groups or indirectly expected by contextual norms or implicit structures, we focus on those that are demanded by a trustor instead of being allowed to emerge voluntarily. Organizational scholars have found that workplace apologies are often motivated by personal expediency or fear of sanctions (Mu & Bobocel, 2019). When a transgressor is called out on their behavior by the trustor, they may face censure from those around them. Public shaming or exclusion from a group may become the perceived motivation for an offender to apologize rather than actual feelings of remorse. Lewicki and Brinsfield (2017) note in their review of trust repair strategies that the effectiveness of an apology will depend on the perpetrator's sincerity and willingness to take responsibility, which are both at the core of our investigation.

In the context of a workplace trust violation, we develop and test a model in which the effects of forced and voluntary apologies on trust repair are mediated by key perceptions of the offender's moral character. We expect that forced versus voluntary apologies will vary in their effect on subsequent trust. Furthermore, our modeling of these different types of apologies captures alternative ways of thinking about the extent to which justice was served in the wake of a violation

that explains the differential effect of forced versus voluntary apologies.

We invoke Mayer et al. (1995) who defined trust as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (p. 712). However, Hosmer (1995) importantly adds an additional element by suggesting that “trust is the expectation by one [entity] of ethically justifiable behavior – that is, morally correct decisions and actions based upon ethical principles of analysis – on the part of the other [entity] in a joint endeavor or economic exchange” (p. 399). This conceptualization of trust places emphasis on expectations of moral character on behalf of the trustee. This suggests that when a trustor monitors a trustee for ethical behavior, their attention is focused on the influences and causes of conduct rather than simple reliance on the personal relationship (Bluhm, 1987). Thus, focus is drawn to the social mechanisms accounting for relevant behavior. In the wake of a transgression, this distinction may hold implications for interpersonal trust repair, which is “a partial or complete restoration of the willingness to be vulnerable to [another] party following a decline in that willingness” (Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009, p. 87). A forced (as opposed to voluntary) apology may draw attention to the apparent need to enforce standards of conduct and discipline offenders since they failed to voluntarily take action to resolve the conflict, leading to larger questions of the offender’s moral character and dampening the trustor’s willingness to be vulnerable. We conducted an experimental study to probe these issues.

The present research offers several key contributions to the trust repair literature. First, this study examines the distinction between forced and voluntary apologies within practical workplace interactions, extending beyond traditional trust game experiments that have financial incentives serving as the experimental manipulation. Second, our research focuses on the attributions regarding the locus of an apology rather than the types of trust violation (e.g., Kim et al., 2004). Third, we explore how different justice frameworks imply variations in value congruence, assessed through the perception of key values via overlapping mental representations. Finally, we introduce interpersonal victimhood as a novel individual difference of the trustor, highlighting its potential significance in trust research.

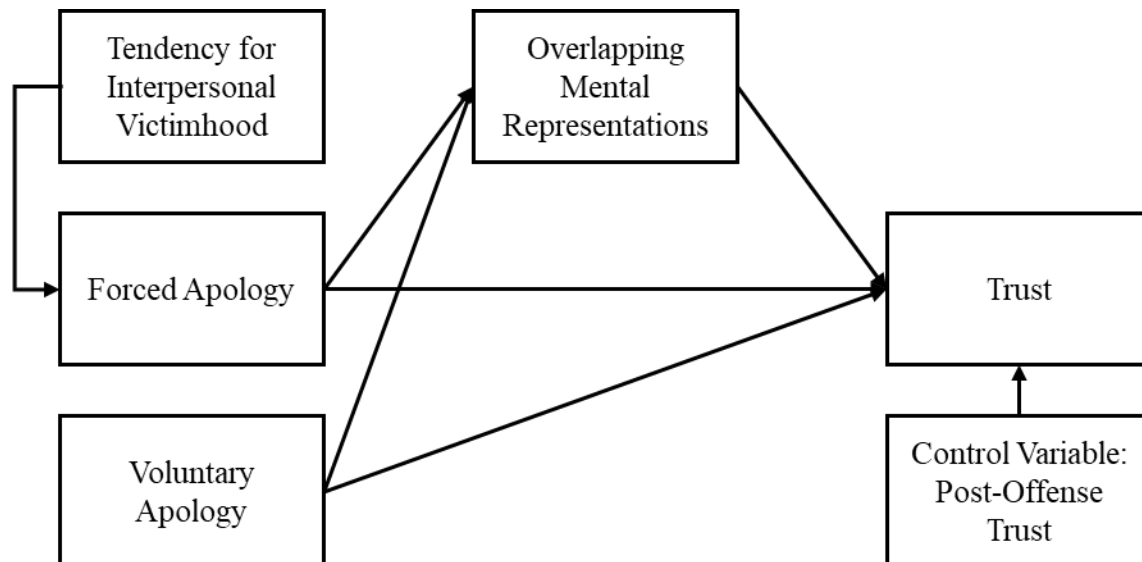
### Literature review

In the aftermath of an offense, it is understandable that apologies would be regarded as “cheap talk,” because mere words come at a low cost for the offender and are difficult for recipients to verify as authentic signals (Farrell & Rabin, 1996). However, a significant body of research attests that apologies are a generally effective tool for repairing damaged trust (e.g., Kim et al., 2004; Lewicki & Polin, 2012; Tomlinson et al., 2004). This body of research understands such speech acts as indeed costly for the speaker (specifically with respect to one’s ego) as it symbolically splits him/herself into two parts: one who has committed unacceptable behavior, and the other who is staunchly committed to desirable behavior (Goffman, 1971). Apologies seek to convey the renouncing of one’s former (unacceptable) self and a re-commitment to desirable behavior in the future. Lewicki and Polin’s (2012) research extracted the key components of apologies that account for their effectiveness, thereby signaling their authenticity: (1) expression of regret for the offense, (2) acknowledgment of responsibility, (3) declaration of repentance, (4) offer of repair, (5) explanation of why the violation occurred, and (6) request for forgiveness. Related work has also emphasized factors such as perceived sincerity and timeliness (Haesevoets et al., 2016; Tomlinson et al., 2004), compatibility with the type of trust violation (Kim et al., 2004), and

extensiveness of the apology that matches the severity of the offense (Ohbuchi et al., 1989).

Despite the volume of research on apologies as a tool to repair broken trust, our reading of this literature highlights several limitations. First, although conceptual work on apologies as they pertain to trust repair suggests a bilateral, dyadic process (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996), the empirical work seems to focus on what apologies seem to indicate about the motives and characteristics of the speaker (such as remorse, repentance, etc.) (De Cremer & Desmet, 2012; Dirks et al., 2011; Lewicki et al., 2016), or the type of trustworthiness deficit that caused the violation (Tomlinson & Mayer, 2009). Similarly, extant work on apologies seems disproportionately aimed at the one giving the apology, like how frequently they apologize (Schumann et al., 2023; Schumann & Ross, 2010) or what wording they should convey in general terms (Lewicki et al., 2016; Lewicki & Polin, 2012) or more specifically based on their gender (Polin et al., 2024). Finally, despite research suggesting that voluntary apologies are superior, instrumental apologies are often used to simply avoid negative outcomes (Yamamoto et al., 2021). In sum, we perceive something of significance that behavioral scientists are missing the opportunity to explain because we are not fully accounting for the trustor's point of view across two common types of apologies (forced versus voluntary). Indeed, trust repair is ultimately decided by the one who granted trust initially, the trustor. Thus, it may be worthwhile to consider how the trustor's relational motives, relational perceptions, and personal characteristics come into play, specifically in terms of how the trustor is likely to re-extend trust after a forced versus voluntary apology.

**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model of Forced Versus Voluntary Apology and Trust Repair



*Note.* This figure demonstrates the proposed effect of TIV on demanded apologies, as well as how perceived similarity (OMR) mediates the relationship between a forced or voluntary apology and trust repair, while controlling for initial post-violation levels of trust.

Accordingly, we begin by drawing from the criminal justice and law literature to discuss two major approaches to justice (restorative and retributive) that we use as a framework to understand forced versus voluntary apologies. That is, we argue that the different relational motives implied by these approaches to justice can be seen as a function of two broad types of apologies: apologies that are offered voluntarily are consistent with a restorative approach, while apologies that are

compelled (or forced) by the trustor reflect a more retributive approach. Next, we argue that these different kinds of apologies affect the trustor's relational perceptions after a trust violation, which accounts for their differential effects on subsequent trust. Finally, we incorporate recent research on personality to consider how the tendency for interpersonal victimhood might prompt one to demand an apology in the aftermath of a violation. Our model is summarized in **Figure 1**.

### Relational Motives: Restorative versus Retributive Justice

Various approaches to justice reflect different philosophies on how wrongs can be righted. *Restorative justice* centers around victims and offenders resolving their own interpersonal issues, allowing for the affected parties to be the ones directly involved in achieving justice (Christie, 1977). It implies that the trustor's relational motive is at least receptive to restoring balance in the relationship via a gift of sorts: a voluntary exchange whereby the offense is willingly offset by elevating the victim (the voluntary apology confers status and respect to the victim) and humbling the offender (the apology signifies self-derogation) (Bottom et al., 2002). Voluntary apologies are initiated by trustees, and as a result, the trustor is more likely to be receptive to (and/or not hostile to) repairing the relationship in a restorative manner.

In contrast, *retributive justice* holds that a transgressor deserves to be punished in direct proportion with the severity of their transgression to reestablish justice, and this punishment is enacted by a force that is not focused on their rehabilitation (Wenzel et al., 2008). It implies that the trustor's relational motive is directed to restoring balance in the relationship via a punishment of sorts: an involuntary exchange whereby the offense is offset by elevating the victim (who claims superior moral status) and humbling the offender (the compelled apology signifies the offender's being put in his/her place). We expect that compelled apologies are initiated by trustors in the absence of a voluntary apology, and the trustor is not receptive to (or is hostile toward) repairing the relationship. The relational motive is to punish, not restore the relationship (and trust) itself.

We believe that voluntary apologies (construed as the offender's attempt to pursue restorative justice) will be more effective in repairing trust than forced apologies (the victim-initiated effort to pursue retributive justice). Since restorative justice involves elective self-censure by the transgressor, it may result in greater satisfaction for the victim than retributive justice (Latimer et al., 2005; Sherman et al., 2005). Emotional restoration is highly valued by victims, which retributive justice does not typically offer (Strang, 2002). As noted above, volitional reparative efforts by the offender are consistent with a restorative justice approach, and prior trust research suggests that such efforts lead to greater repair. Lewicki and Bunker (1996) stress the importance of the offender taking the initiative to repair broken trust to keep the victim from being re-victimized from not only having to endure the violation, but also the added discomfort of raising the issue with the offender.

Forced apologies (emanating from a retributive justice approach whereby the victim imposes it on the offender as punishment) suggest less remorse and guilt from the offender, hold less value for resolving conflicts (Saulnier & Sivasubramaniam, 2015), and are generally considered empty gestures (Opt, 2013). Most importantly, the fact that the apology was forced or compelled by the victim suggests that retribution is a more salient goal than relationship (and trust) restoration. Thus, we expect that victims who receive a forced apology will have lower levels of subsequent trust in the offender than victims who receive a voluntary apology. Therefore, we expect that:

**H1.** Forced apologies will result in lower levels of trust repair than voluntary apologies.

## Relational Perceptions: Overlapping Mental Representations

In the previous section, we drew from work on restorative versus retributive justice as a framework to understand how voluntary versus forced apologies are likely to evoke different relational motives, such that victims will be more likely to restore some level of trust after the former than the latter. In this section, we describe the hypothesized mechanism of this effect. The trust literature has repeatedly discussed shared values between trustor and trustee as important to trust (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995, 1996; Mayer et al., 1995; Sitkin & Roth, 1993; Tomlinson et al., 2014), and we predict that voluntary apologies are more likely to positively influence overlapping mental representations (OMR). OMRs consider the perceived overlap an individual has with a referent across multiple attributes (Myers & Hodges, 2012), and provide a sense of the victim's perceived values congruence with the trustor. As opposed to ability and behavioral integrity, values congruence is more central to the *relationship* between trustor and trustee (as opposed to being merely a perceived characteristic of the trustee) yet is rarely studied in empirical trust research. We posit that this perceived similarity will mediate the relationship between a forced or voluntary apology and trust repair, as depicted in **Figure 1**. The perceived interpersonal match of attributes such as honesty, sincerity, empathy, respectfulness, and capability will lead a victim to see the offender as similar or disparate in likeness. We chose these ethical values that are core to trustworthiness to integrate with OMR and the definitions of trust central to this study.

The construct of self-other overlap has experienced a proliferation of names and measurements, including self-other merging, perceived similarity, and perceived closeness. Aron et al. (1991, 1992) considered this construct within close interpersonal relationships such as spouses while others like Batson et al. (1997) and Goldstein and Cialdini (2007) incorporated it into a variety of relationships. However, collectively this research suggests that self-other overlap predicts positive attitudes, such as relationship satisfaction, stronger commitment, and less relationship dissolution (Myers & Hodges, 2012). Drawing on restorative justice theory in which both the trustor's and the trustee's responses are driven by their pro-social motivations, we suggest that individuals are more likely to increase trust in others that they view like themselves. In the context of a trust violation, a victim may feel very distinct and different from the offender where it drives a wedge between the two parties. A voluntary apology should induce somewhat stronger thoughts and feelings of closeness since the offender is actively and volitionally seeking to restore relational balance. This is expected insofar as the apology is taken as more than evidence of the trustee's reformed character: it further signals (in the apology act itself) that there is a degree of values congruence between trustor and trustee, such that the trustor can perceive high commonality with the apologizer. Thus, overlapping mental representations blur the lines of self and other, developing an understanding and increased willingness to restore the relationship. Alternatively, a forced apology suggests the offender's avoidance and the victim's coercion, which may indicate to the victim that the offender subscribes to an alternative moral code. The victim's (trustor's) judgment has been passed that the offender (former trustee) does not share the same values. In sum, we predict that voluntary apologies will lead to greater OMR while forced apologies will lower self-other overlap, and that the degree of OMR will predict subsequent trust.

**H2a.** Forced apologies will indirectly influence trust repair through overlapping mental representations.

**H2b.** Voluntary apologies will indirectly influence trust repair through overlapping mental representations.

## Individual Characteristics: Tendency for Interpersonal Victimhood

In this study, we also wanted to explore the possible role of trustor individual differences. Individuals differ across a variety of well-established personality traits, but Gabay et al. (2020) recently introduced the tendency for interpersonal victimhood (TIV). This is generally defined as a perpetual feeling of being a victim. Across multiple studies Gabay et al. (2020) found that higher TIV is associated with a lack of motivation to forgive, negative attributions of others, and a desire for revenge. TIV has four dimensions which include a need for recognition of victimhood, moral elitism, lack of empathy, and rumination. These elements are based on attachment theory, where anxiously attached individuals have a higher need for constant validation. Individuals high in TIV experienced more intense negative emotions, and this even led to behaviors such as withholding money in a cooperative game. In the context of influencing trust, we suggest that individuals high in TIV will be more likely to demand an apology driven by their need to receive recognition of their victimhood. Drawing on retributive justice (where external pressure is the motivating factor for action), forcing an apology is not motivated by the desire to restore the relationship but rather to validate the victim and punish the offender.

**H3.** The tendency for interpersonal victimhood will predict the demand for an apology.

## Method

The purpose of this study was multifaceted. First, we sought to test H1, that forced apologies will result in lower levels of victims' trust than voluntary apologies. Second, we sought to develop a model that explains the path to trust following a forced or voluntary apology. Third, instead of manipulating a forced apology as in the trust studies by Desmet et al. (2010, 2011), we measured demand by offering participants an actual choice to demand an apology or wait for a response.

## Sampling

Management students across multiple courses at a large southeastern state university were asked to recruit potential participants to engage in a two-part survey for nominal course credit. Students submitted the name of the employing organization and the email address of their full-time working recruit. The research team directly submitted links to potential participants via email, so at no time did the students access the study links (Frazier et al., 2013). To incentivize participation, a drawing to win one of three \$100 gifts cards was offered for participants that completed both surveys. In total, 280 invitations to participate were sent out. Two hundred thirty-six participants completed part 1 survey (84% response rate) and 184 completed part 2 (66% response rate). Ultimately, 156 surveys were perfectly matched, and all cases were retained for analysis. Females made up 55% of the sample and the average age was 41. The racial make-up was 86% White, 5% Hispanic, 4% Black, and 4% Asian. Many industries were represented with the largest majority being in healthcare or social assistance (22%) and professional, scientific, or technical services (12%).

Part 1 of the survey asked participants to respond to measures about themselves, including demographics, personal attribute ratings, and the TIV scale. It concluded with a scenario prompt that introduced an ability-based violation adapted from Mayer & Norman (2004). We chose a transgression related to competence since other trust repair studies have found trust repair efforts tend to be more effective than other dimensions of trustworthiness (Ferrin et al., 2007; Kim et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2004) A video-vignette was recorded in Zoom to provide a realistic depiction of

an ostensible coworker that fails to complete an important assignment. Part 1 concluded with a measure of violated trust. Part 2 was sent to participants a few days later and reminded them about the prior scenario. Participants were then offered a choice to either demand an apology or wait to see what would happen. Participants were randomly assigned to an apology or no response condition. Part 2 concluded with a specific attribute rating of the offender and the second measurement of trust. Additional details regarding the vignette scripts are provided in **Table 1**.

**Table 1** Overview of the vignette scripts

Scenarios	Script
Instructions	<i>Please read the following scenario and try to imagine yourself in the situation as it is described.</i>
<b>Part 1</b>	
Ability-based violation set-up	You have been doing some online work on the side managing virtual team projects. One of your colleagues named J.B. really likes you and bends over backwards to help you out whenever possible. All his peers seem to like him and believe he's fair. On paper, J.B. is qualified, but you have some serious doubts about his skills. J.B. has a degree from a well-respected university and has been in the current position for over a year. During that time, you have found some very surprising mistakes. When you have tried to explain these things, J.B. claims to understand. However, J.B.'s work doesn't seem to show it.
Violation	Today you have a zoom call with J.B. for him to give you a report that you need to complete your own important assignment that is due in less than 24 hours. Missing the deadline will result in you not getting paid and also not receiving future assignments. <i>J.B. is on video in a Zoom window offering the following explanation: "Hey, I know I promised to get the report you needed by now, but I don't have it. I really meant to update you earlier, but I forgot, and I guessed that by now that you had probably figured something else out. I just didn't understand how to do it and no matter how hard I tried I couldn't finish."</i>
<b>Part 2</b>	
Reminder	Your teammate J.B. recently failed to submit a report to you at the last minute and it led to you not getting paid for the work you had done for the client. You also worry that the damage to your reputation will lead to this client and others choosing to do work with other providers.
Victim Choice	Please select one of the following options regarding how you would like to proceed: "Demand J.B. apologize" or "Wait and see what happens"
<b>Randomized conditions:</b>	
No response	You still have not heard anything back from J.B. since your last Zoom call when he failed to deliver on his part of the project.
Apology	"I'm sorry! I have a hard time learning brand new processes like that, but it was my fault for being late. I can try and take the blame, so it doesn't make you look bad. I hope you can forgive me though, I won't surprise you by failing like that again."

## Measures

The tendency for interpersonal victimhood was measured using the validated 22-item scale from Gabay et al. (2020) using a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Overlapping mental representations were measured using the absolute difference in ratings across five focal attributes: honesty, sincerity, empathy, respectfulness, and capability. Research on overlapping mental representations uses key words or concepts of interest that can uncover (dis)similarities that exist between individuals. The extant research uses words that are related to focal concepts in the study (Loehlin & Nichols, 1976; Batson et al., 1997; Myers & Hodges, 2012). Our selection of values such as honesty, sincerity, empathy, respectfulness, and capability (the commitment to perform effectively) were selected based on their particular relevance to trust and apologies. To follow best practices, these ratings (0-10) were collected at separate times and capture perceived self-other overlap across the specific attributes of interest. In part one of the experiment, participants rated themselves across our five focal terms before receiving the scenario. In part two, several days later, participants were asked to rate the offender. The values were reverse scored so that lower numbers represented closer overlap. Finally, trust was measured at time 1 and time 2 using four items from Mayer and Davis (1999) on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The trust items were mildly adapted to change the referent to the individual in the video-vignette.

## Results

### Transparency and Openness

To support the promotion of transparency and openness, we report our sample size, data review, all manipulations, and all measures in the study. Data were analyzed using SPSS PROCESS model 4 following Hayes and Preacher (2014) mediation analysis for multicategorical independent variables. Data, analysis code, and research materials are available upon request. This study's design and its analysis were not pre-registered.

**Table 2** Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. TIV	3.05	.62					
2. Demand	.52	.50	-.17*				
3. Experimental Conditions	.77	.82	-.02	-.29**			
4. OMR	5.21	2.40	-.03	-.07	.40**		
5. Trust <sub>T1</sub>	2.34	.91	-.02	-.01	-.09	.05	
6. Trust <sub>T2</sub>	2.18	.92	.02	-.23**	.13	.38	-.08

*Note.* N = 156. \* $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ . Experimental conditions were coded with demanded apology dummy coded as 0 = no, 1 = yes. OMR = overlapping mental representations. T1 = Time 1 (first survey) T2 = Time 2 (second survey).

## Study results

The correlations and descriptive statistics are provided in **Table 2**. An independent-samples *t*-test was conducted to compare whether the main effect of forced versus voluntary apologies would alter the victims' level of trust in the offender. Participants that waited and then received a voluntary apology were compared to participants that demanded an apology and then received one. Results supported Hypothesis 1 in that the forced apology ( $M = 2.02$ ,  $SD = .82$ ) resulted in a significantly lower level of trust (post reparative effort) than the voluntary apology ( $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 1.01$ ), ( $F(1,80) = 3.54$ ,  $d = -0.48$ ,  $p < .05$ ), while controlling for the post-violation level of trust.

**Table 3** OLS Regression Coefficients and Indirect Effects

Regression Model	B	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
<i>Outcome: Overlapping Mental Representations (OMR)</i>						
$F(3, 152) = 11.30, p < .001, R^2 = .18$						
Constant	3.61	.53	6.76	<.001	2.5557	4.6663
Forced	1.83	.42	4.40	<.001	1.0125	2.6626
Voluntary	2.23	.44	1.19	<.001	1.3612	3.0941
Trust	.23	.19	1.19	.238	-.1532	.6123
<i>Outcome: Trust (TR)</i>						
$F(4, 151) = 8.89, p < .001, R^2 = .19$						
Constant	1.71	.23	7.37	<.001	1.2534	2.1704
Forced	-.41	.17	-2.43	.05	-.7437	-.0761
Voluntary	-.04	.18	-.22	.82	-.3982	.3160
OMR	.16	.03	5.32	<0.001	.1032	.2253
Trust <sub>T1</sub>	-.11	.07	-1.53	.12	-.2600	.0330
<i>Bootstrapped Direct and Indirect Effects</i>						
Forced → TR	-.41	.17			-.7437	-.0761
Voluntary → TR	-.04	.18			-.3982	.3160
Forced → OMR → TR	.30	.09			.1436	.4888
Voluntary → OMR → TR	.37	.10			.1878	.5824

*Note.* Coefficients are unstandardized (B). Statistics generated using PROCESS in SPSS with 5,000 bootstrapped samples and 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (Cis). Lower and upper-level confidence intervals (LLCI; ULCI) do not include zero and thus indicate significant mediation. Coefficients and indirect effects shown represent unique variance accounted for by individual variables and indirect paths (i.e., while simultaneously controlling for other effects in the model). SE = standard error.

We tested our mediation model using PROCESS model 4 following Hayes and Preacher (2014) mediation analysis for multicategorical independent variables. We also incorporated Preacher and Hayes' (2004) non-parametric bootstrapping method, which is recommended for small sample sizes. We used indicator coding to examine the effect of a forced apology and voluntary apology when compared to a reference group of no response following the offense. Model results for the forced apology to trust suggest mediation by overlapping mental representations (indirect effect: .30,  $SE = .09$ , 95% CI [.1436, .4888]), indicating empirical support for hypothesis 2a. In addition, the relationship between voluntary apology and trust was also mediated by overlapping

mental models (indirect effect: .37, SE = .10, 95% CI [.1878, .5824]). In accordance with our prediction, voluntary apologies led to higher levels of overlapping mental representations ( $b = 1.83$ ,  $p < .001$ ) while forced apologies had lower levels of overlapping mental representations ( $b = 2.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Hypothesis 2b is supported. Full model results are available in **Table 3**.

A logistic regression was conducted to determine if the tendency for interpersonal victimhood predicted the likelihood that victims would demand an apology or not following an offense. The results of the logistic regression were statistically significant  $\chi^2(1) = 4.36$ ,  $p < .01$ . The variance in victim's choice of demanding an apology predicted by the model ranges from 2.8% to 3.7% based on the Cox and Snell  $R^2$  or Nagelkerke  $R^2$ , respectively. Percentage accuracy in classification was 57.1% of cases. Sensitivity was 66.7%, which is the percentage of cases in which demanding was observed and correctly predicted by the model. Specificity was 46.7%, which is the percentage of cases in which demanding was not observed and was correctly predicted by the model. The positive predictive value was 84.38% and the negative predictive value was 77.78%. The tendency for interpersonal victimhood was statistically significant ( $b = -.55$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, an increase in one point on the tendency for interpersonal victimhood scale decreased the victim's log odds of demanding an apology by -.55. This evidence suggests that individuals higher in TIV have decreased odds for demanding an apology. This result is surprising, and counter to our prediction, leaving Hypothesis 3 not supported.

## General Discussion

These findings provide evidence that individuals discern and have differing reactions based on the whether the locus of an apology is forced or voluntary. This research provides support for our hypotheses that apologies perceived as forced, rather than voluntary, will evoke different reactions in the victim, which ultimately affects the level of trust. This study also provides evidence that overlapping mental representations in regards to shared values mediates the relationship between forced or voluntary apologies and trust repair. Interestingly, we found surprising evidence that higher tendency for interpersonal victimhood has a negative relationship with the log odds of demanding an apology or not. This may be due to an individual high in TIV having an external locus of control, leaving one without any perceived power to demand an apology. Additionally, since identification as a victim is central to their identity, victims of trust violations may not actively seek a solution to the grievance in order for them to stay a victim.

## Theoretical Implications

There are several contributions from the present research. First, this research investigates forced versus voluntary apologies in a novel way. Prior studies, such as the work of Desmet et al. (2010, 2011) use a trust game to create deceptions related to financial compensations, where intentionality is part of the focus and a third party is involved in evoking the apology. Other work in this area has been conducted in the context of legal disputes, which again involve third parties beyond the trustor and the trustee. Our study created a realistic scenario in which we accounted for time, by conducting the experiment with days in between two surveys. It also allowed us to focus on the perspective of the trustor by allowing them to make the decision to wait for an apology or demand one and explore their perceptions of their own values in relation to the perpetrators.

Second, while the majority of trust repair research has focused on different types of trust violations, namely competence-based versus integrity-based (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2017), our

focus is on the perceived cause of the reparative effort. Considering the locus of the apology (i.e., coming volitionally from the trustee or demanded by the trustor) speaks to the trustee's larger character and motivation for trust repair in the relationship and also factors in the trustor's perspective. While other research in this area has looked at attributions in regard to the cause of the violation (Tomlinson et al., 2020), the present study considers attributions about why the apology occurs and what it means regarding the trustee's trustworthiness. This examines the context, rather than the content, of an apology. Thus, the perceptions surrounding the context of a reparative effort may be just as important as the reparative effort itself.

Third, we investigate how retributive and restorative justice may respectively infer differences in values congruence. We collected the trustor's perceptions of specific values of interest regarding the trustee's trustworthiness and used overlapping mental representations to show how trustor's perceptions of similarity with the violator will influence their willingness to trust in them again. This study provides evidence that the perceived overlap in attributes serves an important function in the trust process.

Fourth, we incorporate the tendency for interpersonal victimhood, a novel individual difference variable that has relevance to trust. The results were surprising, insofar as the evidence suggests that individuals high in TIV were actually less likely to demand an apology. Individuals with a high TIV may perceive external forces as controlling their circumstances, which can lead to a sense of powerlessness in seeking an apology. Rather than feeling empowered to address the wrongdoing, they may view themselves as lacking the agency to demand reparative action. Additionally, because the identity of being a victim is central to their self-concept, they may be less motivated to pursue resolution, as doing so could diminish the validation they derive from their victim status. As a result, they might unconsciously resist efforts to repair trust, preferring to maintain the narrative of being wronged rather than seeking closure.

Finally, this research integrates restorative and retributive justice with interpersonal trust. While these theories have primarily been used in the domains of criminal justice and law, they offer important insights into workplace conflict management. As evidenced by the present study, an apology may not promote positive reactions from the offender and may not be perceived as a true signal of justice or warrant restoring any meaningful level of trust in the offender. The inclusion of these theories adds to the conversation on trust by suggesting that legalistic forms of justice in interpersonal trust violations may prove ineffective in promoting interpersonal trust, and instead how relational similarity, engagement, and investment are needed. Lee (2005) proposed in a criminal justice context that apologies should have three key components to be effective: voluntary, timely, and sincere. There is evidence that a negotiated apology may hold similar value to a spontaneous apology, assuming that responsibility for the offense is fully accepted and declared (Robbennolt, 2013). However, interpersonal apologies that are seemingly forced still call into question if the offender would have volitionally offered an apology, whether they would have apologized had they not been caught, and whether they are truly sincere. Thus, the differences between these forced and voluntary interactions are comparable to differences studied across social and transactional exchanges between individuals. Brokered transactions that are meant to limit risk and maximize the economic benefit of each party may instead hinder trust, instead of one party being able to provide evidence of their trustworthiness through social exchange (Blau, 1964; Molm, Takahashi, & Peterson, 2000). Our research uses retributive and restorative justice as an overarching framework to inform our understanding of how trustors and trustees may respond differently following a trust violation.

## Practical Implications

This research offers practical implications for workplace relationships. Perceived sincerity matters and trustees guilty of violating trust should voluntarily and quickly apologize to help signal genuine remorse and responsibility. The context of the apology is important, perhaps more than the content itself, and why an apology occurs is a matter of significance to the victim. Simply demanding apologies after trust violations may not be an effective approach to trust repair. Instead, creating psychological safety and an expectation for honesty may be important factors for encouraging voluntary apologies. Since personal values and perceived similarity influence the trust repair process, it's important that trustees signal their character to pursue trust repair out of care for the trustor and as an investment in the restoration of the relationship.

Trustors who demand an apology often seek a sense of justice. In moments of emotional intensity, they may not consciously reflect on how a compelled apology impacts trust or they may simply be indifferent to its effect once received. This dynamic is crucial for both trustors and trustees to recognize and understand. An offender seeking to take responsibility and make amends will likely voluntarily apologize. However, if an apology is not forthcoming from the trustee, a victim may be better off merely seeking out answers about the situation or simply expressing their experience rather than demanding an apology.

## Limitations and Future Research

While the experiment conducted in this study was pre-tested to ensure internal validity, the present research is still inherently limited by internal validity, which affects causal inference, and external validity, which constrains generalizability. Future research should consider other experimental designs that may more accurately capture the differences between forced and voluntary apologies. To address external validity concerns, future research may consider using the critical incident technique to elicit salient real-life experiences from participants. The narrative details may provide unique qualitative data leading to a better understanding of the variables that may transmit or even change the nature of the relationship between forced and voluntary apologies as well as different forms of justice. Another limitation is that we do not investigate apologies that are demanded by third parties or cultural norms, which provides an opportunity for future research to consider.

In addition, this study was limited by sample size. However, we utilized bootstrapping which is encouraged for modest samples. Nevertheless, the study results should be interpreted with caution and future research should incorporate a larger sample size and utilize structural equation modeling to provide more detailed analysis of each measure.

Future research should consider how individuals high in tendency for interpersonal victimhood may respond differently to various trust repair strategies. It may also be meaningful to investigate the long-term effects for an individual with high TIV on workplace relationships and whether they experience more perceived trust violations.

## Conclusion

Apologies can be very helpful in resolving conflicts and restoring interpersonal trust. However, not all apologies have a positive effect. We found that individual victims may respond differently to the same trust violation. They may also differ in their willingness to trust depending on whether

they receive a forced or voluntary apology. We also found evidence that that the victim's perceived overlap with the offender may have ramifications on the ability to restore trust in the affected relationship. While this research provides initial findings for what mediates the relationship between apologies and trust, scholars should seek to further untangle the precise differences between the nature and consequences of forced and voluntary apologies.

### Author Note

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