

Impediments to Forgiveness: Victim and Transgressor Attributions of Intent and Guilt

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We investigate the possibility that victims and transgressors are predictably miscalibrated in their interpretation of a transgression, and that this has important implications for the process of forgiveness. Across 5 studies, we find that victims underestimate how much transgressors desire forgiveness. This is driven by a 2-part mediating mechanism: First, victims are more likely than transgressors to see the transgression as intentional, and second, this causes victims to believe transgressors feel less guilty than transgressors report feeling. Ultimately, this chain of asymmetries stymies the processes of forgiveness because victims tend to withhold forgiveness from those who actually desire it. The predicted effect emerged in the context of scenario studies (Studies 3 and 5), a real transgression that occurred in the lab (Study 4), transgressions from participants' pasts (Study 1), and transgressions from the same day (Study 2). In Study 4, we describe a new procedure in which 1 participant commits a real transgression against another participant, providing an effective means for researchers to study real-time transgressions from the perspective of both parties involved. Furthermore, in Study 5, we found that when victims were encouraged to empathize with the transgressor, the asymmetries were attenuated, suggesting a means of overcoming this impediment to forgiveness.

Keywords: forgiveness, guilt, transgression, intent, empathy

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When Tom Tate and five of his fellow Royal Air Force (RAF) crew bailed out of a burning aircraft over Germany in 1945, they couldn't have known how unfortunate the location was. An RAF bombing campaign had recently killed a quarter of Pforzheim's 72,000 inhabitants. People were looking for revenge. That night, a commandant of the Hitler Youth directed a group of his members to execute the captured crew. Egged on by an angry mob, the group carried out their orders. Only Mr. Tate managed to escape by running off at an opportune moment; he was later captured by German soldiers and spent the rest of the war as a prisoner. For the next 50 years, Mr. Tate's anger about what had happened in Pforzheim was so great that he swore he would never return to the country that had transgressed against him.

But in 1995, he did return. By chance, Mr. Tate was reading about a golf vacation in a magazine and came across an article about Pforzheim. He read about an annual commemorative ceremony that took place at a cathedral where a plaque reading "Father Forgive" listed the names of the airmen who had been killed. The ceremony was a way for the townspeople to seek forgiveness for the war crime. He read that even one of the Hitler Youth members who had been responsible for the killing had attended the first

ceremony, seeking some form of forgiveness. Eventually, Mr. Tate decided to visit. Of his trip, he said,

Guilt had hung over the village for years, but by going there it somehow changed things for them. I was so welcomed, and so well looked after, that suddenly I realized I'd made a mistake. I wish that I'd gone to Germany earlier to relieve these people of their guilt. When someone comes with arms open to embrace you, you can't feel enmity any more. The act of friendship invites forgiveness. (Tate, 2010)

This story communicates much about the cycle of transgression and repair, and the critical role of forgiveness. One feature we want to highlight, however, is the discrepancy between the beliefs that Mr. Tate held about the people of Pforzheim before his visit and the Pforzheim residents' actual experience. As a victim, Mr. Tate underestimated his transgressors' desire for forgiveness, and this miscalibration left the relationship unrepaired for many years. We propose that such miscalibration is not unique to this story, but is instead a fundamental feature of transgressions, rooted in the different roles that victims and transgressors inhabit. In Mr. Tate's case, the miscalibration was rectified by his chance viewing of a magazine article. But what if, as so often happens after a transgression, the victim had avoided the transgressor (Barnes, Brown, & Osterman, 2009; McCullough et al., 1998) and never learned of his or her desire to be forgiven? In such cases, the fact that victims underestimate transgressors' desires for forgiveness would mean that many relationships that could be repaired by forgiveness are instead left damaged.

In the current research, we develop a theoretical rationale for why victims reliably underestimate transgressors' desires for for-

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giveness. Drawing on the actor–observer bias literature, we propose that victims are more likely than transgressors to see the act as intentional, which then translates into asymmetric perceptions of how guilty the transgressor feels, and ultimately to victims ascribing lower desires for forgiveness than transgressors report wanting. In the following sections, we first situate our core prediction within the broader forgiveness literature. We then outline the mechanisms of intent and guilt that we propose give rise to this miscalibration effect. Finally, we introduce a moderator—empathy—that may serve to attenuate the miscalibration.

Asymmetries in Forgiveness

Forgiveness has been identified as one of the most effective means of repairing relationships after a transgression. Whereas a transgression creates a debt that the transgressor owes to the victim, forgiveness communicates the victim's willingness to forgo that debt and repair the relationship (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004). Forgiveness has been shown to have beneficial effects on relationships: Transgressors are more likely to repent and comply with favor requests from victims (Kelln & Ellard, 1999; Struthers, Eaton, Shirvani, Georgiou, & Edell, 2008; Wallace, Exline, & Baumeister, 2008). Moreover, victims show improved mental and physical health (e.g., Hannon, Finkel, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2012; Toussaint & Webb, 2005). Indeed, perhaps because of these benefits, much research has been devoted to shedding light on when forgiveness is more or less likely to be offered. By and large, this line of research focuses on the victim's psychology. For example, in their meta-analysis of the extant research, Fehr and colleagues (2010) proposed and tested three drivers of forgiveness: cognition (what the victim thinks about the transgressor and transgression), affect (how the victim feels after the transgression), and situational constraints (how embedded the victim is in the relationship with the transgressor).

Although this research provides valuable insights, focusing on the victim's role in the process of forgiveness only communicates part of the story. Our research takes a broader, more interactional perspective. Rather than asking *when* victims forgive, we investigate whether victims and transgressors are *calibrated* in the psychological processes leading up to forgiveness. In an ideal world, victims would offer forgiveness to those who desire it, rather than offering it to transgressors who do not want it, or withholding it from transgressors who desire it. Recent findings suggest that one type of miscalibration—victims who overestimate how much transgressors want forgiveness—can cause damage to the relationship (Adams, Zou, Inesi, & Pillutla, 2015). In the current research, we explore the psychology underlying the opposite miscalibration: victims who underestimate how much transgressors desire forgiveness. By looking into victims' and transgressors' psychological representations of transgressions, we can obtain some sense of whether forgiveness is being offered in the right circumstances.

To test for victim–transgressor calibration, we look at both victims' and transgressors' beliefs about transgressors' desires for forgiveness. We ask: Are victims correct in their beliefs about transgressors' desires? Recent research suggests that victims' beliefs about how much transgressors want forgiveness is a strong predictor of their intention to express forgiveness (Adams & Inesi, 2016). Therefore, by understanding both perspectives, we can

begin to understand whether victims offer forgiveness to those who want it, or if there is a fundamental inefficiency in the system.

In the current research, we test the proposition that victims reliably underestimate how much transgressors desire forgiveness, and that this miscalibration is rooted in the role that each party plays and the asymmetric attributions generated by these roles. We explore these attributions in the next section.

Mechanisms

Asymmetric Perceptions of Intentionality

In the context of a transgression, victims and transgressors inhabit different social roles: Transgressors commit the violation and victims experience it. These roles in many ways echo those described in the actor–observer bias literature, which suggests that—through their different roles and perspectives—actors and observers generate predictably different attributions for actors' behavior. Specifically, observers are more likely to attribute actors' behavior to dispositional factors than the actors themselves are (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). The actor–observer asymmetry has been explained by the different information available to each party when making sense of the actor's behavior (Kelley, 1967) and the different ways that information is processed (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). For example, behaviors and actions are more salient to observers than actors, whereas environmental triggers are more salient to actors. Thus, observers are more likely to make internal attributions to actors (*vis-à-vis* the environment), whereas actors tend to attribute their behaviors to the situation. This asymmetry has been shown in a wide variety of contexts, from the types of language used in romantic relationships (Fiedler, Semin, Finke-nauer, & Berkel, 1995) to descriptions of own versus friends' choices of college majors (Nisbett, Caputo, Legant, & Marecek, 1973). Furthermore, although a recent meta-analysis found little support for a difference between actors' and observers' attributions for positive actions, the effect was robust for negative actions (Malle, 2006), which we examine in the current research.

We propose that the actor–observer asymmetry has important implications in the context of transgressions. Specifically, the attributional biases that emerge between actors and observers will also emerge in the context of interpersonal transgressors. In fact, the bias may be particularly pronounced because victims are active observers (i.e., involved in the focal action) rather than passive observers (i.e., not part of the actor's situation). Jones and Nisbett (1971) theorized that the tendency for observers to make dispositional attributions is stronger for active observers than for passive observers because active observers must respond to the situation and are therefore under time pressure. Supporting our prediction about these role-based biases emerging in the context of interpersonal transgressions, Chaikin and Darley (1973) found that participants who took the victim's role in a scenario generated different (and more dispositional) attributions for the transgression compared to participants who took the transgressor's role.

In sum, victims should be more likely to attribute the transgression to dispositional factors. More specifically, we predict that victims will be more likely than transgressors to see the transgression as intentional (i.e., believe that the transgression was caused by the transgressor's desire, belief, intention, awareness, and ability to transgress; Kearns & Fincham, 2004; Malle & Knobe, 1997).

Our prediction assumes that the transgressor's actual intention to transgress is not known to the victim, who must engage in a sense-making process. Although research has tended to study interpersonal transgressions as if the transgressor's intentions were fully known and transparent to the victim (e.g., [Struthers, Eaton, Santelli, Uchiyama, & Shirvani, 2008](#)), such transparency is not the case for most real transgressions. In reality, victims must deduce transgressors' intentions using the attributional processes described above. Thus, to develop our theory and predictions, we focus our inquiry on transgressions where intentionality is not fully transparent, which we believe represent the majority of real-world interpersonal transgressions.

At the same time, our predicted asymmetry in attributions of intent should be smaller when transgressions are completely intentional. Indeed, Malle and colleagues propose that asymmetries in person-situation attributions do not emerge when an actor's behavior is perceived as completely intentional (e.g., "She went to the café" or "By choice, Ian worked 14 hours a day last month"; [Malle, Knobe, & Nelson, 2007](#)). Logically, if a transgressor already reports his or her actions as totally intentional, then there is no room for a victim to overestimate his or her intentionality.

Asymmetric Perceptions of Transgressor Guilt

Thus far, we have discussed how the different roles that victims and transgressors inhabit lead to asymmetric attributions in transgressor intent. How would this ultimately result in victims underestimating transgressors' desires for forgiveness? We believe that asymmetric perceptions of transgressor guilt play a critical mediating role.

Guilt is a frequently studied moral emotion that arises in response to transgressions. It has been defined as an aversive emotional state resulting from a negative outcome (e.g., a transgression or wrongdoing) for which one feels responsible and includes the perception that one has breached one's personal standards or violated a norm ([McGraw, 1987](#); [Roseman, 1984](#); [Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996](#); [Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007](#); [Wiltermuth & Cohen, 2014](#)). The literature on guilt ([Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011](#)) suggests that it is an emotion that arises from one's behavior ("I did a bad thing"). In contrast, shame, a related self-conscious emotion, arises from more global attributions about the self ("I'm a bad person"). Moreover, whereas guilt is associated with the motivation to repair relationships following transgressions, shame is associated with withdrawal from relationships ([Tangney, 1991](#)). Therefore, because of our primary interest in the psychological processes leading up to forgiveness, we investigated guilt as the mechanism leading to increased desires to address the transgression and repair the relationship.

Prior research has shown that transgressor guilt is directly linked to intentionality. Specifically, the more intentional a transgression, the less guilt the transgressor experiences ([Leunissen, DeCremer, Folmer, & van Dijke, 2013](#); [McGraw, 1987](#)). This may be because transgressors who intend to cause harm see their actions as justifiable and therefore do not perceive themselves to have breached a moral standard or norm ([McGraw, 1987](#)). The notion that transgressors who intend to cause harm subsequently experience less guilt is also shared by victims. In two studies using both recalled

real transgressions and hypothetical transgressions, participants who were randomly assigned to perpetrator and victim roles reported that the perpetrator experienced greater guilt after an accidental compared to an intentional transgression ([McGraw, 1987](#)). Therefore, if both victims and transgressors link transgressor intent with transgressor guilt, then the miscalibration we predicted earlier for transgressor intent should carry over into guilt: Victims will underestimate the amount of guilt that transgressors experience. Indeed, in the opening example, Mr. Tate's quotation shows that his experience is consistent with this prediction: As a victim, he seemed surprised by the amount of guilt experienced by Pforzheimer's residents (the transgressors) and wished he could have addressed it earlier.

Guilt and desires for forgiveness. As mentioned, an important downstream consequence of guilt that distinguishes it from other moral emotions such as shame and outrage is the activation of a desire to repair the relationship with the victim (e.g., [Tangney, 1991](#)). For example, guilt-proneness correlates with greater tendencies to apologize ([Howell, Dopko, Turowski, & Buro, 2012](#)) and state guilt has been related to both a higher self-reported likelihood of apologizing ([Leunissen et al., 2013](#)) as well as a higher likelihood of altering the behavioral pattern that led to the transgression ([Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994](#)). More pertinent to the current research, transgressors who feel guilty show a greater desire for forgiveness. A longitudinal study showed that at Time 1, guilt (but not shame) predicted forgiveness-seeking behaviors at Time 2 ([Riek, Luna, & Schnabelrauch, 2014](#)). In this way, transgressor guilt serves as the key psychological stepping-stone between intent and desires for forgiveness. Our full model therefore proposes that victims *overestimate* transgressor intent relative to transgressors, which translates into their *underestimation* of transgressor guilt, and ultimately victims' *underestimation* of transgressors' desire for forgiveness.

Empathy as a Remedy

Given the many benefits of relationship repair and of forgiveness in particular, we sought a possible remedy to correct the miscalibration between victims and transgressors in desires for forgiveness. We identified empathy, defined as the ability to perceive what another person is feeling ([Levenson & Ruef, 1992](#)). If the asymmetry can be reduced or even eliminated, then this could provide not only a better understanding of the mechanism, but also a means of hastening relationship repair after a transgression.

According to the information-processing explanation for the actor-observer bias ([Jones & Nisbett, 1971](#)), dispositional or personal factors of the actor are relatively more salient to observers than to actors, whereas aspects of the situation are relatively less salient to observers. This role-based difference in perception leads to observers being more likely to generate dispositional attributions for actors' behavior. Jones and Nisbett theorized that if the observer empathizes with the actor, the asymmetric attributional pattern would be less pronounced: The observer would shift her attentional focus, would be more attentive to situational factors, and therefore would be less likely to generate dispositional attributions. [Regan and Totten \(1975\)](#) found support for this prediction. Although their theory focused more broadly on perspective-taking, they operationalized this construct through empathy.

Indeed, empathy has been described as affective perspective-taking (Denham, 1986, as cited in Galinsky et al., 2006) because the process of empathizing requires imagining how another person is feeling. In the current research, we explore the possibility that asking a victim to empathize with the transgressor will lead him or her to attribute less intentionality to the transgressor's actions. This should then lead victims to believe that the transgressor experiences greater guilt and wants forgiveness more, thereby reducing asymmetries between the two parties.

The Present Research

We tested our hypotheses across five studies in which we randomly assigned participants to think about transgressions from the perspective of either victims or perpetrators. In all studies, we tested the hypothesized asymmetry in beliefs about transgressors' desires for forgiveness, and explored attributions of transgressor intent and guilt as mechanisms responsible for this asymmetry. In Study 1 we studied participants' recollections of their own past experiences with real transgressions, and in Study 2, we conducted a longitudinal diary study of transgressions on the same day that they occurred. In Studies 3 and 5, we used a scenario procedure, whereas in Study 4, we developed a novel laboratory-based paradigm in which participants transgressed against or were victimized by another participant. In the final study, we investigated victim empathy for the transgressor as one possible means of rectifying the asymmetry.

All initial sample sizes in the studies we report below were determined a priori, and we report all data exclusions, manipulations, and measures (Simmons, Nelson, & Simonsohn, 2012). Across all studies, our datasets comprised only participants who completed all measures in the survey. Subsequently, we endeavored to exclude participants who were obviously not reading materials (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009). To do this, we additionally excluded people who could not recall a central feature of the scenario when asked or who provided content in an essay that duplicated another response or was totally unrelated to the prompt. In Studies 1, 3, and 5, these criteria led to one participant being excluded from each study. When these participants were included in the studies below, the significance of the results did not change. In Study 4 (a lab study), no participants were excluded on these grounds because we did not ask the attention check questions.

Study 1

In Study 1, we conducted an initial, ecologically valid test of the prediction that victims and transgressors are fundamentally miscalibrated in their reactions to a transgression. We used a micro-narrative procedure (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; see also Zechmeister & Romero, 2002) to test our predicted effects in the context of transgressions participants experienced in their pasts. Participants provided a short summary of a past transgression from their own lives from the perspective of either the victim or the transgressor. In addition to providing external validity, this method allows us to test our hypothesis over a wide variety of transgressions.

Method

Participants. The final sample for this study was 98 MTurk workers (64 men; 34 women; $M_{age} = 33.73$ years).

Procedure. Participants were randomly assigned to the role of victim or transgressor. Participants in the transgressor condition were asked to recall and write about a time they had done something that had harmed or offended another person; participants in the victim condition were asked to recall and write about a time someone did something that harmed or offended them. To increase participants' psychological involvement, we asked them to type in the initials of the person who had harmed them (or whom they had harmed), and then fed this text through the dependent measures.

Measures. We measured intentionality, guilt, and desires for forgiveness on scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Intentionality. To measure intentionality, we asked participants to respond to the item, "(Initials) intended to harm or offend me" or "I intended to harm or offend (initials)."

Guilt. To measure guilt, we asked participants about their agreement with the statement "(Initials) feels guilty about what he/she did" or "I feel guilty about harming or offending (initials)."

Desires for forgiveness. We asked two items to measure transgressors' desires for forgiveness. Transgressors were asked about their agreement with two statements: "I want (initials) to express forgiveness for what I did" and "I want to be forgiven by (initials)." Victims were asked to predict the extent to which "(Initials) wants me to express forgiveness for what he/she did" and "(Initials) wants me to forgive him/her." These items were highly correlated and therefore combined into a composite measure of desires for forgiveness, $r(98) = .87, p < .001$.

Results

Intentionality. Victims ($M = 5.00, SD = 1.76$) thought the transgressor had intended to cause harm more than transgressors reported ($M = 3.04, SD = 2.30$), $F(1, 96) = 22.61, p < .001, d = .97$.

Guilt. Victims ($M = 3.20, SD = 1.86$) thought their transgressors experienced less guilt than transgressors ($M = 5.28, SD = 2.03$) actually reported experiencing after their transgressions, $F(1, 96) = 28.12, p < .001, d = 1.07$.

Forgiveness. Victims ($M = 3.48, SD = 1.91$) thought their transgressors wanted to be forgiven less than transgressors reported wanting forgiveness ($M = 5.13, SD = 2.03$), $F(1, 96) = 17.19, p < .001, d = .84$.

Mediation. We employed a sequential mediation model that is able to account for a causal path through two mediators. We tested for an indirect effect of role on forgiveness through intentionality and guilt using PROCESS Model 6 (Hayes, 2013). Using 5,000 bootstrapped samples, the coefficient was .38 (95% CI [.10 to .81]). Thus, relative to transgressors, victims made higher estimates of how intentional transgressors' wrongdoings were, which caused them to discount how guilty transgressors felt, which resulted in lower estimates of how much transgressors wanted to be forgiven (see Figure 1).

Supplemental analyses. We additionally coded the micro-narratives for two different purposes. First, we wanted to investigate whether the asymmetry between the victim and transgressor regarding the transgressor's state of mind (intent, guilt) would spon-

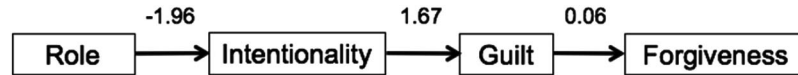


Figure 1. The relationships between victim and transgressor role, intent, guilt, and forgiveness, Study 1. Coefficients are unstandardized.

taneously emerge in participants' descriptions of the transgressions. This is a very conservative test of our hypothesis and would mean that individuals do not need to be prompted by questions in order for evidence of the asymmetry to emerge in real transgressions. Second, we wanted to test alternative explanations that may have spuriously given rise to our findings. Since we were relying upon self-generated transgression narratives, we wanted to rule out the possibility that any effect could be attributed to systematic differences in the type of transgression being recalled by victims and transgressors. Therefore, we also coded the responses for relational closeness between the two parties, severity of the transgression, context of the transgression (personal vs. professional), and the number of victims and transgressors.

Coding for intentionality and guilt. We asked two coders (one with three years of research experience, the other an undergraduate research assistant who had not coded a project before) who were blind to the study's hypotheses to rate the essays in terms of intentionality and guilt. The logic behind this was to see whether third parties would be able to detect differences in attributions of intentionality and guilt even before participants were consciously asked to self-report their own intent and guilt. We did not ask them to code for transgressors' desires for forgiveness because it was not spontaneously mentioned in any micronarratives. The coders rated whether, in the transgressor condition, the respondent intended to harm or offend the person they described, or in the victim condition, whether the person they described intended to harm or offend the author (0 = no, 1 = yes). We also asked them to code whether the author had experienced guilt (or whether the author described the target as having experienced guilt; 0 = no, 1 = yes). For both of these, we used the same coding system as Baumeister and colleagues (1990); these authors justified the use of binary coding because of the unreliability of more fine-grained coding schemes in this context. The authors agreed 80% of the time for intent, and 94% of the time for guilt ($\kappa_{\text{intent}} = .68$ and $\kappa_{\text{guilt}} = .91$, indicating substantial agreement; Landis & Koch, 1977). When the authors disagreed, they were asked to discuss and reconcile their coding. The coders could not agree on intent in one essay; we excluded it from the analysis.

Before comparing victims' and transgressors' essays, we wanted to get a sense of whether the coding results were related to the self-reported results described earlier. Therefore, we ran point-biserial correlations and found that coded intent was correlated with participants' later self-reported intent, $r(97) = .52$, $p < .001$, and coded guilt was correlated with participants' later self-reported guilt, $r(98) = .61$, $p < .001$.

When comparing transgressors' and victims' essays for mentions of intent, we found that 74.5% of victims said the transgression was intentional according to coders, whereas 63.0% of transgressors reported acting intentionally. Although this was directionally similar to our hypothesis, the difference was not statistically significant, $\chi^2(1, N = 97) = 1.49$, $p = .222$. When comparing mentions of guilt in victims' and transgressors' essays, we found that whereas

coders reported no victims discussing whether the transgressor experienced guilt, 63.8% of transgressors discussed feeling guilty in their essays, $\chi^2(1, N = 98) = 46.92$, $p < .001$, providing support for our prediction.¹

Alternative explanations. For relational closeness, we asked the coders to respond to the question, "How well do the author and the person they describe know each other?" on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all/complete strangers*) to 4 (*close friends/family members*). The two coders were highly reliable, ICC = .98 (as suggested by Hallgren, 2012, we used ICC for continuous measure reliability, and κ for dichotomous measures). To code for severity of the transgression, we asked coders to answer, "How serious was the harm or offense the participant described?" (1 = *not at all serious*; 7 = *extremely serious*), ICC = .73. For both the closeness and severity measures, we averaged the two coders' responses to create composite measures. Finally, we asked the coders to identify the number of victims and transgressors recalled in the essay (only one of the coder's responses was used because the other proved inaccurate), and whether the transgression occurred in a personal or professional context ($\kappa = .69$). In some cases, these variables could not be coded, but overall, victims and transgressors seemed to recall similar transgressions in terms of closeness, the transgression's severity, the number of people involved, and the context, all $F_s < 2.52$, $p_s > .116$. When we controlled for these characteristics, the effects of perspective on participants' self-reported ascriptions of intent and guilt all remained significant, all $p_s < .001$.

Discussion

The way that people describe past transgressions, that is, the narratives that they construct and how they interpret and make sense of wrongdoings, appears to be a function of the role they played in the event. Moreover, differences in attributions of intentionality and guilt are, to some extent, detectable by third parties even before participants are specifically asked to make these attributions. Such differences emerge in response to a wide variety of transgressions above and beyond the severity of the transgression, and even when taking into account the closeness of the relationship between the two parties. The results of this study provided statistical support for the full theoretical model that differences in victims' and transgressors' attributions of intent and guilt influence estimates of transgressors' desires for forgiveness.

One potential weakness inherent to the method used in Study 1 is that role assignment may have led to different conceptualizations of the transgression. Although external validity and general-

¹ We also coded for regret as per Baumeister, Stillwell, and Wotman (1990) and found the results were consistent with our theory: Coders rated only 1 victim (2%) as having expressed regret, but they coded 60% of transgressors as having experienced regret, $\chi^2(1, N = 98) = 38.97$, $p < .001$. Coded regret correlated highly with coded guilt, $\phi^2 = .88$, $p < .001$.

izability were high, it could be that victims and transgressors generated different types of transgressions to write about. For example, from a pool of past transgressions, victims may sample on one type of transgression and transgressors a different type. We found that role did not affect the severity of the recalled transgression, participants' familiarity with their counterpart, the context in which the transgression occurred, or the number of victims or transgressors involved, but there could have been other differences that we did not code for. It is also possible that, because victims and transgressors perceive the same event differently, there is a systematic difference in the pool of past transgressions that is cognitively available to be called upon. We therefore conducted a second study in which participants were asked about transgressions that had occurred that day.

Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was, like Study 1, to test our predictions in the context of real transgressions that occurred in participants' lives outside the laboratory. At the same time, we wanted to restrict the range of possible experiences that participants could reflect upon to reduce the possibility that victims and transgressors were recalling systematically different types of transgressions from their past. To do this, we conducted a study using a daily diary method in which participants answered questions about transgressions from that day, and did so over a 5-day period. Our procedure is based on Luchies and colleagues' method (2013), which validated the daily diary method in the context of forgiveness for interpersonal transgressions. We could then test this aggregate set of recent transgressions for our predicted asymmetries. By constraining the transgressions to the current day (rather than a lifetime, as in Study 1), this design reduces the possible pool of transgressions available to choose from. Therefore, it makes it less likely that transgressors and victims would select reliably different types of transgressions from a given pool of past transgressions. Also, because it is possible that victims' and transgressors' memories of past transgressions change over time in systematically different ways (Luchies et al., 2013), the time constraint in this procedure addresses this potential concern.

Method

We conducted an initial survey to register a maximum of 200 people to participate in a 5-day longitudinal study; this registration survey was sent to an online pool of participants maintained by a behavioral research lab in the U.K. We asked participants to sign up for the study by clicking a link to a web page that explained the payment and logistics of the study and asked them to provide demographic information. All 188 participants who registered were then randomly assigned to a victim or transgressor condition. Participants were paid £1.00 for each day that they completed the survey, and an additional £5.00 if they responded to the survey all 5 days. We included people in the final analysis if they completed at least one diary entry (final $n = 179$, 60 men, 119 women, $M_{age} = 27.01$ years).

All registered participants were sent a series of 5 links over 5 days (1 per day) at exactly 4:00 p.m. each day. Those in the victim condition always received links that asked them to recount any events that had occurred that day in which they were victimized,

and those in the transgressor condition always received links that asked them to recount any transgressions they had committed that day. Specifically, we asked,

Think about the events that have transpired today (date inserted). We are particularly interested in whether you did anything that made another person upset, angry, or hurt. Tell us about the incident even if it was very brief, and even if you felt fine by the end of it. Did anything like this happen?

If participants clicked "Yes, this happened to me today" they were directed to questions regarding how many times that had happened to them. In the victim condition, we rephrased the prompt and questions to be appropriate to that role. Using the same items as in Study 1, we asked participants to describe an incident and to rate intent, guilt, and desires for forgiveness.

We additionally asked how close they were to the person in question (1 = *not at all close*, 7 = *one of the people to whom I feel closest in my life*), how frequently they interacted with the person (6-point scale ranging from *daily* to *never*), and how serious the consequences of the event were (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*) in order to control for any possible effects these might have on attributions of intent, guilt, and desires for forgiveness.

Our procedure is slightly different from the typical daily diary method, which asks participants to respond before going to bed. Because we conducted the study online and participants were sent a new link every day via email, we modified the procedure to maximize the likelihood that people would respond to all five days of the survey. Because people do not necessarily read emails as soon as they arrive in their inbox and would not necessarily fill out the survey once they read the email, we needed to select a time that would give participants enough time for a transgression to have occurred that day, but also enough time to fill it out before going to sleep. This led to our decision to send the link to the survey at 4:00 p.m. each day. Because the survey took place between Monday and Friday, this might suggest some oversampling of workplace transgressions. At the same time, the time stamps of when people completed the survey revealed that 56% of respondents filled it out between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. and 44% filled it out after 7 p.m., suggesting a fair number of the transgressions may have occurred in the evening.

Results

Out of the 188 people who registered, 179 completed at least one diary entry. Thirty-five indicated they had not been victimized or transgressed against during this period, and another 4 participants said they had been transgressed against but did not provide any further information. These remaining 140 participants discussed a total of 257 transgressions (144 victim accounts and 113 transgressor accounts). Because the data provided by any participant for multiple transgressions are not independent, we conducted random-coefficient modeling using the *xtmixed* function in Stata, and represented multiple observations from a given participant as nested within participants; this method can also account for missing data from participants. We report R^2 for each effect as proposed by Bryk and Raudenbush (1992) and computed this using the *mltrsq* function in Stata.

There were significant effects of role on attributions of intent, $B = -.90$, $SE(B) = .28$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .15$; guilt, $B = 1.67$,

$SE(B) = .32, p < .001, R^2 = .37$; and desires for forgiveness, $B = 1.62, SE(B) = .29, p < .001, R^2 = .29$. Means are listed in Table 1. All of these results held when simultaneously controlling for the closeness of the relationship, the frequency of interaction, and the severity of the transgression, all $ps \leq .038$.

Mediation. To test the hypothesized indirect effect, we conducted multilevel sequential mediation when nesting intent, guilt, and desires for forgiveness within participants (see Figure 2). We conducted this test of sequential mediation in Mplus using structural equation modeling by combining the Mplus codes specified by Preacher and colleagues for multilevel mediation (Preacher, Zyphur, & Zhang, 2010; Preacher, Zhang, & Zyphur, 2011) and Stride and colleagues' code for sequential mediation (Stride, Gardner, Catley, & Thomas, 2015) to test the effect of role on desires for forgiveness through intent and guilt. We also tested for normality of residuals using the boxcox program in the MASS package (Venables & Ripley, 2002) in R (R Core Team, 2013; Venables & Ripley, 2002). To address positive skew, we performed a reflected inverse transformation on intent, which we then reverse-scored to put back in its original direction. We also performed a square root transformation on guilt to address positive skew.² All predictor variables, with the exception of condition, were then standardized for ease of interpretation. When we constrained the slopes representing the effects of intent on guilt and intent on forgiveness and the slope representing the effect of guilt on forgiveness to be equal to the within-slopes coefficients, this test yielded a standardized coefficient of .08 for the indirect effect ($a1*d*b2$), with a 95% CI of $-.02$ to $.14$ (with the control variables, $-.001$ to $.09$). Although the 95% CI did include zero with control variables included, the magnitude of the estimated effect with and without controls is consistent with a small mediation effect.

As a secondary test, we followed the original procedure conducted by Luchies and colleagues (2013) and created averages of intent, guilt, and forgiveness for all transgressions within each participant. When testing for the two-step mediation process with 5,000 bootstrapped samples, the bootstrap coefficient was $-.24$ ($SE = .11$) and the 95% CI excluded zero [$-.50$ to $-.06$]. When controlling for the closeness of the relationship, the frequency of interaction, and the severity of the transgression, the 95% CI did not exclude zero [$-.02$ to $.19$].

Discussion

Even across 257 real transgressions that involved 140 unique individuals, we found evidence supporting our hypotheses about asymmetries in intent, guilt, and desires for forgiveness. The

results suggest that there is a fundamental asymmetry in how victims and transgressors interpret the same event. However, one strength of both Studies 1 and 2 is also a limitation: studying transgressions from participants' own lives enables us to test whether these asymmetries hold across many different types of transgressions in uncontrolled environments, but in doing so, we have sacrificed experimental control for generalizability. One weakness inherent in both Studies 1 and 2 is that victims and transgressor may perceive transgressions differently, meaning that they have different pools of past transgressions to call upon. This subtler way of confounding role with transgression can only be addressed by holding the event constant. Thus, in the remaining studies, we restricted participants to imagine or experience the same transgression in order to test our hypotheses in a more controlled environment.

Study 3

In Study 3, we tested our hypotheses using a transgression that was the same across all participants. Participants imagined that they were either harmed by or caused harm to someone else. We then asked them to report how much the transgressor intended to cause harm, how much guilt the transgressor experienced, and how much the transgressor desired forgiveness.

Method

Participants. The final sample for this study was 119 workers recruited from Amazon MTurk to participate in an online study (82 men; 37 women; $M_{age} = 33.09$ years).

Procedure. All participants read a scenario adapted from Leunissen and colleagues (2013) in which role (victim vs. transgressor) was manipulated. Participants in the victim condition read, "Your colleague breaks your coffee mug by pushing it off your desk. You were very fond of this coffee mug." Participants in the transgressor condition read, "You break your colleague's coffee mug by pushing it off your colleague's desk. Your colleague was very fond of this coffee mug." In the original scenario, Leunissen and colleagues specified whether the transgression was intentional or accidental; for the purposes of our study, we left the intention ambiguous because information about transgressor intention is rarely known to victims and such knowledge would diminish the likelihood that these predicted asymmetries would emerge.

Measures. We measured intent, guilt, and desires for forgiveness from victims' and transgressors' perspectives.

Intentionality. To measure intentionality, depending on condition, we asked participants, "How much was it your colleague's (your) intention to break the coffee mug?" (1–7 *not at all* / *very much*) depending on whether they were in the victim or transgressor condition.

Guilt. To measure the experience of guilt, we asked transgressors (victims), "How guilty would you (your colleague) feel about what happened?" Participants responded on a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very guilty*).

Desires for forgiveness. Participants in the victim condition were asked 3 items: "How much would your colleague want you

Table 1
Mean Intent, Guilt, and Desires for Forgiveness by Role, Study 2

Dependent measures	Role	
	Victim ($n = 144$)*	Transgressor ($n = 113$)*
Intent	2.74 (1.91)	1.93 (1.62)
Guilt	2.99 (1.88)	4.51 (2.16)
Desires for forgiveness	2.93 (1.83)	4.44 (1.79)

Note. Standard deviations are indicated in parentheses.

* indicates the number of transgressions reported by each condition.

² These results remain unchanged when not adjusting these variables for skew.

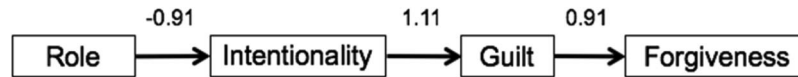


Figure 2. The relationships between victim and transgressor role, intent, guilt, and forgiveness, Study 2. Coefficients are unstandardized.

to tell them that you forgive them; want you to express forgiveness; like being told that they have been forgiven?" on scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Those in the transgressor condition were asked the same questions edited to reflect their perspective (e.g., "How much would you want your colleague to tell you that they forgive you?"). These items were combined into a composite measure of desires for forgiveness, $\alpha = .97$.

Results

Intentionality. We conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and found a main effect of role on intentionality, $F(1, 117) = 13.36, p < .001, d = .67$, which was consistent with our hypothesis. Victims thought the transgression was more intentional ($M = 3.83, SD = 1.78$) than transgressors ($M = 2.50, SD = 2.17$) reported it was.

Guilt. Also consistent with our prediction, victims ($M = 4.93, SD = 1.46$) estimated lower levels of transgressor guilt for transgressors than transgressors reported ($M = 5.67, SD = 1.72$), $F(1, 117) = 6.28, p = .014, d = .47$.

Desires for forgiveness. Finally, we found a main effect of role on desires for forgiveness, $F(1, 117) = 11.49, p = .001, d = .63$. Victims ($M = 4.74, SD = 1.64$) gave lower estimates of how much transgressors wanted to be forgiven than transgressors did ($M = 5.71, SD = 1.46$).

Mediation analyses. We tested for an effect of role on forgiveness through estimations of intentionality and guilt (see Figure 3) with 5,000 bootstrapped samples (Model 6; Hayes, 2013). The bootstrap coefficient for the two-step mediation path was .22, and the 95% confidence interval did not include zero [.07 to .49].

Discussion

Study 3 again provides support for the notion that one's role in a transgression—victim versus transgressor—is a critical determinant of how the involved parties subsequently think about it. Specifically, even when considering the same event, victims consistently read greater intent into the transgression than transgressors reported, believed that transgressors experienced less guilt than they did, and desired forgiveness less than transgressors reported desiring it.

The method we used—a scenario—could be considered a strength and a weakness. On one hand, this method could be considered a strength because the manipulation of role was minimal, yet still yielded strong differences in attributions of intention-

ality, guilt, and desires for forgiveness. Furthermore, the severity of the transgression was held constant across conditions. On the other hand, the short scenario may not have been particularly emotionally involving for participants. It therefore might not have yielded a strong sense of injustice, and more importantly, people's beliefs about how they would respond might have differed from how they actually would respond. Moreover, the paucity of detail in the scenarios could have led participants to fill in different contextual factors as a function of role assignment. In the next study, we attempt to retain the positive features of Study 3 while addressing some of its weaknesses.

Study 4

Thus far, we have evidence for our predicted effect for past transgressions and for an imagined transgression. The primary goal of Study 4 was to extend our test into the context of a transgression occurring in real time. To do this, we developed a new procedure in which transgressors would actually commit a transgression against a real participant, who would experience the associated negative consequences. Unlike many studies of transgressions in which either the victim or the transgressor is a confederate or a preprogrammed computer response (Reich & Hershcovis, 2015; Simantov-Nachlieli & Shnabel, 2014), both of our roles were real participants who interacted with one another. Furthermore, just as in the real world, we wanted the transgressor's true intentions not to be known to the victim. Finally, we wanted to hold constant the magnitude of the violation, so all transgressors committed the same harmful act. After victims had experienced the consequences of the transgression, we asked victims and transgressors to report transgressor intent, guilt, and desires for forgiveness. We describe this procedure in detail below.

Method

The final sample contained 46 participants (23 dyads; 18 men, 28 women; $M_{age} = 24.9$ years) recruited from a list maintained by a behavioral research lab at a university; those who participated in Study 2 were excluded from participation in this study. Each participant was paid £10 (~\$15.55) for their participation. The final count does not include 16 dyads in which the participant in the transgressor role did not transgress (41% of the total sample). The procedure required transgressors to freely choose a course of action that would lead to a negative outcome for their partner, so

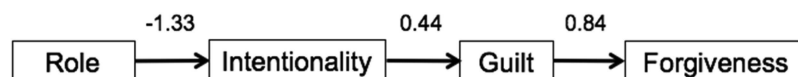


Figure 3. The relationships between victim and transgressor role, intent, guilt, and forgiveness, Study 3. Coefficients are unstandardized.

the design inevitably meant that some transgressors would not choose the transgressing option (see design below).

We invited two participants per timeslot into the lab to take part in what was advertised as a project management study. Participants were randomly assigned to their role (transgressor, victim) before their arrival (the experimenter verbally referred to them as Participants 1 and 2). Upon arrival, they were asked to sign a consent form that also gave background information about the study. On this form, participants received information indicating that Participant 1's choice of task would affect Participant 2's task allocation: If the Participant 1 chose Task 1 [Task 3], their counterpart would have to perform Task 3 [Task 1], but if he or she chose Task 2, their counterpart would also perform Task 2. Although the interdependent nature of the transgressor's choice was clearly stated on the consent form, we assumed that it would not be read by most participants, who often sign the form without reading it carefully (see Cryder et al., 2012). This would mean that most participants in the transgressor role would choose the desirable task, not knowing until afterward that it would mean their partner would have to complete the undesirable task.

Both participants were then invited to sit in two rooms across the hall from one another, and were directed to fill out a series of unrelated questionnaires that we described as typical of those given to employees when they first start a new job: the PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), a scenario from Higgins, Rholes, and Jones (1977), the Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999), and the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI; Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann, 2003). We asked participants to rate how long they thought it took them to fill out the questionnaires, and how enjoyable they thought this task was. This bolstered our cover story that we were interested in project management and the timing and enjoyment of tasks that people choose to do. This information was also built into the cover story later in the experiment.

At this point, the transgressor was presented with a sheet of paper describing three tasks and was invited to choose which task he or she wanted to do next. Task 1 was a measure of attention span (crossing out the letter 'e' from a long text of nonsense words); participants were told that it had previously been rated as not very enjoyable and took other participants approximately 35 min to complete. Task 2 was a series of questionnaires similar to those they had already completed, and participants were told it had previously been rated as enjoyable as most other lab studies and took others approximately 20 min to complete. Task 3 was described as a chocolate-sampling project in which participants would get to taste and rate three small pieces of chocolate. Participants were told others had rated it as highly enjoyable and that it took others approximately 5 min to complete. Thus, Task 3 was designed to be the most attractive option and Task 1 to be the least attractive option. We expected most transgressors to choose Task 3.

We crafted and included the middle choice option so that choosing Task 3 would seem like a transgression by comparison. Based on the information they received about Task 2, it was presented as being as attractive as most lab studies, and as attractive as the initial tasks they had completed upon entering the lab. In this way, we assumed that Task 2 would be treated as the default reference point, with a better task seen as a gain and a worse task seen as a loss (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Therefore, from the

victim's perspective, a partner who chose Task 3 would be committing a transgression because he or she would benefit at a cost to the victim, who would have to complete Task 1 as a result.

The second way that including Task 2 served to emphasize that choosing Task 3 would be a transgression was by providing an option that would be equally attractive to both participants. Since victims knew this option was available to transgressors, then a transgressor who chose the most attractive task for him or herself (meaning the victim would have to complete the least attractive task) would be seen as transgressing. Without the middle option, transgressors would be faced with harming themselves or harming the victim, so choosing the attractive one for themselves would seem more like a reasonable choice rather than a transgression.

After transgressors made their choice, they were told, "You were previously informed that the task you chose to complete would influence what the other participant would do." At this point, they were presented with a matrix summarizing how each option affected the other participant, which reinforced the implications of their decision for the victim. They were then asked to wait while the experimenter informed the victim of their choice.

While victims waited for the transgressor to choose, they were presented with a description of Tasks 1, 2 and 3. After the transgressor chose, victims were informed of the outcome and what task they would complete. They were also told, "The other participant was previously informed that the task you would complete would depend on what he/she chose to do." Then they were presented with the matrix summarizing how each option presented to the transgressor affected the victim.

In sum, we purposefully designed the study in such a way that there would be no deception involved. All participants received the same information and the transgressors' choice was honestly communicated to the victim. At the same time, we attempted to model real transgressions, leaving substantial room for transgressors and victims to vary in their perceptions of intent. We included in the final sample only dyads in which the transgressor chose to do Task 3, thus allocating Task 1 (the unattractive task) to their victims. Finally, all participants actually did the tasks they had chosen to do (or that were chosen for them); in this way, all transgressors in the final sample actually transgressed and all victims were actually victimized by their transgressors.

Measures

After the tasks had been completed, participants were asked to report which task they had done, which task their partner had done, and to rate their enjoyment of the task they had completed and how much they thought their counterpart had enjoyed their task (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). These items were asked to support our cover story about project management and also served as a manipulation check of their enjoyment of each task.

Because some methodologists advise against single-item measures (e.g., Nunnally, Bernstein, & Berge, 1967, although see Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007 and Loo, 2002), we used two items to probe intent, guilt, and forgiveness in Study 4. To measure intent, we asked, "How much did you want your counterpart to do the task they did?" and "How much did you intend for your counterpart to do the task they did?" $r(46) = .69, p < .001$. To measure guilt, we asked, "How bad do you feel that your counterpart had to do the task that they did?" and

“How guilty do you feel that your counterpart had to do the task that they did?” $r(46) = .82, p < .001$. Finally, to measure desires for forgiveness, we asked, “How much would you want your counterpart to forgive you for making them do the task they did?” and “How much would you like being told that you’ve been forgiven for making your counterpart do the task they did?” $r(46) = .72, p < .001$. All items were asked on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very*).³

Results

Because victims and transgressors interacted with one another from the start of the study, we needed to account for variance that could be attributed to the dyad. Therefore, we conducted multi-level modeling to test our hypotheses, and we again report R^2 for each effect as proposed by Bryk and Raudenbush (1992).

Enjoyment of tasks. In the final sample, all transgressors did the chocolate-tasting task and all victims did the tedious task. Transgressors rated their task as more enjoyable ($M = 6.17, SD = 1.14$) than victims rated their tedious task ($M = 2.26, SD = 1.57$), $B = 3.91, SE(B) = .37, p < .001, R^2 = .71$. Victims also thought their counterpart enjoyed their chocolate-tasting task ($M = 6.26, SD = .81$) more than transgressors thought their counterpart enjoyed their tedious task ($M = 2.13, SD = 1.22$), $B = -4.13, SE(B) = .28, p < .001, R^2 = .82$, indicating that victims thought their counterpart was enjoying themselves while they were not, and that transgressors thought their victim was miserable while they were enjoying themselves.

Intent, guilt, and desires for forgiveness. As hypothesized, victims overestimated how much transgressors intended to make them do the harmful task, $B = -2.41, SE(B) = .39, p < .001, R^2 = .50$, and underestimated how guilty transgressors felt, $B = 2.10, SE(B) = .35, p < .001, R^2 = .60$. Victims also underestimated how much transgressors wanted to be forgiven, $B = .67, SE(B) = .44, p = .122, R^2 = .05$, although this was not significant. We report the means for these measures in Table 2.

Having found that role predicts differences in estimates of intent and guilt, but not forgiveness, we note that it is possible for mediation to occur even if the initial predictor variable (role) does not have a total effect on the outcome variable (forgiveness; Kenny, Kashy, & Bolger, 1998). Therefore, as in Study 2, we tested sequential mediation in MPlus (see Figure 4) to test the effect of role on desires for forgiveness through intent and guilt and to nest these measures within each dyad. We conducted this analysis after performing a log transformation on the intent measure so that the residuals were normal. The bootstrap coefficient was $-.45 (SE = .17)$ and the 95% CI excluded zero $[-.89$ to $-.01]$. Thus, we concluded that there was an effect of role on

intent and guilt, and that the role-based difference in intent was associated with role-based differences in perceptions of guilt and, subsequently, desires for forgiveness.

Discussion

In this study, we developed a new procedure in which transgressing participants caused harm to victim participants in a laboratory setting. Furthermore, as in Study 3, the magnitude of the transgression was held constant. We replicated the findings from Studies 1–3: Victims overestimated how much transgressors intended to transgress, and underestimated how much transgressors felt guilty; these attributions were associated with different estimates of desires for forgiveness.

One limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size. Because of the expense associated with this procedure, and the robustness of the effect demonstrated in the prior studies, we recruited a smaller-than-normal sample. We expected the vast majority of transgressors to choose Task 3. However, a larger percentage than we expected (41%) chose one of the other tasks, which further decreased the number of participants in each condition. Although the predicted effects emerged, we are cognizant of the problems associated with small cell sizes (Button et al., 2013). The robustness of the effect across the other studies gives us confidence that we are not detecting a false effect.

The fact that 41% of participants did not choose the transgression option also suggests a possible concern regarding generalizability. That is, it could be that the effect would only emerge for the type of individuals who chose the transgression option. Because the effect emerged across the other studies, which included large, diverse samples of individuals considering both actual and imagined transgressions, it appears that the effect is not due to selection bias.

In many ways, the results of Studies 1–4 provide disheartening news: The fact that victims underestimate how much transgressors desire forgiveness implies that many relationships that could be repaired by forgiveness are not. In the final study, we investigated a possible remedy to this miscalibration in an effort to overcome this barrier to reconciliation.

Study 5

Our goal in Study 5 was to investigate a remedy to the asymmetry that would yield more equivalent interpretations between victims and transgressors. To do this, we asked victims to empathize with transgressors. Some research has shown that perspective-taking (which includes empathy; Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006) can help a person to adjust away from one’s egocentric anchor (Epley, Keysar, Van Boven, & Gilovich, 2004; Regan & Totten, 1975). We reasoned that this process would

Table 2
Mean Intent, Guilt, and Desires for Forgiveness by Role, Study 4

Dependent measures	Role	
	Victim	Transgressor
Intent	3.85 (1.90)	1.43 (.84)
Guilt	2.98 (1.51)	5.09 (1.61)
Desires for forgiveness	3.96 (1.36)	4.63 (1.64)

Note. Standard deviations are indicated in parentheses.

³ At the end of the study, we asked participants whether they had read on the consent form that Participant 2 would have to do the task Participant 1 did not choose (an item which we asked among four other items ostensibly designed to test participants’ recall of certain features of the study). Of the 23 dyads, 60.9% of victims and 21.7% of transgressors indicated that they were aware of this information, $\chi^2(1, N = 46) = 7.26, p = .007$. We interpret this result as a combination of transgressors’ self-serving desires to avoid blame for the transgression and victims’ desire to be seen as attentive to all study materials.

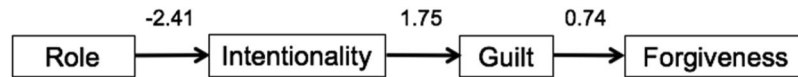


Figure 4. The relationships between victim and transgressor role, intent, guilt, and forgiveness, Study 4. Coefficients are unstandardized.

therefore better align victims' beliefs about transgressors' desires for forgiveness with transgressors' actual desires for forgiveness.

Method

Participants. The final sample for this study was 141 participants: 41 men, 100 women, $M_{age} = 29.17$ years. Participants were from a pool maintained by a behavioral research lab in the United Kingdom. The study was advertised via a link in an email that participants could click to participate. As payment, we held a lottery for four £25 Amazon.co.uk gift cards.

Procedure. Participants read the same scenario about a broken mug used in Study 3. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: transgressor, victim-control, or victim-empathy. The victim-control and transgressor conditions were the same as in Study 3, but participants in the victim-empathy condition were given the scenario and also an empathy manipulation adapted from Regan and Totten (1975). Victims were told,

While you are imagining this scenario, please try to empathize with John. Imagine how John feels as this occurs. Picture to yourself just how he feels in this situation. You are to concentrate on the way he feels. Think about his reaction to you. In your mind's eye, you are to visualize how it feels to be John in this situation. On the next page, you will be asked about John's behavior.⁴

Measures. We measured intent, guilt, and desires for forgiveness ($\alpha = .77$) as in Study 3.

Results

The logic underlying our predictions was that, through the process of empathizing with transgressors, victims would shift toward seeing the transgression as the transgressor does, thereby diminishing the asymmetry. We therefore conducted three planned contrasts. First, we compared transgressor responses to victim-control responses to test whether the basic predicted asymmetry emerged, as in the previous studies. Second, we tested whether victim-control and victim-empathy participants reported different responses to our dependent variables. We predicted that empathizing victims would report less transgressor intent, greater transgressor experience of guilt, and a greater transgressor desire for forgiveness compared to control-victims. Third, we tested the size of the asymmetry between transgressors and victim-empathy participants. This effect should be smaller than the effect emerging in the first contrast. See Table 3 for all means and mean differences.

Intent. We conducted a one-way ANOVA and found a significant effect of condition on ascribed intent, $F(2, 138) = 10.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$. Planned contrasts revealed that victims in the control condition made higher estimates of how intentional the mug-breaking was relative to transgressors, $t(138) = 4.62$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.09$. Second, victims in the control condition attributed greater intent to the transgressor than empathizing victims did,

$t(138) = 1.82$, $p = .071$, $d = .33$, although this was only marginally significant. Finally, empathizing victims made greater estimates of the intentionality of the mug-breaking, relative to transgressors, $t(138) = 2.72$, $p = .007$, $d = .69$, although as expected, this contrast was weaker than the transgressor versus control victim contrast.

Guilt. A one-way ANOVA demonstrated a significant effect of condition on guilt, $F(2, 138) = 4.94$, $p = .008$, $\eta^2 = .07$. According to planned contrasts, victims in the control condition gave lower estimates of how guilty transgressors felt than transgressors reported feeling, $t(138) = 3.14$, $p = .002$, $d = .68$, replicating the results from the prior studies. Second, victims in the control condition did not think the transgressor felt less guilt than empathizing victims did, $t(138) = 1.38$, $p = .170$, $d = .26$, although the means were in the direction predicted. Finally, empathizing victims did not differ from transgressors in terms of guilt, $t(138) = 1.71$, $p = .090$, $d = .38$, demonstrating that the transgressor-victim asymmetry was reduced when victims were asked to empathize.

Desires for forgiveness. There was a marginally significant effect of condition on desires for forgiveness, $F(2, 138) = 2.98$, $p = .054$, $\eta^2 = .04$. Control-condition victims made lower estimates of how much transgressors wanted to be forgiven than transgressors did, $t(138) = 2.14$, $p = .034$, $d = .45$, consistent with prior studies. Second, victims in the control condition thought the transgressor wanted to be forgiven less than empathizing victims, $t(138) = 2.08$, $p = .040$, $d = .41$. Third, empathizing victims did not differ from transgressors in terms of desires for forgiveness, $t(138) = .03$, $p = .975$, $d = .01$, again supporting our predictions.

Mediation analyses. As in the previous studies, we conducted a 2-step analysis of the indirect effect of role on forgiveness through intent and guilt (see Figure 5) again using a sequential mediation model (PROCESS Model 6; Hayes, 2013). First, we compared the victim-control condition to the victim-empathy condition (controlling for the transgressor condition) because we thought that empathizing victims would have a similar psychology to transgressors. We found that the indirect effect through intent and guilt on forgiveness was not supported (bootstrap coefficient with 5,000 samples = .05, 95% CI [-.003 to .23]). As this was a strong test of our hypothesis, we ran a second mediation model, comparing the victim-control condition against the victim-empathy and transgressor conditions (combined). We found evidence for an effect through intent and guilt on forgiveness (bootstrap coefficient with 5,000 samples = -.10, 95% CI [-.31 to -.02]). This replicates the causal chain found in our earlier

⁴ We also randomly assigned a group of participants to a transgressor-empathy condition, but we later realized that, theoretically, we would not expect empathizing with the victim to affect a transgressor's experience of his own guilt or his/her own desire for forgiveness. We therefore did not include this condition in the analyses for this study.

Table 3
Mean Intent, Guilt, and Desires for Forgiveness by Role, Study 5

Dependent measure	Condition		
	Victim control	Victim empathy	Transgressor
Intent (1–7)	2.90 (2.09) _a	2.24 (1.96) _b	1.27 (.89) _c
Guilt (1–7)	5.08 (1.64) _a	5.51 (1.63) _{ab}	6.04 (1.18) _b
Forgiveness (1–7)	5.13 (1.25) _a	5.65 (1.28) _b	5.66 (1.14) _b

Note. Standard deviations are indicated in parentheses. Means with different subscripts within each row differ significantly from one another at $p < .05$ (or in the case of intent, between the two victim conditions, $p = .07$).

studies: Compared to both transgressors and victims who empathized with transgressors, victims in the control condition again made higher estimates of how much transgressors intended to break the mug than transgressors did, which in turn yielded lower estimations of how guilty transgressors felt and how much they wanted to be forgiven.

Discussion

It appears that an effective remedy to asymmetric attributions lies in asking victims to empathize with transgressors. In addition to introducing a potential remedy to the asymmetry, these results also draw attention to the very nature of the problem: that of the psychological power of social roles in influencing interpretations of transgressions (see also Baumeister & Catanese, 2001). Despite the fact that people likely have experience as both victims and transgressors, it seems they do not spontaneously apply this knowledge when inhabiting a given role (see also Flynn, 2011). One implication is that an effective intervention for conflict mediation and dispute resolution is to induce empathetic perspective-taking, thus opening the door to all of the potential benefits of forgiveness.

General Discussion

It seems that transgressors want forgiveness more than victims realize. Historical transgressions, transgressions that occurred on the same day, scenario-based transgressions, and transgressions that occurred in a laboratory setting all revealed the same finding: Victims impute greater intent, less guilt, and reduced desires for forgiveness on transgressors than transgressors report experiencing. Furthermore, it is the asymmetry in intent that causes the asymmetry in guilt and ultimately leads victims to believe transgressors do not want forgiveness when they actually do. We tested alternative parameterizations of this mediation model (the results are reported in the supplementary online materials) and found that this causal model was the most consistent across all studies. At the same time, Study 5 provided some hope of fixing this damaging

miscalibration: We found that victim empathy for transgressors attenuated the effect.

Contributions and Future Directions

Transgressions and forgiveness. The primary contribution of our findings is a better understanding of the dynamics that help or hinder the forgiveness process. Specifically, we have identified what could be described as a fundamental “inefficiency” in the relationship repair process. Transgressors seek forgiveness more than victims realize, suggesting that victims might withhold forgiveness when it could repair the relationship. This asymmetry arises from the very nature of transgressions: Victims and transgressors inhabit different roles in the situation, and therefore appraise it differently.

To investigate this phenomenon, we employed a method that considers both victim and transgressor reactions to the transgression (Leunissen et al., 2013; Stillwell, Baumeister, & Del Priore, 2008). In general, research on forgiveness has generally tended to adopt the perspective of the victim, studying the antecedents of its expression (Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010). Some have studied transgressors’ reactions to being forgiven (Adams, Zou, Inesi, & Pillutla, 2015; Struthers, Eaton, Shirvani, Georgiou, & Edell, 2008), but few have researched whether and how victims and transgressors diverge in their perspectives on forgiveness and how this bears on relationship repair. One exception is in the close relationships literature, where some forgiveness researchers have conducted studies on intimate partners (e.g., Friesen, Fletcher & Overall, 2005) or on family members (e.g., Maio et al., 2008). However, these studies did not investigate role-based differences in perceptions of the same construct (e.g., transgressor guilt), and the roles that were analyzed were gender or family roles. To the extent that both victim and transgressor perspectives are studied simultaneously, this new lens on relationship repair could lead to better calibration of victims’ and transgressors’ repair strategies, thus improving “efficiency” within justice restoration and conflict resolution.

A related contribution of this article is the development of a laboratory paradigm in which one participant commits a real transgression against another participant (Study 4). It is notoriously difficult to get participants to transgress in the lab. For transgressors to do so against a real victim adds a further level of complexity, which is why most paradigms use confederates. Although ours is an admittedly expensive paradigm because some of the participants choose not to transgress, we think it provides an effective means for researchers to study real-time transgressions from the perspective of both parties involved.

Our findings also contribute to recent work documenting the differing needs of victims and perpetrators. Following transgressions, victims face status-based threats whereas perpetrators experience concerns about their moral reputations (Shnabel & Nadler,

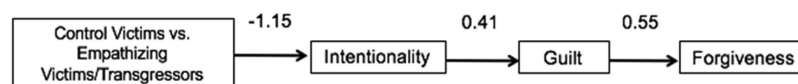


Figure 5. The effect of control condition victims compared to transgressors and victims who empathized with transgressors on intent, guilt, and forgiveness, Study 5. Coefficients are unstandardized.

2008). According to this research, victims want their transgressors to accept responsibility whereas perpetrators want social reacceptance and for victims to understand their perspective. Our evidence that perpetrators want to be forgiven aligns with Shnabel and Nadler's argument that perpetrators desire reacceptance, but we extend this research by further documenting that victims do not appreciate this desire. Indeed, offering forgiveness may even be experienced as a loss of power and/or status for victims as they give up their victimhood and their right to claim further reparations (Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Sullivan, Landau, Branscombe, & Rothschild, 2012). The findings from Study 5 suggested that empathizing may be one way for victims to recognize the extent to which transgressors desire forgiveness. Whether this would overcome their concerns with power or status loss and stimulate forgiveness is a question best left for future research.

To date, forgiveness researchers have tended to study either intrapsychic forgiveness or interpersonally communicated forgiveness (Exline & Baumeister, 2000), but less is known about how highly the psychological experience of forgiveness correlates with its social expression. Our research highlighted this disconnect by suggesting that victims may feel forgiveness and may even want to express it, but may be inhibited from doing so if they think transgressors do not desire it. More generally, studying how much victims' intrapsychic forgiveness aligns with transgressors' beliefs about how much they have been forgiven (in the absence of a direct expression) could be another way to shed light on this asymmetry.

Guilt has often been discussed in the self-conscious emotions literature vis-à-vis shame: Transgressors report feeling guilt when they negatively evaluate their moral transgressions, whereas shame pertains to a negative global evaluation of the self (Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011; Lewis, 1971; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). This begs the question of whether victims accurately understand how much shame transgressors feel. People tend to be their own harshest critics, evaluating themselves more negatively (e.g., as more morally wrong, having let others down) than they believe others do (Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). This would suggest that victims underestimate transgressor shame in addition to transgressor guilt. Our focus on guilt was driven by our interest in forgiveness: Guilt tends to yield greater motivations to repair relationships to forgive than shame does (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton, 1994; Tangney, 1991). At the same time, if the source of shame is addressable, it may also motivate repair. Indeed, people experiencing shame do sometimes report a desire to make amends (Keltner & Harker, 1998). Thus, two interesting avenues for future research would be (a) to test whether the asymmetry between victims and transgressors emerges for shame, and (b) whether differences in shame drive asymmetric beliefs about transgressors' desires for forgiveness.

Finally, a fruitful avenue for future research may be to study other fundamental asymmetries between victims and transgressors after harm or wrongdoing occurs. For example, transgressors might provide different estimates of victims' desires for compensation and remuneration than victims do. If victims view transgressors' actions as more intentional, they might desire more compensation than transgressors offer. However, if transgressors feel guiltier than victims predict, then they might offer more compensation than victims expect. Relatedly, the field is ripe for investigation into asymmetric perceptions of apology expressions

(Leunissen et al., 2013), beliefs in the appropriateness of punishment and retributive justice, the deservingness of reparations, and other forms of justice restoration.

Actor–observer asymmetries. By adopting a social exchange perspective on transgressions, the current research also provided a noteworthy extension to the idea that social roles govern perceptions and attributions (e.g., Flynn & Lake, 2008; Gneezy & Epley, 2014; Keysar, Converse, Wang, & Epley, 2008; Zhang & Epley, 2012). Whether givers or receivers, actors or observers, or victims and transgressors, an important implication of this research is that victims and perpetrators—just as other people in these social roles—are *not* different kinds of people. Social roles govern the way victims and transgressors perceive the injustice and contribute to their asymmetric perceptions. Although research has theorized about differences between victims' and transgressors' perceptions (e.g., Baumeister & Catanese, 2001), we have conducted an empirical test of these asymmetries.

We built on and developed these theories about social roles by examining not just asymmetries in perceptions of transgressions (e.g., Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990), but also asymmetries in expectations *following* transgressions regarding forgiveness. This research thus makes an important contribution to the research on perspective-taking in judgment and decision-making by demonstrating the important effects of social roles and how they govern not just perceptions of conflict, but also beliefs about how to respond to and resolve conflict. By highlighting this asymmetry, we attempt to inform a debate within the justice literature about the best way to respond to interpersonal transgressions. Forgiveness is helpful when it comes to resolving conflicts, but it may not lead to resolution if both parties do not share similar expectations about how much it is desired.

Finally, our findings also provide support for the idea that active observers—like passive observers—evinced the actor–observer asymmetry. Jones and Nisbett (1971) hypothesized that the asymmetry between actors and observers in attributions for behavior would emerge when the observers were involved in the interaction, and that the asymmetry would be stronger for active rather than passive observers. Some early research provided support for this proposition with either brief scenarios (Chaikin & Darley, 1973; Cunningham, Starr, & Kanouse, 1979) or with a Prisoner's Dilemma game (Miller & Norman, 1975). Here, we contribute to this literature by finding support for the original proposition in the context of rich, real-world transgressions.

Is Repair the Responsibility of the Victim?

One important implication of our findings is that there are missed opportunities for conflict repair. If victims make lower estimates of transgressors' desires for forgiveness than transgressors do, they may fail to express the very sentiments that have the capacity to repair a relationship and enable both parties to move forward. This suggests that victims may be missing an opportunity to amend their relationships with transgressors, and that conflict resolution may only be a step away.

However, we hesitate to suggest that an appropriate blanket remedy to this problem is for victims to increase their expressions of forgiveness, or to always empathize with their transgressors. For a variety of reasons, victims may not want to repair their relationships with transgressors—even if transgressors desire forgiveness.

Transgressions may not be forgivable or victims may decide that maintaining their victim status is preferable to offering forgiveness (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Furthermore, victims often report experiencing self-blame and doubt when they are transgressed against (Branscombe, Wohl, Owen, Allison, & N'gbala, 2003; Miller & Porter, 1983). Therefore, encouraging people to offer forgiveness, especially when it is not sincerely felt, might entail victims' sacrificing their feelings of self-worth in order to save a relationship. Instead, what we would like to communicate in our work is that victims may often be unaware of how much their transgressor wants forgiveness. To the extent that this variable is important to victims in determining whether to offer forgiveness (Adams & Inesi, 2016), we hope our results will serve to hasten relationship repair under such circumstances.

Another potential resolution would be for transgressors to better communicate their desire for forgiveness. In the supplemental online materials, we describe a study in which we tested the effect of transgressor apologies on this asymmetry. Although an apology did not diminish the asymmetry, it did increase victims' beliefs that transgressors want forgiveness. In addition to or instead of offering an apology, transgressors could ask for forgiveness directly. Alternatively, they could go further back in the causal chain and explain to the victim how the transgression was not intentional or express how guilty they feel. These possibilities would benefit from future research.

Conclusion

Across five studies, we find that victims and transgressors are miscalibrated in their beliefs about transgressors' intent and guilt. One critical implication of these asymmetric attributions is that victims underestimate transgressors' desires for forgiveness. Although we have argued that these social roles serve as barriers to resolving conflicts, by identifying this obstacle and empathy as a possible solution to it, we have made progress toward enabling these two parties to move beyond the transgression through forgiveness.

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