

# Victim and Observer Asymmetries in Their Reactions to an Apology: How Responsibility Attribution and Emotional Empathy Lead to Forgiveness

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## Abstract

We examined whether victims and observers react asymmetrically to different types of apologies given by a transgressor. Namely, we considered the apology's effects on its perceivers' motivation to forgive the transgressor, and also whether factors of responsibility attribution and emotional empathy mediate such effects. For this purpose, we presented 136 undergraduates with vignettes depicting a hypothetical predicament, followed by an apology scenario. The scenarios were manipulated on the perspective the participants took (victim/observer) and the sincerity of the apology (spontaneous/coerced). The data indicated an interaction effect in how the victims and the observers reacted to the types of apology: the coerced apology facilitated forgiveness motivations among only the observers and not the victims. Furthermore, we found a victim/observer asymmetry in the mediation processes that lead to their forgiveness. The effect of apologies on the observer's forgiveness was mediated by both responsibility judgment and empathic reaction, whereas its effect on the victim's forgiveness was mediated by empathy alone. The results suggest that, during a social predicament, victims and observer make decisions on a different motivational basis.

**Key Words:** apology, victim/observer asymmetry, forgiveness, responsibility attribution, emotional empathy

## Introduction

Social predicament occurs when a party's behaviors interfere with others' values and actions, causing damage to the relationship and the social reputations of the parties involved (Schlenker & Darby, 1981; Doi & Takagi, 1993). In such situations, the victims are likely to react to transgressors in a retaliatory manner based on their cognitive and emotional states of mind (Ohbuchi & Kambara, 1985; Vidmar, 2000), or they may choose to forgive and recon-

struct the relationship damaged by the transgression (McCullough, 2001; McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Height, 1998; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997).

Much as the victims are and have been regarded as playing the key role in deciding the fate of transgressors, studies show that observers or indirectly related parties also experience disturbance from the predicament and are likely to pursue justice (Green, Burnette, & Davis, 2008; Risen & Gilovich, 2007). The present study distinguishes

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and compares how victims and observers of a social predicament react to a transgression, focusing on how they respond to apologies. We consider potential factors, such as responsibility judgments and emotional empathy, which may account for the effects of an apology on people's willingness to punish or forgive the harm-giver.

### Apology and Forgiveness

Among the research centering on the effects of a transgressor's account-giving on the judgments of victims and other potent parties, the topic of apology has been gaining substantial empirical progress in the field of psychology (Fincham, 2000; McCullough, 2000, 2001; McCullough & Witvliet, 2005). Results from vignette studies (e.g., Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1991; Worthington & Scherer, 2004), episode recall studies (e.g., McCullough et al., 1997; McCullough et al., 1998), and laboratory experiments (e.g., Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989; Struthers, Eaton, Santelli, Uchiyama, & Shirvani, 2008; Zechmeister, Garcia, Romero, & Vas, 2004) consistently demonstrate that the transgressor's apology mitigate a perceiver's negative judgments or retaliatory motivations toward the transgressor, and helps foster positive and constructive reactions toward the relationship. Namely, an apology is considered to effectively promote the psychological processes of *forgiveness*—a complex of motivational changes in which one becomes decreasingly motivated to retaliate against or to maintain estrangement from the transgressor and increasingly motivated by conciliation and goodwill for the transgressor (McCullough, 2001; McCullough et al., 1997).

### Third-parties in Social Predicaments

In addition to the directly associated victims, people who have no direct contact with the event are also especially eager to hold retributive emotions toward the transgressors (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Vidmar, 2000). Interestingly, when third-parties are personally related to the victims (e.g., being friends with the victim), they are less likely to forgive than the actual victims (Green et al., 2008). Thus, in addition to how the victims respond in social predicaments, the role of third-parties is equally important. However, despite the rapid accumulation of social psychological literature on forgiveness, only few studies have examined its difference between the victim and the third-party.

Particularly relevant to our interest, Risen and Gilovich (2007) report that victims tend to react forgivingly when given an apology regardless of whether the apology is spontaneous or coerced; in contrast, observers of the predicament distinguish between the two types and accept only the spontaneous apology. They further discuss, as the cause of such indifference, the effects of evaluation apprehension and of social scripts the victims and the observers hold regarding how they should behave in conflicts.

Although Risen and Gilovich provide us with a stimulating case where an apology asymmetrically functions for the victims and the observers, they do not clarify the internal processes which are potentially involved in the phenomenon. For instance, the account-giving literature proposes factors such as responsibility attribution (e.g., Weiner et al., 1991) and emotional empathy (e.g., McCullough et al., 1997) as being influenced by apologies. In order to elaborate on the mechanisms that produce the victim/observer asymmetry, we need to consider whether an asymmetry exists in these types of cognitive and emotional processes that the parties undertake in response to an apology. Furthermore, we will examine whether the factors of responsibility and empathy significantly mediate the effect of an apology on the victim's and the observer's motivation to forgive.

### Responsibility Attribution

Studies focusing particularly on third-party judgments point out that apologies modify the observers' responsibility attribution (Gold & Weiner, 2000; Weiner et al., 1991). For example, when a politician charged of fraud makes a public confession about one's misdeed, perceivers tend to perceive the cause of the wrongdoing as less internal and controllable for the transgressor (Weiner et al., 1991).

On the other hand, evidence is scarce regarding the effect of an apology on the victim's responsibility attribution. Although studies propose that victims' acceptance of apologies or their willingness to forgiveness are indeed rooted in the perceived responsibility of the transgression (Aquino, Tripp, & Bies, 2001; Bennett & Earwaker, 1994; Struthers et al., 2008), it is unclear as to whether an apology *modifies* such attributions of responsibility as it does for observers. However, in studies prompting participants in a victim's role to take the perspective of the transgressor, the manipulation indicates no effect on their attributed responsibility—primarily on the causal locus and controllability dimensions—

even when the strategy enhances their emotional and motivational domains of forgiveness (Takaku, 2001; Takaku, Weiner, & Ohbuchi, 2001). Such facts suggest that the victims' assumptions on who is responsible for the harm is firm and stable, and are not likely to easily be affected by mitigating factors. Thus, we predict that, as compared to observers, an apology is less effective in altering the victims' responsibility judgments.

### Emotional Empathy

Operationally, the variable of emotional empathy incorporates concepts such as sympathy, compassion, and tenderness (Batson & Shaw, 1991). Studies consistently highlight the significance of emotional empathy as a mediator between apology and forgiveness among actual victims of a transgression. These include studies based on the reminiscence of past self-experience (McCullough et al., 1997, 1998) and on hypothetical settings (Takaku, 2001; Takaku et al., 2001).

Much as for victims, evidence hints of the possibility that emotional empathy is also associated with the observers' apology-induced forgiving processes. Studies indicate that participants, from an observer's perspective, tend to feel more "sympathy", as well as forgiveness, toward the individual when the transgressor confesses his/her own fault (Weiner et al., 1991; Gold & Weiner, 2000). In addition, research related to social motivation provides evidence that when people judge an event from a third-party perspective, their responsibility judgments influence benevolent and aggressive motivations via sympathetic emotions (Rudolph, Roesch, Gritemeyer, & Weiner, 2004; Weiner, 1995).

Thus, based on the existing literature, we presume an apology to influence the emotional empathy of both the victims and the observers of a predicament.

### Summary of Predictions and Research Design

In the present study, we aimed to capture the asymmetry that potentially arises between victims and observers of a predicament in response to an apology given by a transgressor. Following the paradigm by Risen and Gilovich (2007), we particularly considered the victim/observer asymmetry related to receiving apologies that differ in their level of sincerity.

On the motivational dimension, we expect to replicate the asymmetry reported by Risen and Gilovich: sincere (i.e.,

spontaneous) apology mitigates negative motivations and, in turn, increase motivations of forgiveness for both the victims and the observers, whereas a perfunctory (i.e., coerced) apology yields forgiveness among the victims, but not among the observers.

Moreover, we address whether victim/observer asymmetries also exist in the internal process mediating the effect of apology on forgiveness. As potential mediators of the process, we concentrated on the factors of responsibility attribution and emotional empathy. Among the two, an asymmetry is more likely to be observed for the former: an apology will mitigate the responsibility attribution of observers than victims, in turn facilitating forgiveness. Emotional empathy, on the other hand, will mediate the effect of apology on forgiveness analogously for victims and observers.

To test the above hypotheses, we utilized hypothetical vignettes about an interpersonal predicament, and experimentally manipulated participants' perspective (victim or observer) and the type of apology the transgressor gives. Furthermore, we directly considered the effect of apology on one's forgiveness by measuring participants' psychological reactions at two different points during the experiment: (1) following the transgression and (2) following the apology. In this way, we anticipated to draw a more precise picture of how an apology actually modifies the impressions and emotions people hold toward the transgressor.

## Method

### Design and Participants

Experimental design consisted of a single within-participant variable (pre/post apology measurements) and two between-participant variables of perspective (victim/observer) and apology-type (coerced/spontaneous). We randomly assigned 136 students of a Japanese private university (56 males, 79 females, 1 unknown; mean age=20.93,  $SD=2.38$ ) to one of the four between-participant conditions.

### Procedure and Scenarios

We distributed and collected questionnaire packets during a single session of an introductory psychology class. Participants received partial class credit for answering the questionnaire. The first part of the packet contained a hypothetical transgression scenario, followed by questions

measuring the participants' initial attitudes toward the transgressor (pre-apology measurement). The second part of the packet contained a continuation of the story, in which the transgressor apologizes to the victim, which was also followed by identical set of questions (post-apology measurement).

*Transgression scenario.* Participants were presented with a hypothetical vignette depicting a situation where they were described as being a member of a student club at their university. After a New Year's party held among the club members, one of the other members of the group, referred to as X, is drunk and starts fighting with another partygoer. Another member of the club intervenes to stop the fight, but is accidentally knocked down by X, hitting the ground and fracturing an elbow. Participants in the victim condition read the story from the injured victim's perspective, while those in the observer condition read the story from the perspective of another member of the club who witnesses the event.

*Apology Scenario.* In the apology scenario that followed the transgression scenario, we manipulated the sincerity of the apology, in addition to the victim/observer perspective. In both conditions, the expressed apology was, "I was drunk, and I did not know what I was doing ... I'm sorry." In the spontaneous apology condition, the transgressor X rushes to the hospital and immediately apologizes to the injured club member. In the coerced apology condition, the victim sees X on campus the following day and although they apparently notice each other, X attempts to turn away—only after being demanded to do so, does X apologize to the victim.

The participants were given feedback on the objectives and results of the experiment during a later class session.

### Questionnaire

Items were identical for the pre- and the post-apology measurements except for the two manipulation check items: we included the perceived damage item only in the pre-apology measurement, and the perceived sincerity item only in the post-apology measurement.

For all items, we asked the participants to place a slash mark on a 6-cm continuous line segment with ends anchored on the left as *disagree* and on the right as *agree*. Participants' responses were quantified in terms of the distance of the marked point from the left edge of each

scale (measured in tenths of a cm: minimum 0.0 cm to maximum 6.0 cm). Thus, higher numbers indicated greater agreement by the participant.

*Forgiveness Motivation.* We constructed a Japanese version of the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivation (TRIM) scale (McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002) which measures the amount of revenge, avoidance, and benevolence motivation a person holds toward others. To ensure a valid translation, a colleague unfamiliar with the original scale and to the research objective back-translated the Japanese items into English, which we double-checked for consistency with the original version. We then modified the wording of parts of the items to suit the observer condition.

Based on the resulting 18-item scale, we conducted a maximum-likelihood factor analysis with promax rotation, separately for the pre- and post-apology measurements. Based on an eigenvalue of 1, for both analyses we extracted three factors that corresponded to the factor structure found for the original scales (McCullough et al., 1998; McCullough & Hoyt, 2002). After excluding items with loadings below .40 and those that did not show identical loading patterns between the pre- and post-apology structures, the final scales included five revenge, three avoidance, and three benevolence items, respectively (see Table 1). For each forgiveness motivation sub-scale, we used their mean scores in the subsequent analyses (Chronbach's alphas also presented in Table 1).

*Responsibility Attribution.* Two items measured participants' perceived locus of the responsibility for the transgressor ("X is the cause of the accident", "X is responsible for the harm") and one item measured perceived controllability of the predicament ("The accident could have been prevented if X was more careful"). The mean of these three items served as the measure for internal responsibility attribution (pre-apology  $\alpha=.70$ , post-apology  $\alpha=.74$ ).

*Emotional Empathy.* We measured the degree of empathetic, positive emotions the participants felt toward the transgressor. The scale consisted of five items: sympathetic, sorry, softhearted, empathetic, and compassionate (pre-apology  $\alpha=.77$ ; post-apology  $\alpha=.83$ ).

*Manipulation Check Items.* To check whether the participants appropriately distinguished between their perspective as the victim or the observer, we asked, "How much damage do you feel *you* have incurred from the incident in the

Table 1  
Promax-Rotated Factor Loadings, Communalities, and Chronbach's Alphas for the Forgiveness Motivation Scores

Item	Pre-apology				Post-apology			
	1	2	3	$h^2$	1	2	3	$h^2$
I want punishment to be given to X (Xさんに、罰を与えたい)	<b>.93</b>	-.08	.02	.78	<b>.57</b>	.16	.07	.43
I want to make X pay (Xさんに責任を取らせたい)	<b>.73</b>	.06	.16	.49	<b>.51</b>	-.04	-.09	.27
I want X to get what X deserves (Xさんに、その行為に見合った報いを受けてほしい)	<b>.69</b>	-.03	.04	.44	<b>.51</b>	.09	.04	.31
I want to see X hurt and miserable (私は、Xさんが傷つき、惨めになる様を見たい)	<b>.67</b>	.03	-.15	.60	<b>.97</b>	-.08	.03	.83
I wish that something bad would happen to X (Xさんに何か悪いことが起きてほしい)	<b>.63</b>	.01	-.07	.45	<b>.89</b>	.00	-.02	.80
I would keep as much distance from X as possible (Xさんとの間にできるだけ距離をとる)	-.07	<b>1.08</b>	.12	.98	-.01	<b>.99</b>	.06	.90
I would withdraw from X (Xさんのそばから離れる)	.00	<b>.81</b>	-.08	.74	.03	<b>.91</b>	.03	.84
I find it difficult to act warmly toward X (Xさんに温かく接することは難しい)	.26	<b>.50</b>	-.16	.61	.13	<b>.48</b>	-.22	.52
I try not to break up the relationship with X (Xさんとの関係を、壊さないように努める)	.05	.00	<b>.91</b>	.78	-.03	-.19	<b>.67</b>	.67
Despite what X did, I would want to have a positive relationship (Xさんがしたことにかかわらず、ポジティブな関係を持つようにする)	.03	-.03	<b>.74</b>	.55	.01	.07	<b>.84</b>	.64
Although X hurt or angered me, I would put them aside so we could resume our relationship (Xさんの行為は自分に苦しみや怒りをもたらししたが、Xさんとの関係を続けるために、それらをひとまず脇に置く)	-.01	.06	<b>.63</b>	.37	.03	.07	<b>.67</b>	.39
Chronbach's $\alpha$	.86	.88	.78		.86	.89	.78	

Note. Boldface indicates highest factor loadings. "X" refers to the hypothetical transgressor in the vignette. Factor 1=Revenge; Factor 2=Avoidance; Factor 3=Benevolence.

scenario?" (scaled from *not much damage* to *great damage*).

To check the perceived sincerity of the apology, we asked, "How much sincerity do you feel from the account X has made?" (scaled from *insincere* to *sincere*).

## Results

### Manipulation Checks

**Perceived Damage.** Independent samples *t* test yielded a significant difference between the perspective conditions ( $t(134)=7.79, p<.001, r=.56$ ). Participants in the victim condition ( $M=4.62$ ) perceived more damage than those who were observers ( $M=2.47$ ).

**Perceived Sincerity of Apology.** 2 (apology-type)  $\times$  2 (perspective) analysis of variance (ANOVA) yielded only the

main effect of the apology-type ( $F(1, 114)=119.18, p<.001, \eta^2=.51$ ). Participants in the spontaneous apology condition ( $M=4.74$ ) perceived higher sincerity in the transgressor's apology than those in the coerced apology condition ( $M=2.11$ ).

### Preliminary Analysis on the Pre-Apology Responses

Before focusing on the main set of analyses, we first conducted 2 (apology-type)  $\times$  2 (perspective) ANOVAs on just the pre-apology scores of the three forgiveness motivations, responsibility attribution, and emotional empathy. Unexpectedly, an interaction effect of apology-type  $\times$  perspective emerged for pre-apology revenge motivation ( $F(1, 132)=12.47, p<.01, \eta^2=.05$ ). Specifically, participants in the

Table 2  
Condition Means for the Forgiveness, Responsibility, and Empathy Measures

	Coerced Apology		Spontaneous Apology	
	Pre-apology <i>M (SD)</i>	Post-apology <i>M (SD)</i>	Pre-apology <i>M (SD)</i>	Post-apology <i>M (SD)</i>
Victim				
Benevolence Motivation	3.16 (1.18)	3.09 (1.08)	3.11 (1.03)	3.90 (.87)
Avoidance Motivation	3.01 (1.45)	2.86 (1.28)	3.08 (1.20)	1.79 (1.21)
Internal Responsibiliy Attribution	3.53 (1.25)	3.86 (1.02)	3.89 (.96)	3.81 (1.18)
Emotional Empathy	2.04 (.83)	2.28 (1.09)	1.64 (.96)	2.94 (.85)
	<i>n</i> = 35		<i>n</i> = 29	
Observer				
Benevolence Motivation	3.05 (1.18)	3.33 (1.20)	3.30 (1.13)	3.61 (1.29)
Avoidance Motivation	2.83 (1.33)	2.51 (1.44)	2.28 (1.12)	1.52 (.95)
Internal Responsibiliy Attribution	4.15 (.86)	3.78 (.99)	3.88 (.95)	3.62 (1.15)
Emotional Empathy	1.77 (1.01)	2.46 (1.07)	1.95 (.89)	3.17 (1.05)
	<i>n</i> = 32		<i>n</i> = 40	

observer condition differed on their pre-apology revenge scores depending on the apology-type condition they were assigned to<sup>1)</sup> ( $M=3.65$  in coerced,  $M=2.46$  in spontaneous,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.07$ ). Since we only manipulated the victim/observers perspectives in the pre-apology scenarios, this suggests a possible failure in the random assignment of participants to a particular experimental condition regarding the revenge variable. Thus, we will refrain from further discussion of revenge motivation, and instead focus on the results we obtained for the other variables that did not show a similar sign of defect (all  $\eta^2s<.02$ ).

The main part of our research consists of a series of 2 (pre-/post-apology measurement)  $\times$  2 (apology-type)  $\times$  2 (perspective) mixed-design ANOVAs. Means for the benevolence and avoidance motivations, responsibility attribution, and emotional empathy are provided in Table 2.

#### Effects of Apology and Perspective on Forgiveness Motivations

**Benevolence Motivation.** We found a significant difference between the pre-/post-apology measurements ( $F(1, 132)=22.14$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.14$ ), qualified by a significant measurement  $\times$  apology-type interaction ( $F(1, 132)=10.40$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $\eta^2=.07$ ). Moreover, we obtained a significant three-way interaction of measurement  $\times$  apology-type  $\times$  perspective

( $F(1, 132)=8.77$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $\eta^2=.06$ ). As expected, spontaneously given apologies increased the benevolence motivations for both the victims ( $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.18$ ) and the observers ( $p<.05$ ,  $\eta^2=.04$ ), while coerced apologies generated different reactions between the different perspectives. However, contradicting our assumption that the victims would be more affected by a coerced apology than the observers, our data indicated that the observers increased their benevolence motivation following a coerced apology ( $p=.06$ ,  $\eta^2=.03$ ) and not the victims ( $\eta^2=.00$ ). Alternatively, the level of post-apology benevolence reported by victims in the spontaneous apology condition was significantly greater than those who read the coerced apology ( $p<.01$ ,  $\eta^2=.06$ ); whereas for observers, no marked difference existed in the post-apology levels of benevolence between the two types of apologies ( $\eta^2=.01$ ).

**Avoidance Motivation.** ANOVA revealed significant difference between the pre-/post-apology measurements ( $F(1, 132)=46.03$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.26$ ), the main effect of the type of apology ( $F(1, 132)=10.69$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $\eta^2=.08$ ), and a significant interaction of measurement  $\times$  apology-type ( $F(1, 132)=17.92$ ,  $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.12$ ): while the spontaneous apology mitigated the avoidance motivation ( $p<.001$ ,  $\eta^2=.32$ ), the coerced apology did so only to a marginal degree ( $p=.07$ ,  $\eta^2=.02$ ). The main effect of perspective was

1) This and all subsequent post hoc analyses employ the Bonferroni-adjusted multiple comparison.

also significant ( $F(1, 132)=4.22, p<.05, \eta^2=.03$ ), indicating that victims showed stronger avoidance motivation than observers. Above all, the effects were qualified by a three-way interaction ( $F(1, 132)=3.65, p=.06, \eta^2=.03$ ). Consistent with the pattern for the benevolence motivation, spontaneous apologies mitigated both the victim's ( $p<.001, \eta^2=.24$ ) and the observer's ( $p<.001, \eta^2=.13$ ) avoidance motivations over time; whereas, the coerced apology, albeit marginally, reduced observer's avoidance ( $p=.09, \eta^2=.02$ ) but not the victim's ( $\eta^2=.01$ ).

### Effects of Apology and Perspective on the Mediators

**Responsibility Attribution.** As we expected, we found a significant interaction of measurement and perspective ( $F(1, 132)=5.09, p<.05, \eta^2=.04$ ). Before an apology, observers judged the transgressor to be moderately more responsible for the harm than did the victims ( $p=.09, \eta^2=.02$ ). Furthermore, a stronger asymmetry emerged in how the two parties reacted to the apologies, supporting our prediction. Observers judged the transgressor as less responsible for the damage after they observed the transgressor apologize ( $p<.05, \eta^2=.04$ ), regardless of the sincerity of the given apology. In contrast, neither apologies affected victims' responsibility judgments after receiving them ( $\eta^2=.01$ ).

**Emotional Empathy.** ANOVA yielded a significant effect of measurement ( $F(1, 131)=98.62, p<.001, \eta^2=.43$ ), qualified by an interaction with the type of apology ( $F(1, 131)=20.65, p<.001, \eta^2=.14$ ). Analysis of this interaction indicated that although both types of apology boosted empathic emotions toward the transgressor (with coerced,  $p<.001, \eta^2=.10$ ; with spontaneous,  $p<.001, \eta^2=.44$ ), the spontaneous apology induced higher levels of empathy than did the coerced apology ( $p<.001, \eta^2=.10$ ). As we anticipated, the perspectives made no difference in the pattern.

### Test of Mediation (and Moderation)

So far, we have noted that an apology given by the transgressor affects the victims' and the observers' forgiveness motivations, as well as the factors of responsibility attribution and emotional empathy. Next, we examined whether

perceived responsibility and empathic emotions accounted for these changes in participants' forgiveness. Due to the nature of the experimental design involving the within-participant manipulation of apology, we relied on the methodology proposed by Judd, Kenny, and McClelland (2001), which allows for a test of mediation and moderation in situations where observations under one condition are not independent of observations in another condition. Specifically, the method tests for effects by regressing the calculated difference between the two repeated measurements of the dependent variable (i.e., forgiveness) on the calculated differences and sums of the predictor variables (i.e., responsibility attribution and empathy). A significant coefficient for the predictor's difference-variable estimates the degree to which the within-participant treatment's effect on the dependent variable is due to the change in the relevant predictor, hence indicating *mediation*. A significant coefficient for the predictor's sum-variable estimates the degree to which the treatment effect in the dependent variable is *moderated* by the average score of the predictor over the treatment conditions.

For this particular analysis, we combined the two forgiveness motivation sub-scales by subtracting each participant's avoidance score from the benevolence score to construct a single index of forgiveness<sup>2)</sup>. We then calculated change in this single index of forgiveness caused by an apology by subtracting the pre-apology forgiveness score from the post-apology score (mean difference was .46 points).

To simultaneously test the models for victims and observers, we performed a multiple-group structural equation path analysis using maximum likelihood method. We regressed the forgiveness difference score on apology-type (dummy-coded as -1 for coerced and 1 for spontaneous) and difference- and sum-terms of each of the two predictors (responsibility attribution and emotional empathy). We also included paths from the apology-type variable to all of the predictors. Starting with a full model, we then eliminated paths insignificant in both the victim's and the observer's model until reaching a model with only significant paths and a good fit to the data. This final model is presented in Figure 1<sup>3)</sup>.

2) The main results did not differ when we conducted the mediation/moderation analyses independently for the benevolence and avoidance subscales.

3) In both of the models, error variances of the four predictor variables did not covariate with each other.

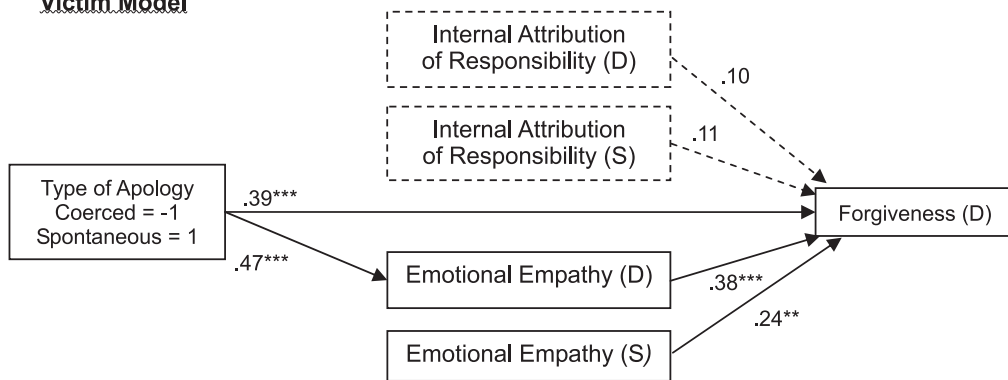
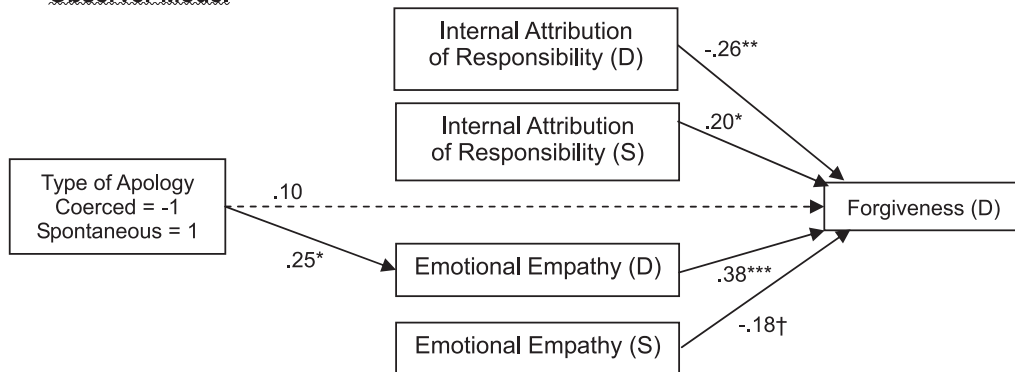
**Victim Model****Observer Model**

Figure 1. Multiple-Group Path Analysis Models for the Victim's and the Observer's Change in Forgiveness

Note.  $\chi^2(18)=24.77$ , *n.s.*; GFI=.95; AGFI=.87; RMSEA=.05. † $p<.10$ , \* $p<.05$ , \*\* $p<.01$ , \*\*\* $p<.001$ . D: Difference of post-apology minus the pre-apology score; significant path coefficients indicate that the corresponding predictor mediates the effect of apology on forgiveness. S: Sum of pre- and post-apology scores; significant path coefficients indicate that the corresponding predictor moderates the effect of apology on forgiveness. All path coefficients are standardized. Dotted lines indicate insignificant paths/variables.

As Figure 1 illustrates, path analysis provided evidence of an apparent victim/observer asymmetry regarding the role of responsibility attribution. In the victim model, we found that neither the difference-term nor the sum-term of responsibility attribution significantly predicted change in forgiveness. In contrast, both of these variables predicted the change in forgiveness for observers. The significant difference-term in the observer model provides evidence for mediation by responsibility attribution: lower internal responsibility judgments induced by an apology account for the increase in observers' forgiveness motivations. Statistically, the path coefficient from the responsibility attribution mediation-term to forgiveness differed significantly between the victim and the observer models ( $z=2.65$ ,

$p<.01$ ). In addition, the moderation effect (i.e., the significant path from the sum-term of responsibility attribution) in the observer's model suggests that the magnitude of the effect of an apology on forgiveness depends on the average value of their responsibility attribution measured before and after an apology. In our case, a positive coefficient of the moderation-term ( $\beta=.20$ ) indicates that an apology more strongly predicts forgiveness among observers when, on average (or in sum), they also hold a stronger internal responsibility attribution toward to transgressor.

For emotional empathy, the difference- and sum-terms significantly predicted change in forgiveness for both victims and observers. The mediation-term positively affected forgiveness in both models ( $\beta=.38$  for both), indicating that



an increase in forgiveness induced by an apology is due to a corresponding increase in emotional empathy. In addition, emotional empathy significantly moderated the effect of apology on forgiveness, although this pattern was significantly different for victims and observers ( $z=3.22, p<.001$ ). Among victims, the moderation-term positively predicted forgiveness ( $\beta=.24$ ), indicating that an apology more strongly facilitates forgiveness for victims with a stronger average empathy. Conversely, the moderation-term in the observer's model negatively predicted forgiveness ( $\beta=-.18$ ), indicating that those with stronger average empathy tended to show *less* of an increase in forgiveness.

Lastly, the analysis indicated that the dummy-coded apology-type variable predicted the emotional empathy's difference-terms for both victims and observers, consistent with the ANOVA results in that the spontaneous apology produced more empathy among participants than the coerced apology. Further, the models indicated a significant difference between the victims' and the observers' paths from type of apology to forgiveness ( $z=1.99, p<.05$ ), suggesting that such effect is mediated by empathy partially among the victims and fully among the observers.

### Discussion

The present study was designed to assess possible asymmetries that exist in the patterns of reaction victims and observers show when transgressors either sincerely or insincerely apologize for their misconducts. Based on Risen and Gilovich (2007), we had initially predicted that observers (and not the victims) would discriminate between the two types of apologies. However, our data indicated a reversed pattern, with victims presenting a stronger distinction between forgiveness induced by a coerced versus a spontaneous apology, while observers tended to forgive the transgressor even after receiving a coerced apology. A possible explanation for the result we obtained and for the contradiction with the Risen and Gilovich study could be derived if we turn our attention to how victims and observers reacted in terms of responsibility attribution and emotional empathy. What these findings further suggest is that the victims and the observers focus on different aspects of the information conveyed via an apology.

### Apology-induced Psychological Processes of Victims/Observers

As we predicted, a victim/observer asymmetry was found in the way an apology affected judgments regarding who is responsible for the harm. Particularly for observers, the result of the ANOVA suggests that the apology functioned as a cue to modify their cognitive interpretation of the event, leading them to view the transgressor as less at fault for the caused harm. For the victims, on the other hand, the presence of an apology by the transgressor had no effect on their judgments of who was responsible. Moreover, the subsequent path analysis indicated that changes in observers' responsibility judgments after an apology actually accounted for their increased forgiveness motivations, while it did not account for victim's forgiveness. A noteworthy finding was that both the spontaneous and the coerced apologies decreased observer's perceived responsibility. Thus, what appears to be important is the sole fact that the transgressor apologized rather than how sincerely it was conducted.

Regarding emotional empathy, both victims and observers became more emotionally concerned and sympathetic for the transgressor following an apology. According to the path analysis, such effect on empathy effectively mediated the apology's effect on forgiveness for both victims and observers. Thus, emotional empathy is a crucial regulator of people's forgiveness intentions regardless of whether they are the actual victims or the third-party observers of a transgression. Furthermore, the participants tended to show a greater increase of empathy in the face of a spontaneous apology as compared to a coerced apology.

The set of results implies that an apology conveys multiple facets of information, two of which are: Information on who is responsible for the predicament, represented by verbal statements referring to one's blameworthiness or the admittance of fault, and secondly, information on the transgressor's present internal state, represented as expressions of regret or remorse (Schlenker & Darby, 1981; Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Forster, & Montada, 2004).

In our study, the verbal elements of the apology conveyed that the transgressor admits the fault for causing the damage, while it simultaneously gave the transgressor's subjective explanation for why the damage occurred. In response, we assume that the participants in the observer perspective made judgments retrospectively about the case, attributing

less responsibility on the transgressor and possibly more on external factors (such as alcohol).

Relative to such retrospective judgments, we expect that the sincerity of the apology cues the perceivers to make more present-oriented judgments concerning the transgressor's current attitude towards the predicament. We believe that emotional empathy induced among the perceivers of the apology is an indicator of such present-oriented information processing since empathy is facilitated when they are notified the transgressor is experiencing guilt and distress at the moment (McCullough et al., 1997).

Internal processes regarding the past (i.e., responsibility attribution) and the present (i.e., emotional empathy) will both serve as the basis for one's willingness towards the future relationship with the transgressor (i.e., forgiveness), but our data has shown that an asymmetry exists in the processes the victims and observers tend to pursue in the face of an apology. The fact that the apology did not affect the victim's responsibility judgments but facilitated their empathy suggests that they processed the apology predominantly in a present-oriented manner, with the distinction between the apology's sincerity having a powerful impact on their forgiveness. In contrast, the apology affected the observer's forgiveness via the retrospective responsibility judgments as well as the empathy factor. The fact that they were motivated to forgive even with a coerced apology is due to the retrospective judgments they underwent, which remitted the impact of apology's sincerity and nevertheless had a positive effect on forgiveness.

### Comparison with Existing Research

Returning to the Risen and Gilovich (2007) study, notable differences exist between their study and ours, which may render explanation for the different patterns we obtained. Specifically, we note two issues: intentionality of the depicted transgression, and the relationship among the parties associated with the predicament.

Regarding the intentionality of the harm, our scenarios depicted the transgression itself as accidental rather than intentional: a fight between the (intoxicated) transgressor and another individual resulting in an incidental injury of the victim. We have already noted that the apology given by the transgressor led the observers to make retrospective judgments and to discount the perceived intentionality of the harm, in turn attenuating their responsibility judgments. In

contrast, the existing research dealt with transgressions purposefully aimed toward the victim (as in Study 2 of Risen and Gilovich, where the transgressor makes harmful remarks to the victim). In such intentional cases, apologizing for one's act may have ended up emphasizing, instead of attenuating, the responsibility attributed to the transgressor. In fact, such downside effect of an apology has been pointed out by past research (e.g., Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004; Weiner et al., 1991), and comparison between Risen and Gilovich's and our study suggests that the perceived intentionality of the transgression may be related to the issue.

Another factor discriminating our study from Risen and Gilovich (2007) is the neutrality of the observer's standpoint. The parties in the Risen and Gilovich study associated with each other temporarily for the lab experiment. In contrast, scenarios in our study depicted the observer as belonging to the same close community (i.e., university club) as the victim and the transgressor. Given the significance of student club activities for Japanese university students (Arai & Matsui, 2003), participants in our study may have had a strong tendency to identify other characters in the scenario as ingroup members. Based on reports that causal and responsibility attributions are often times biased to favor the ingroup (e.g., Hewston, 1990; Karasawa, 2002), it is possible that the observers who deemed the transgressor as a fellow ingroup member were more likely to make favorable attribution judgments than those in the Risen and Gilovich's study.

The result of the present study, in conjunction with the pre-existing research, proposes that especially retrospective judgments are bound to be moderated by factors such as the perceived intentionality of the transgression or the relationship between the parties involved. However, such assumptions are merely hypotheses awaiting further empirical examinations and we cannot make a solid statement at this point. Future studies need to examine more elaborately the effects of intentionality and relationship on the victim/observer asymmetry of forgiveness.

### Moderation Effects by Responsibility Attribution and Empathy

Our data also suggest that responsibility judgments and emotional empathy moderate the effect of an apology on forgiveness with an apparent victim/observer asymmetry in

the way these factors work. The moderation effect is calculated based on the average values of responsibility attribution or emotional empathy each participant reported over the pre-/post-apology measurements, allowing us to interpret it as the effect of individual differences in how much overall cognitive or emotional reactions they experienced.

For victims, the apology affected forgiveness more for those with stronger average empathy scores, indicating that individuals who were generally more prone to empathize with the transgressor were likely to increase their forgiveness in response to an apology. The victims thus follow a general intuition that those high in trait empathy are likely to respond forgivingly (e.g., Schimmel, Wohl, & Williams, 2006).

The observers reacted more forgivingly to an apology when they exhibited, on average, *less* empathy as well as more internal responsibility attribution. One possible explanation for the observers is that their levels of responsibility judgments and empathy reflected how much they perceived the depicted situation as relevant. Contrary to the victims, the observers may see the predicament but not deem it as relevant to themselves, and so the participants who responded with more extreme responsibility attributions or empathy, and consequently, who were more prone to be affected by the apology, may have been those who focused more attention on the situation. However, our data is not yet sufficient to make a concluding remark on this topic, and further investigation is needed to test this hypothesis, as well as on other individual difference factors that moderate people's reactions to an apology.

#### Why Might Victims and Observers Differ?

The victim/observer asymmetry we observed in the parties' responsibility judgments is particularly indicative of their motivational tendencies during a social predicament. Previous research has revealed that individuals tend to attribute responsibility according to self-protective motives in the face of a negative event (e.g., Burger, 1981; Shaver, 1970).

In this regard, the victims in our experiment may have been resistant to altering their original responsibility judgments due to their motivation to avoid potential blame being directed onto themselves rather than the transgressor. In order to defend one's status over the transgressor, victims may be likely to retain their perception that the trans-

gressor is the one to blame.

On the other hand, observers, who showed a more malleable responsibility judgment, may be motivated to avoid being a future target of the transgression in a similar situation. To assess the possibility that observers themselves will be in the victim's shoes in a similar situation, they should be motivated to correctly judge responsibility using the available situational cues, including the transgressor's apology.

Although thought-provoking, we are able to point out only possibilities of the fundamental motivations that drive the relevant parties during a predicament. Further research needs to highlight the goals that both parties aspire toward in conflict situations.

#### For Further Generalization of the Findings

Given the fact that the findings we have discussed thus far are based on an experiment conducted under a single controlled situation, several major issues are bound to be considered upon theoretical generalization.

Firstly, we need to consider whether our findings are generalizable across different types and characteristics of the transgression. For instance, during troubles between intimate partners, relational satisfaction has close ties to forgiveness (Fincham, 2000), and victims are more likely to forgive the transgressor (Green et al., 2008). In monetary troubles, concerns for loss or restitution of finance or property might lead the parties to react based on self-interest than any other motivations (e.g., Ohbuchi, Suzuki, & Takaku, 2003). Moreover, since the severity of the transgression is a determinant of the appropriateness of an account (Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Schlenker & Darby, 1981), we may find different reactions from participants depending on the degrees of harm. Participants in our victim condition rated the transgression as mildly harmful ( $M=4.62$ ), and it would be necessary to consider people's reactions when the harm intensifies or softens. According to Boon and Sulsky (1997), severity information more likely influences blame judgments rather than forgiveness judgments; hence, it is probable that the magnitude of the harm would moderate most the observers' changes in responsibility judgment.

Secondly, the scenarios we employed focused primarily on describing the situation, and left out information on specific dispositions (e.g., gender, age, intimacy level) of the characters. In doing so, we intended to regard as an

experimental error the differences in the transgressor's image portrayed by each participant. However, we may have ignored certain factors crucial in the context, such as status (i.e., whether the characters are one's senior or junior in the club) which has been reported as associated with Japanese people's views toward account giving (Takaku, 2000). Thus, future studies call for more deliberate control or measurement of the imaginary target's characteristics.

The third point is whether our findings are universal or culturally-specific. Cross-cultural studies hitherto have demonstrated that the Japanese tend to favor responsibility-accepting apologies, relative to Americans (Ohbuchi et al., 2003; Ohbuchi, Atsumi, & Takaku, 2008), possibly reflecting the Japanese people's strong concerns for relationship with peers (Ohbuchi et al., 2003; Takaku et al., 2001). Although, in our study, the observers who basically reacted benevolently to apologies might be in consistency with such cultural trend, the victims reacted differently when the apology was not spontaneous. Regarding this point, we have to further discern whether culture did play a role to generate the outcomes of our study, and if so, how it interacted with the situational variables.

### Conclusion

Since most interpersonal predicament situations involve more than just the parties directly inflicted the harm, focusing on just the dyadic structure of a victim-transgressor relationship and the process of forgiveness they generate is not enough to achieve a full understanding of determinants for the outcome of a predicament—especially since certain reactional discrepancies stem from the different motivations that each parties possess. Our study demonstrated one of such patterns by focusing on the judgmental and emotional processes victims and observers employ. The findings are merely an initial step in shedding light on the psychological tendencies of the various parties involved in a predicament, and we expect future studies to provide resolution in understanding human tendencies during conflict situations.

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## 謝罪に対する被害者と観察者の対応における非対称性 —責任帰属と情緒的共感による許しの規定プロセスからの検討—

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本研究は、侵害者が行う謝罪に対して、実際の被害者と、被害の観察者とが異なる反応を示すという傾向を検討した。特に、謝罪によってもたらされる「許し」の動機づけと、さらにその規定因となる責任帰属や情緒的共感といった変数に注目し、被害者と観察者の謝罪に対する反応の差異を検討した。大学生 136 名に対して、被害者／観察者の視点を操作した被害場面シナリオ、及び侵害者による自発性を操作した謝罪シナリオを段階的に提示し、各段階で侵害者への反応を測定した。その結果、「許し」の動機づけに関しては、視点と謝罪タイプの交互作用が見られ、非自発的な謝罪は、観察者のみに対して「許し」の促進効果を持っていた。さらに、謝罪が「許し」を規定する媒介過程においても、視点間の非対称性が示された。観察者においては、謝罪は責任判断と情緒的共感の両者の変数と介して「許し」を規定していたのに対して、被害者においては、情緒共感のみがそのような役割を担っていた。以上の結果から、対人葛藤場面においては、その被害者と観察者の判断を動機づける要因が異なることが示唆される。

キーワード：謝罪、被害者／観察者の非対称性、許し、責任帰属、情緒的共感

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