

Cancelled or Renewed? Psychological Factors Behind Redemption Following Public Transgressions

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Abstract

In an increasingly digital world, people's past wrongdoings sometimes re-emerge publicly online, eliciting renewed moral condemnation. What factors do observers consider in judgments of redemption or condemnation? We expected greater redemption following evidence of personal growth (vs no growth), and especially when growth was private (vs public). We also expected Democrats (vs Republicans) to be less forgiving of past racism (Studies 1 & 2) regardless of growth. In three experiments ($N = 3,607$), observers were more forgiving toward a transgressor when they had demonstrated personal growth since the original incident (i.e., attending classes on the issue, participating in nonprofits, donating money). This effect was observed when the transgressor had posted racist comments online in the past (Studies 1 & 2) or had been arrested for drunk driving (Study 3). Democrats were overall less forgiving than Republicans. Unexpectedly, observers responded similarly to public and to private growth.

keywords: moral judgement, social media, cancel culture, politics, forgiveness, personal growth

Cancelled or Renewed? Psychological Factors Behind Redemption Following Public Transgressions

No-one has a picture-perfect past. In each person's history there are a variety of positive and negative acts, moments they look back on in pride and those they recall with regret. When people grapple with how to understand their undesirable past from minor foibles to serious transgressions, many identify themes of growth, change, and learning (Mansfield et al., 2015; Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997), seeking to assure themselves that their future is not defined by the worst of their past. However, observers have a challenging task when judging another person: they must decide, often on the basis of limited information, whether a past transgression should define a person's enduring moral character, and whether the person should be forgiven and afforded redemption (Baumeister et al., 1990; Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997). There are a number of factors observers may consider, including the severity of the transgression, perceived intentions, the surrounding circumstances, and the passage of time (Adams, O'Connor & Belmi, 2022; McCullough et al., 2010; Ward & Wilson, 2015; Wohl & McGrath, 2007; Young & Saxe, 2011). However, while offline social networks offer opportunities for close acquaintanceship and intimacy, the modern world is global and interconnected. The internet, and social media in particular, has produced the opportunity for unprecedented connection and interaction with strangers. In the online context, impressions may be formed and judgements rendered anonymously, with little background knowledge or personal investment (Lieberman & Schroeder, 2020).

Some observers contend that the contemporary digital social world has given rise to a particular kind of moral judgment phenomenon sometimes dubbed "cancel culture" (Norris, 2021). Anecdotally, cancel culture occurs when a person (often, but not always, public figure) is

harshly called out for something they have done or said. Scholars have noted that cancel culture has been insufficiently studied and that it is difficult to arrive at an operationalization of the concept (Norris, 2021). Precisely defining the phenomenon is difficult because the term has been used to describe such disparate events. “Cancellations” have varied widely from relatively minor offences with outsized consequences – such as Justine Sacco’s ill-considered ironic joke about racial inequity that morphed into a (successful) international campaign to get her fired (Ronson, 2015) – to calls to hold accountable serious offenders, such as Harvey Weinstein (Schumann & Dragotta, 2020).

The drastic variation in the nature of the offenses and the forms of repercussion has led to an equally diverse variety of opinions on the phenomenon at large, which has been variably referred to as “cancel culture” and “accountability culture”. Some see it as censorship and mob rule (Furdyk, 2020; Romano, 2020) while others see it as grassroots accountability and the just consequences for one’s actions (Hagi, 2019; Tensley, 2020). These different perspectives sometimes emerge along political lines; for instance in a poll asking about cancel culture in general, Republicans were more likely to see censorship while Democrats pointed to accountability (Vogels et al., 2021). Although political opponents may define this phenomenon differently in general, evidence suggests that this kind of harsh online judgment occurs across the political aisle (Dawson et al., 2023; Dias et al., 2022).

Redemption

Online shaming often fixates on a single offence taken out of context of a person’s broader life, character, and actions. However, this additional nuance can be highly informative when making judgments. Especially for actions that occurred in the past, a perceiver may look for evidence of repeated wrongdoing, or of repentance and growth, to calibrate the harshness of

their judgment. For instance, after public outcry about antisemitic statements, television host Nick Cannon apologized, met with prominent Jewish figures, and made donations to the human rights museum (Brisco, 2021), describing the incident as a “growth moment” (Owoseje, 2023).

What determines how people react to one’s personal growth following a transgression? In the offline context, people are often motivated to act more morally after committing a transgression (Jordan, et al., 2011; West & Zhong, 2015), but this research does not address the question of whether others grant an offender redemption. While there is currently limited research on the impact of personal growth on moral judgement, studies have shown that making an apology can be reparative (Kammrath & Peetz, 2012; Schumann & Dragotta, 2020). This doesn’t mean that forgiveness is necessarily easy to achieve: past research has shown that people require more evidence to believe that someone has improved in moral character compared to what they require to believe that someone has shown a moral decline (Klein & O’Brien, 2016).

Judgments of growth and redemption are further complicated in the online environment. People usually have limited personal knowledge of the offender, and when repentance happens publicly observers may also wonder whether it reflects genuine growth or performative impression management.

The Current Research

Despite a growing literature examining the role of social media dynamics in moral judgment (Van Bavel et al., 2024), little work has systematically examined the effects of personal growth on moral judgement online. In a study on people’s judgements of racially derogatory tweets, Dawson and colleagues (2023) asked participants which factors would be most likely to change their perceptions of the person who posted them. Acknowledging past mistakes and personal growth as well as contributing time and money to anti-discrimination

causes were two of the biggest factors participants said would lead to less judgement. However, this finding was descriptive, and participants were not actually exposed to cases where such examples of growth took place. The current research examines people's reactions to similar types of growth following online transgressions with an experimental approach.

We examined participants' responses to past transgressions of a public figure, looking at how evidence of growth following the transgression would alter judgement. We manipulated whether the public figure demonstrated personal growth and whether the growth occurred in private or in public. We also manipulated the timing of the growth, whether it took place before or after the figure's past transgression resurfaced to face public scrutiny. These factors were examined across three studies. Studies 1 and 2 included statements posted on Twitter that were derogatory towards Asian people, while Study 3 included a drunk driving charge in the public figure's past.

We expected that when the public figure showed evidence of growth, and especially when the growth was conducted in private, judgements would be less harsh, participants would perceive more genuine improvement, and that the surrounding circumstances (e.g. distance in time from the event, age of the public figure) would be viewed in a more positive light. We also expected that evidence of growth would lead participants to see the person's transgression as less reflective of their true self compared to their more recent actions. When it came to the timing of when the growth occurred, we expected that all of the variables listed above would reflect better on the public figure when the growth occurred *before* the transgression resurfaced to invoke criticism. Finally, based on existing divisions over "cancel culture" (Vogels et al., 2021) and the racial targeting of the tweets (Sterling et al., 2019; Tetlock, 2003; Tetlock et al., 2000), we also expected to find political differences, specifically that Democrats compared to Republicans

would give harsher judgements, perceive less growth, view the surrounding circumstances (e.g. distance in time from the event, age of the public figure) in a less forgiving light, and view the past transgression as more reflective of the public figure's true self. See full list of formal hypotheses in Table 1.

Table 1

Formal hypotheses for each study.

Hypothesis 1a. Democrats will show harsher judgements in response to the offense compared to Republicans.
Hypothesis 1b. Democrats will view the subjective circumstances in a way that looks worse for the public figure compared to Republicans.
Hypothesis 1c. Democrats will perceive less growth than Republicans.
Hypothesis 1d. Compared to Republicans, Democrats will see the public figure's present behavior as less representative of their true self and their past behavior as more representative of their true self.
Hypothesis 2a. The public figure will be judged less harshly in both growth conditions compared to the no growth condition.
Hypothesis 2b. The subjective circumstances will be viewed in a way that is better for the public figure in both growth conditions compared to the no growth condition.
Hypothesis 2c. More growth will be perceived in both growth conditions compared to the no growth condition.
Hypothesis 2d. In both growth conditions compared to the no growth condition, the public figure's present behavior will be seen as more representative of their true self and their past behavior will be seen as less representative of their true self.
Hypothesis 3a. The public figure will be judged less harshly in the private growth condition compared to the public condition.
Hypothesis 3b. The subjective circumstances will be viewed in a way that is better for the public figure in the private growth condition compared to the public condition.
Hypothesis 3c. More growth will be perceived in the private growth condition compared to the public condition.
Hypothesis 3d. In the private condition compared to the public condition, the public figure's present behavior will be seen as more representative of their true self and their past behavior will be seen as less representative of their true self.
Hypothesis 4a. In the before condition, there will be no difference between private and public growth. In the after condition, the public figure will be judged less harshly in the private growth condition compared to the public condition.
Hypothesis 4b. In the before condition, there will be no difference between private and public growth. In the after condition, The subjective circumstances will be viewed in a way that is better for the public figure in the private growth condition compared to the public condition.
Hypothesis 4c. In the before condition, there will be no difference between private and public growth. In the after condition, more growth will be perceived in the private growth condition compared to the public condition.
Hypothesis 4d. In the before condition, there will be no difference between private and public growth. In the after condition, the public figure's present behavior will be seen as more representative of their true self and their past behavior will be seen as less representative of their true self in the private condition compared to the public condition.

Note. While all hypotheses were tested across studies, not all were preregistered each time. Hypotheses 4a-4d were not tested in Study 1 as there was no timing manipulation. Several of our predictions were also dialed back after they did not emerge in previous studies. See Table S1 for full breakdown of preregistered hypotheses across studies.

Because the three studies use the same methodology with small changes, we report them all together, noting key differences along the way. All studies, measures, manipulations, and data are reported in the manuscript or its supplementary material. All three studies were preregistered. Preregistrations as well as study materials, data files, and analysis syntax can be found on OSF (<https://osf.io/39gfz/>).

Materials and Methods

Participants and Power

Across all studies, we aimed to recruit United States citizens 18 years and older, with equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans in each sample. Participants self-selected into the study via CloudResearch in Studies 1 and 3 and Prolific in Study 2. The same exclusion criteria were used for each study. Participants were removed if they failed both attention checks, which asked them to select a specific number to show that they were paying attention. An open-ended effort check asked what factors participants used when making judgements about the past incidents and the public figure involved. Participants were removed if they did not respond, responded with nonsense, or did not discuss anything relevant to the question. As well, an honesty check at the end of the surveys asked participants if they believed we should use their data. Participants were removed if they indicated that they lied in their responses, chose their answers without reading the questions, chose their answers at random, or accidentally entered incorrect information. Finally, if participants did not identify as Republican or Democrat after starting the survey, they were removed as well. See Table 2 for demographic breakdown by sample.

Table 2

Demographics by study.

	Study 1	Study 2	Study 3
	<i>N</i> = 895	<i>N</i> = 1528	<i>N</i> = 1190

Age			
Mean	41.91	39.73	43.05
SD	13.17	14.39	15.63
Political Party			
Democrat	469 (52.4%)	776 (50.8%)	629 (52.9%)
Republican	426 (47.6%)	752 (49.2%)	561 (47.1%)
Ethnicity			
White/Caucasian	727 (81.2%)	1268 (83%)	970 (81.5%)
Black/African/African North American	88 (9.8%)	84 (5.5%)	93 (7.8%)
Hispanic/Latin American	44 (4.9%)	106 (6.9%)	77 (6.5%)
American Indian/First Nations/Métis/Inuit/Alaska Native	7 (0.8%)	21 (1.4%)	9 (0.8%)
Middle Eastern	4 (0.4%)	8 (0.5%)	3 (0.3%)
South Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)	6 (0.7%)	22 (1.4%)	8 (0.7%)
East Asian (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, etc.)	25 (2.8%)	71 (4.6%)	50 (4.2%)
Southeast Asian (Thai, Vietnamese, Indonesian, etc.)	15 (1.7%)	23 (1.5%)	17 (1.4%)
Pacifica Islander/Native Hawaiian/Polynesian	2 (0.2%)	4 (0.3%)	4 (0.3%)
Other	9 (1.0%)	7 (0.5%)	1 (0.1%)

Note. Participants were allowed to select multiple options for ethnicity.

Study 1

Study 1 took place in November of 2021. According to G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) to test any possible 2-way interaction with simple main effects with a relatively small effect size ($\eta_p^2 = 0.02$) would require 864 participants. We added 15% to account for exclusions and rounded to 1000 for our desired sample size. Our initial sample included 1025 participants. Twenty-three were removed for failing both attention checks, 69 were removed based on the effort check, 2 were removed based on the honesty check, and 96 were removed because they did not identify as Democrats or Republicans. This gave us a final sample of 895.

Study 2

Study 2 took place in May of 2022. According to G*Power, we needed a final sample of 1,404 in order to test the 4 simple main effects included in the 2 (Growth Type Condition) \times 2 (Timing Condition) \times 2 (Participant Political Party) interaction with a relatively small effect size ($\eta_p^2 = 0.02$). To account for a predicted 15% exclusions, we aimed for a sample of 1652. Our initial sample included 1663 participants. Twenty failed both attention checks, 61 failed the effort check, 5 were removed based on the honesty check, and 101 did not identify as Democrat or Republican, giving a final sample of 1528.

Study 3

Study 3 took place in July of 2022. According to G*Power, a (simple) main effect between two groups of a relatively small effect size ($\eta_p^2 = 0.02$) requires 352 participants. If we want to look at the simple main effects of the timing condition for each of the growth type conditions, that will mean a final sample of $352 \times 3 = 1,056$. Accounting for 15% exclusions means that the initial sample recruited will need $1,056/0.85 = 1,242$ participants. Our initial sample included 1298 participants. Twenty-one failed both attention checks, 50 failed the effort check, 0 were removed based on the honesty check, and 81 did not identify as Democrat or Republican, giving a final sample of 1190.

Procedure

Demographics

Participants provided basic demographic information as well as a variety of measures on their political views. For the current studies we primarily use the measure in which participants self-reported their preferred political party (Republican or Democrat) with participants who did not choose one of the main two parties excluded from analyses.

Scenarios

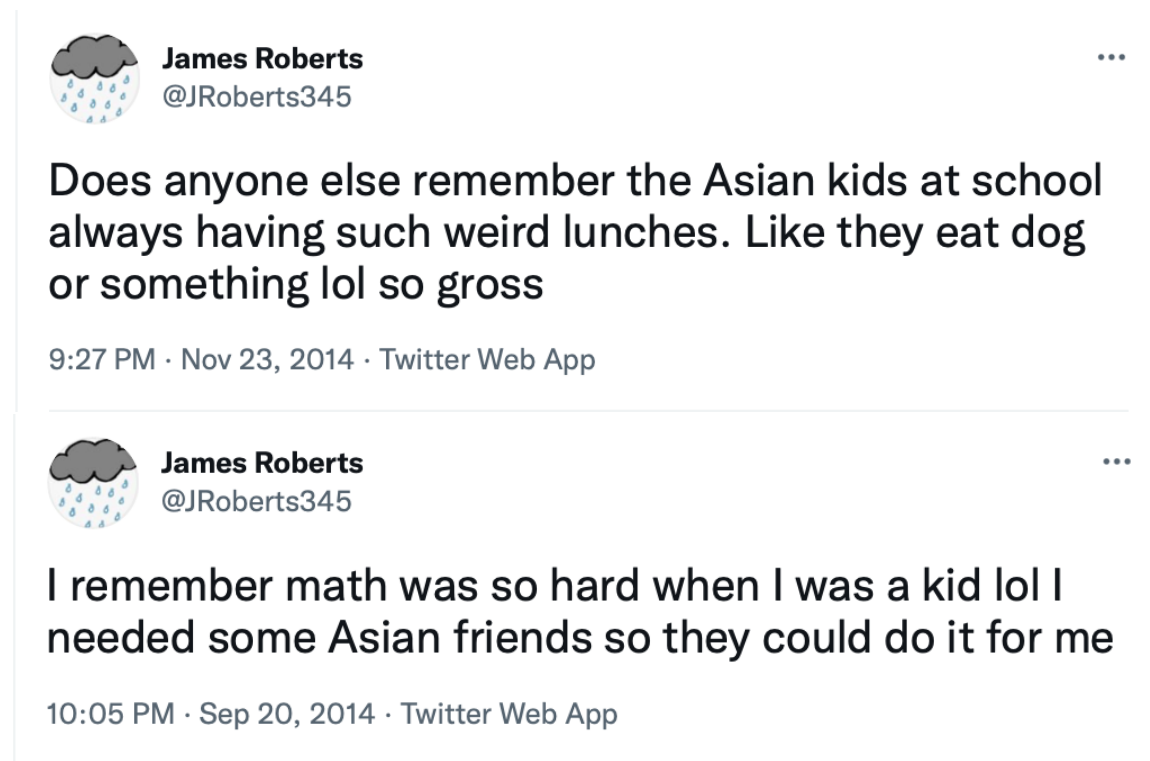
In each study, participants read about a public figure who had committed some transgression in the past that had recently been uncovered to great public scrutiny. The public figures and scenarios were fictional, but participants were not told this until the debriefing. We used two different scenarios across studies.

Studies 1 & 2. Participants read about a public figure named James Roberts, a weather forecaster at a local news station. Roberts had recently come under public criticism for offensive tweets he posted on Twitter 7 years prior, when he was 22 and still in college. Participants were shown the tweets in question, which all included offensive jokes about Asian people. See Figure 1 for the tweets as they appeared.

Figure 1

Tweets shown to participants, Studies 1 & 2





Study 3. In our final study, we wanted to extend our findings beyond the case of racially offensive tweets, and examine a scenario that would be (roughly) equally offensive to both Democrats and Republicans. Participants read a story about Edward Day, another weather reporter from a local news station, who had recently come under criticism for a DUI charge in his past. About 2 years prior in 2020, when he was 30 years old, Day was convicted for driving recklessly while drunk and crashing into a lamppost. (The incident took place earlier in the same year.) The incident became public knowledge 1 year later in 2021 when a reporter uncovered the court records. Day had not attempted to conceal the information.

Growth Descriptions

After reading the stories (and, in Studies 1 and 2, seeing the tweets), participants were told about how the public figure had grown as a person since the original incident. As an example, in Studies 1 and 2 participants were told that James Roberts “participated in anti-racism

non-profit organizations, attended classes on social inequalities, and donated large sums of money to racial justice charities.” In Study 3, participants were told that Edward Day “voluntarily participated in non-profit organizations against drunk driving and donated large sums of money to raise awareness of the dangers of driving impaired.” In all scenarios, we confirmed that no similar incidents had occurred since the original transgression. In all studies, the exact wording varied by condition. See Table S2 for exact descriptions across studies and conditions. We manipulated two factors in particular.

Growth Type Condition. The public figure either demonstrated growth in a very public or very private fashion, or, in Studies 1 and 3, did not demonstrate growth at all. In the private condition, the information on the public figure’s growth came from inside sources, their charity work was behind the scenes, and their donations were given anonymously. In the public condition, the public figure’s growth was evidenced by their social media posts and both their charity work and donations were done in a public manner. In the no growth condition, we told participants that little was known about the public figure’s behavior since the incident (but that no repeat incidents seemed to have occurred).

Timing Condition. In Studies 2 and 3, we also attempted to manipulate whether the public figure’s growth took place *before* or *after* the past incident resurfaced to become public knowledge (the growth always took place after the incident itself.) In Study 2, participants in the before condition were told that the growth occurred “at least five months before the tweets recently resurfaced online” while participants in the after condition were told it occurred “at least in the five months since the tweets recently resurfaced online”. In Study 3, participants in the before condition were told the growth occurred “in the year that passed between the conviction for the DUI in 2020 and when it became known to the public in 2021” while those in the after

condition were told it occurred “for the last year since the DUI conviction became known to the public in 2021”. Note that the timing manipulation was very subtle (potentially too subtle in retrospect) compared to other aspects of the experiment. The timing of the growth was mentioned in passing within the larger story; it was not brought to the participants’ direct attention in any separate section.

Measures

All variables were measured in the same way across studies unless otherwise stated.

Dependent Variables

Judgement. Our first two measures, adapted from Dawson et al. (2023) were focused on overall judgements of the public figure. These included a *consequences* variable assessing endorsement of various punishments the public figure may have to face, and a *moral character* variable assessing the figure’s overall moral character and likeability in the present.¹ Both the consequences ($\alpha = .92, .93, .90$) and moral character ($\alpha = .96, .93, .93$) variables showed good reliability. The exact items for each variable can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Items for consequences and moral character variables.

Consequences
To what degree should this person be judged now based on their tweets [past impaired driving]? 1 (<i>Not at all</i>) to 7 (<i>Very much so</i>)
To what degree should this person be forgiven for their tweets [past impaired driving]? 1 (<i>Not at all</i>) to 7 (<i>Very much so</i>)
Should this person's employer take disciplinary action against them, based on these tweets [their past impaired driving]? 1 (<i>Not at all</i>) to 7 (<i>Definitely</i>)
Should this person's employer fire them, based on these tweets [their past impaired driving]?

1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Definitely*)

Should this person resign from their job for these tweets [their past impaired driving]?

1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Definitely*)

Moral Character

Please think about this person [and what they did] and give your judgements of that person in the present on the following dimensions. To what degree is this specific person:

1 (*Immoral*) to 7 (*Moral*)

1 (*Good*) to 7 (*Bad*)

1 (*Trustworthy*) to 7 (*Untrustworthy*)

1 (*Likeable*) to 7 (*Unlikeable*)

Note. Consequences Item 2 and Moral Character Items 3-4 were reverse-coded. Words in square brackets show the versions used for Study 3.

Subjective Circumstances. These variables assessed participants' perceptions of the circumstances surrounding the past transgression and how they influenced its relevance. Past research has found that people may shift such perceptions in order to enhance or diminish the significance of a person's offense (Dawson et al., 2023).

Subjective Time. Participants were asked "Sometimes events tend to feel closer or further away, regardless of how long ago it actually occurred. Think about when the original tweets were made [Day originally drove while drunk], as described previously. Place the sliders at the point that best indicates how long ago the statements being made feels to you." They responded using two slider measures ranging from 0 (*Feels very recent*) to 100 (*Feels very long ago*) and 0 (*Feels like yesterday*) to 100 (*Feels like ancient history*). In Study 3 the second item was replaced by a slider ranging from 0 (*Feels like yesterday*) to 100 (*Feels like the distant past*). The subjective time measure showed good reliability across studies, $R_{SB} = .94, .92, .93$ (For two-item scales we report the Spearman-Brown coefficient; recommended by Eisinga et al., 2013).

Subjective Age. This measure consisted of two 7-point Likert scales in which participants were asked “In general, people can seem quite young or old regardless of their actual age. How old or young did this person seem when they shared the posts [drove impaired]?” and “This person was quite young when they made these statements [drove impaired].” The two items showed poor reliability in Study 1, $r_{SB} = .47$. Studies 2 and 3 added “This person was quite old when they made these statements [drove impaired], making a three-item scale with good reliability, $\alpha = .83, .70$.

Current Relevance. This measure consisted of 7-point Likert scales adapted from Dawson et al. (2023) assessing the relevance of the past transgression to the present. Items included “This past incident has no bearing on who this person is today”, “How much do you think that this person’s past actions reflect their current character?”, and “This person is a different person now than when they made these statements [drove impaired].” Studies 1 and 2 also included “To what degree do you think that the statements made by this person 7 years ago are deeply held beliefs in the present?” Current relevance showed good reliability across studies, $\alpha = .89, .91, .75$.

Psychological Statute of Limitations. We asked participants “How much time would have to pass before you would feel tweets like this are no longer relevant to judging that person’s character in the present?” They indicated the number of months in one box and years in another box, which were then added up. Some participants indicated extremely high values (e.g. 100,000+ years) which was likely meant to express great disapproval but posed a problem as extreme outliers. To resolve this, we winsorized the data so that responses higher than 100 years total would be set to exactly 100 years. Less than 0.3% of the data was winsorized in each study.

Perceived Growth. We measured participants’ assessment of the public figures growth with four 7-point Likert scales including “How much growth has this person shown since posting the tweets [driving impaired]?”, “This person has shown genuine growth.”, “How satisfied are you

with this person's personal growth since posting the tweets [driving impaired]?", and "I think that the individual has improved as a person since posting the tweets [driving impaired]." This measure showed consistently good reliability, $\alpha = .97, .97, .96$.

True Self. These measures assess whether the past transgression and current growth reflected the public figure's "true self" adapted from Newman and colleagues (2014): "In your opinion, what aspect of this person's personality caused them to post these tweets [drive impaired] at the time?" Participants rated the extent to which the past transgression reflected "Their 'true self' (the deepest, most essential aspect of their being)" from 1(*Not at all*) to 7(*Very much so*).² An otherwise identical item asked the extent to which the person's more recent behavior was reflective of their true self.

Hypocrisy and Performativeness. Although not part of our preregistered hypotheses, we also examined how participants' perceptions of the public figure's hypocrisy and performativeness varied across conditions. These constructs were measured differently across studies, though always with 7-point Likert items. In Study 1, a single item was used for each both hypocrisy ("The person's recent behavior is hypocritical in light of his past statements") and performativeness ("Any growth that this person has shown is likely just performative"). In Study 2, we decided that these constructs needed greater attention, and included three items for hypocrisy, $\alpha = .92$, and four for performativeness, $\alpha = .96$. In Study 3 we made some slight adjustments to the items, resulting in three items for both hypocrisy, $\alpha = .95$, and performativeness, $\alpha = .91$.

Additional Measures

Manipulation and Memory Checks. Several items assessed whether participants accurately recalled the information pertinent to their experimental conditions. We included a privacy check that asked participants how public or private the public figure had been on the

subject of racism or impaired driving, ranging from 1(*Very Private*) to 7(*Very Public*). In Study 3, we included an additional question to see if participants recalled if growth occurred to begin with, measured with a dichotomous *yes* or *no*. Studies 2 and 3 also included a timing check that asked if the public figure's growth occurred before or after their past transgression became public. They chose between before the incident occurred, after, both, or indicated that they didn't know.

Perception of the Offenses. We measured how participants viewed the transgression itself in each study. In Studies 1 and 2, participants were asked to rate the tweets on 7-point scales ranging from *Immoral* to *Moral*, *Good* to *Bad*, *Trivial* to *Important*, *Offensive* to *Inoffensive*, and *Funny* to *Unfunny*. The measure showed good reliability in both studies, $\alpha = .82$, $.77$. In Study 3, we assessed attitudes towards drunk driving with two items asking "How serious do you consider an action such as drunk driving to be?" and "How morally acceptable do you consider drunk driving to be?", $r_{SB} = .72$.

Results

Manipulation and Memory Checks

Across all three studies, participants reported the public figure as being more public with their personal growth in the public condition compared to the private condition (all $ps < .001$). Notably, when included in Studies 1 and 3, the no info condition appeared more private than both of the other growth conditions. ($ps \leq .001$). Means can be found in Table 4. In Study 3, we also examined if participants recalled if growth occurred to begin with. Participants were significantly more likely to say that growth occurred in the public (92%) or private (94%) conditions compared to the no growth condition (13%), $ps < .001$. There was no difference between the public and private conditions, $p = .320$.

Table 4

Extent to which growth was seen as public, estimated marginal means and standard errors.

	Private Growth Condition	Public Growth Condition	No Growth Condition
Study 1	6.24 (0.13)	7.23 (0.14)	4.36 (0.13)
Study 2	4.15 (0.07)	5.22 (0.07)	—
Study 3	2.70 (0.09)	3.95 (0.09)	2.28 (0.09)

Note. Higher scores indicate the growth was seen as taking place more in public.

We also examined if participants remembered if the growth occurred before or after the event became public. In Study 2, 53% of participants correctly recalled whether the growth occurred before or after the tweets resurfaced (49% in the before condition and 56% in the after condition). Recall was even poorer in Study 3, where only 30% of participants correctly recalled when the growth occurred (27% in the before condition, 33% in the after condition). The low accuracy rates may have been because the timing manipulation was rather subtle, requiring participants to track the timeline themselves as they read the story.

Perceptions of the Offenses

Perceptions of the anti-Asian tweets themselves in Studies 1 and 2 did not vary by experimental condition (all $ps > .05$). As intended, however, Democrats saw the tweets as worse than Republicans in both Study 1, $F(1, 886) = 60.63, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .06$, and Study 2, $F(1, 1518) = 186.61, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$. In Study 3, DUI attitudes not only did not differ by condition (all $ps > .05$), but there was also no difference between Democrats and Republicans, $F(1, 1177) = 0.34, p = .561, \eta_p^2 < .001$, suggesting that the offense was relatively partisan-neutral as intended.

Main Hypotheses

Each of the main dependent variables were put into the same political party \times growth type condition \times timing condition ANOVA, with the exception of the lack of timing

manipulation in Study 1 and no growth condition in Study 2. We report main effects and interactions for all outcomes of interest in Table 5, estimated marginal means and standard errors in Table 6, and simple main effects probing the significant interactions in Table 7.

Table 5*Main effects and interactions for dependent variables across studies.*

	Political Party	Growth Condition	Timing Condition	Party × Growth	Party × Timing	Growth × Timing	Party × Growth × Timing
Study 1							
Consequences	$F(1, 889) = 75.22$, $\eta_p^2 = .08***$	$F(2, 889) = 11.24$, $\eta_p^2 = .03***$	—	$F(2, 889) = 4.98$, $\eta_p^2 = .01**$	—	—	—
Moral Character	$F(1, 887) = 21.95$, $\eta_p^2 = .02***$	$F(2, 887) = 34.68$, $\eta_p^2 = .08***$	—	$F(2, 887) = 3.45$, $\eta_p^2 = .01*$	—	—	—
Curr.Relevance	$F(1, 889) = 48.31$, $\eta_p^2 = .05***$	$F(2, 889) = 52.85$, $\eta_p^2 = .11***$	—	$F(2, 889) = 6.38$, $\eta_p^2 = .01**$	—	—	—
Statute	$F(1, 847) = 22.90$, $\eta_p^2 = .03***$	$F(2, 847) = 5.06$, $\eta_p^2 = .01**$	—	$F(2, 847) = 0.37$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$	—	—	—
Subjective Time	$F(1, 887) = 39.33$, $\eta_p^2 = .04***$	$F(2, 887) = 3.78$, $\eta_p^2 = .01*$	—	$F(2, 887) = 1.25$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$	—	—	—
Subjective Age	$F(1, 888) = 21.37$, $\eta_p^2 = .02***$	$F(2, 888) = 3.44$, $\eta_p^2 = .01*$	—	$F(2, 888) = 4.61$, $\eta_p^2 = .01*$	—	—	—
Perceived Growth	$F(1, 888) = 28.66$, $\eta_p^2 = .03***$	$F(2, 888) = 153.00$, $\eta_p^2 = .26***$	—	$F(2, 888) = 9.54$, $\eta_p^2 = .02***$	—	—	—
True Self Past	$F(1, 888) = 21.12$, $\eta_p^2 = .02***$	$F(2, 888) = 9.82$, $\eta_p^2 = .02***$	—	$F(2, 888) = 2.74$, $\eta_p^2 = .02†$	—	—	—
True Self Present	$F(1, 888) = 3.01$, $\eta_p^2 = .003†$	$F(2, 888) = 4.52$, $\eta_p^2 = .01*$	—	$F(2, 888) = 3.81$, $\eta_p^2 = .01*$	—	—	—
Hypocrisy	$F(1, 889) = 1.66$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$	$F(2, 889) = 1.17$, $\eta_p^2 = .003$	—	$F(2, 889) = 2.23$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$	—	—	—
Performativeness	$F(1, 889) = 19.36$, $\eta_p^2 = .02***$	$F(2, 889) = 23.22$, $\eta_p^2 = .05***$	—	$F(2, 889) = 8.61$, $\eta_p^2 = .02***$	—	—	—
Study 2							
Consequences	$F(1, 1520) = 114.29$, $\eta_p^2 = .07***$	$F(1, 1520) = 2.45$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$	$F(1, 1520) = 1.27$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 1.27$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.23$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 6.76$, $\eta_p^2 = .004**$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.27$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$
Moral Character	$F(1, 1519) = 39.13$, $\eta_p^2 = .03***$	$F(1, 1519) = 1.41$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1519) = 0.49$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1519) = 0.42$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1519) = 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1519) = 2.63$, $\eta_p^2 = .002$	$F(1, 1519) = 0.004$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$
Current Relevance	$F(1, 1520) = 46.04$, $\eta_p^2 = .03***$	$F(1, 1520) = 1.79$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 1.29$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 1.32$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.59$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 7.68$, $\eta_p^2 = .01**$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.03$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$
Statute	$F(1, 1417) = 43.70$, $\eta_p^2 = .03***$	$F(1, 1417) = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1417) = 0.06$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1417) = 0.88$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1417) = 3.98$, $\eta_p^2 = .003*$	$F(1, 1417) = 0.16$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1417) = 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$
Subjective Time	$F(1, 1518) = 57.28$, $\eta_p^2 = .04***$	$F(1, 1518) = 1.66$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1518) = 0.68$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1518) = 0.04$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1518) = 0.25$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1518) = 4.97$, $\eta_p^2 = .003*$	$F(1, 1518) = 3.03$, $\eta_p^2 = .002†$
Subjective Age	$F(1, 1520) = 25.65$, $\eta_p^2 = .02***$	$F(1, 1520) = 1.24$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.08$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.004$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.23$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.23$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 1.25$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$
Perceived Growth	$F(1, 1520) = 23.42$, $\eta_p^2 = .02***$	$F(1, 1520) = 4.66$, $\eta_p^2 = .003*$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.003$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 3.32$, $\eta_p^2 = .002†$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.002$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 2.24$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.04$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$
True Self Past	$F(1, 1520) = 32.90$, $\eta_p^2 = .03***$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.004$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.01$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 3.88$, $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 1.70$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 1.49$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 0.23$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$

	$\eta_p^2 = .02***$	$\eta_p^2 < .001$	$\eta_p^2 < .001$	$\eta_p^2 = .003*$	$\eta_p^2 = .001$	$\eta_p^2 = .001$	$\eta_p^2 < .001$
True Self Present	$F(1, 1519) = 0.41,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1519) = 7.95,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01**$	$F(1, 1519) = 0.36,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1519) = 0.39,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1519) = 0.54,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1519) = 1.07,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1519) = 0.01,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$
Hypocrisy	$F(1, 1519) = 8.89,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01**$	$F(1, 1519) = 9.95,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01**$	$F(1, 1519) = 1.22,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1519) = 7.78,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01**$	$F(1, 1519) = 1.30,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1519) = 7.31,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01**$	$F(1, 1519) = 3.01,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002†$
Performativeness	$F(1, 1520) = 11.99,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01***$	$F(1, 1520) = 9.52,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01**$	$F(1, 1520) = 6.64,$ $\eta_p^2 = .004*$	$F(1, 1520) = 6.44,$ $\eta_p^2 = .004*$	$F(1, 1520) = 1.07,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1520) = 4.32,$ $\eta_p^2 = .003*$	$F(1, 1520) = 1.55,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$
	Political Party	Growth Condition	Timing Condition	Party × Growth	Party × Timing	Growth × Timing	Party × Growth × Timing
Study 3							
Consequences	$F(1, 1178) = 4.45,$ $\eta_p^2 = .004*$	$F(2, 1178) = 9.36,$ $\eta_p^2 = .02***$	$F(1, 1178) = 0.02,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 3.93,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01*$	$F(1, 1178) = 1.65,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 0.64,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 0.19,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$
Moral Character	$F(1, 1177) = 0.10,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1177) = 48.04,$ $\eta_p^2 = .08***$	$F(1, 1177) = 0.35,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1177) = 1.69,$ $\eta_p^2 = .003$	$F(1, 1177) = 0.05,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1177) = 0.05,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1177) = 1.21,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002$
Current Relevance	$F(1, 1177) = 0.83,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(2, 1177) = 4.23,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01*$	$F(1, 1177) = 0.34,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1177) = 1.10,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002$	$F(1, 1177) = 0.011,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1177) = 0.15,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1177) = 1.14,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002$
Statute	$F(1, 1135) = 3.82,$ $\eta_p^2 = .003†$	$F(2, 1135) = 0.80,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1135) = 0.16,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1135) = 0.02,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(1, 1135) = 0.30,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1135) = 0.16,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1135) = 0.75,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$
Subjective Time	$F(1, 1177) = 6.90,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01**$	$F(2, 1177) = 1.63,$ $\eta_p^2 = .003$	$F(1, 1177) = 0.20,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(2, 1177) = 1.20,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002$	$F(1, 1177) = 0.07,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1177) = 0.82,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(2, 1177) = 1.36,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002$
Subjective Age	$F(1, 1177) = 11.16,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01***$	$F(2, 1177) = 3.20,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01*$	$F(1, 1177) = 0.23,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1177) = 0.33,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1177) = 2.15,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002$	$F(2, 1177) = 0.05,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1177) = 1.30,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002$
Perceived Growth	$F(1, 1178) = 0.39,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 100.68,$ $\eta_p^2 = .15***$	$F(1, 1178) = 0.15,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 1.38,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002$	$F(1, 1178) = 0.56,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 0.61,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 1.52,$ $\eta_p^2 = .003$
True Self Past	$F(1, 1176) = 0.01,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1176) = 2.06,$ $\eta_p^2 = .003$	$F(1, 1176) = 0.58,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1176) = 2.76,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01†$	$F(1, 1176) = 0.49,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1176) = 2.26,$ $\eta_p^2 = .004$	$F(2, 1176) = 0.44,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$
True Self Present	$F(1, 1178) < .001,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 6.39,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01**$	$F(1, 1178) = 0.10,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 0.60,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1178) = 0.39,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 2.19,$ $\eta_p^2 = .004$	$F(2, 1178) = 1.02,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002$
Hypocrisy	$F(1, 1178) = 2.13,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002$	$F(2, 1178) = 5.92,$ $\eta_p^2 = .01**$	$F(1, 1178) = 0.72,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 0.32,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(1, 1178) = 0.27,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 0.63,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 1.84,$ $\eta_p^2 = .003$
Performativeness	$F(1, 1178) = 0.36,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 1.43,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002$	$F(1, 1178) = 0.46,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 1.24,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002$	$F(1, 1178) = 0.32,$ $\eta_p^2 < .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 0.60,$ $\eta_p^2 = .001$	$F(2, 1178) = 1.44,$ $\eta_p^2 = .002$

Note. Hypocrisy and performativeness were measured using different items across studies. See main text for details. † $p < .10$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 6*Estimated marginal means and standard errors for dependent variables across conditions and studies.*

	Republicans	Democrats	Private Growth	Public Growth	No Growth	Before	After
Study 1							
Consequences	2.14 (0.07)	2.92 (0.06)	2.33 (0.08) _a	2.45 (0.08) _a	2.82 (0.08) _b	—	—
Moral Character	4.58 (0.07)	4.15 (0.06)	4.72 (0.08) _a	4.53 (0.08) _a	3.84 (0.08) _b	—	—
Curr.Relevance	3.16 (0.06)	3.75 (0.06)	3.16 (0.07) _a	3.13 (0.08) _a	4.07 (0.07) _b	—	—
Statute	90.37 (7.92)	142.71 (7.54)	95.99 (9.32) _{a1}	115.35 (9.60) _a	138.28 (9.49) _{a2}	—	—
Subjective Time	67.20 (1.23)	56.57 (1.17)	63.81 (1.45) _a	63.21 (1.50) _a	58.63 (1.45) _b	—	—
Subjective Age	2.54 (0.06)	2.90 (0.05)	2.64 (0.07) _a	2.66 (0.07) _a	2.86 (0.07) _b	—	—
Perceived Growth	7.59 (0.08)	6.99 (0.08)	8.06 (0.10) _a	7.90 (0.10) _a	5.92 (0.10) _b	—	—
True Self Past	4.36 (0.11)	5.04 (0.10)	4.45 (0.13) _a	4.50 (0.13) _a	5.16 (0.13) _b	—	—
True Self Present	6.16 (0.09)	5.95 (0.08)	6.22 (0.10) _a	6.15 (0.11) _a	5.80 (0.11) _b	—	—
Hypocrisy	5.01 (0.10)	5.20 (0.10)	4.95 (0.12) _a	5.16 (0.13) _a	5.20 (0.12) _a	—	—
Performativeness	3.79 (0.10)	4.41 (0.10)	3.66 (0.12) _a	3.88 (0.13) _a	4.77 (0.12) _b	—	—
Study 2							
Consequences	2.46 (0.05)	3.27 (0.05)	2.81 (0.05) _a	2.93 (0.05) _a	—	2.91 (0.05)	2.82 (0.05)
Moral Character	4.24 (0.05)	3.79 (0.05)	4.06 (0.05) _a	3.97 (0.05) _a	—	4.04 (0.05)	3.99 (0.05)
Curr Relevance	3.12 (0.05)	3.63 (0.05)	3.33 (0.05) _a	3.43 (0.05) _a	—	3.34 (0.05)	3.42 (0.05)
Statute	71.79 (5.69)	124.46 (5.57)	98.71 (5.62) _a	97.55 (5.65) _a	—	99.10 (5.62)	97.16 (5.65)
Subjective Time	67.67 (0.84)	58.71 (0.83)	63.96 (0.84) _a	62.43 (0.84) _a	—	63.68 (0.84)	62.70 (0.84)
Subjective Age	2.13 (0.04)	2.43 (0.04)	2.31 (0.04) _a	2.25 (0.04) _a	—	2.25 (0.04)	2.30 (0.04)
Perceived Growth	5.31 (0.05)	4.95 (0.05)	5.21 (0.05) _a	5.05 (0.05) _b	—	5.13 (0.05)	5.13 (0.05)
True Self Past	3.52 (0.06)	4.01 (0.06)	3.77 (0.06) _a	3.76 (0.06) _a	—	3.76 (0.06)	3.77 (0.06)
True Self Present	4.73 (0.05)	4.69 (0.05)	4.81 (0.05) _a	4.60 (0.05) _a	—	4.73 (0.05)	4.69 (0.05)
Hypocrisy	2.95 (0.06)	3.20 (0.06)	2.94 (0.06) _a	3.21 (0.06) _b	—	3.03 (0.06)	3.12 (0.06)
Performativeness	3.29 (0.06)	3.58 (0.06)	3.30 (0.06) _a	3.57 (0.06) _b	—	3.33 (0.06)	3.54 (0.06)
Study 3							
Consequences	2.19 (0.05)	2.34 (0.05)	2.12 (0.06) _a	2.20 (0.06) _a	2.48 (0.06) _b	2.27 (0.05)	2.26 (0.05)
Moral Character	4.64 (0.05)	4.61 (0.05)	4.93 (0.06) _a	4.84 (0.06) _a	4.12 (0.07) _b	4.65 (0.05)	4.61 (0.05)
Curr Relevance	3.21 (0.06)	3.28 (0.05)	3.17 (0.06) _a	3.16 (0.06) _a	3.40 (0.07) _b	3.27 (0.05)	3.22 (0.05)
Statute	37.31 (3.59)	46.92 (3.35)	39.90 (4.19) _a	46.49 (4.23) _a	39.94 (4.35) _a	43.09 (3.47)	41.14 (3.48)
Subjective Time	55.78 (0.92)	52.47 (0.86)	55.72 (1.08) _a	53.23 (1.08) _a	53.42 (1.11) _a	53.84 (0.89)	54.41 (0.89)
Subjective Age	3.25 (0.04)	3.45 (0.04)	3.26 (0.05) _{a1}	3.35 (0.05) _a	3.44 (0.05) _{a2}	3.34 (0.04)	3.36 (0.04)
Perceived Growth	5.33 (0.05)	5.29 (0.05)	5.67 (0.06) _a	5.60 (0.06) _a	4.65 (0.06) _b	5.32 (0.05)	5.29 (0.05)
True Self Past	3.35 (0.06)	3.36 (0.06)	3.25 (0.08) _{a1}	3.33 (0.08) _a	3.47 (0.08) _{a2}	3.38 (0.06)	3.32 (0.06)
True Self Present	5.01 (0.06)	5.01 (0.05)	5.18 (0.07) _a	5.03 (0.07) _a	4.83 (0.07) _b	5.03 (0.06)	5.00 (0.06)

Hypocrisy	2.37 (0.06)	2.25 (0.06)	2.20 (0.07) _a	2.22 (0.07) _a	2.51 (0.07) _b	2.35 (0.06)	2.28 (0.06)
Performativeness	2.77 (0.06)	2.72 (0.06)	2.65 (0.07) _a	2.77 (0.07) _a	2.81 (0.07) _a	2.71 (0.06)	2.77 (0.06)

Note. Numbers in brackets denote standard errors. For growth condition, different subscript letters across means denotes a significant difference (but not the direction of the difference).

Table 7*Estimated marginal means and standard errors with simple main effects for significant interactions.*

Political Party × Growth Condition						
	Republican			Democrat		
	Private Growth	Public Growth	No Growth	Private Growth	Public Growth	No Growth
Study 1						
Consequences	2.13 (0.11) _{aa}	2.02 (0.012) _{aa}	2.28 (0.11) _{aa}	2.53 (0.011) _{ab}	2.87 (0.11) _{bb}	3.36 (0.11) _{cb}
Moral Character	4.79 (0.11) _{aa}	4.76 (0.12) _{aa}	4.20 (0.11) _{ba}	4.65 (0.11) _{aa}	4.32 (0.11) _{bb}	3.47 (0.11) _{cb}
Current Relevance	3.08 (0.11) _{aa}	2.74 (0.11) _{ba}	3.66 (0.10) _{ca}	3.24 (0.10) _{aa}	3.52 (0.10) _{bb}	4.47 (0.10) _{cb}
Subjective Age	2.57 (0.10) _{aa}	2.53 (0.10) _{aa}	2.52 (0.10) _{aa}	2.71 (0.10) _{ab}	2.79 (0.10) _{aa}	3.21 (0.10) _{ba}
Perceived Growth	8.10 (0.14) _{aa}	8.14 (0.15) _{aa}	6.54 (0.14) _{ba}	8.02 (0.13) _{aa}	7.66 (0.14) _{ab}	5.30 (0.14) _{bb}
True Self Present	6.10 (0.15) _{aa}	6.32 (0.16) _{aa}	6.07 (0.15) _{aa}	6.34 (0.14) _{aa}	5.98 (0.15) _{aa}	5.53 (0.15) _{bb}
Performativeness	3.75 (0.18) _{aa}	3.30 (0.19) _{aa}	4.32 (0.17) _{ba}	3.56 (0.17) _{aa}	4.46 (0.17) _{bb}	5.22 (0.17) _{cb}
Study 2						
True Self Past	3.61 (0.09) _{aa}	3.44 (0.09) _{aa}	—	3.93 (0.09) _{ab}	4.09 (0.08) _{ab}	—
Hypocrisy	2.93 (0.09) _{aa}	2.96 (0.09) _{aa}	—	2.95 (0.08) _{aa}	2.45 (0.08) _{bb}	—
Performativeness	3.27 (0.09) _{aa}	3.31 (0.09) _{aa}	—	3.34 (0.08) _{aa}	3.82 (0.08) _{bb}	—
Study 3						
Consequences	2.18 (0.09) _{aa}	2.02 (0.09) _{a1a}	2.38 (0.09) _{a2a}	2.06 (0.08) _{aa}	2.38 (0.08) _{bb}	2.58 (0.08) _{ba}
Political Party × Timing Condition						
	Republican			Democrat		
	Before	After		Before	After	
Study 2						
Statute of Limitations	64.82 (8.15) _{aa}	78.77 (7.95) _{aa}		133.37 (7.74) _{ab}	115.55 (8.02) _{ab}	
Growth Condition × Timing Condition						
	Before			After		
	Private Growth	Public Growth		Private Growth	Public Growth	
Study 2						
Consequences	2.75 (0.08) _{aa}	3.07 (0.08) _{ba}		2.86 (0.08) _{aa}	2.78 (0.08) _{ab}	
Current Relevance	3.18 (0.08) _{aa}	3.49 (0.08) _{ba}		3.47 (0.08) _{ab}	3.37 (0.08) _{aa}	
Subjective Time	65.76 (1.19) _{aa}	61.60 (1.18) _{ba}		62.15 (1.18) _{ab}	63.26 (1.19) _{aa}	
Hypocrisy	2.78 (0.09) _{aa}	3.28 (0.08) _{ba}		3.10 (0.08) _{ab}	3.28 (0.08) _{aa}	
Performativeness	3.11 (0.09) _{aa}	3.54 (0.08) _{ba}		3.50 (0.08) _{ab}	3.59 (0.09) _{aa}	

Note. Numbers in brackets denote standard errors. Only dependent variables showing significant interactions are included. Different subscript letters across means denotes a significant difference (but not the direction of the difference). For political party × growth,

first subscript refers to simple main effects of growth condition within both Republicans and Democrats and second subscript refers to simple main effects of political party within each growth condition. For political party \times timing, first subscript refers to simple main effects of timing condition within both Republicans and Democrats and second subscript refers to simple main effects of political party within each timing condition. For growth \times timing, first subscript refers to simple main effects of growth within each timing condition and second subscript refers to simple main effects of timing condition within each growth condition. Numbers indicate that two conditions are different from each other but not a third condition.

Hypotheses 1a-1d: Political Differences

We predicted that Democrats would react more strongly than Republicans across our different dependent variables, specifically in ways that would be more condemnatory towards the public figure. Generally this prediction was supported, with significant differences for consequences, moral character, subjective time, subjective age, current relevance, statute of limitations, perceived growth, and true self past. Notably, Democrats and Republicans were less consistently divided over the DUI case in Study 3, where they only significantly differed on consequences, subjective time, and age. The inconsistency may reflect the fact that we selected the transgression to be relatively partisan-neutral, in contrast to anti-Asian tweets. Hypocrisy and performativeness as well were less consistent, with significant effects for hypocrisy only in Study 2 and performativeness in Studies 1 and 2.

Hypotheses 2a-2d: Growth vs No Growth

We predicted that the public figure would be treated better when they demonstrated some form of growth (private and public conditions) than when no information was available at all (no growth condition). Generally this prediction was supported, with significant differences for consequences, moral character, current relevance, perceived growth, and past and present true self in both Study 1 and Study 3. (Recall we did not include the no growth condition in Study 2.) The difference was more consistent for private growth than public growth. Only private growth was seen in a significantly better light for statute of limitations in Study 1 as well as subjective age and true self past in Study 3.

Hypotheses 3a-3d: Private vs Public Growth

We also predicted that the public figure would be treated better in the condition where they demonstrated growth in private compared to when they demonstrated growth in public. Overall, we did not find consistent support for this prediction. Private growth was only seen as better than public for perceived growth, hypocrisy, and performativeness^f in Study 2. Otherwise there was not a significant difference. This suggests that what is most important is not the type of growth that is demonstrated, but that the public figure demonstrated growth to begin with. It is noteworthy, however, that whenever there was a difference, participants favored private growth.

The political party \times growth type interaction, which we examine in Table 7, may help to shed some light on the difference between private and public growth. Across all three studies, what stands out in this interaction is that Democrats see private growth as better than public growth, whereas Republicans do not. It is possible that the inconsistent main effects are due to the fact that only Democrats distinguish between these conditions. We should be very cautious, however, because the political party \times growth type interaction was not very consistent. While it was significant for consequences, moral character, current relevance, subjective age, perceived growth, true self present, and performativeness in Study 1, it was only significant for true self past, hypocrisy, and performativeness in Study 2 and consequences in Study 3. In most cases, the private and public forms of growth were treated the same.

Hypotheses 4a-4d: Growth and Timing

In our original hypotheses, we predicted that private growth would be better received than public growth only if it occurred after the past transgression became public, because then the public figure would have a clear and immediate incentive to repair their reputation through performative acts. We did not find support for this prediction in any of our dependent variables.

In Study 3, we do not find any interaction between growth type and timing. In Study 2, we do find an interaction for consequences, current relevance, subjective time, hypocrisy, and performativeness (see Table 4). However, the pattern of results is the opposite of what we predicted. Private growth looked better than public growth in the *before* condition but not the *after* condition. There is no clear interpretation of why this was the case. It is possible that participants confused when the event became public and when the event occurred. Posting something *after* being very public about social justice issues may invoke a sense of hypocrisy, and indeed we see this interaction for both hypocrisy and performativeness, among other variables. However, we do not have a means of assessing if that was the case. Given that only 53% of participants in Study 2 correctly recalled when the growth occurred, and that no growth type \times timing interaction was found at all in Study 3, these findings should be treated with skepticism. Overall, we do not find evidence that participants' reactions depended on timing, though this may be because the timing manipulation was not reliably noticed and remembered by many participants

General Discussion

Overall, our studies demonstrate that personal growth and attempts at redemption can be effective in reducing the harshness of moral judgement following a transgression, for both offensive statements and harmful actions. Although sometimes in online “cancellations,” condemnation appears to be indiscriminate, our results suggest that people do attempt to discern who deserves a chance at redemption. We expected that these effects may be more evident when growth was private, speculating that private growth would be less dismissed as performative. Although our observed patterns were slightly more consistent for growth that took place in

private, overall both forms of growth were interpreted similarly. What was consistently most important was that the public figure demonstrated growth to begin with.

Largely as expected, judgements were also divided along political lines: Democrats showed harsher reactions to the offenses compared to Republicans. This may be because Republicans have a more negative view of cancel culture overall (Vogels et al., 2021). However, it could also be a function of the specific offenses they were called to judge. Studies 1 and 2 focused on derogatory statements towards a racial minority (in the US), an issue of greater concern for political liberals (Sterling et al., 2019; Tetlock, 2003; Tetlock et al., 2000). In Study 3, where the offense was designed to be more partisan-neutral, we still saw some tendency for Democrats to be harsher, but political differences were smaller and less consistent. Since past work has illustrated that both sides of the political spectrum take part in cancelling, but over different issues (Dawson et al., 2023; Dias et al., 2022), we would likely obtain different results in different circumstances.

Finally, in addition to examining growth (vs no growth), growth that was public versus private, and partisan differences in judgment, we also originally aimed to examine the apparent timing of the growth – whether it occurred before or after the transgression was publicly called out. Our main analyses did *not* find strong evidence for the timing of the growth, with few main effects or interactions. These results should be treated with caution, however. It appeared that a substantial proportion of our participants did not attend to or recall details about when the growth had occurred. In Study 2, only a slight majority recalled it correctly, while in Study 3, the majority did not recall timing. In retrospect, we recognize that the manipulation of timing was likely simply too subtle as it was mentioned in only a few words of a longer passage with more detailed information about the type of growth (public or private). Future research could further

investigate (with a stronger manipulation) the question of whether growth that occurs before a transgression becomes public is viewed differently from growth that comes after a call-out.³

Limitations and Future Directions

Self-Report

The stimuli in our studies were designed to be life-like, especially in Studies 1 and 2 with the images of the tweets. But an online survey is still different from the actual online environment on social media. We cannot determine whether viewing the tweets in isolation, rather than appearing in one's news feed with comments, like counts, and retweets would lead to the same impression of the statements. Similarly, for the DUI scenario in Study 3, observers would not necessarily originally discover the information in such a clear and neutral format, and would likely find it passed on through others' social media posts or in a news outlet with its own format, audience, and biases. It is also difficult to discern if condemnation expressed through a Likert scale would translate to any real-world cancelling behaviors, such as posting or commenting about the issue on social media or boycotting the public figure's company or products. Experimental research with greater ecological validity would likely require tools such as the Mock Social Media Tool (Jagayat et al., 2021) which can simulate the online context in a more extensive fashion.

Generalizability

All three studies looked at United States residents only. Although the samples were balanced on political affiliation, they were not representative on other demographic characteristics. In particular most of our participants were White, with only a small number of Asians despite the focus on anti-Asian prejudice in Studies 1 and 2. Naturally, people may react to such statements differently when they themselves are being targeted. As well, the

transgressions shown to participants were limited to two scenarios: the derogatory tweets and the DUI. There are a variety of other contexts in which personal growth and redemption could be examined, including prejudice towards other racial groups, gender, sexual orientation, and social class. The offenses could also be higher or lower in severity, which might require more or less effort to achieve redemption. Since cancel culture and its backlash often takes place along the current battle lines of culture wars, there are a variety of controversies that rise and fall in focus and may illicit stronger or weaker responses and larger or smaller political differences at different points in time.

It is also relevant to note that our samples may not have been primarily composed of those who are most active online. A Pew Research poll from 2022 found that at the time only 23% of respondents reported using Twitter at all, and of those who did, 25% of users were posting 97% of the tweets (Odabaş, 2022). Regarding cancel culture in particular, research has found that most people do not engage in online cancellations (Dias et al., 2022) and that those who do are more likely to be ideologically extreme (Ferrucci et al., 2020). Even if the average person is not involved in online trenches of cultural warfare, it is still valuable to understand how they perceive those who are. But if most of cancellation and online debate is done by a small minority with an outsized reach, then we are missing a large piece of the puzzle if we are not studying such groups. It may be difficult to recruit such people, however, as cancellation activity would likely be determined by self-report.

Apology

Previous work in offline contexts has found evidence that apologies can be effective in achieving forgiveness (Kammrath & Peetz, 2012; Schumann & Dragotta, 2020). In particular, Schuman and Dragotta (2020) examined what made for an effective apology in the context of the

MeToo movement. Apologies were more effective when they were more extensive, non-defensive, and made to address low severity offenses. While our research was in part inspired by past research on the redemptive effects of apology, it did not focus on apology in particular. It is unclear if apologies are perceived in the same way in the online context where the original text can be put through the filter of comments and retweets on social media.

Conclusion

Despite the harsh reputation of the current social media environment, observers appear to be at least open to forgiveness when the transgressor demonstrates personal growth. People respond positively to growth regardless of whether it takes place in private or in public, though they may show some preference for growth that occurs before the person has been called out in public. As well, while adherents to different political groups may differ in their willingness to forgive, both groups show some support for growth. But not all is clear on the path to redemption. It is still uncertain how the severity of the offense may come into play, and if people are more or less forgiving in different contexts. It is also unclear if those who are most active in cancelling and online debates in general represent the ordinary population, and whether this particular group is as open to the possibility of redemption. The questions we ask will only grow in complexity as online debates move from one topic to the next, and society continues to negotiate the boundaries of morality and justified repercussions.

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Footnotes

1. We originally intended to combine all judgement items into one aggregate judgement variable. However, based on exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, we decided to divide this variable into two separate consequences and moral character measures. See Tables S3 and S4 in the supporting info for more information on the factor analyses and Tables S5-7 for a version of the main analyses using the aggregate judgement variables. Overall, patterns did not diverge substantially from the analyses reported in the main text.
2. Each “true self” item was also paired with an item that asked the extent to which the transgression (or subsequent growth) reflected “Their ‘surface self’ (the things that they learned from society and others)”. We originally considered reverse coding these “surface self” items and putting them together with the “true self” items, making an aggregate measure (2 items each) for both the past behaviour and the present behavior. However, across studies, both the aggregate past ($R_{SB} = .44, .42, .34$) and aggregate present ($R_{SB} = .48, .26, .34$) measures showed very poor reliability. For this reason, we decided to just focus on the true self items, in line with the approach taken by Dawson et al. (2023). For the sake of transparency, however, the full analyses for each item true self and surface self items as well as the aggregate measures are reported in Tables S9-10.
3. In light of the low number of participants who correctly recalled the timing of the growth, we ran additional analyses to consider what the results would look like if we focused only on participants who correctly recalled the timing condition. Although there are many reasons to treat such analyses with caution, we include the results in Table S11 in the supporting information for the sake of transparency.