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Managing a Perilous Stigma: Ex-Offenders' Use of Reparative Impression Management Tactics in Hiring Contexts

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Individuals with a criminal record face employment challenges because of the nature of their stigma. In this study, we examined the efficacy of using reparative impression management tactics to mitigate integrity concerns associated with a perilous stigma. Drawing on affect control theory, we proposed that the use of 3 impression management tactics—apology, justification, excuse—would differentially affect hiring evaluations through their influence on perceived remorse and anticipated workplace deviance. Across 3 studies, we found support for our proposed model. Our results revealed the use of an apology or justification tactic when explaining a previous criminal offense had a positive indirect effect on hiring evaluations, whereas the use of an excuse tactic had a negative indirect effect. These findings suggest applicants may benefit from using impression management tactics that communicate remorse when discussing events or associations that violate integrity expectations.

Keywords: criminal record stigma, impression management, remorse, selection

> I'm watching body language, I'm watching tone, I'm watching expressions when I ask for an explanation. For instance, I had a guy that was convicted of domestic violence. I asked him to explain, you know, hey what happened here? And this one didn't go too well because during his explanation he felt like he did nothing wrong. . . . If you have no remorse of what you've done, then really it shows me that maybe he still got some things to work on. But on the other hand, I have had an applicant come in who was convicted of assault and say, 'hey, you know I messed up, I really regret that I've done this and look what it's done to me in life, now here I am having to sit here and explain this time after time, hoping that somebody will give me a shot.' At that point I can see, it's really the true them hopefully, and I'm always more than willing to help those individuals out.
>
> —Hiring manager from Study 3

Although numerous factors contribute to barriers to employment for individuals with criminal records (e.g., limited education, cognitive skills, and work experience; Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll, 2003), one such barrier is stigma that manifests in hiring decisions (Pager, 2003; Swanson, Langfitt-Reese, & Bond, 2012; Uggen, Vuolo, Lageson, Ruhland, & Whitham, 2014; Young & Powell, 2014). Nearly two thirds of companies conduct criminal background checks on all their applicants (Society for Human Resource Management, 2012), which can present an employment hurdle to the roughly 65 million U.S. adults who have a criminal record (Rodriguez & Emsellem, 2011). Although companies use criminal record checks as a means to mitigate risks that prospective employees with criminal records may pose including cases of negligent hiring (Hickox & Roehling, 2013), the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC; Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, 2012), informed by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, set out standards of practice for how criminal record information should be used, including that employers should offer applicants the opportunity to explain circumstances surrounding the offense. Furthermore, in 2015, U.S. President Obama introduced the Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act aimed at helping formerly incarcerated individuals obtain employment, including "Ban the Box" (The White House, 2015). Already implemented in 25 U.S. states and more than 150 cities and counties (Rodriguez & Avery, 2017), banning the box encourages employers to not ask about criminal history on the job application but delay such inquiries until later in the hiring process. Policies and practices aimed at aiding individuals with criminal records find employment are particularly important because unemployment is a contributing factor to recidivism and strongly impacts broader community health and safety (Uggen, 2000).

A long history of research on criminology, law, and sociology has investigated the nature and consequences of criminal record stigma as a source of bias in hiring decisions (e.g., Pager, 2003), although it has received very little attention in organizational scholarship (for a recent exception, see Young & Powell, 2014). A stigma is an attribute that is "tainted, discounted, and deeply discredited" (Goffman, 1963, p. 3) and in the context of hiring

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decisions, employers might be concerned that applicants with criminal records would be a source of deviance in their organization (Harris & Keller, 2005; Uggen et al., 2014; Zeidner, 2014). Thus, criminal record stigma reflects peril, or a fear of danger and vulnerability for oneself and organization (Jones et al., 1984; p. 65). Recognizing that past behaviors in many instances predict future behaviors, organizations might be fearful of hiring individuals with previous evidence of deviance (Gatewood, Feild, & Barrick, 2010). To mitigate potential stigmatization, applicants face decisions about how they should make their criminal history known to potential employers. As the opening quotation suggests, managers tasked with hiring decisions sometimes base their judgments on the candidates' explanation for the criminal offense and whether such explanation ameliorates concerns of future deviance. How then can applicants with criminal records best manage impressions of their offense so as to overcome evaluators' concerns of peril?

There are a number of strategies individuals can adopt to manage impressions of their stigma (e.g., Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005; Ragins, 2008; Roberts, 2005; Shih, Young, & Bucher, 2013; Smart & Wegner, 1999). Existing research has also shown that job seekers with criminal records view being open and honest about the nature of the offense as the best strategy in overcoming negative biases (Uggen et al., 2014; Winnick & Bodkin, 2008). However, applicants can be open about, and manage impressions of, the offense in different ways, such as by apologizing, offering a justification, or providing an excuse. Research to date has not thoroughly examined how different impression management (IM) tactics aimed at mitigating criminal record stigma influence hiring decisions, although previous research on IM (Krylova, Longacre, & Phillips, 2016) and the counseling literature focused on ex-offenders (Shivy et al., 2007) call for such investigations. Therefore, a central aim of the current paper is to compare how three reparative IM tactics (apology, justification, excuse) influence peril-related mechanisms that underlie evaluators' concerns in hiring applicants with criminal records.

We draw from affect control theory (ACT; Heise, 1979, Heise, 2007) to inform our predictions about how the IM tactics differently influence evaluators' peril-related concerns (e.g., low integrity) regarding applicants with criminal records. Specifically, through the lens of ACT, we argue that the three IM tactics—apology, justification, and excuse—uniquely influence evaluators' perceptions of applicants' remorse, with greater remorse disconfirming the dispositionality of the applicants' criminal identity (Robinson, Smith-Lovin, & Tsoudis, 1994). When this occurs, we theorize that evaluators' concern regarding future workplace transgression or deviance (i.e., peril) is minimized, resulting in more favorable employment evaluations.

As such, our work makes several contributions to current theory and research about IM of stigma (Roberts, 2005). First, we explicitly compare the effects of three reparative IM tactics—apology, justification, and excuse—commonly referenced in literatures on explanations of transgressions on selection decisions. Although previous research has compared the effectiveness of apologizing versus excuses on forgiveness and trust repair following a transgression (e.g., Davis & Gold, 2011; Kim, Dirks, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2006; Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004), it is unclear how apology and excuse compare with justification in mitigating stigma as peril. Second, although previous research has identified perceived remorse following confession of a criminal offense as predictive of anticipated future criminal behavior (Gold & Weiner, 2000), how perceived remorse influences evaluators' anticipation of deviance within the organizational context and subsequent selection decisions or how different reparative IM tactics affect this process has not been empirically assessed.

Theory and Hypothesis Development

Individuals with criminal records tend to be stigmatized as dangerous, dishonest, and disreputable or lacking integrity (Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010). Similar to research on job-fit stereotypes (e.g., Lyness & Heilman, 2006), inferences about an applicant's character affect whether an applicant will be viewed as appropriate for a job. Accordingly, individuals viewed as perilous are likely to be seen as threatening and less desirable (Jones et al., 1984). Drawing from implicit personality theory (Schneider, 1973), Sanderson, Zanna, and Darley (2000) argue that without in-depth knowledge about applicants, evaluators use criminal record information to infer personality characteristics, which affect their judgments about how threatening a candidate will be. For example, applicants may be seen as having a criminal personality and particularly likely to commit a crime again (Sanderson et al., 2000), despite evidence suggesting that employees with criminal records are not chiefly responsible for workplace crimes (Harris & Keller, 2005). Consequently, criminal record stigma has been shown to have profound effects on the capacity of individuals with a criminal record to secure employment. For example, in an experimental audit, Pager (2003) found, with all else being equal, job applicants who indicated having a criminal conviction were less than 50% as likely to receive a call-back compared with those who did not indicate a criminal conviction in the application. In addition, given that nearly 70% of prisoners released (approximately 404,638 individuals) reoffend within 3 years (Durose, Cooper, & Snyder, 2014), a lack of employment opportunities is an important influence on the likelihood of reoffending (Bellair & Kowalski, 2011; Raphael & Weiman, 2007).

There are several aspects of criminal record stigma that make considering IM tactics unique compared with other concealable stigma commonly examined in organizational scholarship, such as sexual orientation (Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007). First, in hiring contexts, applicants can choose whether to conceal or disclose their invisible stigma (Clair et al., 2005). For criminal record stigma, however, criminal records are typically publicly available knowledge, so it is inadvisable for applicants to conceal criminal history if probed by potential employers (Harris & Keller, 2005; Uggen et al., 2014). Furthermore, in light of recent changes to Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, 2012) enforcement guidance recommending that employers offer applicants an opportunity to explain their offenses, demands on IM are instituted in the selection practices of many employers. Applicants with criminal records are thus faced with unique pressures not about *whether* they should disclose but *how* they should disclose. Second, criminal offenses are often viewed as a legitimate basis for exclusion. Fearful of negligent hiring claims and concerned about the safety of their organization (Zeidner, 2014), employers may use a criminal conviction as a legitimate qualifier for exclusion of individuals viewed as threatening, even if the criminal offense is not job

related (Pager, 2003). Thus, applicants must manage impressions about their criminal conviction to overcome perceptions that they are not a threat to the organization and that criminal acts are not attributed to stable aspects of their character.

Our theorizing about IM tactics and their influence on hiring evaluations is informed by ACT (Heise, 1979, 2007). ACT proposes a general framework describing the relations among identity, behavior, and emotions. According to ACT, when a person enters a social setting (e.g., an interview), he or she immediately occupies a situated identity (e.g., an applicant). These situated identities carry with them fundamental sentiments, which are "culturally shared feelings evoked by the mental representation of a concept" (Schröder & Scholl, 2009; p. 181). Thus, applicants with a criminal record have negative sentiments associated with their identity; for example, their identity often evokes immoral character and low integrity (Jones et al., 1984; Madriz, 1997). This negative sentiment drastically differs from sentiments employers would like to associate with applicants (e.g., good person, high integrity). In a hiring setting, therefore, ACT suggests applicants with a criminal identity will engage in behaviors in attempts to get closer to the desired applicant identity. Specifically, consistent with extant IM frameworks, applicants would be motivated to enact reparative IM tactics to minimize the effect their criminal record stigma has on their professional identity (Roberts, 2005).

According to ACT, displayed emotions following a behavior are important because they signal the actor's identity (Smith-Lovin, 1990). For example, if a person displays positive emotions (e.g., happy) following a negative act (e.g., theft), an observer is more likely to make negative trait inferences (e.g., bad person) versus when the same person displays negative emotions (e.g., guilt) following the act (Robinson et al., 1994; Tsoudis & Smith-Lovin, 1998). This is because emotions "tell us something about the consistency of our current behavior with our presumed identities" (Robinson et al., 1994; p. 178). Thus, applied to our context, IM tactics employed when describing the criminal act can signal to an evaluator whether the act is congruent with the actors underlying identity (e.g., a bad person). Specifically, we argue that apology, justification, and excuse differentially influence evaluators' judgment of applicants' remorse, with higher remorse perceptions, leading to more positive inferences about the individual's identity.

We believe remorse is a key emotion in this process because it has been shown to be effective in reshaping negative impressions of criminal record identities (e.g., Robinson et al., 1994; Tsoudis & Smith-Lovin, 1998, 2001). Remorse is characterized by moral or emotional distress resulting from the consequences of one's past transgressions (Brooks & Reddon, 2003). Remorse signals that the individual understands the consequences related to what he or she did, feels bad about those consequences, wants to avoid future negative feelings, and will avoid committing future offenses (Robinson et al., 1994; Weisman, 2004). Corwin, Cramer, Griffin, and Brodsky (2012) found that criminal defendants who expressed remorse in their explanations of offenses received more lenient sentences from mock judges than defendants who did not express remorse. Therefore, applicants who can successfully signal remorse are likely to more effectively challenge assumptions of the stability of the causes of their previous offense (Heise & Thomas, 1989; Weiner, 1986) and will reduce concerns that they will commit future offenses in the organization (Gold & Weiner, 2000). We posit that reparative IM tactics (apology, justification, excuse) differ in shaping remorse perceptions.

Reparative Impression Management Tactics

Explanation of a criminal record serves as a crucial opportunity for employers to look beyond stereotypes that they may have about the applicant as a threat to the organization (Goffman, 1963; Jones et al., 1984; Pager, 2003; Uggen et al., 2014). Effective IM tactics would replace perceptions that causes of the applicant's previous offense are a stable component of the applicant's identity (i.e., likely to repeat offenses in the future), with perceptions that the offense was circumstantial and that the applicant has the integrity to abide by organization norms (Gold & Weiner, 2000). IM tactics refer to attempts to "control the images that are projected in "social interactions" (Schlenker, 1980, p. 6). For individuals with criminal records, reparative IM tactics aim to restore their professional identity tarnished by their convicted offense (Higgins, Snyder, & Berglas, 1990; Schlenker, 1980). Researchers have examined a number of reparative IM tactics, including apologies, justifications, and excuses (e.g., Ellis, West, Ryan, & DeShon, 2002; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). As we describe below, we expect that apologies, justifications, and excuses will differently influence the extent to which evaluators see applicants as remorseful for their convicted offenses (see Figure 1).

Apology. When an individual apologizes, they accept responsibility for the offense but they also acknowledge that the offense is wrong and that they should be punished for the offense (Goffman, 1971; Tedeschi & Melburg, 1984). Apologizing is considered to be a verbal acknowledgment of remorse (Weisman, 2004). Apologies signal that individuals with criminal records have suffered because of their offenses, which may represent that the moral character of the applicant has recovered (Gold & Weiner, 2000). That is, the individuals recognize that they are guilty of wrongdoing and that they value the violated social rule, norm, or contract (Goffman, 1971; Weiner, 1986). According to ACT, by accepting responsibility for the offense and admitting that the offense is wrong, apologies signal remorse, which in turn shapes the ways we think about the transgressors' identity (Tsoudis & Smith-Lovin, 2001). Specifically, apologies challenge causal attributions as to the cause and stability of the offense by signaling that the offense is not indicative of the offenders' moral character but a circumstantial incident that happened that the offender will aim to avoid in the future (Gold & Weiner, 2000). Following a transgression

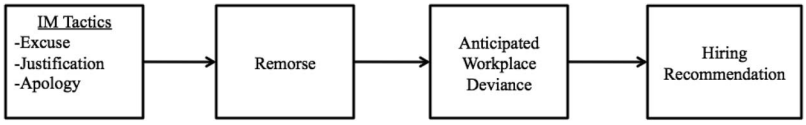

Figure 1. Conceptual model. IM = impression management.

(e.g., trust violation, criminal offense), offenders' apologies increase evaluators' perceptions of offenders' remorse, moral integrity, and their forgiveness of the offender (Davis & Gold, 2011; Kim et al., 2004). We thus expect that:

> *Hypothesis 1a:* Candidates will be viewed as more remorseful when they apologize for their criminal behavior than when no explanation is provided.

Justification. Similar to apologizing, when an individual offers a justification, they take responsibility for the offense but, different from an apology, a justification denies the inappropriateness of the offense or provides an external explanation for the offense (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Stevens & Kristof, 1995; Shaw, Wild, & Colquitt, 2003). For example, a woman convicted of robbery may justify her offense by saying that she needed to provide for her family. In making a justification, individuals appeal to higher ethics, ideologies, norms, or loyalties that evaluators might see as morally defensible (Shaw et al., 2003). We expect that justification will have similar effects as apologizing for a criminal offense. Appeals to higher authorities may invoke in evaluators a perceived morality of the offenders (Gold & Weiner, 2000), emphasizing that the offender understands their wrongdoing but circumstances required them to commit the wrongdoing anyway. We thus expect that:

> *Hypothesis 1b:* Candidates will be viewed as more remorseful when they provide a justification for their criminal behavior than when no explanation is provided.

Excuse. Unlike apologies or justifications, excuses admit wrongdoing but deny responsibility and accountability for the offense (Shaw et al., 2003). In some circumstances, distancing oneself from the transgression by providing an excuse has been shown to be an effective strategy (Shaw et al., 2003; Snyder & Higgins, 1988a). For example, Crant and Bateman (1993) found that by providing an excuse for performance failures, individuals were viewed as less blameworthy, which in turn resulted in favorable impressions. Although providing an excuse has appealing qualities, within the context of criminal records, however, a conviction is known (or will be known) by the potential employer. Denial of responsibility and accountability thus alleges that the conviction is wrong or untrue, which can signal no regret (Kim et al., 2004) and may also be viewed as not being forthright (Pontari, Schlenker, & Christopher, 2002). Denial of responsibility means that the offender feels they do not need to rectify their behavior, which suggests that the offender may commit offenses in the future (Gold & Weiner, 2000). As such, we expect that:

> *Hypothesis 1c:* Candidates will be viewed as less remorseful when they provide an excuse for their criminal behavior than when no explanation is provided.

Individuals thought to be remorseful will be perceived as having greater moral character, and there will be decreased assumptions about the stability of the criminal character (Davis & Gold, 2011; Gold & Weiner, 2000). For example, Robinson et al. (1994) found that display of remorse by an actor led to evaluators making positive identity inferences about that actor, which in turn influenced sentencing decisions. Applied to our setting, remorse perceptions should influence future workplace deviance evaluations. According to Proeve and Tudor (2013; p. 72), this is because "remorse suggests that in some degree the actor disavows his or her action so that such actions are inconsistent with the actor's future intentions or inconsistent with the actor's general character." We thus hypothesize that:

> *Hypothesis 2:* Remorse is negatively related to anticipated workplace deviance.

As we elaborated earlier, employers attempt to minimize any behavior that may harm the interest of the company, that is, its people and products (Sackett & DeVore, 2001). Safeguarding this interest should result in the use of vigilant strategies whereby safety concerns become part of the selection criteria. Therefore, we suspect that anticipated workplace deviance diminishes chances for employment consideration.

> *Hypothesis 3:* Anticipated workplace deviance is negatively related to hiring recommendation.

Finally, we posit that the reparative IM tactic adopted during the hiring process indirectly relates to hiring recommendations through its influence on remorse and anticipated workplace deviance. Specifically, we propose a positive indirect effect for the use of apology and justification on selection decisions, whereas the use of excuse IM tactic will result in a negative indirect effect. Thus, we forward the following hypothesis.

> *Hypothesis 4:* The IM tactics of apology, justification, and excuse will indirectly relate to hiring recommendation through their influence on the serial mediators of remorse and anticipated workplace deviance.

We test our hypotheses across two experiments using two selection contexts, applications (Study 1) and interviews (Study 2). We also sought to determine how the results generalize across crime and job type, so in each experiment we account for crimes that are property or person related and jobs that are property or person oriented. Furthermore, we also conducted a qualitative study (Study 3) to enrich understanding about how real-life managers make hiring decisions in response to IM tactics adopted by applicants with criminal convictions.

Study 1

Method

Participants. We recruited 450 undergraduate psychology students at a large Midwestern university to participate in this study. Of those participants, 97 failed the manipulation checks (e.g., failed to identify the type of criminal conviction the candidate had). Final participants ($N = 353$) were mostly White (82.1%), female (70.2%), with a mean age of 20.24 ($SD = 1.27$) years, and mostly employed (58.4%). Participants received course extra credit in exchange for their participation.[1]

Procedure. We selected the application stage for Study 1 because the disclosure of criminal record information is embedded within the job application in many jurisdictions (excluding those

[1] The data collection was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University (Protocol #x14-103e).

cities, counties, and states that have adopted "Ban the Box" policies) with questions like "Have you ever been convicted of a felony?" Thus, applicants need to make IM choices early on in the selection process and evaluators may make judgments about the applicant, depending on how the applicant describes any such offense.

The online experiment was a 16-cell, between-subjects design in which we manipulated the type of crime (2: burglary vs. aggravated assault), the type of job (2: janitor vs. customer service representative), and IM tactic (4: control vs. excuse vs. justification vs. apology). Crime and job type were manipulated to examine whether the effects of the different IM tactics on our proposed process are generalizable. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the 16 conditions.

Participants were told to imagine themselves in the role of a hiring manager and were provided with information about the company and a job description for the target jobs. For example, in the janitorial condition, participants read the following:

> Company X has an opening for a janitor who follows instructions and established procedures in performing all-around heavy cleaning in work offices, public areas, and restrooms. Responsibilities for this position include: sweeping; collecting trash and removing to dumpster; moving furniture; and obtaining and replenishing cleaning supplies, paper, products, etc.

Then participants reviewed a one-page hand-written application that had the applicant's information, including their education, previous employment, desired salary, and whether they worked in this company previously. This information was held constant across conditions. To minimize bias that may arise from knowing the race/ethnicity and gender of the applicant, the section in the application asking participants' personal information was redacted. After reading over the application, participants were asked to evaluate the candidate (hiring recommendation, perceptions of remorse, and anticipated workplace deviance) and provide their own demographic information.

Manipulation. We manipulated crime type by selecting crimes that were targeted toward either persons or property, thus aligning with the ways in which crimes are broadly classified (Hickox & Roehling, 2013). Specifically, we selected one person-oriented (aggravated assault) and one property-oriented (burglary) crime. Job type also followed a similar dichotomization of either being property oriented (janitor) or person oriented (customer service representative). When considering job type, we selected jobs that had low or medium preparation skills needed with respect to education, work experience, and training (O*NET, 2015) because of their relevance for applicants with criminal records. According to O*NET, medium-level jobs (and below) need training in vocational schooling, job experience, or an associate degree, which is more in line with the education and training levels of individuals with criminal records (Harlow, 2003). In testing our hypotheses, we collapsed the crime-type and job-type conditions because there were no statistically different measures across conditions.

The manipulation of the IM tactics occurred in response to the application question, "Have you ever been convicted of a crime? If yes, please explain." All candidates responded "Yes" to the question but gave different responses according to the impression management manipulations. In the control condition, candidates gave the following response: *"I would be happy to discuss in the interview."* In the excuse condition, candidates gave the response: *"I was convicted of [aggravated assault/burglary]. I was not responsible for the incident because I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was not my fault."* In the justification condition, candidates gave the response: *"I was convicted of [aggravated assault/burglary]. I accept responsibility because I should not have been involved but I got involved in the incident because I was trying to help out a family member."* And, in the apology condition, the candidates gave the response: *"I was convicted of [aggravated assault/burglary]. I should not have been involved and I understand what I did caused harm. I apologized and promised it would never happen again."* In testing our hypotheses, the control condition was used as the referent.

Measures. Unless indicated otherwise, participants responded using a five-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*) for all measures in Studies 1 and 2.

Remorse. Using the single-item scale from Corwin et al., (2012) as a starting point, we developed two more items to capture perceptions of remorse. The three items were: "The applicant appeared remorseful for their past criminal conviction"; "The applicant appeared to be sorry for their past criminal conviction"; and "The applicant appeared to regret their past criminal conviction." Coefficient alpha for this scale was .91.

Anticipated workplace deviance. We used a shortened (eight items) measure of deviance in the workplace from Bennett and Robinson (2000). This measure captures deviance targeted toward other employees (e.g., "act rudely toward someone at work"; $\alpha = .92$) and deviance targeted toward the organization (e.g., "take property from work without permission"; $\alpha = .90$). A two-factor model separating the two dimensions provided a better fit ($\chi^2 = 83.44$, $df = 19$; RMSEA = .10; CFI = .97; SRMR = .03) than a single-factor model combining both dimensions ($\chi^2 = 256.93$, $df = 20$; RMSEA = .18; CFI = .90; SRMR = .05), ($\Delta\chi^2 = 173.49$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .01$).

Hiring recommendation. We used a single-item to capture hiring recommendation, *"Would you recommend hiring this applicant"* with a yes/no response.

Perceived competence. As an additional manipulation check, we measured perceived competence to ensure our IM tactics did not significantly differ from each other on this dimension. Perceived competence was measured using the two-item scale from Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, and Mishra (2011), and we added an additional item to capture general future job performance ("I anticipate this candidate will perform well on the job"). Coefficient alpha for this scale was .75. Given that education and work experience were identical across conditions, we suspected that there would not be a significant difference on perceptions of competence between them. A one-way ANOVA revealed a nonsignificant main effect of explanations on perceived competence $F(3, 349) = 2.00$, $p > .05$.

Results

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between Study 1 variables. In Table 2, we provide the means and standard deviation across all conditions. Before testing our hypotheses, CFAs were conducted to examine whether perceived remorse and anticipated workplace deviance were distinct con-

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study 1

Variable	1	2	3
1. Remorse	—		
2. Anticipated workplace deviance	−.28*	—	
3. Hiring recommendation	.20*	−.37*	—
M	3.14	2.50	.58
SD	1.01	.84	.49

Note. $N = 353$. Hiring recommendation is coded as 1, *yes*; 0, *no*.
* $p < .01$.

structs from each other. We compared three different models: a three-factor model including perceived remorse, and separating the two dimensions of anticipated workplace deviance; a two-factor model including perceived remorse and the two dimensions of anticipated workplace deviance loading onto one factor; and a one-factor model with all items loading onto one factor. As expected, the three-factor model had a significantly better fit to the data ($\chi^2/df = 120.85/41$; RMSEA = .07; CFI = .97; SRMR = .03), compared to a two-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 294.48/43$; RMSEA = .13; CFI = .92; SRMR = .04), and a one-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 988.26/44$; RMSEA = .25; CFI = .69; SRMR = .14). In our analyses, the two dimensions of anticipated workplace deviance were combined because of the strong standardized latent correlation between the two, ($r = .85$, $p < .01$). In our results, findings were consistent irrespective of whether we used the separate dimensions or the aggregate form.

Hypotheses were tested using Hayes (2013) PROCESS macro (Model 6) for SPSS with both remorse and anticipated workplace deviance entered as mediators operating in a casual/serial chain, with remorse being the first mediator in the serial chain and anticipated workplace deviance being second (see Figure 2 for model results for Study 1). Hypothesis 1 predicted that providing an apology (H1a) or justification (H1b) would result in candidates being viewed as more remorseful than the nonexplanation condition, whereas providing an excuse (H1c) would result in being viewed as less remorseful than the nonexplanation condition. As can be seen in Table 3, candidates who provided an apology ($b = 1.00$, $p < .01$) or justification ($b = .86$, $p < .01$) were viewed as more remorseful, whereas candidates who provided an excuse ($b = -.34$, $p < .01$) were viewed as less remorseful compared with the control group (i.e., no explanation). Therefore, Hypotheses 1a-c were supported.

Remorse negatively related to anticipated workplace deviance ($b = -.25$, $p < .01$), supporting Hypothesis 2. We also found support for Hypothesis 3 such that there was a negative relationship between anticipated workplace deviance and hiring recommendation ($b = -1.06$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 4 predicted that remorse and anticipated workplace deviance would mediate the association between IM tactics (excuse, justification, apology) and hiring recommendation. There was a significant positive indirect effect for apology ($b = .27$, confidence interval [CI] [.14, .46]) and justification ($b = .22$, CI [.11, .40]), whereas there was a negative indirect effect for excuse ($b = -.09$, CI [−.21, –.03]), relative to candidates in the nonexplanation condition. Thus, hypothesis 4 was supported.

Discussion

The findings of Study 1 supported all of our hypotheses. Providing an apology or a justification, which invoked a moral obligation (i.e., supporting a family member), resulted in applicants with a criminal record being viewed as more remorseful. When this occurred, evaluators were more likely to hire the candidate because the remorse perception decreased the primary concern associated with the stigma, namely future deviant behaviors at work. In contrast, providing an excuse as an account for the criminal behavior did not ameliorate concerns regarding future deviant behavior because the applicant was viewed as not being remorseful for his or her action. Thus, providing an excuse reduced the likelihood of gaining employment. Finally, we found that these effects emerged across job and crime type, providing evidence for the generalizability of this process.

In Study 2, we aimed to replicate our results while addressing some limitations. First, we wanted to examine whether the findings generalized to later parts of the hiring process (the interview stage). This is particularly important because some employers have adopted the guidelines from the "Ban the Box" movement that encourages employers to delay asking questions regarding criminal records until later stages in the hiring process (Rodriguez & Avery, 2017). Thus, in Study 2, we examined our model in the interview context. Second, we used a managerial sample with hiring experience to complement our student sample in Study 1. We thought it is important to examine whether our process generalizes as managers may be more in tune with selection legislation and less prone to basing selection decisions on information that is not job related. Finally, in Study 2, the comparison group for the effects of IM tactics changed such that excuse became the referent condition.

Study 2

Method

Participants. Participants were 150 managers as a part of a panel in the Qualtrics Panel Management service, and were compensated $25 for participation.[2] Of all the participants, 31 failed the manipulation check regarding the nature of the IM tactic the candidate used (e.g., Kim et al., 2004; Kim, Dirks, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2006). Final participants ($N = 119$) were mostly White (72.3%), female (54.6%), with a mean age of 45.08 years ($SD = 13.20$), mostly employed (96.6%), and across many industries including finance (7.6%), education (8.4%), health care (8.4%), restaurant (6.7%), retail (11.8%), and other services (19.3%). Our sample, on average, had 6 years of managerial experience.

Procedure. The procedure for Study 2 was similar to that of Study 1, except that, in addition to reviewing applications, participants watched parts of an interview. The job application participants reviewed differed from Study 1 in the following ways. First, the personal background information was not redacted, given the identity of the candidate would be revealed in the video. Second, because racial disparities exist in crime rates (Rodriguez & Emsellem, 2011), we controlled for any effects because of applicant

[2] The data collection was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University (Protocol #x14-103e).

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations Across Conditions for Study 1

Conditions	Remorse	Anticipated workplace deviance	Hiring recommendation
No explanation	2.76 (.79)	2.57 (.69)	.71 (.48)
Excuse	2.43 (1.03)	2.63 (.87)	.56 (.50)
Justification	3.63 (.76)	2.32 (.79)	.53 (.50)
Apology	3.78 (.78)	2.56 (.79)	.52 (.50)
Burglary	3.32 (1.01)	2.48 (.82)	.49 (.50)
Aggravated assault	3.22 (1.09)	2.52 (.79)	.58 (.49)
Janitor	3.10 (.98)	2.53 (.72)	.61 (.49)
Customer service	3.19 (1.06)	2.50 (.86)	.54 (.50)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Hiring recommendation is coded as 1, *yes*; 0, *no*.

race and thus made the applicant White. Third, the response to the conviction question on the application was not manipulated; rather it read, "I would be happy to discuss in the interview," allowing us to manipulate the IM tactics in the interview responses. Fourth, we kept the effects of job type and crime type constant by examining only one crime type (aggravated assault) and one job type (janitorial position) because these showed no effects in Study 1. Fifth, we changed the education level so that the applicant did not have a high school diploma to represent the education profile of individuals with a criminal record (Harlow, 2003). After reviewing the completed application, participants were randomly assigned to view one of three prerecorded interview videos that manipulated the IM tactic adopted (excuse, justification, apology). They then provided their evaluation of the candidate (hiring recommendation, perceptions of remorse, anticipated workplace deviance).

Manipulations.

IM tactics. All participants watched the candidates' responses to three questions: (a) "Can you tell me a little about yourself"; (b) "why are you applying for the current position"; and (c) "what are the essential job tasks of a custodian?" The candidates' responses to questions 2 and 3 were identical across conditions. The IM tactics were manipulated in response to question 1. Specifically, in the excuse condition, the candidates' response was: "Before we get started, there's something you have the right to know. I've made a mistake and was incarcerated for aggravated assault. *I was not responsible for the incident because I was in the wrong place at the wrong time; it was not my fault*. It's important for you to know that I'm a hard worker, learn new things very quickly, and from what I know about your company, I believe I could be an asset to your business." In the justification condition, we changed the second sentence to read, *"I accept responsibility but I got involved in the incident because I was trying to help out a family member."* In apology condition, the second sentence read: *"I should not have been involved and I understand what I did caused harm. I apologized and promised it would never happen again."*

Measures.

Remorse. Perceptions of remorse were assessed using an identical approach to Study 1. Cronbach's alpha was (.93).

Anticipated workplace deviance. We assessed deviance using an identical approach to Study 1. Cronbach's alpha was (.92) for deviance toward employees and (.91) for deviance toward the organization. A two-factor model separating the two dimensions provided a better fit ($\chi^2 = 37.92$, $df = 19$; RMSEA = .09; CFI = .98; SRMR = .03) than a single-factor model combining both dimensions ($\chi^2 = 73.61$, $df = 20$; RMSEA = .15; CFI = .94; SRMR = .04), ($\Delta\chi^2 = 35.70$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .01$).

Hiring recommendation. Identical to Study 1, hiring recommendation was assessed with a single question: *"Would you recommend hiring Matthew"* with a yes or no response.

Perceived competence. Given that in all three of the IM conditions, the candidates' response to the interview question, "What are the essential job tasks of a custodian?" was identical, we predicted that the IM tactics would not be significantly different from each other. To be consistent with existing IM literature, this time we measured perceived competence ($\alpha = .82$) using the three-item scale from Kim et al. (2004; sample item: "Matthew has much knowledge about the work that needs to be done on the job"). A one-way ANOVA revealed a nonsignificant main effect of explanations on perceived competence $F(2, 116) = .33$, $p > .05$.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations for Study 2 are presented in Table 4 and the means and standard deviations across all conditions are presented in Table 5. Consistent with Study 1 CFA findings, a three-factor model separating perceived remorse and the two dimensions of anticipated workplace deviance fit the data better ($\chi^2/df = 67.69/41$; RMSEA = .07; CFI = .98; SRMR = .03), compared with

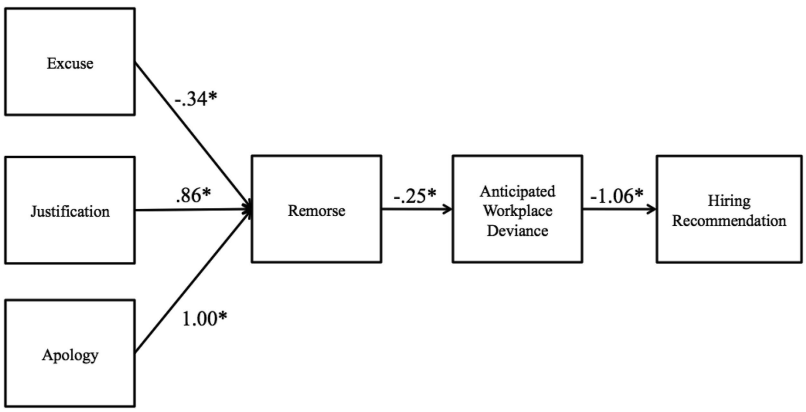

Figure 2. Model results for Study 1. * $p < .01$; control condition is the referent for the IM tactics.

Table 3
Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Model Summary Information for the Proposed Serial Mediation Model for Study 1

Predictors	Remorse (M1)		Anticipated workplace deviance (M2)		Hiring recommendation	
	Estimate	*SE*	Estimate	*SE*	Estimate	*SE*
Independent variables						
Excuse versus no explanation	−.34*	.13	−.03	.11	−.38	.35
Justification versus no explanation	.86*	.13	−.04	.12	−1.69*	.37
Apology versus no explanation	1.00*	.13	.24	.12	−1.55*	.38
Mediators						
Remorse	—	—	−.25*	.05	.64*	.15
Anticipated workplace deviance	—	—	—	—	−1.06*	.18
Intercept	2.77*	.09	3.26*	.15	1.95*	.73
Model summary information	$R^2 = .31$ $F(3, 348) = 50.46^*$		$R^2 = .09$ $F(4, 347) = 9.10^*$		$R^2 = .21^a$; $R^2 = .28^b$ −2LL = 396.09	

Note. $N = 352$; M = mediator. Hiring recommendation: 1, *yes*; 0, *no*. [a] Cox and Snell. [b] Nagelkerke. * $p < .01$.

a two-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 108.34/43$; RMSEA = .11; CFI = .95; SRMR = .05), and a one-factor model ($\chi^2/df = 318.40/44$; RMSEA = .23; CFI = .77; SRMR = .10). Similar to Study 1, because the two standardized latent dimensions were strongly correlated, $r = .90$, $p < .01$, we combined them and used the overall measure in testing our hypotheses. Findings did not differ based on whether we used the combined deviance measure versus separating the dimensions.

We again tested all hypotheses using Hayes, 2013 PROCESS macro (Model 6; see Figure 3 for model results for Study 2). Hypothesis 1 was fully supported: both apology ($b = .89$, $p < .01$) and justification ($b = .78$, $p < .01$) significantly predicted remorse (see Table 6) as compared to the excuse condition. Hypothesis 2 was also supported such that remorse negatively related to anticipated workplace deviance ($b = -.45$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 3 was also fully supported; anticipated workplace deviance negatively related to hiring recommendation ($b = -1.75$, $p < .01$). For Hypothesis 4, there was a significant positive indirect effect for apology ($b = .70$, CI [.20, 1.64]) and justification ($b = .61$, CI [.17, 1.71]) on hiring recommendation. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was fully supported.

Discussion

Our findings from Study 2 are consistent with the results of Study 1. However, in both studies, we tested our hypotheses in experimental settings that may lack generalizability to real hiring contexts. Study 3 utilizes a qualitative approach to provide greater insight into how IM tactics influence managers' decisions in real hiring contexts. Thus, for Study 3, we sought to understand how managers, who have experience making hiring decisions involving applicants with criminal convictions, think about applicants' adoption of different IM tactics.

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study 2

Variable	1	2	4
1. Remorse	—		
2. Anticipated workplace deviance	−.59*	—	
3. Hiring recommendation	.39*	−.46*	—
M	3.76	2.06	.76
SD	1.08	.77	.43

Note. $N = 119$. Hiring recommendation: 1, *yes*; 0, *no*.
* $p < .01$.

Study 3

Method

Participants, procedure, and data analysis. We recruited 27 hiring managers using the Qualtrics Panel Management service. We used a completely different sample from the managers used in Study 2. The majority of managers (56%) were male, with varied age groups (25–34 [22%], 35–44 [37%], 45–54 [37%]) as well as race/ethnicity (White [44%], Black/African American [26%], Hispanic [22%]). The managers represented diverse industries and on average had 5–10 years of hiring experience. The managers were compensated $20 for their participation.[3]

Interviews were conducted via telephone and each interview lasted approximately 30 min. We followed a semistructured interview protocol and recorded the interviews for subsequent verbatim transcription. Each interview started with participants describing their organization's formal hiring process, including the processes in place for gathering information related to candidate's criminal history and whether candidates are provided opportunities to explain their conviction. Each manager was presented with three scenarios that captured the three different IM tactics. The prompt given to the managers was as follows: "Imagine you are reviewing a job candidate's material and this candidate discloses that they were convicted of a felony. They further explain by providing the following note surrounding their offense." The IM note for apology was: *"I should not have been involved and I understand what I did caused harm. I apologized and promised it would never happen again."* For justification, it was: *"I accept responsibility but I got involved in the incident because I was trying to help out a family member."* Finally, for excuse it was: "*I was not responsible for the incident because I was in the wrong place at the wrong time; it was not my fault*." The

[3] The data collection was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Michigan State University (Protocol #x16-1054e).

Table 5
Means and Standard Deviations Across Conditions for Study 2

Conditions	Remorse	Anticipated workplace deviance	Hiring recommendation
Excuse	3.20 (1.35)	2.25 (.85)	.72 (.46)
Justification	3.98 (.85)	1.84 (.66)	.79 (.42)
Apology	4.09 (.74)	2.26 (.71)	.79 (.41)

Note. Standard deviations are in parentheses. Hiring recommendation is coded as 1, *yes*; 0, *no*.

ordering of scenarios was counterbalanced across managers. For each scenario, managers were asked what their impression of the job candidate was, adjectives they would use to describe the candidate, and what follow-up questions they may have for the candidate regarding their suitability for the job.

The first two authors reviewed the transcripts and coded the responses. Our coding approach matched what Hsieh and Shannon (2005) consider directed content analysis, whereby our initial coding was guided by previous theory and research followed by open coding of emergent themes. Furthermore, in coding the managerial reactions to the different IM tactics, the first author created an impression matrix categorizing the reactions into positive, negative, or neutral. The second and third authors checked the categorization, and any discrepancies that emerged from coding were resolved through discussion.

Interview Findings

When considering expectations surrounding disclosure of criminal history information, most managers indicated that job candidates are expected to divulge criminal background information on the job application. Several recounted that their hiring process requires candidates to disclose criminal record information during the interview stage. Others, however, noted because of "Ban the Box" legislation, they are not supposed to ask candidates about criminal background information. Instead, job candidates are told to sign a document stating they are subject to a criminal background check.

When considering the importance of a candidate providing an explanation for a criminal conviction, managers generally viewed it positively for several reasons. First, managers viewed it positively from an information-gathering perspective because companies that conduct background checks provide limited information regarding the conviction. Second, the content of the explanation informs manager's general impressions of the candidates' character. As one manager who was reviewing a candidates' Driving Under the Influence convictions explained:

> [The candidate] kind of brushed it off as few beers once in a while and they didn't really go into too much detail about it and made it seem like they didn't really take responsibility and explain to my satisfaction why they ended up getting two DUIs [Driving Under the Influence]. They just blamed it on the police and the fact that they were profiled. To me, it also gave me an indication that they're not taking responsibility for their actions, their part of it as well, especially if you have two. That is also an indication to me that if they are not taking responsibility for their actions, then how is that going to reflect if they actually end up working for us? Are they going to blame other people for their actions? Are they going to be truthful? Are they going to minimize issues that come up or just completely hide them? So, to me that just didn't sit very well at all and we ended up not hiring this candidate."

Although managers did note that they appreciate an honest and upfront explanation about a previous offense, the effectiveness of an explanation hinged on other characteristics associated with the offense (e.g., the nature of the crime, years that have lapsed since the conviction) and the candidate's experiences and skill sets. As one manager explained:

> I think two [employees with a conviction] who are currently on my team told me about how shortly after they started college as freshman, they went and stole a car and they went joyriding and they got caught. So naturally that comes up on their record and what came into these two guys' favors was that they were honest with me. They told me we did get convicted for stealing a car and we did this when we were 18/19 years old and since then we have stayed clean. Because of their honesty [and] because of the age of offense, that's why I hired them and they are still members of my staff to this day.

In our qualitative analysis of the manager's reactions to the different explanation scenarios, we consistently found that managers reacted positively to candidates who provided an apology or a justification, and they generally reacted negatively to candidates who provided an excuse (see Table 7). We asked the managers which adjectives they would use in response to the three IM scenarios. When making an apology, the candidate was consistently viewed as "remorseful," "honest," "regretful," and "accountable." When making a justification, the candidate was seen as "sincere," "responsible," "family oriented," and "caring." When making an excuse, the candidate was viewed as "immoral," "dishonest," "immature," and "rebellious." We asked each manager to

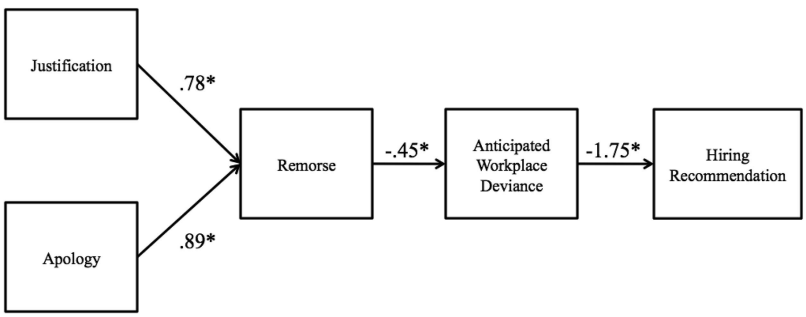

Figure 3. Model results for Study 2. * $p < .01$; excuse condition is the referent for the IM tactics.

Table 6
Regression Coefficients, Standard Errors, and Model Summary Information for the Proposed Serial Mediation Model for Study 2

Predictors	Remorse (M1)		Anticipated workplace deviance (M2)		Hiring recommendation	
	Estimate	*SE*	Estimate	*SE*	Estimate	*SE*
Independent variables						
Justification versus excuse	.78*	.16	−.06	.14	−.95	.72
Apology versus excuse	.89*	.23	.40*	.14	−.16	.73
Mediators						
Remorse	—	—	−.45*	.05	.47	.30
Anticipated workplace deviance	—	—	—	—	−1.75*	.51
Intercept	3.20*	.16	3.68*	.20	4.03**	1.80
Model summary information	$-R^2 = .13$ $F(2, 116) = 9.02^*$		$R^2 = .41$ $F(3, 115) = 26.89^*$		$R^2 = .24^a$; $R^2 = .37^b$ −2LL = 96.80	

Note. $N = 119$; M = mediator. Hiring recommendation: 1, *yes*; 0, *no*. [a] Cox and Snell. [b] Nagelkerke. * $p < .01$. ** $p < .05$.

rank order the three candidates on integrity and trustworthiness. Sixty-two percent ranked the candidate in the apology scenario as being the highest on integrity and trustworthiness, whereas 35% of the managers ranked the justification candidate as the highest, followed by the excuse candidate (3%).

Overall, our qualitative findings provide additional support for our expectations. That is, apology and justification do a better job (compared with excuse) at ameliorating the negative identity associated with a criminal record and that such reparative IM tactics result in favorable trait evaluations (i.e., higher on integrity and trustworthiness).

Table 7
Example Quotes Regarding Managerial Reactions to Reparative Impression Management Tactics for Study 3

IM dimension	Representative quotes
Excuse	"Now with that, yeah, I can definitely see that happening. I see that happened all the time, sad to say. I live in a society, but even more so a city where crime rate is very high. So being in a wrong place at the wrong time that can happen to anybody and so with that being said, my impression of that candidate is going to be, you know, more so of—I'm going to say mutual standing, at the same time, you know, positive standing based upon honesty that was delivered and of course that clearly those situations can happen to any of us."
	"My initial reaction would be disingenuous, lack of culpability or accountability, lack of responsibility. I have a difficult time accepting a statement like that."
	"An explanation like that makes me wonder if that person is trying to maybe get out of the conviction or trying to maybe say that they weren't at fault, but they were convicted at it. My initial impression would be negative."
	"I think definitely I won't want to hire this person because if anything happened I couldn't expect this person to be open about what happened. They would probably put the blame on someone else."
Justification	"Well, it's technically not all their fault because they were trying to help out a family member, which shows courage and determination. They're trying to do a good deed, so they're being helpful and being caring to a family member. So it shows that they did what they did because they're trying to help a family member. So that's taken into consideration definitely and it shows that they are helpful and they care about others and it helps in the interview and it helps through the hiring process."
	"I am sympathetic because we all have family members."
	"Well, so I'm listening to that scenario and that to me seems like an honest individual, someone who had accepted their mistakes and who's ready to move on. I mean you can't get no more sincere than that, you know, accept the responsibility of your own because that's the first step in trying to amend what you have done, in my opinion."
	That's kind of double standard a little bit there, because when I hear that phrase, I understand from the incident of or I can just say from the side of it being okay if the family member not felt like I need to help that person, but just to know just because this is your family it doesn't make it right, okay. We still have to know and understand that right is right and wrong is wrong and that doesn't mean that just because it is a family member that makes it alright or make it accepting to do so. And so I'm not going to stand here and say that that's just going to leave just a major negative impression of me, but it's going to put me in that middle ground, okay. The middle ground is saying you didn't make the wisest choice, okay, to involve yourself with that.
Apology	"I would say they are responsible; they do have moral character."
	"It sounds like this individual has admitted that they've done something wrong and they're regretting. They are regretful of what they've done. And it sounds like they are willing to subject themselves to punishment."
	"I think that first sentence is owning up to the fact that they committed this crime and that they are trying to make it right if they're wrong and then try to move forward and be a better person. I think that shows maturity; I think that shows that they're taking responsibility and they're saying that they're doing something about it. They're trying to turn that around. They're trying to be in the workforce now and they're trying to turn that around and follow the laws."
	"That one to me would be iffy. You know that's right down real thin line. I think people that say, "I promise it'll never happen again" to me it's like four times out of ten it's going to happen again. That's just how I think and I believe. You know if you're really sorry for what you did, I don't think that the "I promise it won't happen again," you know, is really very truthful. So yeah, that way I would be really iffy about that one."

General Discussion

Applicants with a criminal record face immense employment challenges because of the nature of their perilous stigma. Existing research has yet to examine how applicants with criminal record stigma manage impressions surrounding their offense and how these different IM tactics come to influence selection decisions. In this paper, we investigated the implications of three reparative IM tactics—apology, justification, excuse—in minimizing the negative effects of criminal record stigma on hiring decisions, namely their effects on perceptions of remorse and anticipated workplace deviance. Results from two experimental studies provide evidence that apologizing or providing a justification have positive effects, whereas excuse has negative effects, on hiring decisions indirectly through their influence on remorse and anticipated workplace deviance. Furthermore, in our qualitative study, we found evidence that hiring managers do consider candidates' IM tactics (in both applications and interviews) regarding their criminal record when making hiring decisions.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

To our knowledge, our research is the first to examine reparative IM tactics in shaping a perilous stigma within the hiring context. We contribute to the existing IM of stigma literature by articulating a pathway through which reparative IM tactics influence hiring decisions. Our findings suggest that the IM tactic adopted by an applicant matters a great deal. In response to apology or justification tactics, evaluators perceived candidates as remorseful for their criminal behavior. In such instances, when security and safety concerns feed into candidate evaluations, expressing remorse communicates to the evaluator the individual values social norms and that the criminal behavior is atypical of the candidate, resulting in positive impressions as predicted in ACT (Robinson et al., 1994; Tsoudis & Smith-Lovin, 1998). Our qualitative findings were also reflective of this because managers viewed candidates who provided an apology or justification as being high on integrity and trustworthiness and believed they would uphold company values and social norms.

Our findings for excuse diverge from previous literature that has typically shown that providing an excuse under performance-failure situations leads to favorable evaluations (e.g., Crant & Bateman, 1993; Wood & Mitchell, 1981). We found that, in the case of criminal offense in which there are integrity concerns, an excuse is disadvantageous because it does not communicate remorse and does not reduce evaluators' concerns of the dispositionality of bad behavior. When evaluators are concerned about reducing the occurrence of negative behavior rather than elevating behavior, providing an excuse may be detrimental. We thus extend previous work on reparative IM tactics by highlighting the context in which it can be disadvantageous to use certain tactics rather than others.

Our findings also enhance understanding of ACT. Existing research using ACT has shown that in mock trials, defendants' emotion displays (e.g., expression of sadness) influence criminal identity, which in turn affects sentencing decisions (Robinson et al., 1994; Tsoudis & Smith-Lovin, 2001). These studies find that jurors are more likely to recommend shorter sentences because defendants' expression of regret and remorse leads them to make positive evaluations concerning the defendants' underlying identity. We showed that reparative IM tactics could be an important determinant of perceived remorse. Moreover, our findings for the identical effects of apology and justification on remorse suggest that there may be multiple pathways to influencing remorse perceptions. As such, future research linking reparative tactics to emotions may benefit from investigating the large number of justification accounts candidates can use when explaining previous offense and their effects on different emotions. To this end, researchers can use the justification typology forwarded by Tedeschi and Reiss (1981; p. 288) to examine which variations of justifications lead to different positive emotions.

Our research also contributes to the social cognition literature. According to the stereotype content model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002), people evaluate groups along the dimensions of competence and warmth, and individuals with criminal records are viewed as being low on both competence and warmth (Côté-Lussier, 2016). In Studies 1 and 2, we measured perceived competence and found that they did not significantly differ across the explanation conditions. Although we did not measure perceived warmth, we suspect that it may be the clear factor that differs when people talk about being remorseful. Indeed, at an interpersonal level, being remorseful signals that the individual's deviant act is incongruent with their underlying disposition; managers from our qualitative study consistently attributed positive traits indicative of high warmth (e.g., trustworthy, caring, sincere) to candidates using an apology or justification tactic. We suggest future research build on our findings concerning the efficacy of reparative tactics by integrating the theoretical model forwarded by Young and Powell (2014), which elaborates on the ways in which candidate characteristics can shape competence and warmth perceptions.

In addition to the implications for theory and research, our findings offer important implications for practice, particularly in light of recent legislation surrounding "Ban the Box." Whereas "Ban the Box" may increase the likelihood of those with criminal records making it past the application stage, these individuals may still be asked to speak about prior offenses (Equal Employment Opportunities Commission, 2012). Our research shows that how individuals convey information about their prior offense is important in multiple stages of the selection process (i.e., applications and interviews). Our findings suggest that providing an apology—which includes accepting responsibility, expressing remorse and regret, and promising to abide by social rules (Goffman, 1971)—or providing a justification—by providing an account that appeals to a moral obligation (e.g., helping a family member)—may be the best tactics because they reduce integrity concerns. However, for both tactics, we want to stress the importance of providing truthful accounts for the offense. That is to say, in light of our evidence, we are not advocating that candidates with a criminal record just fake remorse. We recognize that candidates want to put their best foot forward in hiring situations but stress that they do so in honest ways. Indeed, in the qualitative study, managers commented on the importance of sincerity as conveyed by body language and tone. Further research on explanations (Greenberg, 1994; Shapiro, Buttner, & Barry, 1994) shows the importance of sincerity in acceptance of an explanation.

Our results may generalize to individuals managing impressions about a variety of other potentially negative events (e.g., being fired from a previous job). However, previous research (e.g., Kim et al., 2004) has noted that an important boundary condition of the effectiveness of IM tactics is whether the evaluators have information about whether the offender is or is not connected to the offense (i.e., information indicating whether the applicant is innocent or guilty). In cases of criminal record, details of the conviction are often publicly known and available to employers, so our recommendations would be particularly useful for situations when the candidates' connection to the offense is known. Future research would thus benefit from examining how and why different reparative IM tactics relate to hiring evaluations for tarnished identities in instances in which innocence or guilt is not verifiable.

Furthermore, we noticed considerable variability in hiring recommendations across Studies 1 and 2, even when the nature of the crime and job was held constant. This suggests that evaluators are using information outside job relatedness of the crime to inform their hiring recommendations and that their evaluations are subject to influence by IM tactics. It is therefore in employers' best interest to carefully consider how they train and monitor those individuals making hiring decisions to reduce the potential for bias.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

A strength of our design is that we manipulated crime and job type (Study 1) and used different samples (undergraduate college students vs. experienced hiring managers from different industries). Our results thus suggest some level of generalizability across job and crime type, industry, and sample characteristics. Experiments also enable us to draw some causal inferences around the effects of IM tactics on hiring evaluations, whereas our qualitative data (Study 3) provided contextual richness to understanding real hiring manager decision making.

As with all research, our studies had some limitations. The focus of this research was on forwarding a model through which reparative IM tactics influence hiring evaluations. However, whether or not IM tactics have their effect on the proposed mechanisms could be shaped by additional candidate characteristics, including the candidates' race or ethnicity and prior record information. Existing evidence finds that the ex-offenders' race or ethnicity plays a role in hiring decisions (e.g., Pager, 2003; Pager, Western, & Sugie, 2009). Given that in Study 2 we exclusively used a White candidate in our manipulation of IM tactics, it is unclear to what extent our findings would change as function of incorporating additional race or ethnic categories (e.g., Hispanic, Black or African American). Furthermore, we posit that evaluators' perceptions of applicants' remorse and future deviant workplace behavior would be influenced by whether the candidate is a repeat offender. Given that perceived remorse signifies the candidate may not repeat the criminal act in the future, we suspect that the efficacy of reparative IM tactics, especially the use of apology, may diminish if candidates have multiple offenses. Therefore, future research could build on the findings from this study and examine personal characteristics that could either enhance or diminish the effects of IM tactics on hiring evaluations.

Another limitation surrounds the nature of the decision process within our study design. Across both experimental studies, raters evaluated a single candidate. It is therefore unclear to what extent our findings generalize to contexts in which raters compare several candidates. Specifically, it may be that when comparing an applicant with a criminal record to one without a criminal record—whether they are equally qualified or even less qualified—IM tactics may not necessarily lead to a preference toward the candidate with the criminal record. In our qualitative study, some managers mentioned that in most hiring situations, there would be candidates with similar qualifications for the job that do not have a criminal record, and they deemed such candidates more desirable. Thus, a needed direction for future research is to empirically examine the conditions under which reparative IM tactics result in favorable evaluations when other candidates are in the applicant pool.

A final limitation in our two experiments was that the mechanisms and dependent variable were collected at the same time, which raises concerns of common method bias. Future research can overcome the limitation associated with the measurement-of-mediation design by utilizing what Spencer, Zanna, and Fong (2005) call experimental-causal-chain design whereby both the independent and mediating variables are experimentally manipulated.

The current set of studies focused on how candidates with a criminal record stigma manage their impressions during the hiring process. Another direction for future research is examining how individuals with a criminal record manage their stigma once employed (Clair et al., 2005). Specifically, given that ex-offenders can choose to conceal their identity, research that examines the factors that shape the disclosure process (Chaudoir & Fisher, 2010) is needed. For example, future research might adopt a multilevel framework (e.g., Jones & King, 2014) to examine the within-person as well as situational determinants of whether and how employees with criminal record stigma choose to reveal or conceal.

Conclusion

In this research, we sought to understand how candidates manage impressions associated with a perilous stigma. To accomplish this, we drew from the literature on reparative IM tactics and ACT to develop an individual-level model of mechanisms through which IM tactics influence evaluators' hiring decisions. Across three studies, our results suggest that providing an apology or justification is a useful strategy for candidates with a criminal record in that it leads to favorable hiring evaluations. In line with ACT, these verbal strategies led to evaluators perceiving the candidate as more remorseful and less likely to engage in deviant behaviors at work. In addition, providing an excuse has a negative effect on hiring decisions because it fails to mitigate the threat associated with the criminal identity. Thus, our research sheds lights on how individuals with a criminal record can navigate the hiring process and use reparative IM tactics to minimize the effects of their stigma.

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