

Target and Observer Differences in the Acceptance of Questionable Apologies

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Do people distinguish between sincere and insincere apologies? Because targets and observers face different constraints, we hypothesized that observers would differentiate between spontaneous and coerced apologies but that targets would not. In Studies 1 and 2 participants either received or observed a spontaneous apology, a coerced apology, or no apology, following a staged offense, and the predicted target–observer difference emerged. Studies 3–5 provided evidence in support of 3 mechanisms that contribute to this target–observer difference. Studies 3 and 4 indicate that this difference is due, in part, to a motivation to be seen positively by others and a motivation to feel good about oneself. Study 5 suggests that social scripts constrain the responses of targets more than those of observers.

Keywords: apologies, target–observer differences, sincerity, coercion

A stiff apology is a second insult—G. K. Chesterton

It is not uncommon in elementary school classrooms to witness a teacher dragging one child up to another and insisting that the reluctant student issue an apology. It is also common to witness the aggrieved child showing every sign of being completely satisfied with the obviously coerced effort and the two children going off together as friends. Is this spectacle unique to young children, who are notorious for their short memories, or are people as a whole inclined to accept apologies, even when there are grounds for doubting their sincerity? How do coworkers at a firm or factory, strangers on the street, families in a feud, or countries in conflict react to coerced or other sorts of stiff apologies?

Scholars who have studied apologies maintain that they serve several purposes. They stand as acknowledgements that social rules have been broken and as reaffirmations of the legitimacy of those rules (Darby & Schlenker, 1982), they restore the standing of the victim (Ohbuchi & Sato, 1994), they reestablish the flow of social interaction (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994; Goffman, 1955), and they head off the perception that the wrongdoing is linked to an underlying disposition of the offender (Goffman, 1955; Ohbuchi & Sato, 1994; Takaku, 2001). Some of these purposes suggest an ability to distinguish sincere apologies from insincere apolo-

gies, but other purposes do not. Some suggest that recipients and observers of an apology may differ in their readiness to distinguish stiff apologies and heartfelt apologies. The research reported here was designed to address these very questions. How do people react to sincere and insincere apologies, and do observers and recipients tend to react in the same way?

We began with the hypothesis that although observers tend to discriminate between sincere and insincere apologies, the recipients of apologies do not. This hypothesis was based on existing data on reactions to apologies and on parallel findings in other areas of psychology. Research on ingratiation, for example, might be taken to suggest that recipients and observers may differ in their reactions to apologies, with recipients more likely to accept a stiff apology. Studies of ingratiation have demonstrated that although targets of false flattery tend to believe the sincerity of an ingratia-tor, observers do not (Gordon, 1996; Vonk, 2002). Vonk (2002) concluded that a self-enhancement motivation best explains the target–observer difference in reactions to false flattery and argued that targets of ingratiation can feel good about themselves by accepting flattery uncritically but that observers may be motivated to be more discerning because they have less to gain from the flattery.

An examination of the social settings in which apologies are offered, and of the psychological processes that are engaged in those settings, also suggests that recipients and observers may respond differently to questionable apologies. Social desirability constraints, for example, are likely to play out differently for recipients and observers, leading them to respond differently to the offered apology. The target may be motivated to come across as a forgiving person and to restore the smoothness of the social interaction so that the audience does not look down on him or her. Indeed, a study by Bennett and Dewberry (1994) suggests that how recipients react to an apology influences how they are viewed by others. Not surprisingly, participants perceived the victim of an offense more positively when the victim accepted a sincere apolo-

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ogy than when the victim rejected it. Remarkably, the result was the same for an insincere apology. Although participants believed that the apology was unconvincing, they still rated a victim who rejected the insincere apology more harshly than a victim who accepted it.

The situation for observers is different. If an observer excuses someone who offers an insincere apology, the observer may be seen as insufficiently empathetic to the victim. It may thus be in the interest of observers to respond differently to sincere and insincere apologies and thereby signal that they care about others.

In addition to wanting to be liked by others, people are motivated to feel good about themselves, and satisfying this motivation may also require different reactions to apologies on the part of targets and observers. Targets may be motivated to believe apologies because an ostensibly sincere apology implies that their feelings and their predicament are important and that the individual who offers the apology cares enough to offer it. In addition, believing that one is a magnanimous, forgiving person can be a source of personal esteem. Observers, in contrast, are more likely to achieve a sense of personal esteem by believing that they are the type of person who can accurately judge whether someone is being sincere and forgive or punish the person accordingly. Targets and observers may therefore respond differently to insincere apologies because targets may feel good about themselves when they accept any type of apology, whereas observers may feel good about themselves when they reject insincere ones. This claim parallels Vonk's (2002) explanation of why targets of false flattery tend to believe the sincerity of an ingratiation, but observers do not.

Another reason that targets and observers might respond differently to insincere apologies is that the prevailing social script is not the same for the two roles. When a social interaction is repeated often enough, it can give rise to mindless, automatic behavior that conforms to a recognizable script (Langer, 1978; Schank & Abelson, 1977). People are taught at a young age to apologize when they have done something wrong and to accept the apology of someone who offers them one. It is common to hear, "It's OK," "No worries," or "Not a problem," after an apology, but unusual to hear such statements as, "You keep your apology," or "I don't think you're being sincere." In other words, the apology-followed-by-forgiveness script is well practiced, but there does not seem to be a script for how one rejects an apology directed at oneself. Thus, it can often feel as though there is little choice but to accept the apology.

This notion has received support from a study that found that even though children can distinguish apologies given by someone with a bad reputation from those given by someone with a good reputation, both apologies tend to mitigate punishment of the harmdoer (Darby & Schlenker, 1989). In other words, regardless of how the children may have felt about the apology, it tended to be followed by a form of forgiveness. Darby and Schlenker suggested, "It may be that the apology-forgiveness sequence is such an ingrained aspect of social life that an apology automatically improves the actor's social position. Apologies may thus evoke an unthinking, scripted reaction" (Darby & Schlenker, 1989, p. 361). Responding to an apology as an observer is a far less frequent event, which could lead to a less constraining script for observers.

In sum, it seems that the motivations to be well regarded by others and to feel good about oneself may operate differently for targets and observers of a questionable apology. Whereas targets

may be motivated to accept an insincere apology, observers may be motivated to behave in ways that show that they distinguish insincere from sincere apologies. In addition, the apology-forgiveness social script may constrain the response of a target more than that of an observer. For these reasons, we predicted that targets would be less likely than observers to distinguish between sincere and insincere apologies.

Existing research on this question is mixed. Darby and Schlenker (1989) compared responses to apologies that differed in sincerity and found that 7th graders liked a character described in a vignette more after the character offered a sincere apology than after the character offered a perfunctory apology or no apology at all. Participants' liking ratings were equally unfavorable in the no apology and perfunctory apology situations. As mentioned above, however, the participants were more likely to forgive the offender when an apology was offered, even if it was not sincere. These results suggest that even if observers do not differentiate between sincere and insincere apologies in terms of punishment, observers are able to differentiate apologies internally, and observers believe that they will like someone more if the person offers a sincere apology.

Although these results are suggestive, it is unclear whether recipients of real-life apologies distinguish sincere apologies from insincere apologies. First, the within-subject design used in the Darby and Schlenker study may have encouraged participants to differentiate their responses to the different apologies. Second, the study relied solely on hypothetical scenarios and responses. Given that people's predictions of their behavioral and emotional reactions are not always accurate (Epley & Dunning, 2000; Gilbert, Pinel, Wilson, Blumberg, & Wheatley, 1998; Vallone, Griffin, Lin, & Ross, 1990), the participants' responses may not reflect what their reactions would be in a real-life situation. Third, the participants assumed the role of an outside observer and, thus, did not predict how they would feel as the victim of the offense and the recipient of the apology. Responses from a hypothetical observer may not capture responses from a hypothetical victim, let alone an actual victim.

The present studies were designed to go beyond the patchwork of existing findings on reactions to apologies and examine whether targets and observers react similarly to sincere apologies but diverge in their reactions to insincere apologies. In Studies 1 and 2, we examined targets' and observers' reactions to a spontaneous apology or a coerced apology that was offered in the aftermath of a staged laboratory offense. In Studies 3-5, we examined possible explanations of why targets and observers respond differently to insincere apologies. In Study 3, we examined the role of self-presentational concerns; in Study 4, we examined the impact of the desire for personal esteem; and in Study 5, we examined whether targets and observers may be constrained by different social scripts.

Study 1

In this study, we sought to go beyond the hypothetical scenarios used in past research and examine reactions to sincere and insincere apologies in a real interaction. Past studies have operationalized an insincere apology as a perfunctory one or as one given by a character with a bad reputation. Here, sincerity was manipulated by having the apology be either spontaneously given or given only after the harmdoer was coerced into doing so. Thus, in the coerced

condition, much like in the schoolyard, an apology was only given after the harmdoer was specifically told to apologize, and both the target and observer were aware of the coercion. On the basis of the evidence discussed, we predicted that although observers would respond differently to spontaneous and coerced apologies, targets would not.

Method

Participants

Participants were 130 Cornell undergraduates who participated in exchange for course credit in psychology or human development courses.

Materials and Procedure

Along with two confederates of the experimenter, 2 participants were run in each session and were led to believe that the study was about communication skills. Participants were asked either to engage in a communication task with one of the confederates (targets) or to observe the communication task alongside another confederate (observers). The communication task involved one confederate (the harmdoer) putting a set of K'nex toy pieces together and giving directions to the target (who was back-to-back with the harmdoer) about how to put an identical set of pieces together in the same way. The target had to follow the directions without asking any questions or making any comments. All participants were informed that the pair working on the task could earn money on the basis of how well they performed in the allotted 5 min (\$0.25 for every matching piece).

After explaining the task and assigning roles, the experimenter left the room. During the communication task, the harmdoer confederate made it impossible for the target participant to perform well. He began by giving unclear directions and then answered his cell phone. As the phone conversation went on, he tried to explain that he was in an experiment, but then got caught up in the conversation and stayed on the phone for 1.5 min. Participants could hear his half of the conversation, which was designed to sound trite, "What? . . . No? . . . I can't believe he did that. . . . Really?" After hanging up, he continued to give confusing clues until the timer sounded, signaling the end of the task. After the timer sounded, but before the experimenter returned to the room, the confederates randomly assigned the participants to a condition on the basis of a subtle signal given by the experimenter before leaving the room.

In the spontaneous condition, the harmdoer immediately turned to the target and said, "I'm sorry, I really screwed that up for you." In the coerced condition, the observer confederate waited a few moments, apparently allowing the harmdoer a chance to apologize, and then said to him, "That was terrible. I can't believe you took a phone call. You totally ruined it for him [her]. You really need to apologize." The harmdoer then turned to the target and said, "I'm sorry, I really screwed that up for you." The harmdoer was coached to use similar body language when delivering the spontaneous and coerced apologies. In the no apology condition, rather than offer an apology, the harmdoer sighed and began to count the number of pieces that he had used until the experimenter returned. To control for the possibility that the harm would not be as salient

in a condition without an apology as it would be in the two other conditions, participants in the no apology condition were either assigned to the no apology/offense-not-salient condition, in which no special attention was drawn to the harm, or to the no apology/offense-salient condition, in which the observing confederate drew attention to the harm, just as she did in the coerced condition, by saying, "That was terrible. I can't believe you took a phone call. You totally ruined it for him [her]." It is important that in the no apology/offense-salient condition, the observing confederate did not say that the harmdoer should apologize (as she did in the coerced condition). The harmdoer responded simply by sighing before the experimenter returned.

Dependent Measures

On returning, the experimenter explained that she needed each participant to fill out a set of questionnaires to evaluate their experience up to that point in the experiment. The participants were then separated into different corners of the room and asked to rate the harmdoer (as well as the other participants) on a number of traits and to report the percentage of money each member of the communication pair deserved from the amount they were to receive from the experimenter.

On the Trait Rating Questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate how likable, selfish, sincere, arrogant, rude, and compassionate each participant was by placing a slash on an 11-cm continuous line. Participants rated the other participant first, the harmdoer second, and the other confederate third. For each trait, the line was anchored on the left at *not at all* and on the right at *extremely*. On the Communication Performance Questionnaire, participants were asked to rate separately how much effort the clue giver and the target had exerted during the task. Participants were also asked to report the percentage of money that they thought each participant should receive.

Finally, participants were probed for suspicion and debriefed. The target participant was always paid the entirety of what the participant had earned with the harmdoer.

Results

Because there were no differences in participants' responses in the two no apology conditions on the primary dependent measures (liking of harmdoer and amount of money recommended), participants' responses in these two conditions were pooled.

Of the 130 participants who completed the study, the data from 16 (12.3%) had to be omitted because of suspicion.¹ Participants were considered suspicious if, during the probed debriefing, they said that they thought the harmdoer was a confederate or the phone call was planned. Of the 16 excluded, 6 were in the coerced condition, 3 were in the spontaneous condition, 1 was in the no apology/offense-not-salient condition, and 6 were in the no apology/offense-salient condition. In addition, 10 of the 16 were in the role of observer and 6 were in the role of the target. Of the remaining 114 participants, 91 were female (80%).

¹ When the 16 people who expressed suspicion were included in the analyses, the results for participants' impression of the harmdoer were the same as those reported in the text, and the significant effects found for the desire to pay the harmdoer became marginally significant ($ps < .10$).

Impression of the Harmdoer

The six traits were averaged to create an overall impression index ($\alpha = .71$), with responses to rude, selfish, and arrogant reverse scored so that higher numbers indicated more favorable impressions. As hypothesized, participants' ratings of the harmdoer indicated that targets did not evaluate the harmdoer differently in the two apology conditions but that observers did (see Table 1).

The impression index was submitted to a 3 (apology: spontaneous, coerced, or none) \times 2 (role: target or observer) between-participants analysis of variance (ANOVA),² which revealed a significant effect of apology, $F(2, 107) = 3.44, p < .05$, and more important, a significant Apology \times Role interaction, $F(2, 107) = 5.81, p < .01$. Our hypothesis—that targets would like the harmdoer more if the harmdoer apologized than if the harmdoer did not and that observers would like the harmdoer more if the harmdoer offered a spontaneous apology than if the harmdoer offered a coerced apology or no apology—was tested in a one-way ANOVA with the following contrast weights: target–spontaneous apology, 1; target–coerced apology, 1; target–no apology, –2; observer–spontaneous apology, 2; observer–coerced apology, –1; and observer–no apology, –1. This analysis yielded a significant contrast, $F(1, 107) = 5.71, p < .02$, and no significant effect of the residual ($F < 1$).

Simple effects tests revealed that, as predicted, targets liked the harmdoer equally following a spontaneous apology or a coerced apology ($M_s = 4.61$ and 4.40 , respectively, $t < 1$), but observers liked the harmdoer significantly less following a coerced apology ($M = 2.68$) than following a spontaneous one ($M = 4.31$), $t(107) = 3.18, p < .005, d = 1.15$.

Money Deserved

Our next measure of the participants' reaction to the harmdoer was the portion of the money, earned by the target and the harmdoer, that the participant believed the harmdoer deserved. Because participants believed their response would influence the actual amount that the harmdoer was paid, the response can be seen as a measure of punishment. As predicted, responses indi-

cated that targets wanted to punish the harmdoer equally in the two apology conditions, but observers wanted to punish the harmdoer more in the coerced apology condition (see Table 1).

The proportion of the earnings that participants thought the harmdoer deserved was submitted to a 3 (apology: spontaneous, coerced, or none) \times 2 (role: target or observer) between-participants ANOVA. This analysis revealed a significant effect of apology, $F(2, 106) = 3.40, p < .05$, and a significant effect of role, $F(1, 106) = 20.97, p < .001$. More important, these two significant main effects were qualified by a significant Apology \times Role interaction, $F(2, 106) = 3.14, p < .05$. The same set of contrast weights were used in a follow-up analysis and again revealed significant support for the original hypothesis that targets would differentiate any apology from no apology and that observers would differentiate a spontaneous apology from a coerced apology or no apology, $F(1, 106) = 7.00, p = .01$. Again, simple effects tests revealed that, as predicted, targets wanted to pay the harmdoer an equal percentage following either type of apology ($t < 1$), but observers wanted to pay the harmdoer, on average, 14% more following a spontaneous apology than following a coerced one, $t(107) = 3.09, p < .01, d = 1.12$.

Discussion

The results support our contention that there is a pronounced target–observer difference in reactions to spontaneous and coerced apologies. As predicted, targets responded similarly to the spontaneous and coerced apologies, in terms of both how much they liked the harmdoer and how much they thought the harmdoer deserved to be paid for his or her efforts. Observers, in contrast, responded differently to the spontaneous and coerced apologies. They thought the harmdoer was significantly more likable in the spontaneous condition than in the coerced condition, and they wanted to pay the harmdoer 14% more in the former condition than in the latter.

The careful reader will have noticed one anomalous result among the six condition means: Observers in the no apology condition seem to have liked the harmdoer more and wanted to pay the harmdoer more than did observers in the coerced condition. In the eyes of the observer, in other words, the coerced apology was worse than no apology, and the failure to offer an apology seemed to work as well as offering a spontaneous apology. This was true

Table 1

Target's and Observer's Impressions of the Harmdoer and Recommended Share of Money Earned

Role	Apology		
	Spontaneous	Coerced	None
Target			
<i>n</i>	17	16	26
Impression (<i>M</i>)	4.61 (1.89)	4.40 (0.95)	3.89 (1.40)
% money (<i>M</i>)	41.70 (11.72)	39.38 (09.64)	36.00 (13.62)
Contrast weight	1	1	–2
Observer			
<i>n</i>	18	14	23
Impression (<i>M</i>)	4.31 (1.19)	2.68 (1.24)	4.44 (1.60)
% money (<i>M</i>)	33.53 (08.43)	19.24 (15.05)	30.48 (15.31)
Contrast weight	2	–1	–1

Note. The higher the number, the more the harmdoer was liked. Values in parentheses represent standard deviations.

² Because the data from each experimental session are not independent, the data were also analyzed in a 3 \times 2 repeated measures ANOVA, with apology as a between-sessions variable and role as a repeated measures variable. The results, and the conclusions to be drawn from them, are the same as those reported in the text, and we present between-participants analyses in the text for two reasons. First, the experimental session did not capture significant variance in participants' responses. For both dependent measures, we ran a 3 \times 2 repeated measures ANOVA in which each target was randomly paired with an observer who participated in the same condition but in a different experimental session, and it revealed the same pattern of results and an almost identical mean square error. Second, because 16 participants were removed for suspicion (rarely from the same experimental session), the between-participants analysis includes more participants ($N = 114$) than the repeated measures analysis ($N = 98$). The larger number of participants is consistent with the number included in follow-up tests that compare (across different sessions) targets with targets and observers with observers.

even in the no apology/offense-salient condition, in which attention was drawn to the harm.

Although the response of observers in the no apology condition was not expected, it is consistent with findings from the legal arena, which suggest that apologies may only benefit harmdoers if their responsibility for the harm is clear. When the responsibility is clear, apologies increase the chance of plaintiffs and defendants reaching a settlement. If responsibility is ambiguous, however, apologies can be costly to the defendant because of the admission of responsibility (Robbennolt, 2003).

At first glance, the most obvious interpretation of the relatively favorable impressions of the harmdoer on the part of observers in the control condition is that, absent an admission of wrongdoing, the harm may not have been clear to them. This interpretation does not entirely square with the fact that the ratings made by participants in the no apology/offense-not-salient condition did not differ from those made by participants in the no apology/offensive-salient condition. If clarity or salience of the harm were the issue, one would expect the ratings in these two conditions to differ because of the dramatic difference in the degree to which attention was called to the offense. However, because the harmdoer failed to admit responsibility in the no apology conditions, the harm may have remained somewhat ambiguous even in the no apology/offense-salient condition. To determine whether ambiguity about the harm may indeed have played a role in this result, we designed Study 2 as a conceptual replication in which there was no ambiguity about the offense.

Study 2

Using an on-line interaction, we designed Study 2 to assess the robustness of the target–observer difference found in Study 1. After taking steps to ensure that the responsibility for the harm was clear, we expected observers to respond harshly in both the coerced apology and no apology conditions compared with the spontaneous apology condition. In addition, we crafted the procedure to allow us to measure participants' impressions of how bad the harmdoer felt about committing the harm after the harmdoer apologized. Thus, unlike Study 1, it was possible to determine whether targets and observers differed in how convinced they were by the spontaneous and coerced apologies.

Method

Participants

Participants were 98 Cornell undergraduates who participated in exchange for course credit in psychology or human development courses.

Materials and Procedure

In each experimental session, 2 participants and an experimenter took part in an online group discussion. The experimenter had one screen name reserved for herself and also played the roles of 2 other supposed participants. The experimenter met the 2 real participants in the waiting area and explained that 2 other participants had already arrived. The experimenter then guided the participants to the two closest, empty cubicles and directed the explanation of the study to four cubicles with the doors ajar,

conveying an impression that the other 2 participants occupied the two further cubicles. One participant (the target) was randomly assigned the screen name MAC1 and the other participant (the observer) was assigned the screen name MAC3. The experimenter played the roles of MAC4 (harmdoer) and MAC2 (coercer in the coerced apology condition). Participants were informed that they would not learn which screen names matched which participants.

The experimenter told participants that productive discussions are open, honest, and insightful and that while discussing mildly sensitive topics, they should try to make comments that facilitate a productive discussion. The experimenter then proceeded to pose a series of questions, which ranged in topic from politics to adjustment to college. Each question was directed to one person, and then the 4 participants had a chance to comment until the experimenter posed a new question to a new person. Some questions were open ended and some encouraged participants to answer simply "yes" or "no".

The experimenter posed the fourth question to the target. The question was written to encourage participants to simply respond "no." The experimenter asked, "MAC1, do you think that the United States is doing everything it possibly can to provide equal rights for its gay citizens? Yes or no?" After the participant said "no," the experimenter delivered the unambiguous offense in the role of MAC4 by saying, "mac1, you should just go move to australia or canada or something—this discussion thing would be more productive if you quit being such an ungrateful baby . . . realized that you're lucky to live here, and stopped focusing only on the negative."³

In the spontaneous condition, the harmdoer (MAC4) immediately wrote an apology: "You know what—that was too harsh. i'm sorry, mac1." In the coerced condition, the experimenter wrote as MAC2, "mac4, i can't believe you said that. that was totally uncalled for. you need to apologize to mac1." MAC4 then wrote, "you know what—that was too harsh. i'm sorry, mac1." In the no apology condition, MAC4 did not offer an apology and the discussion continued. In all conditions, three more questions were posed before the discussion ended, and participants completed the dependent variables.

Dependent Measures

The experimenter informed participants (over the computer) that the group discussion was complete and that they should fill out the packet of questionnaires in their cubicle. The participants were asked to rate the harmdoer (as well as the other participants) on a number of traits, to answer several questions about the most productive and destructive comments made during the discussion, and to report how to split a \$4 bonus among the 4 participants.

On the Trait Rating Questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate how likable, selfish, kind, arrogant, rude, and compassionate each participant was by placing a slash on an 11-cm line. Participants rated the other participant first, the harmdoer second, and the other supposed participant third. For each trait, the line was anchored on the left at *not at all* and on the right at *extremely*. In addition to rating each

³ In 7 of the 49 (14%) experimental sessions, the target responded to the question by saying "yes." In those sessions, the experimenter could not deliver the scripted harm. Thus, only 84 participants (42 sessions × 2 participants) were exposed to the harm and to one of the three apologies (spontaneous, coerced, or none).

participant on each trait, they rated how much interest they had in working with each participant again in a future psychology experiment, on the same 11-cm scale, with the same anchors. On the Comments Questionnaire, participants were asked to indicate the most productive and destructive comment made during the discussion. For each, they were asked to rate how productive or destructive it was, how good or bad the person who made the comment should feel, and how good or bad the person who made the comment actually feels. These ratings were made on 11-point scales (0–10), which were anchored at 0 with *not at all productive, not at all good, not at all destructive*, and *not at all bad* and at 10 with *extremely productive, extremely good, extremely destructive*, and *extremely bad*. Participants were then asked to split a \$4 bonus among the 4 participants on the basis of how much they thought each participant advanced the discussion. Participants were told that the 4 participants' suggested amounts would be averaged to calculate each participant's actual bonus pay. Finally, participants were probed for suspicion and debriefed. Each participant was paid a \$2 bonus.

Results

Of the 84 participants to whom the experimenter could deliver the harm, the data from 15 (18%) had to be omitted because of suspicion.⁴ Participants were considered suspicious if, during the probed debriefing, they said that they thought MAC2 or MAC4 might not have been real participants. Of the 15 excluded participants, 7 were in the spontaneous condition, 5 were in the coerced condition, and 3 were in the no apology condition. Further, 8 of the 15 participants were observers, and 7 were targets.

Judged Severity of Harm

The results made it clear that participants recognized the comment as harmful: All participants reported that the most destructive comment was MAC4's harsh response to the target. Overall, participants judged the comment to be significantly more destructive than the midpoint of the scale ($M = 7.57$, $SD = 1.78$), $t(68) = 11.97$, $p < .001$. This was true for participants in each of the six conditions ($ts > 3.65$, $ps < .01$).

It is important to note that a 3 (apology: spontaneous, coerced, or none) \times 2 (role: target or observer) between-participants ANOVA revealed no between-conditions differences in participants' ratings of how destructive they believed the comment to be (all $Fs < 1.2$).

Impression of the Harmdoer

The six traits were averaged to create an overall impression index ($\alpha = .75$), with responses to rude, selfish, and arrogant reverse scored so that higher numbers indicated more favorable impressions. Replicating the results of Study 1, participants' ratings indicated that targets did not evaluate the harmdoer differently in the two apology conditions but that observers did. Furthermore, both targets and observers rated the harmdoer more harshly when no apology was offered than when a spontaneous apology was offered (see Table 2).

The impression index was submitted to a 3 (apology: spontaneous, coerced, or none) \times 2 (role: target or observer) between-participants ANOVA,⁵ which revealed a significant effect of apol-

Table 2

Target's and Observer's Impressions of the Harmdoer, Interest in Working with the Harmdoer, Recommended Payment to the Harmdoer, and Inferred Remorse

Role	Apology		
	Spontaneous	Coerced	None
Target			
<i>n</i>	10	11	14
Impression (<i>M</i>)	4.34 (1.24)	4.37 (1.43)	2.94 (1.60)
Work (<i>M</i>)	2.82 (1.44)	3.03 (2.45)	1.20 (1.14)
Payment (<i>M</i>)	0.70 (0.42)	0.67 (0.51)	0.38 (0.48)
Remorse (<i>M</i>)	5.60 (2.01)	5.00 (2.49)	2.54 (2.44)
Contrast weight	1	1	-2
Observer			
<i>n</i>	11	12	11
Impression (<i>M</i>)	5.26 (1.56)	3.62 (1.89)	3.61 (1.36)
Work (<i>M</i>)	5.82 (2.47)	2.60 (1.87)	3.11 (1.72)
Payment (<i>M</i>)	0.98 (0.58)	0.73 (0.48)	0.68 (0.46)
Remorse (<i>M</i>)	5.09 (2.88)	3.21 (2.08)	2.27 (1.74)
Contrast weight	2	-1	-1

Note. The higher the number, the more the harmdoer was liked, the more interest participants had in working with the harmdoer, the more money they thought the harmdoer deserved, and the worse they assumed the harmdoer felt about making the destructive comment. Values in parentheses represent standard deviations.

ogy, $F(2, 63) = 5.88$, $p < .01$. The Apology \times Role interaction failed to reach statistical significance in the omnibus 3×2 ANOVA, $F(2, 63) = 2.06$, $p < .15$. However, our hypothesis—that targets would like the harmdoer more if the harmdoer apologized than if the harmdoer did not and that observers would like the harmdoer more if the harmdoer offered a spontaneous apology than if the harmdoer offered a coerced apology or no apology—was tested, as in Study 1, in a one-way ANOVA with the following contrast weights: target-spontaneous apology, 1; target-coerced apology, 1; target-no apology, -2; observer-spontaneous apology, 2; observer-coerced apology, -1; and observer-no apology, -1. This analysis yielded a highly significant contrast, $F(1, 63) = 16.48$, $p < .001$, and no significant effect of the residual ($F < 1$).

Simple effects tests revealed that, as predicted, targets liked the harmdoer equally following a spontaneous apology or coerced apology ($Ms = 4.34$ and 4.37 , respectively, $t < 1$), but observers liked the harmdoer significantly less following a coerced apology ($M = 3.62$) than following a spontaneous apology ($M = 5.26$), $t(63) = 2.64$, $p = .01$, $d = 1.10$. Furthermore, targets liked the

⁴ When the 15 people who expressed suspicion were included in the analyses, the pattern of data remained unchanged. The predicted contrast and simple effects for participants' impressions of the harmdoer, their interest in working with the harmdoer, their recommended payment to the harmdoer, and their inference about remorse on the part of the harmdoer remained significant.

⁵ As in Study 1, because each experimental session can be considered the independent unit of analysis, the data were also analyzed in a 3×2 repeated measures ANOVA, with apology as a between-sessions variable and role as a repeated variable. The pattern of results and significance levels remained unchanged. Despite the similar findings, we present between-participants analyses in the text for the same two reasons as in Study 1.

harmdoer more following either apology than following no apology ($M = 2.94$, $t_s > 2.25$, $ps < .03$, $ds > .90$). Finally, observers liked the harmdoer significantly more following the spontaneous apology than following no apology ($M = 3.61$), $t(63) = 3.05$, $p < .01$, $d = 1.10$, but they liked the harmdoer equally in the coerced and no apology conditions ($t < 1$).

Interest in Working With the Harmdoer Again

Participants' ratings of how much they would want to work with the harmdoer in the future were submitted to the same analyses, which revealed a similar pattern of results (see Table 2). Targets were equally interested in working with the harmdoer in the two apology conditions, but observers were more interested in working with the harmdoer in the spontaneous condition than in the coerced condition. In addition, both targets and observers were more interested in working with the harmdoer after a spontaneous apology than if no apology was offered.

A 3 (apology: spontaneous, coerced, or none) \times 2 (role: target or observer) between-participants ANOVA revealed significant main effects of apology, $F(2, 63) = 7.64$, $p = .001$, and role, $F(1, 63) = 10.69$, $p < .01$, and a significant Apology \times Role interaction, $F(2, 63) = 4.77$, $p < .02$. Once again, we tested our more specific hypothesis in a one-way ANOVA with the same set of contrast weights. This analysis yielded a highly significant contrast, $F(1, 63) = 24.20$, $p < .001$, and no significant effect of the residual ($F < 1$).

Simple effects tests revealed that, as predicted, targets were equally interested in working with the harmdoer following a spontaneous apology or coerced apology ($M_s = 2.82$ and 3.03 , respectively, $t < 1$), but observers were significantly less interested in working with the harmdoer following a coerced apology ($M = 2.60$) than following a spontaneous apology ($M = 5.82$), $t(63) = 4.07$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.70$. Furthermore, targets were more interested in working with the harmdoer following either apology than following no apology ($M = 1.20$, $t_s > 2.00$, $ps < .05$, $ds > 0.85$). Finally, observers wanted to work with the harmdoer significantly more following the spontaneous apology than following no apology ($M = 3.11$), $t(63) = 3.36$, $p = .001$, $d = 1.43$, but they wanted to work with the harmdoer equally in the coerced and no apology conditions ($t < 1$).

Recommended Payment

The final measure of participants' reaction to the harmdoer was the portion of the money, to be split among the four discussants, that participants believed the harmdoer deserved. As in Study 1, this can be seen as a measure of punishment because participants believed that their response would influence the actual amount the harmdoer was paid. As predicted, the pattern of responses indicates that targets wanted to punish the harmdoer less in the two apology conditions than in the no apology condition, but observers wanted to punish the harmdoer less only in the spontaneous apology condition (see Table 2).

The amount of money that participants thought the harmdoer deserved was submitted to a 3 (apology: spontaneous, coerced, or none) \times 2 (role: target or observer) between-participants ANOVA. This analysis did not reveal any significant effects. However, the same set of contrast weights were used and again revealed signif-

icant support for our hypothesis that targets would differentiate any apology from no apology and that observers would differentiate a spontaneous apology from a coerced apology or no apology, $F(1, 62) = 5.49$, $p < .03$. Unlike the previous two measures, however, the simple effects tests on participants' recommended payment to the harmdoer were not significant ($ps > .10$).

Inferred Remorse

Because all participants reported that the most destructive comment in the discussion was MAC4's harsh response, participants' ratings of how bad they thought MAC4 felt about making the comment could serve as a measure of how much participants believed the harmdoer's apology when one was offered. As predicted, targets inferred a substantial amount of remorse following both apologies, but observers did so only after witnessing a spontaneous apology (see Table 2).

A 3 (apology: spontaneous, coerced, or none) \times 2 (role: target or observer) between-participants ANOVA performed on these data revealed a significant effect of apology, $F(2, 63) = 9.35$, $p < .001$. The interaction between apology and role was not significant. More to the point, the contrast testing the specific hypothesis that targets would differentiate any apology from no apology and that observers would differentiate a spontaneous apology from a coerced apology or no apology yielded a highly significant contrast, $F(1, 63) = 19.32$, $p < .001$, and yielded no significant effect of the residual ($F < 1$).

Simple effects tests revealed that, as predicted, targets believed that the harmdoer felt equally badly after the harmdoer offered either a spontaneous apology or a coerced apology ($M_s = 5.60$ and 5.00 , respectively; $t < 1$) but observers assumed that the harmdoer felt marginally worse after the harmdoer gave a spontaneous apology ($M = 5.09$) than after the harmdoer gave a coerced apology ($M = 3.21$), $t(63) = 1.95$, $p = .056$, $d = 0.81$. Furthermore, targets thought that the harmdoer felt worse following either apology than following no apology ($M = 2.54$), $t_s > 2.65$, $ps < .01$, $ds > 1.05$. Finally, observers thought that the harmdoer felt worse following a spontaneous apology than following no apology ($M = 2.27$), $t(63) = 2.86$, $p < .01$, $d = 1.22$, but thought that the harmdoer felt as bad when the harmdoer offered a coerced apology as when the harmdoer failed to apologize ($t < 1$).

Discussion

These results replicate the target–observer difference in response to spontaneous and coerced apologies that was observed in Study 1. Observers responded more harshly to the harmdoer following a coerced apology than following a spontaneous apology. They formed more negative impressions of the harmdoer, wanted to work with the harmdoer less, recommended less compensation, and assumed that the harmdoer did not feel as bad about the harm when the apology was coerced. Targets, in contrast, responded similarly to both apologies, on all four measures. Furthermore, Study 2 ensured that responsibility for the harm was clear, resulting in a harsh response from both targets and observers when the harmdoer failed to apologize. Thus, whereas targets viewed any apology more favorably than no apology, observers viewed a spontaneous apology more favorably than either a coerced apology or no apology.

Studies 3–5 were designed to explore three possible mechanisms for the target–observer difference documented in Studies 1 and 2. Studies 3 and 4 examined the motivation on the part of targets and observers to be regarded positively by others and themselves, and Study 5 examined the constraints imposed by social scripts.

Study 3

Although both targets and observers want to be regarded favorably by others, the different social consequences that targets and observers confront when they accept or reject an apology may lead them to act differently on this desire. Study 3 was designed to examine these different social consequences by comparing the attributions made about targets and observers who reject or accept spontaneous apologies or coerced apologies.

A target who rejects an insincere apology may come across as an unforgiving and uncharitable person who is unable to turn the other cheek (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994). By accepting the apology, however, a target can signal to themselves and others that the target is a kind, forgiving person. Past research has demonstrated that targets are judged harshly when they reject sincere or insincere apologies, and we expected to replicate these results (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994). An observer, in contrast, might appear fair-minded and compassionate by responding negatively to an insincere apology. Forgiving an insincere harmdoer might suggest that the observer is not concerned about the feelings of the target and is only concerned with getting on with his or her day. Thus, we hypothesized that observers would be judged harshly for rejecting a sincere, spontaneous apology but that, unlike targets, they would be judged positively for rejecting an insincere, coerced apology.

Method

Participants

Participants were 136 Cornell undergraduates who participated in exchange for course credit in psychology or human development courses.

Materials and Procedure

Participants read a short story in which they were asked to imagine being in a class with a group project worth 40% of their grade. The story described four classmates, Jim, Susan, Amanda, and Ben, who divided the work such that Jim and Susan were to work on the 30-page paper and Amanda and Ben were to work on the class presentation. Jim and Susan further divided the work for writing the paper, such that Susan was in charge of researching and writing the literature review and Jim was in charge of writing the proposal. The story went on to state that although Susan was prepared for each meeting, Jim was always a stage behind. At their final meeting, the day before the paper and presentation were due, Jim told Susan that he did not have time to write the proposal because of a prior engagement but that he thought the professor would not mind if it was submitted in outline form. Susan did not want to take the risk, however, so she stayed up all night writing the proposal herself. The next day, Jim apologized to Susan.

Participants read either a version in which Jim offered a spontaneous apology or one in which Ben coerced the apology from

Jim. In the spontaneous version, participants read, “You heard Jim immediately tell Susan that he was sorry for not pulling his share, and that she did a great job on the paper.” In the coerced version, participants read, “Ben told Jim [in front of Susan and Amanda] that his behavior was extremely rude and strongly insisted that he apologize to Susan. In response to Ben’s instruction and only after several moments of hesitation, you heard Jim tell Susan in an offhand manner that he was sorry for not pulling his share, and that she did a great job on the paper.” In addition, participants read either a version in which Susan, the target, responded to the apology or one in which Amanda, an observer, responded. The response was either an acceptance, “Susan [Amanda] smiled at Jim, told him that everyone gets overwhelmed with other things on occasion, and that she appreciated that he apologized [to Susan],” or a rejection, “Susan [Amanda] frowned at Jim, told him he would have to do better than that, and turned away to talk to another student about an unrelated matter.”

After reading the story, participants rated the student who responded to the apology on two global measures (how likable Susan or Amanda was and how much they would want to be friends with her). In addition, participants rated the responder on several traits using an 11-point rating scale anchored by the following bipolar trait terms: *charitable–uncharitable*, *foolish–wise*, *immature–mature*, *socially skilled–socially unskilled*, *disloyal–loyal*, *fair–unfair*, *selfish–selfless*, *principled–unprincipled*, *overly emotional–rational*, *wishy-washy–stalwart*, *savvy–naïve*, and *tolerant–intolerant*. The first trait in each pair was anchored at 0, and the second was anchored at 10. Finally, participants responded to three manipulation checks. They rated how convincing they found Jim’s apology and how forgiving they thought the responder was. They also wrote a brief sentence or phrase next to each character’s name to describe that person’s role in the story.

Results

Manipulation Checks

The data from 21 participants were excluded because they did not correctly identify the roles of the characters in the story, which left 115 participants (85%) in the sample. Participants were most often omitted for not reporting Ben’s role in the coerced apology conditions or not identifying Amanda as the one who responded to the apology in the conditions in which it was Amanda who commented on the apology.

The manipulation check for convincingness revealed that those participants who read a version with a coerced apology rated the apology as significantly less convincing than those who read the spontaneous version, $t(113) = 3.88, p < .001$. Interestingly, both groups rated the apology significantly below the midpoint of 5 on the scale (coerced $M = 1.52, SD = 1.57$; spontaneous $M = 2.79, SD = 1.89$), suggesting that neither group was particularly convinced by Jim’s apology. The manipulation check for forgiveness revealed that those participants who read a version in which Susan or Amanda accepted the apology rated her as more forgiving ($M = 6.35, SD = 2.11$) than those who read a version in which she rejected the apology ($M = 2.05, SD = 1.86$), $t(113) = 11.61, p < .001$.

Global Measures

Liking. We predicted that targets would be liked more when they accepted either type of apology but that observers would be

liked more when they accepted sincere apologies and rejected insincere apologies. This prediction was strongly supported by participants' ratings of how likable they found the target and observer (see Table 3). A 2 (apology: spontaneous or coerced) \times 2 (role: target or observer) \times 2 (response: acceptance or rejection) between-participants ANOVA yielded a significant three-way interaction, $F(1, 107) = 6.12, p < .02$. As predicted, simple effects tests revealed that the target (Susan) was liked more when she accepted either a spontaneous apology or a coerced apology ($M_s = 7.43$ and 7.93 , respectively) than when she rejected such apologies ($M_s = 6.07$ and 5.71 , respectively), $t(107) = 2.00, p < .05, d = 0.74$; and $t(107) = 3.26, p < .01, d = 1.21$. The observer (Amanda) was liked marginally more when she accepted a spontaneous apology ($M = 5.93$) than when she rejected it ($M = 4.70$), $t(107) = 1.83, p < .10, d = 0.67$. In contrast, the observer was liked more when she *rejected* a coerced apology ($M = 5.85$) than when she accepted it ($M = 4.43$), $t(107) = 2.01, p < .05, d = 0.78$.

Friendship desired. A similar pattern emerged with respect to how much participants wanted to be friends with Susan or Amanda (see Table 3). As with the liking ratings, the overall pattern of responses yielded a significant three-way interaction between apology, role, and response, $F(1, 107) = 4.18, p < .05$. Although not significant, the pattern of simple effects was the same as for the global measure of how much participants liked the responder. Participants tended to be more interested in being the target's friend when she accepted either a spontaneous apology or a coerced apology ($M_s = 6.71$ and 7.27 , respectively) than when she rejected such apologies ($M_s = 5.87$ and 6.07 , respectively), $t(107) = 1.18, ns$; and $t(107) = 1.68, p = .10$. Participants were also marginally more interested in being friends with the observer when she accepted a spontaneous apology ($M = 6.20$) than when

she rejected it ($M = 5.00$), $t(107) = 1.71, p < .10$. This pattern was reversed when the observer accepted a coerced apology ($M = 4.43$) rather than rejected it ($M = 5.54$), $t(107) = 1.50, p = .15$.

Trait Ratings

Because the interitem correlations were not high (average correlation = .21), we performed a factor analysis to distill the structure in participants' responses to the different trait ratings. Primary components factor analysis yielded two underlying factors. The traits that loaded on Factor 1 were charitable, mature, loyal, selfless, rational, and tolerant ($\alpha = .72$). Those that loaded on Factor 2 were fair, principled, savvy, wise, and stalwart ($\alpha = .76$). The trait socially skilled did not load on either factor and was therefore not included in analysis. The factor scores for each participant were computed by averaging the traits that loaded onto each factor.

Factor 1. Participants' trait ratings of Susan and Amanda revealed that targets were judged more positively when they accepted either type of apology but that observers were only judged positively when they accepted sincere apologies. A 2 (apology: spontaneous or coerced) \times 2 (role: target or observer) \times 2 (response: acceptance or rejection) between-participants ANOVA for the average ratings on Factor 1 traits again revealed a significant three-way interaction, $F(1, 107) = 7.89, p < .01$. For these traits, as was true with the global measures, the target was judged more positively when she accepted either a spontaneous apology or a coerced apology ($M_s = 7.33$ and $8.32, SD_s = 0.97$ and 1.10 , respectively) than when she rejected such apologies ($M_s = 6.00$ and $6.11, SD_s = 1.37$ and 0.87 , respectively), $t(107) = 3.04, p < .01, d = 1.13$; and $t(107) = 5.03, p < .001, d = 1.87$. Participants also rated the observer more positively on these traits when she accepted a spontaneous apology ($M = 6.19, SD = 0.99$) than when she rejected it ($M = 5.03, SD = 1.56$), $t(107) = 2.69, p < .01, d = 0.98$. In contrast, the observer was judged a bit less positively on these traits when she accepted a coerced apology ($M = 5.45, SD = 0.95$) than when she rejected it ($M = 5.83, SD = 1.43$), but this difference did not approach significance ($t < 1$).

Factor 2. Unlike the other measures, the $2 \times 2 \times 2$ between-participants ANOVA did not yield the predicted three-way interaction for Factor 2.

Discussion

These results indicate that targets and observers of apologies face different public pressures, which may contribute to their different reactions to sincere and insincere apologies. Consistent with previous research (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994), targets were judged more harshly when they rejected an apology than when they accepted it, regardless of whether the apology was sincere or insincere. Thus, if targets want to be viewed favorably, they should accept both spontaneous and coerced apologies.

Observers were also judged more positively when they accepted the apology, but only when it was spontaneous. When responding to a coerced apology, observers did not benefit by accepting it. Thus, if observers want to be viewed favorably, they should accept spontaneous apologies but not coerced apologies.

Table 3
Likability and Desired Friendship Ratings of Targets and Observers

	Condition			
	Spontaneous apology		Coerced apology	
	Accept response	Reject response	Accept response	Reject response
Target				
Likable				
<i>M</i>	7.43	6.07	7.93	5.71
<i>SD</i>	1.74	1.48	1.53	1.38
Desired friendship				
<i>M</i>	6.71	5.87	7.27	6.07
<i>SD</i>	1.20	1.46	2.34	1.54
Observer				
Likable				
<i>M</i>	5.93	4.70	4.43	5.85
<i>SD</i>	2.28	1.96	2.62	1.07
Desired friendship				
<i>M</i>	6.20	5.00	4.43	5.54
<i>SD</i>	2.46	2.30	2.24	1.13

Note. The higher the number, the more the participant liked and desired to be friends with the character.

Study 4

Having established that people judge targets' and observers' responses to insincere apologies differently, we designed Study 4 to explore whether the individuals who respond to the apology may likewise judge themselves differently, depending on the type of apology and the individual's role in the situation. Specifically, we examined whether targets feel better about themselves when they accept any type of apology and whether observers only feel good about themselves when they accept a spontaneous, convincing apology. Of course, how positively targets and observers expect to be judged by others may be an important determinant of how positively they judge themselves. Therefore, we also explored whether targets and observers expect to be judged by others in the way that the targets and observers were actually judged in Study 3. In other words, do people have insight into the different public pressures placed on targets and observers?

Method

Participants

Participants were 134 Cornell undergraduates who participated in exchange for course credit in psychology or human development courses.

Materials and Procedure

Participants read a harm-plus-apology scenario about an employee arriving late to work and leaving a coworker in the unfortunate position of getting yelled at for not completing the work for which both workers were responsible. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of four versions, in a 2 (role: target or observer) \times 2 (apology: spontaneous or coerced) between-participants design. Half the participants read a version in which they were the target of the harm and the ensuing apology, and the other half read a version in which they were an observer (another coworker who was responsible for a different task). In addition, participants read either a version in which the harmdoer spontaneously apologized to the target or one in which the harmdoer only apologized after being coerced to do so by a coworker.

After reading the story, participants were asked to read two responses (one rejection and one acceptance) that their character might say and rate how they would feel if they responded in each of the two ways. The rejection that participants read was, "You frown and say, 'Saying sorry doesn't make it ok to skip out on your responsibility. I think that you should tell the boss what happened and you should be the one to skip lunch to do the work.'" The acceptance was, "You smile and say, 'It's ok. It's the kind of thing that could happen to anyone. Thanks for apologizing.'" The order of responses was counterbalanced.

For each of the two responses, participants rated how they would feel about themselves by circling the appropriate number on 11-point bipolar rating scales anchored by the following traits: *unkind-kind*, *immature-mature*, *disloyal-loyal*, *foolish-wise*, *selfish-selfless*, *uncharitable-charitable*, and *unfair-fair*.⁶ The first trait in each pair was anchored at 0, and the second was anchored at 10. Participants were then instructed to re-read the responses and "decide how other people who witnessed these events would think and feel about you if you responded in that

way." Participants rated how they expected others to judge them on the same seven traits on which they had judged themselves. Finally, participants rated how convincing they found the apology on an 11-point scale with endpoints 0 and 10 labeled *not at all convincing* and *entirely convincing*, respectively.

Results

Manipulation Check

Participants in the spontaneous condition rated the apology as significantly more convincing ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 2.48$) than did those in the coerced condition ($M = 1.89$, $SD = 1.54$), $t(132) = 8.26$, $p < .001$. Overall, targets and observers did not differ in how convincing they thought the apology was ($p > .25$), nor was there an interaction between role and type of apology ($p > .35$).

How Participants Would Feel About Themselves

To determine how participants expected to feel about themselves if they accepted or rejected the different apologies, the traits were scored so that higher numbers were more positive for all traits. The seven traits were then averaged to create an index of the amount of positive regard that participants would have for themselves (if-accept $\alpha = .79$, and if-reject $\alpha = .87$).

As predicted, targets indicated they would feel better about themselves if they accepted rather than rejected either type of apology, but observers indicated they would only feel better about themselves when they accepted a spontaneous, convincing apology (see Table 4). Specifically, targets of spontaneous apologies and coerced apologies reported that they would feel significantly better about themselves if they accepted ($M_s = 6.59$ and 6.26 , respectively) rather than rejected the apology ($M_s = 4.24$ and 5.15 , respectively), $t(34) = 5.28$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.56$; and $t(31) = 3.59$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.95$. Observers also expected to feel better about themselves if they accepted a spontaneous apology ($M = 6.14$) rather than rejected it ($M = 5.16$), $t(33) = 2.12$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.61$. However, there was no difference in self-regard on the part of observers of coerced apologies, regardless of whether they accepted ($M = 5.75$) or rejected it ($M = 5.68$), $t < 1$.

How Participants Expected to Be Judged by Others

The results from Study 3 indicate that targets are judged more positively when they accept rather than reject spontaneous and coerced apologies but that observers are judged more positively only when they accept spontaneous apologies.

To explore whether participants had insight into how they would be judged, a difference measure was created for how much more positively participants expected to be judged when they accepted the apology compared with when they rejected it. If participants had insight into others' reactions, targets of both types of apologies and observers of a spontaneous apology should expect a considerable difference in how positively they would be judged when they accepted the apology rather than rejected it. Observers of a coerced

⁶ Participants also rated their anticipated mood after accepting or rejecting the apology, but this measure yielded no between-conditions differences and is not discussed further.

Table 4
Ratings of Positive Self-Regard

Role	Condition			
	Spontaneous apology		Coerced apology	
	Accept response	Reject response	Accept response	Reject response
Target				
<i>M</i>	6.59	4.24	6.26	5.15
<i>SD</i>	1.51	1.52	1.14	1.20
Observer				
<i>M</i>	6.14	5.16	5.75	5.68
<i>SD</i>	1.83	1.20	1.42	1.60

Note. The higher the number, the better participants expected to feel about themselves.

apology should not expect such a difference. This is precisely what happened. As predicted, targets of spontaneous and coerced apologies ($M_s = 3.73$ and 3.15 , $SD_s = 2.36$ and 1.80 , respectively) and observers of a spontaneous apology ($M = 1.84$, $SD = 3.10$) reported a larger difference in expected positive regard for acceptance rather than rejection than did observers of a coerced apology ($M = 0.92$, $SD = 2.51$). A one-way ANOVA with contrast weights (1, 1, 1, & -3) revealed that participants in the observer-coerced condition expected a smaller difference in how they would be judged after accepting versus rejecting the apology than did participants in the other three conditions, $F(1, 130) = 16.00$, $p < .001$.

Discussion

These results indicate that one's desire to feel good about oneself plays a role in the different reactions of targets and observers to spontaneous and coerced apologies. Although both targets and observers are doubtless equally interested in feeling good about themselves, the self-attributions made after responding to an apology are different in the two roles. That is, targets of spontaneous and coerced apologies reported that they would feel better about themselves if they accepted rather than rejected the apology. Thus, the desire to feel good about oneself may lead targets to accept both sincere and insincere apologies. Observers, in contrast, reported that they would have rather different feelings about themselves after accepting spontaneous apologies versus coerced apologies. Although observers of spontaneous apologies reported that they would feel better if they accepted it, observers of coerced apologies did not. Thus, the desire to feel good about oneself may lead observers to accept spontaneous apologies but to not accept coerced ones.

Study 4 also suggests that people have insight into the way targets and observers are judged when they accept or reject apologies. Participants in the target-spontaneous apology, target-coerced apology, and observer-spontaneous apology conditions all recognized that they would be judged more positively by others if they accepted the apology. Although participants in the observer-coerced apology condition did not report that they would be judged more positively if they rejected the apology (which was demonstrated in Study 3), they did recognize that accepting a coerced apology would not earn them much favor in the eyes of others.

Study 5

Study 5 was designed to explore whether differences in targets' and observers' social scripts might also contribute to the target-observer difference found in Studies 1 and 2. That is, we tested whether targets and observers felt different constraints on how they should respond to sincere and insincere apologies and whether those constraints would encourage them to act differently. We predicted that targets and observers would react in the same way to sincere apologies but that targets would feel more constrained in their reactions to insincere apologies, with targets feeling less able, and less likely, than observers to reject sincere apologies. In addition to looking at spontaneous apologies versus coerced apologies, as was done in the previous studies, we examined the generality of the target-observer difference by using other types of sincere and insincere apologies.

Method

Participants

Participants were 111 Cornell undergraduates who participated in exchange for course credit in psychology or human development courses.

Materials and Procedure

Each participant read four different harm-plus-apology scenarios in the same order. For each scenario there were four versions that followed a 2 (role: target or observer) \times 2 (apology: sincere or insincere) design. Each participant read only one version of each scenario, but, overall, each participant read one version of each type. For example, one fourth of the participants read the target-sincere version of Scenario 1, the observer-sincere version of Scenario 2, the observer-insincere version of Scenario 3, and the target-insincere version of Scenario 4. Therefore, although the order of the scenarios was the same for each participant, participants read the four role-apology combinations in one of four randomized orders. The sincere and insincere apologies were operationalized differently for each of the scenarios.

Scenario 1 involved a friend telling an embarrassing story about the target in front of a group of people, and sincerity was manipulated by having the apology be spontaneous or coerced by another individual. Scenario 2 involved a stranger bumping into a student, causing the student to drop a stack of books, and sincerity was manipulated by having the apology be perfunctory or in-depth. Scenario 3 was about a coworker shirking responsibility, and sincerity was manipulated by whether the coworker had a reputation for behaving this way. Scenario 4 was about a classmate who did not bring back something that he had borrowed, and sincerity was manipulated by whether he offered to make restitution.

After reading each scenario, participants read four different possible responses that their character (target or observer) might give in the situation, and for each response they rated on 11-point scales how much they would want to respond that way, how much they believed they should respond that way, and how likely it was that they would respond in that way. The four possible responses included a strong acceptance of the apology, a weak acceptance of the apology, a weak rejection of the apology, and a strong rejection of the apology. The weak acceptance and the weak rejection were

the same for each of the four stories. The weak acceptance involved their character saying, "It's ok," and the weak rejection raised doubts about the sincerity of the apology, with the character saying, "It doesn't really seem like you're sorry."

The strong acceptance and strong rejection were slightly different for each scenario because they incorporated the content of the scenario into the response. For example, the strong acceptance in the embarrassing story scenario was, "You smile and say, 'Sam, I really appreciate that you apologized to me. I definitely accept. I've probably embarrassed you at some point too, so you really don't need to worry about it.'" The strong rejection in the co-worker scenario was, "You frown and say, 'Saying sorry doesn't make it ok to skip out on your responsibility. You need to stay and help Jim finish.'" Of course, the grammar of the acceptance or rejection matched the role of the participant (target or observer) in that particular scenario.

Finally, after rating the four responses for each scenario, participants indicated how convincing they found the apology.

Results

Manipulation Check

For each of the four scenarios, the apology in the sincere version was judged to be significantly more convincing than the apology in the insincere version (all $ps < .001$). In other words, participants found the spontaneous apology more convincing than the coerced apology, the in-depth apology more convincing than the perfunctory apology, the apology given by someone without a reputation for the harm more convincing than one given by someone with such a reputation, and an apology that offered restitution more convincing than one that did not. There were no significant differences in targets' and observers' judgments of how convincing the apologies were (all $ps > .2$).

Dependent Measures

Recall that each participant rated four possible reactions to each of four scenarios: weak acceptance, weak rejection, strong acceptance, and strong rejection. For purposes of analysis, the ratings for the strong and weak acceptances were averaged together, as were the ratings for the strong and weak rejections.⁷ This allowed us to create indices for how much each participant wanted to accept and reject each apology, how much they thought that they should accept and reject each apology, and how likely they were to accept and reject each apology for the four different versions (target-sincere, target-insincere, observer-sincere, observer-insincere). Preliminary analysis revealed that participants responded similarly across the four scenarios, so the data were collapsed across scenarios and analyzed in a series of repeated measures ANOVAs.⁸ This allowed us to assess how each participant rated the responses when the participant was the target and observer of a sincere and insincere apology.

"How much would you want to respond this way?" As expected, participants' ratings indicated that both targets and observers wanted to accept sincere apologies and reject insincere ones (see Table 5). Regardless of whether the apology was sincere or insincere, the relevant 2 (role: target or observer) \times 2 (response: accept or reject) repeated measures ANOVA yielded only a sig-

nificant effect of response, $F(1, 110) = 14.46, p < .001$; and $F(1, 110) = 63.01, p < .001$, respectively. Specifically, when the apology was sincere, both targets and observers wanted to accept the apology significantly more ($Ms = 4.26$ and 4.11 , respectively) than they wanted to reject it ($Ms = 3.16$ and 3.05 , respectively), both $ts(110) = 2.88, ps < .01, ds = 0.42$. However, when the apology was insincere, both targets and observers wanted to reject the apology significantly more ($Ms = 5.29$ and 5.58 , respectively) than they wanted to accept it ($Ms = 2.91$ and 2.70 , respectively), $t(110) = 5.81, p < .001, d = 0.98$ and $t(110) = 7.21, p < .001, d = 1.19$.

"Would you say this is how you should respond?" Although both targets and observers wanted to accept sincere apologies and reject insincere ones, only the observers believed that they should reject insincere apologies (see Table 5). For sincere apologies, a 2 (role: target or observer) \times 2 (response: accept or reject) repeated measures ANOVA yielded only the predicted main effect of response. Both targets and observers thought that they should accept sincere apologies more than they thought they should reject them, $F(1, 110) = 91.66, p < .001$. For insincere apologies, in contrast, the 2×2 repeated measures ANOVA yielded the predicted Role \times Response interaction, $F(1, 110) = 7.00, p < .01$. That is, observers thought they should reject the apology ($M = 4.65$) more than they thought they should accept it ($M = 2.99$), $t(110) = 4.89, p < .001, d = 0.67$, whereas targets thought equally that they should reject and accept the apology equally ($Ms = 4.06$ and 3.61 , respectively; $t < 1$). Thus, although both targets and observers wanted to reject an insincere apology, only observers thought they should reject it.

"How likely is it that you would respond in this way?" Participants' ratings of how they would respond to sincere and insincere apologies more closely followed their sense of how they should respond than how they wanted to respond (see Table 5). For sincere apologies, a 2 (role: target or observer) \times 2 (response: accept or reject) repeated measures ANOVA yielded only the predicted main effect of response: Both targets and observers indicated that they would be more likely to accept such an apology than reject it, $F(1, 110) = 180.13, p < .001$. For insincere apol-

⁷ Because preliminary analyses revealed that the strength of the response did not play a role in the reported target-observer effect, we collapsed across strength. The only things that are missed by doing so are rather uninteresting main effects of strength, whereby participants wanted to offer a strong response more than they wanted to offer a weak response and thought that they should offer a strong response more than they thought they should offer a weak response, but they were more likely to offer a weak response than a strong response.

⁸ For each dependent measure, we also analyzed the four stories separately in mixed-model ANOVAs, with role and sincerity as between-participants variables and response as a repeated measure variable. The results were consistent with those reported in the text. The pattern of results for Stories 2 and 3 was virtually identical to that reported in the text. The results for Story 1 were in the same direction as those reported in the text but were only marginally significant for the *should* and *likely* dependent measures. However, in Story 1, targets of an insincere apology reported that they wanted to accept the apology as much as they wanted to reject it. In Story 4, there was one different result on one of the measures: targets of an insincere apology indicated that they were equally likely to reject it as to accept it.

Table 5
 Mean Evaluations of Accepting Versus Rejecting Sincere and Insincere Apologies

Role	Condition							
	Sincere apology				Insincere apology			
	Accept response		Reject response		Accept response		Reject response	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Target								
Want	4.26	2.30	3.16	2.56	2.91	2.48	5.29	2.65
Should	5.32	2.22	2.48	1.99	3.61	2.61	4.06	2.34
Likely	5.29	2.00	1.76	1.92	3.87	2.53	3.21	2.24
Observer								
Want	4.11	2.35	3.05	2.45	2.70	2.50	5.58	2.73
Should	4.38	2.16	2.55	2.00	2.99	2.21	4.65	2.38
Likely	4.53	2.21	1.78	1.74	3.29	2.55	3.71	2.27

ogies, in contrast, the 2×2 repeated measures ANOVA yielded the predicted Role \times Response interaction, $F(1, 110) = 6.93, p < .01$. Whereas targets indicated that they would be more likely to accept the apology ($M = 3.87$) than reject it ($M = 3.21$), $t(110) = 2.45, p < .02, d = 0.33$, observers were not as forgiving ($M_s = 3.29$ and 3.71 , for acceptance and rejection, respectively), $t(110) = 1.56, p < .15, d = 0.21$.

Mediating Processes

To determine whether the influence of role on participants' likelihood of accepting or rejecting an insincere apology was mediated by how the participants felt they should respond, we used procedures outlined by Baron and Kenny (1986). For the purposes of running these regression analyses, we created difference scores for participants' reported likelihood of accepting an apology rather than rejecting it and their belief in how much they should accept an apology rather than reject it.

The manipulation of role—whether participants imagined themselves as the target or observer of the apology—significantly predicted participants' reported likelihood of accepting rather than rejecting insincere apologies ($B = -.54, SE = .27, p < .05$) and their ratings of how much they believed they should accept rather than reject insincere apologies ($B = -.61, SE = .26, p = .02$). In addition, participants' ratings of how they should respond significantly predicted how they believed they would respond ($B = .72, SE = .05, p < .001$). Finally, when both the role manipulation and participants' ratings of how they should respond were included in the same equation predicting how they were likely to respond, the former dropped to nonsignificance, and the latter remained significant ($B = -.11, SE = .20, p = .59$; and $B = .71, SE = .05, p < .001$, respectively). A Sobel (1982) test confirmed the significance of this mediated relation ($z = 2.3, p = .02$). Furthermore, the same pattern of results was obtained when participants' desire to accept rather than reject an insincere apology was entered as a covariate in the regressions.

Discussion

Both targets and observers of sincere apologies indicated that they wanted to accept the apology more than they wanted to reject

it, that they should accept the apology more than they should reject it, and that they would be more likely to accept the apology than to reject it. Although targets and observers of insincere apologies also wanted to respond similarly (in this case, wanting to reject them), they differed in how they thought they should respond. That is, observers thought they should reject the apology more than they thought they should accept it, but targets did not. It is notable that participants' predictions of how likely they would be to accept or reject a given apology followed not their desires but their sense of obligation. Despite their desire to reject an insincere apology, targets responded that they were more likely to accept it than to reject it.

Study 5 lends support to the idea that targets and observers face different social constraints and that these constraints may contribute to target–observer differences in reactions to sincere and insincere apologies. Although observers felt that they should reject insincere apologies, targets did not feel that way. The power of the target's apology-forgiveness script appears to constrain how they feel they should respond and can overpower their desires.

The results of Study 5 also expand the target–observer difference documented in Studies 1–4, which dealt with the distinction between spontaneous and coerced apologies, to a more general difference between the way that targets and observers respond to sincere and insincere apologies.

General Discussion

This research documents a pronounced target–observer difference in reactions to sincere and insincere apologies and offers data consistent with three mechanisms responsible for the difference: the motivation to be seen positively by others, the motivation to feel good about oneself, and the social scripts that constrain the responses of targets more than the responses of observers.

Studies 1 and 2 explored how one's role in a social interaction can influence one's reactions to sincere and insincere apologies and demonstrated that although observers are likely to respond differently to the two types of apologies, the targets of such apologies are not likely to respond differently. In both studies, observers evaluated the harmdoer more negatively and punished the harmdoer more following a coerced apology than following a

spontaneous apology. Targets, in contrast, responded similarly to both types of apologies.

It is not surprising that observers liked the harmdoer less and punished the harmdoer more following a coerced apology than following a spontaneous apology. This outcome aligns with intuition and is consistent with past research involving hypothetical scenarios, such as Darby and Schlenker's (1989) finding that participants evaluated a harmdoer more negatively after the harmdoer offered a perfunctory apology than after the harmdoer offered a sincere apology.

The tendency for observers to respond differently to coerced apologies and spontaneous apologies is likely due to the observers' motivation to be viewed positively by others and to feel good about themselves. In particular, observers doubtless want to be seen by others, and to think of themselves, as discriminating and just. In addition to their concern with being (and appearing to be) discriminating, observers may have been concerned with being (and appearing to be) empathetic toward the target. The desire to be viewed positively by others and to feel good about themselves may have led targets, in contrast, to be primarily concerned with being (and appearing to be) forgiving.

Studies 3 and 4 support the idea that targets and observers face different public pressures and expect to make different self-attributions when responding to spontaneous and coerced apologies. In Study 3, the demonstration that targets and observers of apologies are evaluated differently suggests that the motivation to be well regarded by others may be an important mechanism underlying the target–observer difference. Study 4 provides evidence that targets and observers expect to make different self-attributions following acceptance or rejection of a coerced apology. Although participants in both roles expected to feel better about themselves if they accepted a spontaneous apology, targets also expected to feel better about accepting a coerced apology. Therefore, the desire to feel good about oneself would lead targets to accept both types of apologies and observers to only accept spontaneous, sincere ones.

The desire to feel good about oneself could also lead targets to be more convinced by a questionable apology. If targets are motivated to think of themselves as the type of person whom others treat with gravity and respect, targets may set a lower threshold for what is seen as a convincing apology. The results of Study 2 support this contention. Targets believed that the harmdoer felt equally badly about the comment after a spontaneous apology or coerced apology, compared with when no apology was offered. Observers, in contrast, believed that the harmdoer did not feel bad about the comment after a coerced apology or when no apology was offered, compared to when a spontaneous apology was offered. Because we asked about remorse only, we do not know whether the inferences that targets and observers drew about the harmdoer's intentions differed on other dimensions (Malle, 2001; Reeder, Kumar, Hesson-McInnis, & Trafimow, 2002). Nevertheless, the results of these studies suggest that people respond to apologies on the basis of a combination of their identity concerns and their perceptions of an apologies' authenticity and that identity concerns may influence perceptions of authenticity. This is reminiscent of research by Ohbuchi, Suzuki, and Takaku (2003), which demonstrated that harmdoers offer apologies on the basis of a combination of identity concerns and private judgments of responsibility.

Study 5 offers evidence that targets and observers experience different constraints on how they should respond to insincere apologies. Although observers thought that rejecting an insincere apology would be an appropriate response, targets did not. This may be due to the targets' well-practiced social script of accepting apologies. The frequency and commonness of accepting apologies may lead targets to behave (mindlessly or otherwise) according to the apology–forgiveness script. If the script is repeated often enough, targets may learn to automatically respond to an apology with an acceptance. Or, if targets are aware of the script, they may perceive the constraints and mindfully conform to them. However, because it is less common for an observer to respond to an apology (e.g., only 11% of observers wrote a response to the harmdoer's apology in Study 2, whereas 89% of targets wrote a response), people may be less likely to have developed an automatic response when in the role of an observer, or to be aware of a specific script to which they should conform. Thus, observers may reject an insincere apology, think less of the harmdoer, and punish the harmdoer more because there is not a well-practiced apology–forgiveness script for observers.

We have suggested that the target–observer difference in the response to apologies is due to the different social context that targets and observers face. Their different roles lead to the activation of different motivations and different scripts. This implies that to the extent that context or culture alters the targets' or observers' motivations or scripts, one would expect their responses to sincere and insincere apologies to change. Thus, in a culture in which forgiveness is especially prized (more so, say, than fairness or justice), the target–observer difference may disappear because both targets and observers may be motivated to accept both sincere and insincere apologies. And, in a culture in which targets have practice with a script of rejecting as well as accepting apologies, the target–observer difference may disappear because neither targets nor observers would be constrained to accept insincere apologies. Rather than casting doubt on the observed effect, such cultural differences would accentuate the importance of the underlying motivations and scripts in creating the target–observer difference that has been documented here.

Internal Versus External Differentiation

Is the tendency of targets to react similarly to spontaneous and coerced apologies superficial (affecting only their behavioral responses) or deep (affecting how these apologies are encoded and experienced)? The results of Study 5 indicate that although targets did not think they should reject any apology, they nevertheless wanted to reject insincere ones. The fact that they wanted to accept one type of apology and reject the other suggests that the targets were able to differentiate the apologies internally but that propriety constraints would lead them to respond to both the same.

Study 5 involved a set of hypothetical scenarios, not actual behavior, and people do not always accurately anticipate their true emotional reactions to imagined events. Thus, the results of Studies 1 and 2 may be more informative on this issue. Recall that in those studies, targets did not differentiate between spontaneous and coerced apologies, internally or externally. Targets suggested equal payment for the harmdoer in the two apology conditions (external, behavioral response) and also formed similar impressions of the harmdoer in the two apology conditions (internal

experience). If targets were internally differentiating the two types of apologies, one would expect them to form different impressions of the harmdoer.

Of course, 50 years of research suggests that people rarely maintain different internal attitudes and (freely chosen) external reactions to the world (Festinger, 1957). More often than not, people change their internal attitudes to match their external behavior (Festinger & Carlsmith, 1959). The tendency to change one's attitude to match one's behavior coupled with the lack of behavioral response in Study 5 may explain the apparent contradiction between these aspects of Studies 1 and 2 and Study 5. In the real-life interactions of Studies 1 and 2, targets were forced by the situation to respond to the harmdoer's apology. Although the responses varied, there were almost no rejections of the apology. By behaviorally accepting both spontaneous and coerced apologies, targets may have been led to view the harmdoer similarly in the two apology conditions. In other words, targets may not have differentiated the apologies internally because they failed to differentiate them behaviorally. In Study 5, however, targets did not actually respond to the apology, and that might have allowed them to internally differentiate the apologies in terms of their desired response and still recognize that they were unlikely to reject either type of apology. In the absence of evidence that actual (as opposed to role-playing) targets internally distinguish spontaneous and coerced apologies, it seems reasonable to make the tentative claim that they do not.

Benefits of Apologies When the Harm Is Ambiguous

Observers responded differently in Studies 1 and 2 when the harmdoer failed to apologize, suggesting that an important factor in whether an apology is likely to help the harmdoer's cause in the eyes of observers is how clear it is that the harmdoer was responsible. On the surface, it is surprising that observers in Study 1 did not respond negatively when the harmdoer failed to apologize. We designed Study 1 so that the responsibility for the fiasco would be clear. We thought that the responsibility for the pair's poor performance would rest squarely on the confederate, who gave hopelessly uninformative clues and took a phone call in the middle of the task. However, participants' comments in the debriefing sessions suggested that there nonetheless may have been some question about responsibility. Rather than being angry at the harmdoer, a number of both targets and observers seemed to feel bad for the harmdoer, suggesting that the harmdoer may have been feeling sick or that the call may have been an emergency. Although the authors of previous studies have concluded that apologies tend to be beneficial to the harmdoer, most have used scenarios in which the responsibility for the harm is explicitly stated or have used a paradigm in which the participant is in the role of the victim. The results of Study 1 suggest that the value of an apology for a harmdoer is not so clear when the responsibility for the harm is ambiguous and it is an observer's judgment that is at issue. That is, although observers' impressions of the victim may be more favorable when an apology is offered compared with when one is not, their impression of the harmdoer may not be boosted by an apology if the responsibility for the harm is ambiguous.

Related Bodies of Research

The present results share similarities with research findings on the fundamental attribution error (FAE) and on ingratiation.

FAE

The major finding of Studies 1 and 2—that targets do not differentiate spontaneous and coerced apologies, and observers do—could be stated in terms of the FAE. In their reactions to spontaneous and coerced apologies, targets seem to commit the FAE, and observers do not. (Note that this is not an actor–observer difference because neither group of participants is making self-attributions.) Both targets and observers may start with the dispositional inference that a harmdoer who apologizes is truly sorry, but observers may also engage in situational correction when the apology is coerced: “He may only be apologizing because he was told to apologize.” This situational correction involves more work than the original correspondent inference, requiring cognitive resources as well as the motivation to engage in the correction process (Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988).

It seems likely that observers would be more motivated to correct than targets would be. When motivated to believe something, people tend to adopt lax standards for evaluating the pertinent evidence and too easily accept the desired hypothesis without engaging in effortful correction (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Gilovich, 1991). Thus, if targets like the product of their original inference, “He apologized, so he must feel bad about what he did to me,” they may not be motivated to correct it. In contrast, if observers are under internal and external pressure to accurately distinguish between sincere and insincere apologies, they may be motivated to effortfully correct and may successfully avoid committing the FAE.

The cognitive resources available for effortful correction may also be different for targets and observers. If targets are more cognitively engaged in the situation, observers may simply have more resources to consider the situational constraint of coercion. Although at this point one cannot be sure that targets and observers are starting with the same initial inference, in theory, there are both motivational and cognitive explanations for why observers may be more likely than targets of a coerced apology to engage in situational correction and avoid the FAE.

Ingratiation

Research on ingratiation also speaks to the current findings. Similar to the target–observer difference found in reactions to coerced apologies, researchers have demonstrated a target–observer difference in reactions to false flattery. Even when cognitive load and expected future interaction is equalized for targets and observers, when mood is included as a covariate, and when both targets and observers have something to lose by misplacing their trust in the ingratiation, targets of false flattery tend to believe the ingratiation, and observers do not (Vonk, 2002).

In other words, for targets at least, false flattery and coerced apologies seem to work, even though they should not. The similarities in the target–observer difference in reaction to false flattery and coerced apologies suggest that this may be due to similar mechanisms.

We have offered three potential mechanisms to account for the target–observer difference in reaction to apologies. The desire to feel good about oneself matches the explanation offered by Vonk for the difference in reactions to false flattery. However, the other two explanations, a desire to look good in the eyes of others and the power of a social script, may also contribute to a better understanding of the research findings in the area of ingratiation. First, targets' tendency to accept false flattery may partly be due to public pressure to appear gracious. Of course, if targets publicly repeat the flattery, they may appear arrogant rather than gracious (Hareli & Weiner, 2002). Second, the power of a flattery-acceptance social script for targets may help explain why targets believe flattery. Just as people are taught to forgive those who apologize to them, they are also taught to say thank you when someone offers a compliment. Therefore, targets may be more constrained than observers by a social script for false flattery—as they are for apologies.

Conclusion

In everyday life, many apologies are not heartfelt. After bumping into a stranger on the street or keeping someone waiting for an appointment, the apologizer is often not really sorry. Indeed, many daily apologies can be described as routine (Owen, 1983) or ritual (Coulmas, 1981) apologies, reflecting something other than genuine contrition or concern. In a ritual or routine apology, sincerity is optional.

For such an insincere apology to be a second insult, as author Gilbert K. Chesterton suggests, the recipient must distinguish it from a sincere one. The current research indicates that recipients are unlikely to do so. Thus, a stiff apology may indeed be a second insult, but one apparent only to observers.

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