

Belief in the Malleability of Groups Strengthens the Tenuous Link Between a Collective Apology and Intergroup Forgiveness

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Abstract

Although it is widely assumed that collective apologies for intergroup harms facilitate forgiveness, evidence for a strong link between the two remains elusive. In four studies we tested the proposition that the apology–forgiveness link exists, but only among people who hold an implicit belief that groups can change. In Studies 1 and 2, perceived group malleability (measured and manipulated, respectively) moderated the responses to an apology by Palestinian leadership toward Israelis: Positive responses such as forgiveness increased with greater belief in group malleability. In Study 3, university students who believed in group malleability were more forgiving of a rival university's derogatory comments in the presence (as opposed to the absence) of an apology. In Study 4, perceived perpetrator group remorse mediated the moderating effect of group malleability on the apology–forgiveness link (assessed in the context of a corporate transgression). Implications for collective apologies and movement toward reconciliation are discussed.

Keywords

apology, forgiveness, implicit theories, intergroup

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Over the last 25 years, there has been a deluge of apologies offered by various group leaders for recent or past harms perpetrated against members of other groups (Hornsey & Wohl, 2013; Oliner, 2008). Although the reason for this upswing in collective apologies is unclear, the desired outcome is unambiguous—forgiveness and improved intergroup relations (e.g., Lazare, 2004; Tavuchis, 1991; Wohl, Hornsey, & Philpot, 2011). Unfortunately, empirical evidence for a link between a collective apology and intergroup forgiveness is weak and inconsistent. Hornsey and Wohl (2013) suggested that one reason for the weak collective apology–intergroup forgiveness link is that some victimized group members may believe that change in intergroup relations is unlikely to occur. We slightly re-frame this contention. Victimized group members may not forgive because they do not believe that the perpetrator group can change in the future or in response to such forgiveness. If a perpetrator group were believed to lack malleability, then the offering of forgiveness would not be prudent due to the high likelihood of re-offense.

Importantly, there is variability in the extent to which people believe social groups are malleable (Halperin, Crisp, Husnu, Dweck, & Gross, 2012; Halperin, Russell, Trzesniewski, Gross, & Dweck, 2011; Levy, Stroessner, &

Dweck, 1998). Paralleling work on implicit theories of individuals (Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997), some people believe that groups are malleable (incremental theorists), whereas other people believe groups are not malleable (entity theorists). In the research reported herein, we test the idea that collective apologies will yield intergroup forgiveness when victimized group members believe that the nature of groups is malleable rather than fixed. To this end, four studies were conducted in three very different intergroup contexts.

Collective Apologies

At its most basic, the collective apology (akin to the interpersonal apology) is an acknowledgment of harms committed

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and an expression of remorse for those harms (Lazare, 2004). The perpetrator group then gives members of the victimized group the entitlement to trust that the expression of remorse is true (Davis, 2002; Thompson, 2008). If the expression of remorse is perceived to have veracity, it is assumed that pro-social outcomes will follow. This is because remorse communicates an understanding that norms of justice and fair treatment were violated—norms that will be adhered to in any future intergroup interaction (de Grieff, 2008).

Thus, in the main, the collective apology is believed to have the power to restore social harmony (Nobles, 2008; Oliner, 2008; Tavuchis, 1991). Indeed, theorists have positioned the collective apology as a central facilitator of forgiveness and reconciliation in the aftermath of intergroup harm (Lazare, 2004; Staub, 2006; Tutu, 1999). According to Nadler and Liviatan (2006), historical harms obstruct intergroup relations, and the collective apology helps to trim down that obstruction. This is accomplished via successful completion of an apology–forgiveness cycle (Tavuchis, 1991)—a cycle that entails a social exchange whereby the perpetrator group creates a debt by apologizing that is removed only when the victimized group forgives (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008).

Unfortunately, empirical work has not provided conclusive evidence that victimized groups are apt to forgive following the offer of a collective apology. On the optimistic side, some research has shown positive outcomes of a collective apology. Philpot and Hornsey (2008), for example, showed that victimized group members were more satisfied with an apology than with no apology. Moreover, Blatz, Day, and Schryer (2014) observed that victimized group members tend to evaluate the perpetrator group more favorably following an apology. In terms of research that has directly assessed intergroup forgiveness, Leonard, Mackie, and Smith (2011) found that students who received an apology from a group of university professors who publicly criticized student culture were more forgiving than students who were told that the professors refused to apologize. Similarly, Brown, Wohl, and Exline (2008) showed that Canadians were more forgiving of Americans for a friendly fire killing of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan when told the American Government apologized for the event than when no apology was offered.

However, a large body of empirical literature on the collective apology–intergroup forgiveness link presents a more pessimistic picture. Chapman (2007), for example, found that victims of the apartheid regime in South Africa rarely raised the notion of forgiveness spontaneously, and when they did, they expressed a reluctance to grant it despite the apologies offered during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Similarly, experimental and correlational work by Philpot and Hornsey (2008, 2011) failed to find a reliable apology–forgiveness link. In addition, Blatz, Schumann, and Ross (2009) showed that Chinese Canadians tended to believe that an apology provided by the Canadian Government

for historical harms committed against their community was merely an attempt to win votes in the next election. This negative framing of the Canadian Government's apology to Chinese Canadians was likely due to the belief that the apology did not yield change in intergroup relations (see Wohl, Matheson, Branscombe, & Anisman, 2013). Thus, although some research is suggestive of an apology–forgiveness link, other research points to a weak or non-existent link.

The conflicting findings led Hornsey and Wohl (2013) to suggest that researchers should focus their attention on the assessment of possible moderators that could determine the conditions under which a collective apology yields intergroup forgiveness. Providing some initial evidence for the role of moderating variables, Wohl, Hornsey, and Bennett (2012) showed that victimized group members are more forgiving after an apology that contained primary (i.e., non-uniquely human) emotions compared with secondary (i.e., uniquely human) emotions. This is because the capacity to experience secondary emotions is less likely to be attributed to out-groups than to the in-group (infrahumanization; Leyens et al., 2000). Thus, when victimized group members were exposed to an apology that contained secondary emotions, trust in the genuineness of the apology was undermined, which hindered the forgiveness process (see Tam et al., 2007, for similar findings). The point here is that victimized group members need to trust that the collective apology was offered with genuine remorse and that, henceforth, the perpetrator group will be sensitive to and considerate of their needs and interests (see Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003).

In this light, collective apologies might only be effective if victimized group members believe that perpetrator group members can break from past behaviors and thus have the ability to act in a just and fair manner in the future. Indeed, according to theorizing by Staub (2008), belief that a perpetrator group can change eases victimized group members' distress and increases their feelings of security, which allows for greater openness to the perpetrator group. In the current research, we tested the slightly broader supposition that collective apologies facilitate intergroup forgiveness, but only among those who believe in the malleability of groups in general. Thus, we place implicit theories about group malleability as a potentially powerful and previously unexamined moderator of the link between collective apologies and intergroup forgiveness.

Implicit Theories of Change

Research on implicit theories (Chiu et al., 1997; Dweck, Chiu, & Hong, 1995; Dweck & Leggett, 1988) has demonstrated that people vary in their beliefs about the nature of human attributes, which influences how human behavior is understood. A basic opposition is said to exist between people who perceive stability in human nature and people who perceive the possibility for change in human nature. People who believe that personal characteristics are fixed, unchangeable entities

are labeled *entity theorists*. When judging human behavior, entity theorists engage in a type of essentialist thinking in which the possibility for change is absent (Haslam, Bastian, Bain, & Kashima, 2006). People who conceive personal characteristics as malleable qualities that can be developed are labeled *incremental theorists*. In this way, incremental theorists are forward thinking in that they believe that past behavior is not necessarily reflective of future behavior.

Implicit theories can influence an array of outcomes including, among other things, trust in an *interpersonal* apology. Haselhuhn, Schweitzer, and Wood (2010), for example, found that incremental theorists are more likely to trust their transgressor following an *interpersonal* apology than are entity theorists. Thus, incremental theorists should be accepting of an apology when one is offered. In contrast, entity theorists should be relatively unreceptive to an apology. As of yet, however, the role implicit theories play in the relationship between apology and forgiveness has yet to be directly assessed. Nor have researchers examined whether implicit theories might affect the apology–forgiveness link at the intergroup level.

Of relevance to the current discussion is the increasing understanding that the effects of implicit theories extend beyond the attributes of individuals to the attributes of social groups. For example, Levy et al. (1998) found that although entity and incremental theorists are equally knowledgeable about the stereotypes of various social groups (e.g., African Americans, Jews, Asians), incremental theorists were less likely than entity theorists to believe that stereotypes were reflections of the group's innate character. In addition, although people implicitly hold entity or incremental beliefs about the nature of groups, these beliefs are remarkably labile. Within the context of intractable conflicts, Halperin and colleagues (2011) showed that Israeli Jews were more open to compromise with the Palestinians when they were led to believe that groups were malleable (i.e., they had the ability to change). Also, this experimentally induced belief in the malleability of groups was associated with increased motivation for intergroup contact (Halperin et al., 2012). Not yet known, however, is the potential moderating influence implicit theories of groups might have on the effectiveness of a collective apology to yield intergroup forgiveness. In this article, we test the idea that the apology–forgiveness link hinges on incremental theories of groups. To the point, belief in the malleable nature of groups is required for a collective apology to yield intergroup forgiveness.

Overview of Current Research

Our general hypothesis was tested across four studies conducted in three countries (Israel, Canada, and Australia), within three unique contexts. In Study 1, Israelis were exposed to a pending collective apology from the Palestinian leadership. We predicted that incremental theorists would be more likely to accept the pending apology and support steps

toward peace than entity theorists. In Study 2, Israeli Jews were exposed to a group malleability manipulation and then read about an apology by the Palestinian leadership. It was hypothesized that people in the incremental condition would express greater intergroup forgiveness compared with people in the entity condition. In Study 3, Canadian university students were exposed to a public derogatory comment made about their university by the president of a cross-town rival university. In this study, we measured perceived group malleability and manipulated the presence of a collective apology. It was anticipated that victimized students would be more forgiving when an apology was offered, but only among students who believed in the malleable nature of groups. Study 4 replicated and extended the results of Study 3 by assessing whether perceived remorse mediated the hypothesized moderation of perceived group malleability on the relationship between collective apology and intergroup forgiveness. We had Australians read a media report that detailed serious negligence of a pharmaceutical company that placed the lives of Australians at risk. Presence of an apology was manipulated, and implicit theories of groups, remorse, and intergroup forgiveness were assessed. We determined all sample sizes based on a small to medium effect size and 0.80 power.¹

Study 1

The aim of Study 1 was to establish whether perceived group malleability is associated with pro-social intergroup responses to a pending collective apology. To this end, Israeli participants read about an impending apology from the Palestinian leadership for the killing of innocent Israelis during the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. Because the apology was framed as pending, we assessed precursors to forgiveness: willingness to accept an apology as well as willingness to engage in the peace process. It was predicted that Israelis would be more accepting of the apology and be willing for Israel to engage in a peace process with the Palestinians to the extent that they were incremental theorists (i.e., they believed the nature of groups is malleable).

Method

Participants. One hundred and forty Israelis (46 female, 72 male, 22 unidentified) were approached on the Tel-Aviv Be'er Sheva train and asked to answer a short questionnaire in return for candies. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 76 ($M = 32.54$, $SD = 15.50$). Although the train ride itself takes approximately 1.5 hr, there is a 20-min interval with no stops, which we utilized to conduct the study uninterrupted.

Procedure. As part of a larger study, participants were first asked to complete a measure that assessed their implicit beliefs about group malleability. Thereafter, they were presented with a short news article, ostensibly taken from an

Table 1. Correlations Between All Measured Variables (Means and Standard Deviations on the Diagonal): Study 1.

	1.	2.	3.
1. Perceived group malleability	3.39 (0.94)		
2. Willingness to accept the collective apology	0.45*	3.12 (1.28)	
3. Willingness to engage in a peace process	0.35*	0.71*	3.25 (1.33)

* $p < .001$ (2-tailed).

online news website. The paragraph stated that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, backed formally by Ismail Henia (head of the Hamas), intended to publish an announcement regarding the declaration of a unified Palestinian government. Importantly, within the context of this announcement, Abbas would include an apology to Israel for killing innocent Israelis in one specific incident within the conflict. Participants' reactions to this impending collective apology were then assessed. On completion of the study (and all subsequent studies), participants were fully debriefed regarding the purpose of the study. To do so effectively, participants were provided jargon-free explanations of the psychological constructs under investigation as well as the hypothesized relations among variables.

Measured variables. All responses were anchored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Perceived group malleability. Six items were used to assess participants' general beliefs about whether groups had a fixed inherent nature ($\alpha = .73$; adapted from Halperin et al., 2011). An example item was as follows: "Groups can do things differently, but the important parts of who they are can't really be changed."

Willingness to accept the collective apology. Three items ($\alpha = .77$) assessed the extent to which participants would accept the collective apology (e.g., "Abbas and Ismail Henia's words should be taken seriously and their apology should be accepted").

Willingness to engage in a peace process. Three items ($\alpha = .83$) assessed participants' willingness for Israel to engage in a peace process with the Palestinian leadership (e.g., "If Abbas offered such an apology, Israel should initiate a formal meeting with him").

Results and Discussion

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations among variables are presented in Table 1. As predicted, a significant positive correlation was found between the extent to

which Israelis believed in group malleability and their acceptance of the collective apology offered by the Palestinian leadership, $r = .45, p < .001$, confidence interval (CI) = [.31, .57]. A similar positive correlation was found between perceived group malleability and Israelis' willingness to engage in a peace process with the Palestinians, $r = .35, p < .001$, CI = [.19, .48]. In sum, Israelis were more accepting of a collective apology and were more willing to take steps toward peace when they believed that social groups have the ability to change their nature.² In this way, results of Study 1 supported our general hypothesis that the utility of a collective apology to yield pro-social outcomes is contingent on group malleability beliefs. In the subsequent three studies, we sought to replicate and extend the observed influence of implicit beliefs about group malleability on collective apology effectiveness.

Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 was to directly test the causal influence of perceived group malleability on the apology–forgiveness link. To do so, we manipulated perceived group malleability and then exposed Israeli Jews to a collective apology that was ostensibly offered by the Palestinian leadership to Israel. It was anticipated that Israeli Jews who were led to believe that the nature of social groups is malleable would be more willing to grant intergroup forgiveness and take steps toward peace with the Palestinians (by way of reciprocating a collective apology) compared to participants who were primed to believe that the nature of social groups is fixed.

Method

Participants. Sixty-nine participants (45 female, 21 male, 3 unidentified) were recruited at a shopping mall in return for coupons for a local coffee shop. They ranged in age from 18 to 76 ($M = 39.27, SD = 15.41$). All participants were Israeli Jews.

Procedure. Potential participants were approached and asked for 10 min of their time to fill in two short surveys (they were told the surveys were put in one package for administrative purposes). In what was presented as the first survey, participants were told that they were going to engage in a reading comprehension test, and as such, they were asked to read what was posed as an ostensibly real news article published in YNET (a leading Israeli online news website). Moreover, they were told that the article outlined new scientific findings about the nature of groups in general. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions corresponding to the group malleability manipulation (based on Halperin et al., 2012; Halperin et al., 2011).

In the incremental condition, participants read that research findings showed that the nature of groups in general

is malleable and can change. In the entity condition, participants read that research findings showed that the nature of groups is fixed and cannot change. Following the manipulation, participants completed items about the content and readability of the article as well as a measure of perceived group malleability.

In what was presented as the second survey, participants were presented with a short survey framed as an assessment of Israeli Jews' feelings about current events and political issues. All participants read another ostensibly real newspaper article from YNET that outlined Palestinian leader Abbas' collective apology for a terror attack carried out by Palestinian extremists against Israeli citizens. Thereafter, participants completed a questionnaire about the apology, including a measure of intergroup forgiveness and a measure of willingness to reciprocate the collective apology.

Measured variables. All responses were anchored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*).

Manipulation check. A 5-item version ($\alpha = .71$) of the group malleability scale used in Study 1 acted as a manipulation check for Study 2 (note that one item was not included as a result of experimenter error).

Intergroup forgiveness. A 10-item scale of intergroup forgiveness ($\alpha = .82$) was constructed for the purpose of this study. Items reflected forgiveness in light of the collective apology by Abbas (e.g., "It is difficult for me to forgive the Palestinians following this apology" [reversed] and "I can let go of my negative feelings toward the Palestinians").

Apology reciprocation. A 4-item scale of willingness to reciprocate a collective apology ($\alpha = .85$) was constructed for the purpose of this study (e.g., "I believe that in light of Abbas' apology, an honest apology from both sides for wrongdoings throughout the conflict could essentially change the nature of the conflict").

Results and Discussion

Participants in the incremental condition expressed significantly lower beliefs in groups' fixedness ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.80$) than those in the entity condition ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.07$), $t(67) = 2.97$, $p = .009$, $d = 0.72$, $CI = [.23, 1.15]$. Thus, the manipulation was successful at influencing participants' malleability beliefs regarding groups. We then proceeded to test whether the group malleability manipulation influenced both intergroup forgiveness and willingness to provide a reciprocal apology. The manipulation was successful in both regards. As predicted, participants in the incremental condition reported higher levels of forgiveness ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 0.86$) compared with those in the entity condition ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.00$), $t(65) = -2.90$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.73$, $CI = [-.21, -1.13]$. Moreover, willingness to reciprocate a collective

apology was higher in the incremental condition ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 0.89$) compared with the entity condition ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.10$), $t(65) = -2.05$, $p = .04$, $d = 0.60$, $CI = [-.01, -1.06]$.³

Taken together, the results of Study 2 provide a strong case for perceived group malleability as a driver of the collective apology–intergroup forgiveness link. Specifically, it would appear that perceived group malleability facilitates pro-social intergroup responses in the context of a collective apology. This makes a great deal of intuitive sense—if an adversary group has no ability to change, then a collective apology is not worth the words used to express it. However, if groups can change, then a collective apology has weight and is thus worthy of attention (and intergroup forgiveness).

It is important to note that the group malleability manipulation used in Study 2 made no mention of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. We did so to reduce the possibility of demand characteristics, but more importantly to avoid reactance on the side of Jewish Israelis who might be very defensive when directly exposed to positive information about the long-lasting adversary group (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009; Halperin, Cohen-Chen, & Goldenberg, 2014; Halperin et al., 2012; Halperin et al., 2011). With that said, although no participant in the study expressed hypothesis awareness, awkwardness is created in the entity theory condition when participants read that groups do not have the ability to change and then read that an adversary group offered a collective apology (which is suggestive of change). To avoid such awkwardness in subsequent studies, we assessed implicit theories of groups (as opposed to manipulating this factor).⁴

Study 3

Study 3 sought to extend the results of Studies 1 and 2 in three important ways. First and foremost, we experimentally manipulated the presence of a collective apology following exposure to information about an intergroup transgression. We did so to assess whether incremental theorists are more forgiving than entity theorists even in the absence of a collective apology. By manipulating the presence of an apology, we were able to directly test our proposition that implicit theories of group malleability moderate the effectiveness of a collective apology. Second, to minimize possible demand characteristics, assessment of implicit theories of groups and intergroup forgiveness following exposure to a collective apology was separated. Specifically, during a broad-based testing session at the beginning of the academic year, all introductory psychology students completed a battery of questionnaires. One of the assessed variables was perceived group malleability. We sampled from this population to complete the experimental session. Third, to generalize the previous findings beyond the Palestinian–Israeli context, we altered the context in which the link between collective apology and intergroup forgiveness was investigated. Specifically, we wanted to examine whether implicit theories influence the apology–forgiveness link in a context devoid of the

sociopsychological foundations of intractable conflicts (i.e., collective memory and ethos of conflict; see Bar-Tal, 2007). To this end, university students read an ostensibly real news article that described a disparaging comment made about their university by a rival, cross-town university. The presence of a collective apology for that disparaging comment was manipulated. We hypothesized that the collective apology manipulation would interact with perceived group malleability to predict levels of intergroup forgiveness. Specifically, we predicted that an apology would have its most positive effects on forgiveness among incremental theorists.

Method

Participants. Sixty-four students at Carleton University participated in Study 3. Data from two participants were removed because they expressed disbelief in the events described when probed for suspicion at the end of the experimental session. The final sample consisted of 62 participants (52 women, 10 men). They ranged in age from 17 to 39 ($M = 20.69$ years, $SD = 4.57$). All participants received a bonus mark toward their final grade in their introductory psychology course as remuneration for their participation.

Procedure. At the beginning of the academic year, all introductory psychology students are given the opportunity to participate in a session in which they complete a wide array of questionnaires. A measure of implicit theories of groups was included in this array. We then recruited from the pool of students who completed the questionnaire battery. Participants who agreed to participate were randomly sent to one of two websites corresponding to either the apology or no apology conditions. In both conditions, participants read an ostensibly real news article that described a disparaging comment made about their university by a rival, cross-town university. Specifically, participants were told that the official Facebook page and Twitter account of the University of Ottawa relayed comments made by their president who disparaged the academic reputation of Carleton University. Moreover, they were informed that members of the University of Ottawa community reveled in the comments as evidenced by the thousands of “likes and approving comments on Facebook” by University of Ottawa “staff, faculty and alumni” as well as the re-tweet of the comment by the University of Ottawa’s student union. Importantly, half of the participants then read that the president of the University of Ottawa had “taken full responsibility for the comment and offered a sincere apology” to the president of Carleton University and will also apologize to Carleton University’s student union and board of governors. The other half of the participants read that full responsibility has not yet been taken, and no apology had been offered. Participants then completed a measure of intergroup forgiveness as well as other measures not relevant to the current article.

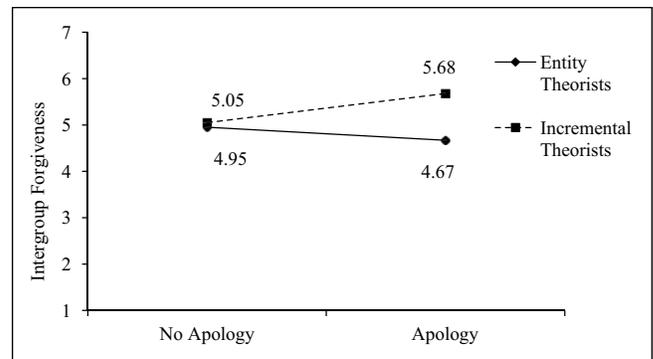


Figure 1. Moderation model with the apology manipulation as the independent variable, perceived group malleability as the moderator, and intergroup forgiveness as the dependent variable: Study 3.

Measures. Perceived group malleability was measured with the scale used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .67$). To assess intergroup forgiveness, we used a 7-item scale ($\alpha = .76$) based on Brown and Phillips’ (2005) State Forgiveness Scale. Sample items included, “The University of Ottawa should be forgiven” and “The University of Ottawa should get what is coming to them” (reverse coded). Responses were anchored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores reflect greater intergroup forgiveness.

Results

To assess the theorized moderating impact of group malleability on the apology–forgiveness link, we entered the collective apology manipulation (coded 1 = *collective apology*, 0 = *no collective apology*) and group malleability (centered), as well as their product into a regression as predictors of intergroup forgiveness (see Figure 1). The omnibus test was not significant, $R^2 = .10$, $F(3, 57) = 2.05$, $p = .11$. However, because of our a priori prediction of a significant interaction between the collective apology manipulation and perceived group malleability term, we proceeded to examine the main effects and interaction. There was no main effect of the collective apology manipulation, $b = .17$, $t = 0.79$, $p = .43$, $CI = [-.26, .61]$, or group malleability, $b = .07$, $t = 0.46$, $p = .65$, $CI = [-.23, .37]$. However, as predicted, the presence of a significant interaction qualified these results, $b = 0.63$, $t = 2.13$, $p = .04$, $CI = [.04, 1.22]$. Simple slopes tests showed that the collective apology manipulation had a significant impact on intergroup forgiveness at 1 SD above the group malleability mean, $b = 0.63$, $t = 2.10$, $p = .04$, $CI = [.03, 1.22]$, but not at 1 SD below the group malleability mean, $b = -.28$, $t = -0.92$, $p = .37$, $CI = [-.90, .34]$. We also tested whether the influence of perceived group malleability on forgiveness depended on the presence of an apology. Results showed, as predicted, perceived group malleability increased forgiveness in the presence of an apology, $b = 0.46$, $t = 2.12$,

$p = .04$, $CI = [.03, .89]$, but not in the absence of an apology, $b = -.17$, $t = -0.85$, $p = .40$, $CI = [-.57, .23]$. In other words, the presence of a collective apology facilitated intergroup forgiveness, but only among people who believed that groups' natures are malleable (i.e., for incremental theorists).

Discussion

Studies 1 and 2 found that incremental theorists are forgiving in the presence of an apology. However, because those studies did not have a no-apology control, it was not possible to determine whether perceived group malleability would facilitate intergroup forgiveness in the absence of a collective apology. Study 3 addressed this issue by manipulating the presence of an apology and in doing so provided a strong (and direct) test of our general hypothesis. In line with predictions, the presence of an apology facilitated forgiveness, but only among incremental theorists. However, this was not the case in the absence of an apology. Specifically, low levels of forgiveness was observed among both incremental and entity theorists in the no apology condition. Thus, it is not the case that incremental theorists are simply more forgiving of intergroup harms—an apology is required for them to express forgiveness. Study 3 also enabled us to demonstrate that the impact of perceived group malleability on the apology–forgiveness link extends beyond a conflict in which reciprocal harm continues to be inflicted, and applies also to a context in which there is a clear victimized group and a clear perpetrator group. Third, Study 3 provided a stronger conceptual test of the moderating role of perceived group malleability on the apology–forgiveness link, because malleability beliefs were collected separately from the apology manipulation.

Study 4

The underlying assumption in the current work is that a belief in group malleability leads victimized group members to believe that the perpetrator group can come to recognize the harms they committed were illegitimate. To the extent that perpetrator groups perceive their past harm as illegitimate, a collective apology would be an indicator of felt remorse for the harm committed. It has been argued that perceived perpetrator remorse is fundamental for an apology to be effective (Allan, Allan, Kaminer, & Stein, 2006; Philpot & Hornsey, 2008, 2011; Zechmeister, Garcia, Romero, & Vas, 2004). Indeed, Gobodo-Madikizela (2002) observed that the presence of a remorseful apology during South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission facilitated a vocabulary of forgiveness among victims. In this light, we tested whether perceived perpetrator group remorse mediates the moderation model assessed in previous studies. To this end, Australian participants read about an act of negligence perpetrated by a (fictional) pharmaceutical company that placed the lives of Australians at risk. As in Study 4,

perceived group malleability was measured prior to the collective apology manipulation. After the apology manipulation, we measured intergroup forgiveness and perceptions of perpetrator group remorse.

Method

Participants. There were 204 participants who completed this study (102 women and 102 men) with an age range of 18 to 79 ($M = 52.75$ years, $SD = 14.67$). All participants were from Australia and had lived in the country for a minimum of 3 years. It was a prerequisite of the study that participants were Australian, as the transgression presented was committed against Australians. Participants were recruited online through panel research administered by Qualtrics.

Procedure. To reduce the transparency of the study, participants were told the purpose was to examine the effects of personality on attitude formation. After completing the demographic section, participants were presented with 50 personality questions in which the key measures of implicit beliefs about group malleability were embedded. This was done to further mask the hypotheses of the study. Participants were then instructed to read a media report that detailed a serious negligent act of Pacific Pharmaceuticals (a fictional pharmaceutical company) that placed the lives of Australians at risk. The transgression was based on a real event that detailed a massive recall of pharmaceutical products due to unsafe manufacturing processes. Participants were randomly assigned to read an article where either an apology was present or no apology was present. Finally, participants completed measures of forgiveness and perceived remorse as part of a larger survey.

Measures

Perceived group malleability. For the purpose of brevity, we used a short, 4-item version ($\alpha = .77$) of the group malleability questionnaire used in Study 3.

Intergroup forgiveness. Adapted from Wohl et al. (2012), intergroup forgiveness was measured with 4 items ($\alpha = .77$). Three items were positively worded (e.g., "I forgive Pacific Pharmaceuticals for the harm done to Australians"), and one item was negatively worded ("It is not possible for me to forgive the actions of Pacific Pharmaceuticals"). Responses were anchored from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Higher scores reflect greater intergroup forgiveness.

Perceived remorse. Based on Philpot and Hornsey (2008), the extent to which participants perceived the out-group as remorseful was measured with three items ($\alpha = .92$). Example items were as follows: "To what extent do you think Pacific Pharmaceuticals feels remorseful?" and "To what extent do you think Pacific Pharmaceuticals is truly sorry?" Responses were anchored at 1 (*not at all*) and 7 (*extremely*).

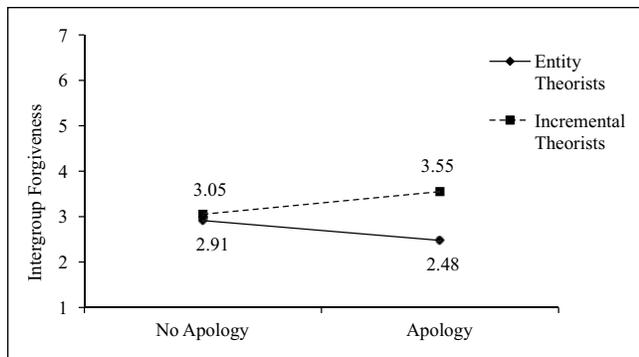


Figure 2. Moderation model with the apology manipulation as the independent variable, perceived group malleability as the moderator, and intergroup forgiveness as the dependent variable: Study 4.

Results

Intergroup forgiveness. The intergroup forgiveness index score was subjected to a moderated multiple regression. Intergroup forgiveness was regressed on the collective apology manipulation (*no collective apology* = 0, *collective apology* = 1), the measure of perceived group malleability (centered), and the interaction term (see Figure 2). The omnibus test was significant, $R^2 = .04$, $F(3, 198) = 2.88$, $p = .04$. There was neither a main effect of the manipulation, $b = .03$, $t = .18$, $p = .86$, $CI = [-.31, .37]$, nor perceived group malleability, $b = .07$, $t = 0.81$, $p = .42$, $CI = [-.10, .23]$. As predicted, however, a significant interaction qualified these results, $b = 0.45$, $t = 2.74$, $p = .007$, $CI = [.13, .77]$. Analyses of the simple slopes showed that the collective apology manipulation increased intergroup forgiveness at 1 *SD* above the mean of group malleability (indicative of incremental beliefs), $b = 0.50$, $t = 2.07$, $p = .04$, $CI = [.02, .98]$. Conversely, the collective apology appeared to marginally decrease intergroup forgiveness at 1 *SD* below the mean of group malleability (indicative of entity beliefs), $b = -.44$, $t = -1.81$, $p = .07$, $CI = [-.91, .04]$. We also tested whether the influence of perceived group malleability on forgiveness depended on the presence of an apology. Results showed, as predicted, that perceived group malleability increased forgiveness in the presence of an apology, $b = .30$, $t = 2.65$, $p = .009$, $CI = [.08, .53]$, but not in the absence of an apology, $b = -.15$, $t = -1.26$, $p = .21$, $CI = [-.38, .08]$.

Perceived remorse. A similar regression was conducted on perceived remorse (see Figure 3). The omnibus test was significant, $R^2 = .08$, $F(3, 198) = 5.60$, $p = .001$. Results revealed a significant main effect of the collective apology manipulation, $b = 0.59$, $t = 3.03$, $p = .003$, $CI = [.21, .97]$, but not perceived group malleability, $b = -.05$, $t = -0.48$, $p = .63$, $CI = [-.23, .14]$. A significant interaction qualified these results, $b = 0.52$, $t = 2.75$, $p = .007$, $CI = [.15, .89]$. Analyses of the simple slopes

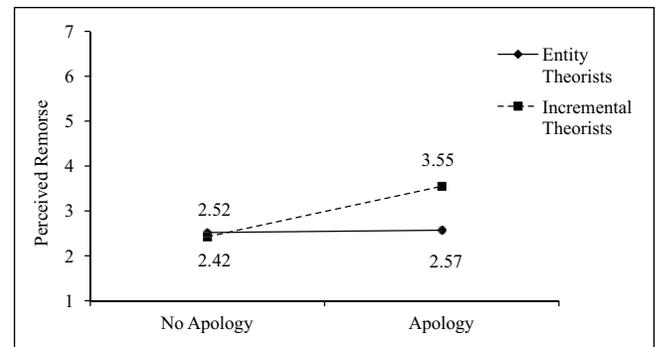


Figure 3. Moderation model with the apology manipulation as the independent variable, perceived group malleability as the moderator, and perceived remorse as the dependent variable: Study 4.

showed that the collective apology manipulation increased perceived remorse at 1 *SD* above the mean of group malleability (indicative of incremental beliefs), $b = 1.13$, $t = 4.08$, $p < .001$, $CI = [.58, 1.67]$. Conversely, there was no effect of the collective apology manipulation on perceived remorse at 1 *SD* below the mean of group malleability (indicative of entity beliefs), $b = .05$, $t = .19$, $p = .85$, $CI = [-.49, .60]$.

Mediated moderation analysis. The previous analyses established that the collective apology manipulation by group malleability interaction predicted both intergroup forgiveness and perceived remorse. A regression test confirmed that perceived remorse predicted intergroup forgiveness, $b = 0.59$, $t = 10.34$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .35$. Thus, we proceeded to test the mediated-moderation model with Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro. To estimate the direct and indirect effect of the interaction, bootstrapping (10,000 iterations) was used with 95% CIs. In line with our predictions, the indirect effect of the interaction term on intergroup forgiveness via perceived remorse was significant, $ab = .27$, $CI = [.51, .05]$.

Simple mediation models were then used to examine the indirect effect of the apology manipulation on intergroup forgiveness via perceived remorse at high as well as at low levels of the implicit theories of groups (i.e., for incremental and entity theorists, respectively). Results showed that the indirect effect of the collective apology manipulation on intergroup forgiveness via perceived remorse was significant for participants who held incremental theories of groups, $ab = 0.59$, $CI = [.29, .93]$. However, there was a non-significant indirect effect of the collective apology manipulation on intergroup forgiveness via perceived remorse among participants who held entity theories of groups, $ab = .03$, $CI = [-.28, .34]$. In other words, the presence of a collective apology yielded intergroup forgiveness by heightening victimized group members' belief that the perpetrator felt remorse for the harms they committed, but only among victimized group members who held the belief that group characteristics are malleable.

Discussion

Results for Study 4 provide an important capstone to the current series of studies. Not only were results of the previous studies replicated in a third context (a collective apology from a corporation to those it harmed), but we were also able to demonstrate one mechanism by which a collective apology yields intergroup forgiveness among victimized group members who hold incremental theories of groups: perceived perpetrator group remorse. This finding makes intuitive sense. For victimized group members who believe that perpetrator groups cannot change, a collective apology will be interpreted as being hollow and devoid of genuine remorse. With such an interpretation, it would be difficult to grant intergroup forgiveness. However, if perpetrator group members are believed to have the capacity to change, then a collective apology can be framed as an expression of genuine remorse.

General Discussion

Despite a wave of collective apologies offered by perpetrator groups to victimized groups over the last 20 years, the effectiveness of these apologies to yield intergroup forgiveness has been debated inside as well as outside the academic arena (see Hornsey & Wohl, 2013). Whereas some research has shown that collective apologies can facilitate intergroup forgiveness (e.g., Brown et al., 2008; Leonard et al., 2011), other research has been more pessimistic about the collective apology's utility (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008, 2011; Wohl et al., 2012). In this article, we conducted four studies to assess the supposition that the apology–forgiveness link is dependent on victimized group members' belief in the malleable nature of social groups.

Across all studies, victimized group members who had an inclination toward incremental theories of groups (as opposed to entity theories)—whether that inclination was measured or manipulated—were more forgiving in the presence of a collective apology. Importantly, we also found that the positive effect of an apology on forgiveness emerged via perceived perpetrator remorse, and only among victimized group members who believe in the malleability of groups (Study 4). Indeed, an apology is likely to be deemed trustworthy and the transgressor remorseful only when it is believed that groups can change. When change is possible, it becomes easier to envision a future devoid of re-offense.

Implications

The current results can inform and equip decision makers who wish to promote pro-social intergroup relations via collective apology. Broadly, the current studies suggest that perpetrator groups should make the case that they have changed before a collective apology is offered. This might take the form of public speeches highlighting how groups can change

coupled with conciliatory action to provide evidence for such change. By prompting and instilling beliefs that groups' nature can change, apologies may have more traction in terms of promoting forgiveness and conflict resolution.

This research also helps unpack the preponderance of null results in the collective apology–intergroup forgiveness literature. Herein, we showed that the flat relationship between collective apology and intergroup forgiveness likely disguises two countervailing effects of an apology for incremental and entity theorists, respectively. Specifically, incremental theorists appear to take the presence of an apology as a sign of out-group change. This perceived change facilitates the forgiveness process. Conversely, entity theorists do not respond to an apology in a pro-social manner. In fact, a non-significant trend toward rebuking the collective apology appeared among entity theorists. Entity theorists may perceive an apology as merely words—words that will not influence the unchangeable nature of an out-group's behavior. In this case, the forgiveness process likely will not be engaged. More troubling, however, is the possibility that entity theorists view a collective apology as a sign of out-group duplicity (“they are trying to pull the wool over our eyes, because they can't change”). If entity theorists make such an attribution, intergroup relations may degrade (as opposed to improve) following a collective apology. An assessment of the attributions entity theorists make in the presence of a collective apology (and means to circumvent these attributions) is a potentially fruitful avenue for future research.

The current research also has implications for expanding the implicit theory literature. Specifically, the extant literature has examined perceptions of malleability of groups as a predictor of intergroup attitudes. Herein, we showed that perceived group malleability might also serve an important moderating role in explicating why certain factors (i.e., collective apologies and intergroup forgiveness) might have a tenuous relationship; that is, variables might only be associated when people believe in group malleability or fixedness. In addition, as can be seen in Studies 3 and 4, group malleability is not associated with forgiveness in the absence of an apology. This means that general belief in the malleability of groups could promote reconciliation only if the perpetrator group provides a sign of change (i.e., a collective apology).

Caveats and Future Directions

Although we showed that remorse is a powerful mediator of the predicted moderation model, remorse may not be the only means by which an apology can yield forgiveness. According to de Grief (2008), an apology yields pro-social outcomes when laws, norms, and unstated rules violated by the transgression are affirmed. In doing so, the perpetrator group demonstrates their commitment to the standards of justice and fair treatment in the future. In the spirit of de Grief, a collective apology might yield intergroup

forgiveness among incremental theorists if they believe that the perpetrator group is committed to norms of justice and fair treatment even in the absence of remorse for harms committed by previous generations of in-group members.

It should also be noted that participants in Studies 1 and 2 might not have been direct victims of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, and because the transgression used in Study 4 was fictitious, there were no direct victims in that study either. However, by virtue of being a member of the victimized group, participants were victimized by extension (see Brown et al., 2008). Moreover, it is important to understand the reactions of “secondary” victims—people who share a common identity with primary victims but did not suffer directly. Having said that, participants in Study 3 were direct victims; thus, it would appear that perceived group malleability influenced the apology–forgiveness link regardless of whether the victimized group member was directly or indirectly harmed by the perpetrator group. That said, the harm inflicted by the perpetrator group in Study 3 was not severe (a derogatory comment). Future research should examine whether the observed effects extend to direct victims of severe intergroup harmdoing.

In addition, the collective apology in Studies 3 and 4 was offered shortly after the transgression. In the case of Study 3, the time between the transgression and the apology was very close. It could be argued that the time frame was too close to allow for the group to change. Incremental theorists, however, look forward to the possibility for change in the future. Therefore, results from Studies 3 and 4 suggest that change need not to be observed for a collective apology to yield intergroup forgiveness among incremental theorists. Instead, forgiveness in light of the collective apology was likely granted in the anticipation of change—a result that is reminiscent of work by Wohl and colleagues (2013) who found forgiveness following a collective apology that was granted in anticipation of a pro-social change in intergroup relations (not in the face of such change). Nonetheless, it would be prudent to directly assess whether intergroup forgiveness varies as a function of the extent to which the perpetrator group has changed.

A notable strength of the current research lies with the various and diverse contexts in which we were able to demonstrate the importance of belief in group malleability on the association between collective apologies and intergroup forgiveness. Indeed, research was conducted within the context of harms inflicted during an intractable conflict (Studies 1 and 2), a derogatory comment made by a cross-town rival university (Study 3) and a serious negligent act of a pharmaceutical company that placed the lives of in-group members at risk (Study 4).

Conclusion

According to both theorists and politicians (see Auerbach, 2004, 2005; Oliner, 2005; Tutu, 1999), a collective apology

is a fundamental pre-requisite for intergroup forgiveness. However, there have been mixed empirical findings about collective apology’s ability to promote intergroup forgiveness. In a recent review, Hornsey and Wohl (2013) argued for the need to identify factors that link collective apologies to intergroup forgiveness. Across four studies, we demonstrated one such factor—beliefs about group malleability. We showed that collective apologies yield intergroup forgiveness, but only among people who believe that groups have the ability to change their nature. Should incremental beliefs about group malleability be heightened, the pathway between intergroup apologies and reconciliation would be clearer.

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Notes

1. Participant recruitment for Studies 1 and 2 were ultimately determined by permission to collect data on the train (Study 1) and willingness of patrons to complete the study in the shopping mall (Study 2). In Study 4, we recruited more participants than indicated by our a priori power analysis because of the anticipated test of moderated mediation.
2. These associations remained significant above and beyond participants’ political ideology.
3. Results remained consistent when controlling for political ideology, indicating that beliefs about the malleability of groups was a significant predictor above and beyond participants’ political orientation. Moreover, no significant manipulation \times political orientation interactions were found on the dependent variables, indicating that the manipulation had the same effect on participants regardless of their political ideology.
4. In the interests of transparency, we note that we also conducted four unreported studies in which we attempted to manipulate both group malleability and the presence of a collective apology back-to-back. Three of these attempts were made within the Palestinian–Israel context used in Study 2, and one attempt was made within the Australian pharmaceutical context used in Study 4. In all cases, the group malleability manipulation check items indicated that we were not able to successfully influence people’s beliefs about group malleability, or that the manipulations contaminated each other. One possible reason for this outcome is that sequential manipulations are likely to facilitate hypothesis awareness and thus the possibility of demand characteristics. Another possible reason is that the absence of an apology might seem particularly mean-spirited after being told about group malleability. The absence of an apology might also invalidate the incremental-relevant information. Last, an apology

might be construed as duplicitous following a group fixedness prime, which would lower forgiveness. Indeed, in Study 4, the collective apology appeared to decrease intergroup forgiveness at low levels of group malleability (indicative of entity beliefs).

Supplemental Material

The online supplemental material is available at <http://pspb.sagepub.com/supplemental>.

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