

# An Exploration of the Structure of Effective Apologies

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## Keywords

apology, trust violation, trust repair.

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## Abstract

Violations of trust are an unfortunate but common occurrence in conflict and negotiation settings: negotiators make promises that they do not keep; parties in conflict behave in unexpected ways, escalating tensions and breaking past trust. What often follows these violations is some form of an account, specifically an apology, in an effort to repair that trust. But are some apologies more effective than others? Two studies reported here examine the structural components of apologies. Six components of an apology were defined from previous research and presented to subjects—singly and in combination—in the form of component definitions and in the context of a trust violation scenario. Results indicate that not all apologies are viewed equally; apologies with more components were more effective than those with fewer components, and certain components were deemed more important than others. Moreover, apologies following competence-based trust violations were seen as more effective than apologies following integrity-based violations. Implications and future directions for research in the structure of effective apologies are presented.

Almost every day, the media covers a high-profile apology. These apologies come from many sources: a business leader apologizes for failures to meet economic forecasts or to follow through on promises made in negotiation talks; a political leader apologizes for a deficiency in the design or implementation of effective social policy; a church leader apologizes for unethical conduct by some of its ministers; or a professional athlete apologizes for unacceptable behavior, both on and off the field. Violations of trust and confidence occur regularly in conflict and negotiation, and apologies (and other forms of social accounts) are common as attempts to restore trust in these relationships. Thus, apologies are clearly central to the disciplines of negotiation and conflict management.

Conflict management and negotiation processes occur when parties must manage and coordinate their interdependence with each other while attempting to satisfy their individual interests (Deutsch, 1962; Kelley, 1966). These conflict management and negotiation processes must address problems of miscoordination; violations of expectations; erroneous, incomplete, and deceptive communication; breaches of promises and commitments; and actions designed to inhibit the other's ability to meet their needs. Given that it is commonly acknowledged that trust is the "glue" that binds strategic relationships together, apologies have been viewed as a key verbal tool to address the source and nature of these problems, and restore more productive communication and coordination processes. But with the ubiquity of apologies, the effectiveness of what constitutes a "good" apology must be considered. Through paying

close attention to what is exactly said in an apology, one may gain insights into when apologies may be particularly efficacious and hence how to optimally construct an effective one.

Relevant to the focus of this article, there are several research literatures that have addressed the question of what constitutes a “good” apology. The first literature draws from the discipline of rhetorical communication, primarily from the work of Benoit’s “image repair theory”. Benoit’s (1995) earlier work proposed a model of image repair discourse and then applied the framework to four major case studies of corporations (and a U.S. President) attempting to repair their image. More recently, Benoit (2015) provides a modification of the framework and references additional case studies that were performed in the intervening two decades. In this work, Benoit identifies five major verbal “accounting” strategies that can be used for image repair: denial of the action, evasion of responsibility for the action, reducing the perceived offensiveness of the specific act, proposing corrective action for the future, and “mortification”, which includes some expression of regret for the offending action.

The second literature that has addressed the question of apologies has been derived from the related fields of social psychology and organizational behavior. Approaches within these disciplines have relied on psychologically based theories and frameworks for repairing damage to an interpersonal or interorganizational relationship, particularly addressing problems of unjust treatment and violations of trust, and employing deductive hypothesis testing and empirical data drawn from laboratory and scenario studies. A violator may take a variety of approaches to address a fairness or trust violation, but the most common is to take ownership of the violation through some kind of a verbal account; for example, an actor may make an acknowledgment that they are aware that a violation occurred, offer an explanation or “account” of what the violation was and why it occurred, and/or address the consequences (Bies & Shapiro, 1987; Scott & Lyman, 1968). An assortment of other typologies of accounts have been offered in the literature, including ones by Scher and Darley (1997), Shapiro (1991), and Shaw, Wild, and Colquitt (2003).

A closer examination of these two literatures—rhetorical communication and social psychology—organizational behavior—indicates that each fundamentally attempts to address a similar question: what constitutes an optimally “effective” apology or account for a violation that damages someone’s image, remedies an injustice, or attempts to repair broken trust? The answers to this question are critical to the development of our understanding of trust repair, but we need to consider that each literature works toward the answers in a different manner. For example, the two literatures differ in the way that they are conceptually derived, and each tends to use a different methodological approach (e.g., Benoit’s approach to data is ethnographic, while the second approach is hypothesis testing and empirical deductive). But despite the fact that each literature does not regularly reference the other, the two do exert influence on one another and other related research streams. An example of this influence on other streams lies in research on the interface of apologies and facework—the idea that those involved in a trust violation situation have differing needs when it comes to face needs, with cultural differences being particularly relevant (Guan, Park, & Lee, 2009; Kim, Guan, & Park, 2012; Park & Guan, 2006). For instance, Park & Guan (2006) documented that, relative to U.S. respondents, Chinese respondents have been shown to be more prone to initiate an apology depending on the broader situational context (i.e., whether their act potentially violated a target’s positive face). While these literatures and research streams each contribute differently toward our understanding of the effectiveness and need of apologies, what remains lacking is a clear answer to the question, “what are the core components of an effective apology, and are certain components more critical than others?”

The purpose of this article is to subject the structural components of an apology—that of providing an account and an apology as well as understanding how that apology is structured—to rigorous empirical examination from the social psychological, deductive perspective. The paper’s intent is to explore and better understand if and when certain types of apologies may be more compelling than others. We begin with a brief review of the literature on the effectiveness of apologies at addressing injustice and repairing trust within this literature, and specify six critical components of an effective apology identified by

Lewicki and Polin (2012). We then present the findings from two empirical studies which tested the relative effectiveness of these different apology components. While our work is informed by those who have studied apologies from the rhetorical communication perspective, we adopt the second perspective identified above, drawing from the deductive, hypothesis testing social psychological and organizational behavior literature on the strategies and tactics of accounts and apologies as they are used to repair trust and justice violations.

## The Efficacy of Apologies

At the outset, it should be noted that some authors have criticized apologies as a form of trust repair. For example, Farrell and Rabin (1996) have argued that apologies are one of many forms of “cheap talk”, and that such talk (e.g., accounts, explanations, apologies, etc.) has no real value to the victim when compared to the violator providing more substantive, tangible reparations for the trust violation. Other studies (De Cremer, 2010) have shown that apologies can be effective only as “supplements” to substantive compensation. For example, Haesevoets, Reinders Folmer, De Cremer, and Van Hiel (2013) found that a simultaneous effect exists for the benefit of compensation and apologies together and that compensation with an apology can better “facilitate relationship preservation” than compensation without an apology (p. 96). Even more broadly, some have argued that the apology has unfairly been considered as “the” best repair strategy, yet find that other repair strategies such as compensation are just as effective as apologies (Coombs & Holladay, 2008). But a number of other studies have indicated that providing an apology alone can be effective because, at the very least, expressing the appropriate words can reveal that the violator understands that some events have occurred which damaged trust (Baron, 1990; Thomas & Millar, 2008; see Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010 for a review) and that the problem must be addressed.

There is an extensive literature on apologies, and how, why, and under what conditions they are effective; only a cursory review of that literature can be provided here. As one example, Tomlinson, Dineen, and Lewicki (2004) provided empirical support for the importance of apologies. Examining the factors which were perceived as important to a victim to reconcile a professional relationship following a broken promise, these authors found that: (a) apologies were more effective than no apologies in trust repair; (b) apologies were more effective when they were perceived as sincere; (c) apologies were more effective when they were delivered soon after the trust violation; (d) apologizers who “took responsibility” for creating the trust violation were seen as more effective than apologizers who attempted to deflect or deny the responsibility; and (e) apologies were more effective when the parties had established a strong, positive relationship and the trust violation was seen as an isolated event rather than a frequently recurring problem (see also Kramer & Lewicki, 2010; Schlenker & Darby, 1981; Scott & Lyman, 1968; van Laer & de Ruyter, 2010 for reviews).<sup>1</sup>

An important and yet poorly understood question that remains, however, is whether the effectiveness of an apology will depend on the structure of the apology itself. Some apologies may be simple—no more than a straightforward “I’m sorry”—while others are rich and extensive in detail. For example, Lewicki and Polin (2012) offered examples of public apology statements made by several well-known personalities and organizations who had violated public trust: professional golfer Tiger Woods; stockbroker and investment advisor Bernard Madoff; global oil and gas energy corporate giant British Petroleum; and the management of JetBlue Airlines. The authors noted that these apologies—as well as numerous other public apologies from corporate, government, religious, sports, and entertainment personalities—were quite different from one another in structure and composition, and that these differences may account for the perceived effectiveness of the statements and their impact on beginning to restore trust in the

<sup>1</sup>A meta-analysis of the image repair literature has been prepared by Benoit et al. (2014). However, since a list of the sources used in the meta-analysis could not be confirmed, its findings are therefore not used in our review.

actor. Therefore, it is appropriate to understand whether some apologies are better than others, that is, that certain components of an apology are more likely to be perceived as central to an apology's effectiveness.

## Apology Components

The composition of an apology matters. The structure of these narratives—in other words, the consideration of both format and content—affects perceptions of the transgressor (van Laer & de Ruyter, 2010). A number of researchers have provided suggestions of what should be verbally included in an apology. For example, Schlenker and Darby (1981) highlight five components, including (1) a statement of apologetic intent, (2) expressions of remorse–sorrow–embarrassment, (3) offers to help the injured party or make restitution, (4) self-castigation, and (5) direct attempts to obtain forgiveness (p. 272). These authors explain that not all components will be used in all apologies; according to them, the consequences of the transgression play a role in the number of components included in the apology such that minimal consequences usually elicited a “perfunctory form of an apology” (p. 275), and increased severity of the predicament brought about by an increased number of apology components. In their later work, these authors state that in a “more complete” apology, “an actor recognizes the existence of interpersonal obligations, acknowledges and reaffirms the values of the rules that have been broken, promises more acceptable conduct in the future, [and] may seem to suffer remorse” (Darby & Schlenker, 1989, p. 354).

As another example, Scher and Darley (1997), through their discourse analysis, relied on the Cross-Cultural Speech Acts Realization Project (CCSARP), an initiative which had performed an extensive analysis of the efficiency of various requests and apologies across cultures. Drawing from work by Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984), Scher and Darley highlighted five components of the “apology speech act set:” (1) an illocutionary force indicating device, (2) an explanation of the cause of the violation, (3) an expression of responsibility for the offense, (4) an offer of repair, and (5) a promise of forbearance (p. 128). To study the use of components, the authors presented participants with a scenario about a person who promised to call a friend with some information that was critical to the friend's upcoming job interview. The person then forgot to make the call and several days later, called, and offered an apology. Each participant judged multiple scenarios where no apology, a 1-component apology, a 2-component apology, a 3-component apology, or a 4-component apology was provided.<sup>2</sup> Their examination of the use of these components in offering an apology demonstrates that the use of apologies does affect others' judgments of the transgressor. More specifically, “the addition of each strategy seems to have had an additive effect on judgments of how appropriate the utterance of the transgressor was and how much the transgressor was blamed and sanctioned for the transgression” (p. 137). That is, a linear trend was found, such that more components were perceived as better than fewer components. The single act of making an apology (compared to not making an apology) contributed the clearest and strongest effect on perceptions of the violator. Although their study is not without limitations, it does provide some support for the argument that the quality of an apology may be affected by the presence and number of certain key apology components.

As a final example, Lewicki and Polin (2012) reviewed the empirical literature on apologies and analyzed a series of high-profile apologies from celebrities and corporate leaders. They argue that a maximally effective apology should consist of six components including the following: (1) an expression of regret, (2) an explanation for why the offense occurred, (3) an acknowledgement of responsibility, (4) a declaration of repentance, (5) an offer of repair, and (6) a request for forgiveness. Through their analysis of apologies, the authors found that an expression of regret and an explanation for why the violation

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<sup>2</sup>Scher and Darley did not examine the explanation component in their empirical study.

occurred were commonly included in apologies, whereas a clear, direct declaration of repentance and the request for forgiveness were lacking in apologies. The acknowledgement of responsibility was usually included, but the quality of the component was questionable in many instances. And the inclusion of an offer of repair was dependent upon the type of transgression and whether repair of damage was possible. Despite useful insights garnered from Lewicki and Polin's evaluation of public apologies, a systematic evaluation of how each of these components and their combination impact the efficacy of an apology has not been fully explored.

These three examples demonstrate that some authors are attempting to increase the understanding of the content that is, and should be, included in apologies. But outside of these articles, most research on apologies does not utilize consistent apology content. The sheer number of components to include in apologies and the clear lack of agreement of what constitutes an apology is problematic. How can findings from these studies be compared and validity ensured when an "apology" used in one study contains different numbers and types of components than an "apology" used in another study? For example, Schlenker and Darby (1981) examine five components in their research of reactions in undesirable events (i.e., statement of apologetic intent, expression of remorse–sorrow–embarrassment, offer of help to the injured party or restitution to redress damage, self-castigation, attempts to obtain forgiveness); De Cremer (2010) uses two components in his trust repair research (i.e., taking responsibility and expressing remorse); Lee and Chung (2012) use only one component in their study (i.e., responsibility admittance); and multiple studies simply use the phrase "I want to apologize" as their studied apology (Haesevoets et al., 2013; Leunissen, De Cremer, & Reinders Folmer, 2012). The content included in an apology matters and affects the apology's efficacy, and an apology lacking the appropriate components "could be perceived as superficial and insincere to the eyes of the public" (Lee & Chung, 2012, p. 932). To better understand this trust repair strategy, we argue that consistency is needed.

At its essence, an apology serves two general functions: first, the mere offering of an apology shows that the apologizer understands there is a "social requirement" to an apology when any sort of harm is done; second, the apology should be accompanied by an emotional expression that provides additional meaning about the apologizer's intentions (Scher & Darley, 1997). The *acknowledgment of responsibility* for committing the offending act demonstrates the apologizer's awareness of this social norm of recognizing harm and caring to rectify it. Of all apology "component" research, the most appears to exist regarding the acknowledgement of responsibility. Coombs and Holladay (2008) go as far as saying it is the "centerpiece of an apology" (p. 253). Research suggests that, indeed, victims perceive more positive evaluations of the violators when the violators show greater responsibility-taking (Hodgins & Liebeskind, 2003). Pace, Fediuk, and Botero (2010) find that taking responsibility of one's actions can lead to less stakeholder anger toward and less reputation damage for an organization. Speaking to the second general function of the apology, an *expression of regret* for the offense is necessary because it demonstrates some negative feeling that have consequently been experienced by the violator because of their actions. Pace et al. (2010) also find that expressing regret over one's actions can lead to less stakeholder anger toward and less reputation damage for an organization.

In addition to the two components listed above, other components have been argued to provide value to an apology (Lewicki & Polin, 2012; Scher & Darley, 1997). First, and given the importance of including an "account", the *explanation for why the violation occurred* will help improve the perceived quality of an apology. After all, victims may respond differently to trust violations depending on the reasoning behind the behavior, and the explanation offers an opportunity to express this reasoning. Second, the *declaration of repentance* signals that the speaker will take steps to ensure that the violation is not repeated. Third, the *offer of repair* acts as a signal that the violator is willing to take, and aware of the need for, actions aimed at remedying the situation and making an effort toward repairing the relationship. Lastly, Lewicki and Polin (2012) propose that it may be useful to also include a *request for forgiveness*, as doing so creates a verbal component which most directly engages the victim in the interpersonal

communication process. In other words, requesting someone's forgiveness can transform the apology from a unilateral set of statements made by the violator to a bilateral communication process, asking for the victim's participation in the trust repair process (Chapman & Thomas, 2006). Research on the offering of apologies suggests that a violator is more likely to offer an apology if they believe the victim will, indeed, join in the trust repair process and offer forgiveness (Leunissen et al., 2012).

## The Impact of Context on Apology Efficacy

If we are to have a broader understanding of the potential efficacy of an apology, it is important to not only examine the relative efficacy of the components themselves, but to also examine whether their efficacy holds, or is highly sensitive to variations, across situations. For instance, recent studies have demonstrated that the efficacy of apologies can be shaped by a variety of factors including the degree of offender responsibility (Bennett & Earwaker, 1994), prior relationship between the victim and the violator (Tomlinson et al., 2004), the timing of the repair communication (Frantz & Bennisson, 2005), the existence of prior deception (Schweitzer, Hershey, & Bradlow, 2006), and the national context (Han & Cai, 2010). To this end, whereas our main question in the current article is to examine the relative efficacy of individual components and how their combinations matter, we also sought to examine how their efficacy would hold across two key contexts which have been shown to have a strong impact on apology efficacy: *competence-based* and *integrity-based* trust violations. Whereas apologies have been documented to help repair trust in cases of a competence-based trust violation, influential studies have called into question whether apologies will provide any value—and that they may even be harmful—in contexts of an integrity-based trust violation (Kim, Cooper, Dirks, & Ferrin, 2013; Kim, Dirks, Cooper, & Ferrin, 2006; Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, & Dirks, 2004). In order to gain broader insights into how and whether certain apology components matter more than others, and whether more components are better than fewer components, we conducted two experiments which examined the perceived quality of apologies across both competence- and integrity-based trust violations.

## Study 1

In our first study, we set out to determine whether some individual components were seen as more effective than others, and whether various combinations of components were judged as more effective than others. Building off of the insights from Lewicki and Polin (2012), it was anticipated that the presence of multiple components would aid in apologies being seen as effective, with apologies containing all six components being seen as the most effective. However, because the type of violation has been documented as a key determinant of apology effectiveness (Kim et al., 2004, 2006, 2013), we examined the components in the context of both competence-based and integrity-based violations, namely we set the six separate components of an apology as previously discussed into the specific context scenario used by these authors, giving subjects a brief overview of the scenario context.

Given the impact that Kim et al.'s (2004, 2006, 2013) work has had on contemporary thinking about the conditional effectiveness of apologies, we based our competence and integrity-based violations after theirs, but we systematically manipulated the number of components of apology presented in response to the scenario. That is, the perceived effectiveness of these components was explored singly, in various combinations of three, and collectively as one aggregation of six in the context of either a competence-based or an integrity-based trust violation. As expressed by the apologizer, the six single components include the following (Table 1): an expression of regret for the offense (subsequently labeled R), an explanation of why the violation occurred (subsequently labeled E), an acknowledgment of responsibility for the offense (subsequently labeled A), a declaration of repentance

Table 1  
Component Apology Definitions

Component	Label	Definition	Statement	
			Competence	Integrity
Expression of Regret	R	A statement in which the violator expresses how sorry they are for the offense	I felt terrible when the mistake became known, and I immediately expressed how sorry I was to both the client and my department manager.	
Explanation	E	A statement in which the reasons for the offense are described to the victim	I felt as though I owed my manager and the client an explanation for my actions. I made the mistake because I was unfamiliar with the correct tax codes. I thought that the error would not be caught and so I went ahead and submitted the document.	I felt as though I owed my manager and the client an explanation for my actions. I made the mistake because I was short on time and knew the deadline for submitting the tax code was quickly approaching. I thought that the error would not be caught and so I went ahead and submitted the document.
Acknowledgement of Responsibility	A	A statement which demonstrates the violator understands their part in the offense	I was wrong in what I did, and I accepted responsibility for my actions.	
Declaration of Repentance	D	A statement in which the violator expresses their promise to not repeat the offense	I regret that this occurred and have learned my lesson. I now understand the tax codes I should have applied and know where to find this sort of information should another situation such as this arise.	I regret that this occurred and have learned my lesson. I now understand that it is not acceptable to submit something I know is not completely accurate.
Offer of Repair	O	A statement extending a way to work toward trust rebuilding on the part of the violator	I attempted to repair the damage done to the client by offering to re-submit the tax return and handle all issues that would come about because of the submission of the incorrect tax return.	
Request for Forgiveness	F	A statement asking for the victim to pardon the violator's actions	I asked both my manager and client to forgive my mistake.	

(subsequently labeled D), an offer of trust repair (subsequently labeled O), and a request for forgiveness (subsequently labeled F).<sup>3</sup>

### Participants and Design

Three hundred and thirty-three participants (mean age = 33.7 years; 59% male; mean years of work experience = 14) residing in the United States recruited from Amazon's MTURK (Buhrmester, Kwang,

<sup>3</sup>A pilot study with a sample of university students (*n* = 15) revealed that all respondents accurately matched the statement used in each component with the label/definition as described Table 1.

& Gosling, 2011) completed our study in exchange for payment. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions in a 2 (Violation Type: Competence vs. Integrity)  $\times$  3 (Number of Apology Components: One vs. Three vs. Six) between-participants design.

## Procedure

After viewing consent information, participants read a trust violation scenario in which, depending on condition, either competence-based trust was broken or integrity-based trust was broken. The scenario and wording of the competence- and integrity-based trust violation manipulations were adopted from Kim et al. (2004, 2006, 2013; see Appendix). Participants were asked to imagine they were reviewing the application of a job candidate for an accounting position who had gotten in some trouble in a prior job over a client's tax return being filed incorrectly. In the *competence-based trust violation condition*, the violation was said to occur because the candidate was not sufficiently knowledgeable in all relevant tax codes. In the *integrity-based trust violation condition*, the candidate was said to have knowingly filed the tax return incorrectly.

After reading the scenario, each participant was presented with only a descriptive definition of apology components (see the Definition column of Table 1). Depending on condition, respondents evaluated *either*: each of the 1-component apology definitions presented one at a time (1-component condition); or each of the possible 3-component apology definitions presented one at a time (3-component condition); or the single 6-component apology definition (6-component condition). Order of presentation of components within each condition was randomized. For each apology, the participant was asked: "Imagine that the candidate's response to this situation was made up of [one, three, six] statements:" followed by the definition(s) of that (or those) statement(s).

Below each apology, participants were asked to respond to three questions on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Not at All*; 5 = *Very*): "How effective would this statement be at dealing with the violation?", "How credible would this statement be?", and "How adequate would this statement be?" Responses to these three questions ( $\alpha = .87$ ) were then averaged to form the dependent variable *apology efficacy*.

## Results

Initial analyses were conducted in the framework of a two-way between-participants ANOVA where apology efficacy was the dependent variable. To maintain statistical independence of observations, when comparing the efficacy of the number of components across participants in our Number of Components conditions, a single overall apology efficacy score was used for each participant assigned to the 1-component condition (i.e., the average efficacy score of the six single-component apologies they evaluated) and for participants assigned to the 3-component condition (i.e., the average efficacy score from the 20 different 3-component combinations they evaluated).

A main effect emerged for Violation Type  $F(1, 327) = 8.97, p = .003$ , indicating that participants had more positive evaluations to apologies from a competence-based violation ( $M = 3.45, SD = 0.82$ ) as compared to apologies following an integrity-based violation ( $M = 3.20, SD = 0.84$ ). A main effect also emerged for the Number of Components factor,  $F(2, 327) = 7.22, p < .001$ . No interaction emerged between the two factors,  $F(2, 327) = 0.53, p = .45$ , suggesting that reactions to violation type did not depend on the number of apology components.

Given the absence of a statistical interaction, we collapsed conditions across the Violation Type factor prior to conducting analyses to better understand how the number of components affected evaluations of apologies. Bonferroni-adjusted significance values were employed to reduce the probability of a type 2 error given that multiple comparisons were being conducted. An inspection of means (Table 2) by condition showed a benefit from having more components: 1-Component:  $M = 3.12, SD = 0.67$ ; 3-Component:  $M = 3.26, SD = 0.82$ ; 6-Component:  $M = 3.61, SD = 0.95$ . Bonferroni multiple

Table 2

Study 1: Means and Standard Deviations for Apology Effectiveness by Condition

	Competence Mean (SD), <i>n</i>	Integrity Mean (SD), <i>n</i>	Total Mean (SD), <i>n</i>
1-Component	3.22 (0.70), 57	3.02 (0.62), 53	3.12 (0.67), 110
3-Component	3.34 (0.78), 60	3.17 (0.86), 55	3.26 (0.82), 115
6-Component	3.83 (0.87), 54	3.40 (0.98), 54	3.61 (0.95), 108
Total	3.45 (0.82), 171	3.20 (0.84), 162	3.33 (0.84), 333

comparisons showed that the 6-Component apology was evaluated more favorably than either the 1-Component ( $p < .001$ ) or 3-Component apology ( $p = .004$ ). No difference emerged between the 1-Component and 3-Component apologies ( $p = .632$ ).

Up to this point, the results suggest that more components are better than fewer, with a particular clear benefit being given to a “full apology” irrespective of whether the violation type was competence-based or integrity-based in nature. We next sought to more closely examine whether certain components are deemed more beneficial than others. To do so, we first investigated responses of participants who only evaluated single apology components. Within-subjects analyses were conducted within the framework of an ANOVA, and Bonferroni adjustments were used to limit the possibility of type 1 errors.<sup>4</sup> Results of the overall ANOVA indicated the presence of difference between individual components  $F(5, 104) = 10.96, p < .001$ . An examination of the means showed clear differences with reactions to the quality of single components (Figure 1), with an Acknowledgement of Responsibility ( $M = 3.49, SD = 0.94$ ) being evaluated as the most effective component and a Request for Forgiveness evaluated as the least effective ( $M = 2.68, SD = 0.99$ ). Post hoc Bonferroni comparisons showed that the Acknowledgement of Responsibility was evaluated significantly more effective than all other components ( $p$ 's  $< .05$ ) with the exception of an Offer of Repair ( $M = 3.34, SD = 1.01$ ) from which it did not differ. Moreover, a Request for Forgiveness was evaluated as significantly less effective than each of the other five components ( $p$ 's  $< .05$ ). Accordingly, these results suggest that if someone can make only one statement in an apology, an Acknowledgement of Responsibility may serve the individual significantly better compared to all other components, while a Request for Forgiveness would be significantly less effective than all other components.

Although our earlier analyses suggest that more components are better than fewer components (i.e., 6-Component apologies were evaluated significantly more favorably than 3- or 1-Component apologies), no differences emerged when comparing single versus 3-Component apologies ( $p = .632$ ). Some of this lack of difference may have had to do with the fact that there is a considerable variance in the efficacy of apology components when aggregated into groups of three. As such, it may be premature to broadly state that there exists no difference in the efficacy of single- versus 3-Component apologies, as attention needs to be given to the specific content of various components.

Based on the data obtained from reactions to the single-component apologies, we next examined reactions to 3-Component apologies to investigate whether certain combinations of apology components might be more effective than others. A repeated-measures ANOVA showed support for a significant effect across evaluations of the 20 different combinations  $F(19, 1,957) = 8.56, p < .001$ .<sup>5</sup> Based on the

<sup>4</sup>Prior to conducting these exploratory analyses, we also explored whether these reactions to single-component apologies were moderated by violation type. Results yielded a non-significant interaction  $F(5, 104) = 1.62, p = .16$  supporting our decision to collapse data across violation type.

<sup>5</sup>No interaction emerged for the 3-component apology participants when we conducted a mixed-ANOVA  $F(19, 1,938) = 0.15, p = .74$ , supporting that reactions to 3-component apologies do not significantly differ depending on violation type.

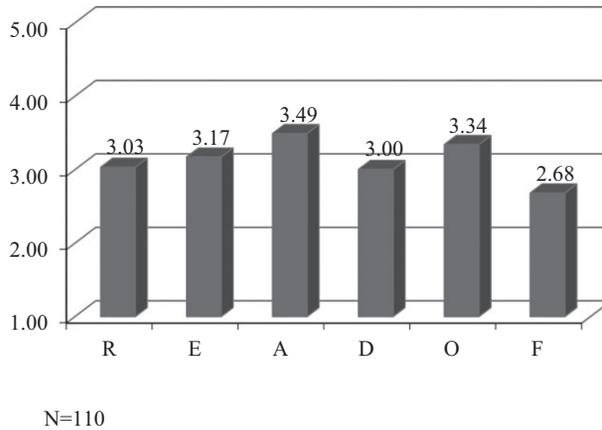


Figure 1. Study 1: Means for 1-component apologies ( $n = 110$ ).

reactions to single-component apologies, we examined whether our more highly rated individual component apologies would yield more favorable reactions when combined as compared to when less effective individual components were combined. When looking at all the means from each of the single components, the three most effective individual components were Acknowledgement of Responsibility (A;  $M = 3.49$ ), Offer of Repair (O;  $M = 3.34$ ), and Explanation (E;  $M = 3.17$ ). The three least effective individual components were Expression of Regret (R;  $M = 3.03$ ), Declaration of Repentance (D;  $M = 3.00$ ), and Request for Forgiveness (F;  $M = 2.68$ ). Based on the responses of participants who evaluated all the 3-Component apologies (Table 3), a repeated-measures analysis was conducted in which we compared the relative efficacy of apologies containing the three most effective individual components (EAO) versus the three least effective individual components (RDF). Results showed support for the expectation that the three most important individual components combined together was evaluated as a much more effective apology ( $M = 3.59$ ,  $SD = 0.93$ ) as compared to combining the three least effective individual components into an apology ( $M = 2.80$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ),  $t(108) = 6.85$ ,  $p < .001$ . It is worth noting that when evaluating the 20 different possible combinations of 3-Component apologies, the aforementioned two particular combinations also were the most favorably rated and the least favorably rated apologies. Taken together, these findings show compelling support for the expectation that not all apologies are created equal, and it is important to pay attention to the content components of an apology, rather than just adding more components, to maximize its potential effectiveness.

## Study 2

Whereas Study 1 provided insight into reactions to definitions of apology components and the perceived efficacy of those components, we sought to replicate and expand upon our findings in two ways. First, to provide a more fine-grained analysis on the number of apology components, we now examined the relative efficacy of the following: 1-, 2-, 3-, 4-, 5-, and 6-Component apologies (as compared to only 1-, 3-, and 6-Component apologies presented in Study 1). Second, whereas Study 1 participants were told to evaluate an apology which contained labels of the individual components and their definitions, to provide more realism we sought to capture the perceived efficacy of these components when they were presented as actual verbalizations from parties within the Kim et al. studies (2004, 2006, 2013), rather than as definitions (see the Statement columns of Table 1). That is, we created statements which contextualized the definitions of each of the six components and had participants evaluate these response(s). We did not label or define components for participants.

Table 3  
 Study 1: Means and Standard Deviations for 3-Component Apology Combinations (n = 115)

Apology Combination	Mean (SD)
REA	3.38 (0.98)
RED	3.29 (0.99)
REO	3.47 (1.07)
REF	3.03 (0.99)
RAD	3.21 (1.03)
RAO	3.38 (1.00)
RAF	3.10 (1.02)
RDO	3.25 (1.14)
RDF	2.80 (1.13)
ROF	3.01 (1.08)
EAD	3.42 (0.97)
EAO	3.59 (0.93)
EAF	3.14 (1.03)
EDO	3.39 (1.04)
EDF	3.17 (1.03)
EOF	3.25 (1.05)
ADO	3.46 (1.19)
ADF	3.08 (1.02)
AOF	3.34 (1.09)
DOF	3.06 (1.14)

**Participants and Design**

Four hundred and twenty-two undergraduate business students (mean age = 21.8; 53% male) at a large Midwestern university participated in the study in exchange for extra credit. Participants were randomly assigned to a condition in a 2 (Violation Type: Competence vs. Integrity) × 6 (Number of Apology Components: One vs. Two vs. Three vs. Four vs. Five vs. Six) between-participants design.

**Procedure**

The procedure for Study 2 was very similar to that of Study 1. After reading either the competence-based or integrity-based trust violation scenario based on the Kim et al. (2004, 2006, 2013) used in Study 1, depending on condition, participants evaluated *either*: each of the six 1-Component apology statements; or each of the 15 possible 2-Component apology statements; or each of the 20 possible 3-Component apology statements; or each of the 15 possible 4-Component apology statements; or each of the six possible 5-Component apology statements; or the single 6-Component apology statement (see Table 1 for the wording of each individual component statement).

As shown in Table 1, the statements only differed between competence- and integrity-based violations for the Explanation component and Declaration of Repentance component. This difference is due to the apology statement needing to coincide with the violation scenario. Order of presentation of components in the 1-, 2-, 3-, 4-, and 5-Component conditions was randomized.

After reading each apology, participants completed the same 3-item scale of apology efficacy used in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .82$ ).

Table 4

Study 2: Means and Standard Deviations of Apology Effectiveness by Condition

	Competence Mean (SD), <i>n</i>	Integrity Mean (SD), <i>n</i>	Overall Mean (SD), <i>n</i>
1-Component	3.12 (0.54), 36	3.03 (0.65), 35	3.08 (0.55), 71
2-Component	3.23 (0.57), 41	2.97 (0.50), 35	3.11 (0.55), 76
3-Component	3.15 (0.41), 37	3.08 (0.50), 33	3.12 (0.45), 70
4-Component	3.34 (0.58), 31	3.24 (0.50), 34	3.29 (0.54), 65
5-Component	3.38 (0.68), 37	3.05 (0.59), 34	3.22 (0.66), 71
6-Component	3.39 (0.64), 35	3.34 (0.94), 34	3.37 (0.80), 69
Overall	3.26 (0.58), 217	3.12 (0.63), 205	3.19 (0.61), 422

## Results

A two-way between-subjects ANOVA was conducted where apology efficacy was the dependent variable. As in Study 1, to maintain statistical independence of observations, prior to conducting analyses to compare participants in the different Number of Components conditions, for conditions where participants evaluated more than 1 apology, we created a single efficacy score for each participant in that condition. Replicating the findings of Study 1, two significant main effects emerged (Table 4). Participants evaluated apologies following a competence-based violation ( $M = 3.26$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ) more favorably than apologies following an integrity-based violation ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ),  $F(1, 410) = 6.48$ ,  $p = .011$ . Moreover, the number of apology components also affected the evaluations of apology effectiveness,  $F(5, 410) = 2.64$ ,  $p = .023$ . As in Study 1, no statistical interaction emerged,  $F(1, 410) = 0.683$ ,  $p = .637$ , suggesting that the efficacy of the number of components was not moderated by the type of violation.

We next collapsed data across violation type and more closely examined how number of components shaped apology evaluations. More components added together in an apology tended to yield a more positively evaluated apology than fewer components: 1-Component ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ); 2-Component ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ); 3-Component ( $M = 3.12$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ ); 4-Component ( $M = 3.29$ ,  $SD = 0.54$ ); 5-Component ( $M = 3.22$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ); and 6-Component ( $M = 3.37$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ). Following the pattern of data observed in Study 1, planned comparison  $t$ -tests were conducted within the framework of a one-way ANOVA. Results confirmed that a 6-Component apology was evaluated as more favorable than either a 1-Component,  $t(416) = 2.85$ ,  $p = .005$  or 3-Component apology  $t(416) = 2.47$ ,  $p = .014$ . Moreover, as in Study 1, no difference emerged when comparing the efficacy of a single- and 3-component apology,  $t(416) = 0.37$ ,  $p = .71$ .

We next sought to examine whether individual components differed in their efficacy similar to what we found in Study 1. To do so, we conducted a within-subjects analysis within the framework of an ANOVA on evaluations of apologies from participants in our single-component condition. A significant ANOVA supported the expectation that our individual components would be differentially evaluated in their perceived efficacy  $F(5, 350) = 29.50$ ,  $p < .001$ . An examination of the means showed that reactions differed between individual components: Offer of Repair ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 0.79$ ), Declaration of Repentance ( $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ), Acknowledgement of Responsibility ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 0.92$ ), Expression of Regret ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = 0.96$ ), Explanation ( $M = 2.74$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ), and Request for Forgiveness ( $M = 2.32$ ,  $SD = 0.90$ ). Although the individual component data did not exactly mirror the order of perceived efficacy for components from Study 1, there was still some consistency in order, providing confirmatory support to the exploratory findings from Study 1. Bonferroni-corrected comparisons showed Request for Forgiveness was evaluated significantly worse than all other single-component apologies ( $p$ 's  $< .001$ ) and was marginally worse than an Explanation ( $p = .057$ ). Also similar to Study 1, Bonferroni-corrected comparisons revealed that an Acknowledgement of Responsibility was evaluated more

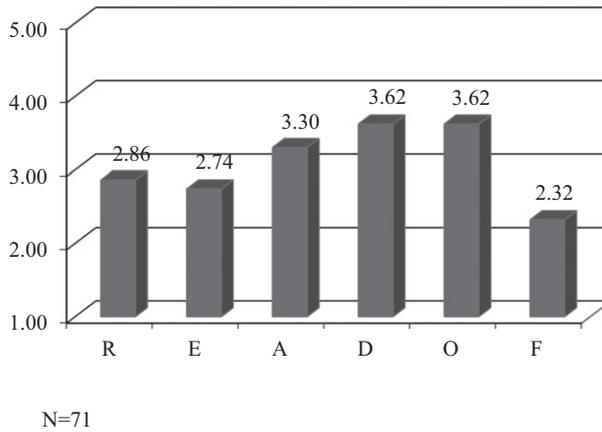


Figure 2. Study 2: Means for 1-component apologies (n = 71).

favorably than an Expression of Regret ( $p = .016$ ), Explanation ( $p = .006$ ), and a Request for Forgiveness ( $p < .001$ ). Acknowledgement of Responsibility did not significantly differ from an Offer of Repair ( $p = .37$ ) or Declaration of Repentance ( $p = .37$ ; Figure 2).

Following up on our exploratory findings from Study 1, we next examined 3-Component apology combinations (Table 5), namely we sought to provide a confirmatory test that the 3-Component apology of EAO would be more effective than the 3-Component combination of RDF. To do so, we conducted a paired-samples planned  $t$ -test where we compared apologies containing EAO components against those containing RDF components. Consistent with the exploratory analyses from Study 1, results confirmed that the EAO ( $M = 3.22, SD = 0.71$ ) was evaluated more favorably than an apology containing the RDF

Table 5  
Study 2: Means and Standard Deviations for 3-Component Apology Combinations (n = 70)

Apology Combination	Mean (SD)
REA	2.96 (0.76)
RED	3.13 (0.94)
REO	3.33 (0.80)
REF	2.73 (0.73)
RAD	3.00 (0.84)
RAO	3.32 (0.85)
RAF	2.66 (0.97)
RDO	3.58 (0.79)
RDF	2.95 (0.84)
ROF	3.06 (0.94)
EAD	3.10 (0.87)
EAO	3.22 (0.71)
EAF	2.74 (0.76)
EDO	3.40 (0.77)
EDF	3.03 (0.77)
EOF	3.06 (0.78)
ADO	3.50 (0.95)
ADF	3.02 (0.98)
AOF	3.06 (0.85)
DOF	3.47 (0.81)

( $M = 2.95$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ),  $t(69) = 2.58$ ,  $p = .012$ . Taken together, these results provide further evidence supporting the argument that in the absence of providing a “full apology” (all six components), there is clear benefit in giving attention to which components one provides in their apology.

## Discussion

Across two studies, we examined whether certain components of an apology, taken individually and collectively, were perceived as more critical for the apology to be perceived as effective. Based on the previous research, it was also important to examine whether these components might be differentially perceived if the apology were being offered for the violation of competence-based versus integrity-based trustworthiness. Across both experiments, strong and consistent results were obtained. First, the greater the number of designated components in an apology, the more effective it was perceived to be. In the first study, this was clear when comparing the definitions within the 6-component apology against the definitions within the components taken one or three at a time; in the second study, this was true when comparing greater number of components to a lesser number of components. Second, the more positive reaction to the greater number of components occurred equally for both competence- and integrity-based offenses, although in general apologies for competence-based offenses were perceived as significantly more effective than apologies for integrity-based offenses. This is in line with Kim et al. (2004), who have documented that apologies are more effective in competence-based offenses than they are in integrity-based offenses. Third, it appears that certain components are more critical than others, but it does depend on how many components are aggregated together and the context in which they were presented.

When presented one component at a time, we found that an Acknowledgement of Responsibility was viewed as most important, Offer of Repair second, and Explanation third; specifically, the components of Offer of Repair and Declaration of Repentance were tied for most efficacious, and Acknowledgment of Responsibility was the third most important. Thus, while there was some general consistency in the order of importance of the components, the context of the Kim et al. (2004, 2006, 2013) scenario may have downplayed the importance of an Explanation and increased the importance of a Declaration of Repentance. However, across both of our studies, the data indicated that Request for Forgiveness was least critical. When components are evaluated three at a time, the importance of certain component aggregates emerges more consistently. Both studies revealed that when an apology contains an Explanation for the offense, an Acknowledgment of Responsibility, and an Offer of Repair (EAO), the apology is perceived as significantly more effective than when it only contains an Expression of Regret, a Declaration of Repentance, and a Request for Forgiveness (RDF).

Taken together, the results illustrate that while more components are better than fewer, some components are clearly more important than others. In addition, the context of the apology matters, but only to some degree. While context appeared to affect the perceived importance of some components (such as Acknowledgement of Responsibility and Explanation), it did not affect other components (such as Request for Forgiveness, which was seen as least important in both studies).

## Contributions to Theory Development

The first and most important question is, how do we explain these results? The results seem to indicate that following some form of violation (of trust, of expectations, or of treatment), victims are highly sensitive since the violation most likely threatens their confidence in their own judgment and sense of personal efficacy. Uncertainty and tension are created by this disconfirmation, and the victim seeks information from the violator that works to restore their own sense of judgment and efficacy. As noted by Kim et al. (2004, 2006), this impact is not as great when a victim has misjudged the actor's competence as it is when victim has misjudged the actor's integrity. In the first case, the actor could have made

a mistake which may or may not have been under his or her control, and an explanation about that mistake may be adequate for us to restore our confidence in the other. In the second case, the actor may have misread the other's fundamental character and honesty, and simple explanations or other verbal statements will not easily restore those character judgments.

It is not just the nature of the violation that affects an apology's effectiveness but also the fact that the victim looks for certain specific assurances in the statements that will serve to reduce the distress and uncertainty created by the violation. While there are variations across the two studies, our results show that while more components are better in general, the presence of three particular components included in a single apology is particularly valuable (not necessarily in any specific order):

An Explanation for why the violation may have occurred, which is an effort by the violator to affect the victim's sense-making about the violation in a way that might make the violation seem more understandable, less intentional, or less dissonance-creating to the victim.

An Offer of Repair, which may restore the tangible or economic damage that occurred as a result of the violation.

An Acknowledgement of Responsibility, in which the violator assumes responsibility for having created the violation, hence limiting the number of alternative explanations for why the violation occurred.

Note that some of these findings support results from past research, while others challenge those results. Speaking to the first of these components, the importance of explanations or "accounts" has been significantly documented in research on procedural justice and trust repair. As noted earlier, Shapiro (1991) showed the importance of an explanation in repairing trust following deception, and subsequent work by Ohbuchi, Kameda, and Agarie (1989) explored how the characteristics of both the explanations and the explainer had a significant impact on whether the victim accepted the explanation.

Speaking to the second of these components, the Offer of Repair offers a promise that whatever tangible or economic damage may have been done can be repaired. As noted in the introduction, there has been a significant debate in the research literature about whether apologies can be effective at all—that is, whether they are no more than "cheap talk"—under conditions when real, tangible, economic damage has been done. Our results seem to indicate that even a verbal commitment to restore damage done by the violation is seen as an important apology component by the victim but clearly would have to be followed by *actual* repair—restoration to assure full credibility (see Kramer & Lewicki, 2010, for a fuller treatment of these literatures).

Finally, speaking to the third of these components, our results indicated that an Acknowledgment of Responsibility was deemed to be quite important. This was true even in Study 2, where the phrasing was drawn from scenarios used by Kim et al. (2004, 2006, 2013). A victim wants to know that the violator acknowledges ownership for creating the violation, even when taking such ownership may undermine the victim's perception of the violator's integrity. In Kim et al. (2004), the authors argue from their results that *denial* of responsibility was a more effective strategy after an integrity-based violation. In contrast, our results tend to show that Acknowledgment of Responsibility was deemed to be important, ranked first when the definitions alone were rated, third when the actual statements were rated in context, and in the critical "top three" in both studies. Since the Kim et al. finding (and a subsequent study by Ferrin, Kim, Cooper, & Dirks, 2007) stresses the importance of "denial" or "silence" as prescriptive advice for dealing with integrity-based trust violations, our findings raise questions about the ubiquity of this approach, and further investigation is required as to the conditions under which taking responsibility versus denying responsibility for an offense can be concluded as sound prescriptive advice. Although we did not include a denial condition in our studies, future work may examine whether a complete apology (i.e., containing all six components) may surpass the efficacy of a denial.

Although our study design allowed us to examine reactions to apologies, and whether they differed, across two main types of trust-violation contexts (i.e., competence- and integrity-based violations),

future work would benefit from examining whether the number of components (and specific components) depends on other potential moderators. For instance, the severity of the violation, the timing of the apology, and the cultural context in which the violation occurred are important aspects which deserve to be examined in future studies. One contextual feature which we anticipate to be particularly influential is the nature of the prior relationship between the parties. In our two studies, we placed participants into the accounting scenario between a job candidate and potential employer. From the subject's point of view (the Accounting Manager), in our scenario drawn from Kim et al.'s (2004, 2006, 2013) influential work, he or she has not directly experienced the violation (and hence been in the victim's shoes) nor heard accounts of it from anyone directly involved in the violation. Moreover, the relationship between the Accounting Manager, the HR Director and the candidate is a transactional one regarding an arms-length hiring decision and not one in which the violator and victim have any kind of established, long-standing history or meaningful, emotion-based relationship. Hence, any evaluation of these apology components may significantly differ in perceived efficacy and impact if one is evaluating them directly from the victim's shoes, and if the violation has occurred in the context of a strong preestablished relationship such as a business partnership, personal friendship, or marriage. Again, future research will need to investigate the resilience of our findings when these important context elements are evaluated in subsequent studies (c.f. Chapman & Thomas, 2006).

In addition to examining the role of contextual moderators, future work may also seek to adopt a person  $\times$  situation framework, as optimally effective apologies not only depend on what component(s) are said, but also depend on individual differences associated with the recipient. For instance, Fehr and Gelfand (2010) argued that an apology is most effective when its contents match with the victim's specific type of self-construal—*independent, relational, or collective*. These authors investigated apologies that took one of three different forms: offers of compensation, expressions of empathy, or acknowledgment of norms or rules that had been violated (note that by this categorization, offers of compensation are similar to our Offers of Repair, expressions of empathy are similar to our Expression of Regret, and acknowledgement of rule violation are similar to our Acknowledgment of Responsibility). They found that the relationship between each of the three apology types and the willingness of the victim to forgive the perpetrator depended on one's self-construal. Thus, their work suggests that the efficacy of which components, and how many components, are stated may depend on the psychological orientation and/or values of the receiver.

## Limitations

As with any exploratory work, there are several limitations that can be noted in our selected methodology and findings. First, the components were presented to research subjects via words on computer terminals. As a result, the words themselves were devoid of emotional tone and intensity. Whether a violator simply says "I'm sorry" in an emotionless tone or expresses it with great intensity and sincerity could clearly make a difference in its perceived impact and importance. Accordingly, we recognize that the results we report here are limited to the more "sterile" verbalizations of words-only presentation, and they might be altered if subjects heard these phrases being expressed through either audio or both audio and video presentation.

Second, our findings demonstrate that an apology which contains more (as opposed to less) components is perceived as more effective. However, across the two studies, it can be argued that apologies containing more components also had more words than apologies containing fewer components. Accordingly, the difference in perceived efficacy when comparing our 1-Component versus 6-Component apology may be accounted for not because of the number of components, but in part by the mere number of words offered after a violation. Although our data cannot rule this out when comparing 1-Component with 6-Component apologies, it is important to note that there were no reliable differences found when comparing the efficacy of apologies containing 1-Component with 3-Components. As such,

if the length alone of the apology drove reactions to what constitutes a positive reaction, one would have anticipated that our 3-Component apologies (which tended to be three times longer in length than 1-component apologies) should have been perceived as more efficacious.

Whereas we based our six key components of effective apologies from Lewicki and Polin's (2012) analysis of the literature and high-profile public apologies made by businesses and celebrities, there may exist other components warranting investigation. For instance, Schumann (2014) has recently argued there are eight components of an apology. In her study, she asked participants to think about someone whom they had offended (generally within a *personal* relationship), and then to write what they would say to that person to apologize. Raters coded the text of these apologies and purported *eight* distinct categories: the six reported by Lewicki and Polin (2012) and investigated in the current article, plus two others in the form of an Admission of Wrongdoing and an Acknowledgement of Harm to the Other. Given that Schumann's work was focused on when people provide more or less components in their apologies, it did not shed light on the perceived efficacy of apologies by recipients or whether her additional two components may provide an added benefit in the perceived efficacy of an apology. Accordingly, although our studies provide an important step in examining apology efficacy as a function of how many, and which, components are used, future work may benefit from seeking to identify and validate the existence of additional apology components, and if their addition (and combination) to the six primary components examined in the current article further shape apology efficacy.

It is also worth noting that the current studies were conducted with participants in the United States, and the results—conclusions may differ across cultural contexts. As illustrated by research on the role of facework in communicating an apology (Guan et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2012; Park & Guan, 2006), there appears to be cultural differences in the needs of those whose trust has been violated. Accordingly, it remains an empirical question whether certain apology components are more versus less important when considering the differing needs and social norms of a culture. In addition to examining the components of effective apologies cross-culturally, a fuller understanding of what constitutes an effective apology would benefit from incorporating broader insights from the facework literature.

Finally, the studies reported in this article only asked research subjects to rate the effectiveness of particular components, but did not explicitly request “effective for what” or attempt to further explore whether the repair effort would have direct or indirect effects on the quality of the subsequent relationship (e.g., trust level) between violator and victim. As literature reviews by Dirks, Lewicki, and Zaheer (2009) have noted, numerous studies of trust and relationship repair have failed to secure adequate pre- and postmeasures of trust, measure the impact of the violation on trust, and measure the impact of the repair effort (e.g., apology) on trust “recovery”. Accordingly, to provide a fuller picture of how apology components affect trust repair, future work may seek to examine how apology components, and their combinations, necessarily affect behaviors associated with repaired trust.

## Summary

The work presented here has attempted to address questions regarding which verbal components, and how many of those components, constitute an effective apology. While background theory is multidisciplinary but unsystematic on this particular aspect of “accounts” in addressing violations of trust and fairness, these initial studies find support for more apology components (as opposed to fewer) being seen as more effective in responding to a violation. This research also begins to differentiate among the efficacy of individual components, suggesting that there are certain statements that are more critical to include in an apology than others and that perceived efficacy can depend on the type of trustworthiness which has been violated. Much work remains to be done to be in this area of the impact of verbal accounts, and we hope this has served to spark and facilitate discussion on the issue. Given the frequency with which apologies are a central component of repairing breakdowns in negotiation and resolving conflicts, a fuller understanding of the structure of an effective apology will enhance these repair and resolution efforts.

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## Appendix A

Imagine that you are working as the manager of the accounting department at Accounting Associates. The Director of HR has recently been interviewing potential candidates to fill a senior-level tax accountant who will be working in your department. The Director has given you detailed notes of the interviews with the potential candidates, and you are now reviewing these notes.

During an interview with one potential candidate, the Director explained that he had contacted one of the candidate's references from a previous employer. This reference explained to the Director that the candidate was involved in an accounting-related violation. The candidate has filed an incorrect tax return that understated a client's capital gains income.

[Competence-Based Trust Violation Scenario] This accounting violation occurred because the candidate was not sufficiently knowledgeable in all relevant tax codes.

OR

[Integrity-Based Trust Violation Scenario] The candidate was said to have knowingly filed this tax return incorrectly.

The reference did tell the Director that this information was hearsay, and thus, the Director may want to confront the candidate about this incident if it was going to be relevant to what they would be doing in this new position at Accounting Associates.

You see in the Director's interview notes that he did indeed confront the candidate about this violation. The candidate admitted to the wrongdoing and made a statement to the Director.

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