

# Sorry, Not Sorry: The Effect of Social Power on Transgressors' Apology and Nonapology

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The current research investigated the role of transgressors' social power on their motivation to apologize or not. Based on power approach theory (Keltner et al., 2003), we predicted that high-power transgressors would be less motivated to apologize and more motivated to engage in nonapology (e.g., shifting blame, minimizing the transgression) than their low-power counterparts. We further predicted that the relation between social power and apology and nonapology would be explained by transgressors' self-other focus. Four multimethod (nonexperimental, experimental), multisample (community, undergraduate) studies supported our predictions. Results are discussed within the context of the extant social motivation literature and applied implications.

## Public Significance Statement

The current research explores how individuals' social power influences their willingness to engage in apologies and nonapologies (e.g., making excuses). We demonstrate high-power transgressors are more willing to engage in nonapology and less willing to engage in apology. Conversely, those with low power are more willing to engage in apology and less willing to engage in nonapology. However, high-power transgressors who take an other-focus become the most apologetic. Applied implications of this research include interventions to affect social power, self-other focus, and conciliatory behavior.

*Keywords:* social power, apology, nonapology, transgressor, self-other focus

Maintaining stable and satisfying relationships across a variety of domains is a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). However, individuals sometimes commit transgressions that hurt others and threaten these valuable social bonds. Apologizing is one interpersonal mechanism that has the potential to repair damaged relationships (McCullough, 2008). Apologies involve acknowledging the transgression, taking responsibility, expressing remorse, saying sorry, providing remediation, and assuring victims that the offense will not occur again (Lazare, 2004; Tavuchis, 1991). Despite their benefit in the successful negotiation of a damaged relationship, some transgressors struggle with the process of apologizing because doing so can subject them to intrapersonal threats such as self-image (Schumann, 2018) and interpersonal threats such as grudge (van Monsjou, 2018) and revenge (Struthers et al., 2019). Research on apologies has found that transgressors find apologies difficult, and their initial reaction is often to make excuses and deflect blame onto others to protect themselves (Guilfoyle et al., 2019; Schumann,


2014, 2018; Schumann & Dweck, 2014; Shoikhedbrod et al., 2019). We refer to these defensive reactions as nonapologies. Because research links social power to negative interpersonal events in which apologies and nonapologies would be appropriate (Galinsky et al., 2015; Hirsh et al., 2011; Keltner et al., 2003; Kipnis, 1972), in the following research we tested the role that social power plays in affecting transgressors' motivation to engage in apology or nonapology.

## Social Power, Apologies, and Nonapologies

Social power is the ability to modify others' outcomes by providing or withholding valuable resources (Keltner et al., 2003) and is a basic feature of interpersonal relationships (Fiske, 1993). Having social power or feeling powerful influences individuals' affect, cognition, and behavior. For example, powerful individuals are more likely to experience positive affect (Berdahl & Martorana, 2006), think abstractly (Smith et al., 2016), and behave selfishly (DeCelles et al., 2012; Handgraaf et al., 2008; Kipnis, 1972).

According to power approach theory (Keltner et al., 2003), having power activates the Behavioral Approach System (BAS; Gray, 1981, 1982), a system that motivates goal-directed behavior. Cognitively, this leads individuals with power to focus their attention on their own rewards and goals. Activation of the BAS, coupled with a self-focus, often motivates powerful individuals to act in

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disinhibited ways to achieve their goals. Conversely, powerless individuals are constrained by their reliance on others for access to valued resources to achieve their goals. This activates the Behavioral Inhibition System (BIS), a system attuned to threats, conflict, uncertainty, and punishment. Given that those who are powerless are dependent on powerful others, activation of the BIS leads people to be cognitively other-focused, such as on those who control their outcomes (Fiske, 1993).

Power approach theory and the development of simple power manipulations have led to exponential growth in research on the outcomes of social power across many applied domains including personnel selection (Galinsky et al., 2015; Lammers et al., 2013), coworker interactions (Struthers et al., 2019), debating (Magee et al., 2007), and social interactions (Karremans & Smith, 2010; Struthers et al., 2019). Although there is research examining how powerful victims react after experiencing a transgression (Aquino et al., 2006; Karremans & Smith, 2010; Struthers et al., 2019; Zheng et al., 2016), we know much less about how powerful transgressors react toward those they have hurt. Research does show transgressors' power influences how effective their apologies are (Waldfisch et al., 2013), as does narcissism, trait self-control, status, and gender, four individual differences related to both social power and transgressors' motivation to apologize (e.g., Gonzalez et al., 1990; Guilfoyle et al., 2019; Shoikhedbrod et al., 2019). However, we do not yet understand the direct association between social power on transgressors' motivation to apologize or not.

Power approach theory can explain why power influences transgressors' desire to apologize or not; namely because power (or lack thereof) activates individuals' approach/inhibition system(s) and cognitively focuses attention on the self or others. When compared to powerless individuals, those who are powerful show decreased perspective-taking and empathy (Galinsky et al., 2006; Gordon & Chen, 2013), strong determinants of the motivation to apologize (Howell et al., 2012). We argue that feeling powerful decreases transgressors' other-focus on their victims' needs and how to satisfy them, and increases transgressors' self-focused desire to avoid threats associated with apologizing. Relatedly, research demonstrates the effects of power can be moderated by variables that influence self-other focus. When high-powered individuals are other focused, the effect of power on behavior is reversed, such that powerful individuals are more prosocial than those who feel powerless (Chen et al., 2001; Gordon & Chen, 2013).

But what about the role of social power on influencing transgressors' motivation to apologize or not? Fundamentally, an apology occurs when transgressors accept responsibility and express remorse (De Cremer, 2010), feel guilt and regret (Darby & Schlenker, 1982), show forbearance (Schumann, 2014), attempt reparations (Schlenker & Darby, 1981), and seek forgiveness (Bassett et al., 2006; Riek, 2010; Sandage et al., 2000). Apologies are an effective strategy for repairing relationship harm (Lazare, 2004), restoring trust (Kim et al., 2009), facilitating forgiveness (Davis & Gold, 2011; Fehr et al., 2010), and reconciling (Lazare, 2004; Tavuchis, 1991). However, the social motivation literature concerning willingness to apologize suggests transgressors are often initially motivated to lay blame elsewhere instead of accepting responsibility and offering an apology (Kim et al., 2009; Lazare, 2004; Schumann, 2014; Schumann & Dweck, 2014; Schumann, 2018; Tavuchis, 1991; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013). As such, nonapologies

are an important component to consider in understanding the social motivation of transgressors following transgressions.

Nonapologies can include justifying bad behavior, minimizing or denying the transgression, excusing it, blaming the victim, and lashing out (Exline et al., 2007; Itoi et al., 1996; Schumann, 2014; Schumann & Dweck, 2014; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013). In their model of trust repair, Kim et al. (2009) argue that once a transgression has occurred, there are competing motives for both transgressors and victims. Transgressors are motivated to be perceived as trustworthy as it protects them by maintaining a positive image as a valuable relationship partner. Victims are motivated to be distrustful as it protects them from future transgressions by making them vigilant against harmful relationship partners. To bridge this divide, transgressors are often first motivated to demonstrate their innocence over guilt or show their transgressive behavior was the result of something situational (i.e., I did a bad thing) rather than dispositional (i.e., I'm a bad person). In other words, transgressors are often initially motivated to engage in nonapologies to protect themselves by appearing innocent or laying blame elsewhere. If impossible or unsuccessful, transgressors are then motivated to show their wrongdoing can be remedied and they can be trusted again. In other words, they are motivated to offer an apology.

The above model of trust repair (Kim et al., 2009) is consistent with other researches demonstrating that transgressors find apologies difficult, initially responding with nonapologies instead (Guilfoyle et al., 2019; Schumann, 2014; Schumann & Dweck, 2014). For instance, in a study that explored autobiographical narratives of interpersonal conflict, only 30.3% of transgressors reported explicitly apologizing and 14.8% of victims reported receiving an explicit apology from the transgressor (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002). Other research finds refusing to apologize can lead to enhanced psychological benefits such as self-esteem and feelings of increased power and control (Okimoto et al., 2013).

In sum, a review of the psychological literature on apologies suggests that transgressors can respond in an automatic, disinhibited way in the form of nonapologies, or in a controlled, inhibited way in the form of apologizing. Power approach theory (Keltner et al., 2003) provides a useful theoretical lens to understand how, why, and when transgressors' power may affect their motivation to engage in nonapologetic defensive, or apologetic responding after committing a transgression. We are not aware of any research that has examined the direct effects of social power on transgressors' motivation to apologize or not. We also do not know whether apologies and nonapologies work as complimentary interpersonal mechanisms. Moreover, previous research has not tested potential theoretical explanations such as transgressors' self-other focus. The current research addresses these gaps in knowledge and helps scholars better understand how and why social power affects transgressors' motivation to apologize or not.

## Current Research

The purpose of this research was to test the relationship between transgressors' social power and their willingness to engage in apology or nonapology. Using power approach theory, we hypothesized that powerful transgressors will be less motivated to apologize and more likely to engage in nonapology than their low-power counterparts. We further hypothesized this would be explained by self-other focus. Specifically, powerful transgressors would be more

self-focused on their own needs and goals to avoid responsibility and lay blame elsewhere, rather than being other-focused on victims' needs and goals to receive an apology. Study 1 was a nonexperimental study to establish the basic association between trait social power with apology and nonapology at trait and state levels. The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate and extend the direct association to determine if the relations between social power and apology and nonapology are causal. Study 3 was a conceptual replication of Study 1 and was designed to test the theoretical mechanism, self-other focus, by measuring the theoretical explanation. In Study 4, we manipulated self-other focus to test whether it causally explains why social power affects transgressors' motivation to apologize or not. Data for the following studies can be found on the Open Science Framework at <https://osf.io/bj2ka/>.

## Study 1

Study 1 was designed to explore the relation between transgressors' social power and both apology and nonapology using a nonexperimental design. A community sample of participants were recruited and asked to complete a questionnaire assessing a variety of psychological constructs, including measures of social power (trait), apology (trait), and nonapology (trait). Next, we tested the extent to which transgressors' trait social power predicted their motivation to engage in state apology and nonapology in response to a retrospectively recalled transgression they committed.

## Method

### Design and Participants

This was a nonexperimental study to test the basic relations between the key variables. A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit a sample of 222 adults from the broader community ( $M_{\text{age}} = 40.25$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 14.16$ ). The participants were part of a larger study assessing demographic and individual differences related to interpersonal transgressions. The sample had approximately equal numbers of women (54%) and men (46%) and was culturally diverse: White (42%), East Asian (14%), Middle Eastern (14%), South Asian (13%), Black (11%), Latin American (4%), Indigenous (1%), and did not know (1%). The sample size was determined by the number of undergraduate students enrolled in a second-year undergraduate psychology course who were asked to distribute a URL to one adult woman and one adult man. Further instructions were that the recruited participants had to be unrelated from one another (e.g., no spouses, related family members).

## Materials

### Measures and Stimuli

**Social Power.** Participants' social power was measured using two items: "I feel I have power to affect events in other people's lives" and "I feel I have control over events in other people's lives" (Struthers et al., 2019) measured from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

**Trait Nonapology.** Participants' tendency to avoid or resist apologizing was measured using the Proclivity to Apologize Measure (PAM; Howell et al., 2011). The PAM uses eight items with examples including "I tend to downplay my wrongdoings to the

other person, rather than apologize" and "My continued anger often gets in the way of me apologizing." All items on the PAM reflect a dispositional tendency to avoid apologizing after transgressions, measured from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

**Trait Apology.** Participants' tendency to apologize was measured using a single item, "I have a tendency to apologize." This item used the same seven-point scale used to measure trait nonapology, from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

**Transgression Recall.** An episodic recall technique was used to test the relation between trait social power and participants' motivation to engage in state apology and nonapology. Participants were given the following instructions:

Please take a moment to think about a time in the last 6 months in which a negative event occurred between you and another person. Think about when you committed a transgression by hurting the other person (physically, psychologically, emotionally, etc.) and the conflict was left unresolved. If you cannot recall such an event in the past 6 months, then please think about the most recent negative event you can. This other person could be a friend, family member, romantic partner, coworker, acquaintance, stranger, or someone else. The negative event could have been due to something you did or failed to do but it must have had a moderate to a severe impact on the other person. The negative event may relate to, but is not limited to, social issues (e.g., immigration and refugees), work issues (e.g., team project), or interpersonal issues (e.g., argument with significant other).

After writing about the transgression, participants were asked about how severe and negative the event was as well as how responsible they were. All variables were measured on the same seven-point scale, from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

**State Nonapology.** This variable was measured using 12 items. Two items evaluated each of the following: justifying actions "to what extent did you justify your actions?" and "to what extent did you believe you were justified in your behavior?," blaming the victim "to what extent did you blame the other person for your actions?" and "to what extent did you think that the person you wronged "had it coming" to them?," diminishing responsibility "to what extent did you try to downplay your wrongdoing?" and "to what extent did you try to minimize your role in the wrongdoing?," transgression denial "to what extent did you deny you had done anything wrong?" and "to what extent did you deny your behavior was a transgression?," lashing out "to what extent did you follow up with further transgressions or misdeeds?" and "to what extent did you lash out when confronted with your wrongdoing?" and excuses "to what extent did you excuse your wrongdoing?" and "to what extent do you think your behavior is excusable?." Each item was assessed from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

**State Apology.** Apology was measured with 11 items, including "To what extent did you acknowledge your offence to the person you transgressed against?," "To what extent did you express remorse to the person? (i.e., how sorry you were)," "To what extent did you apologize to the other person?," "To what extent did you admit to the other person your part in the offence?," "To what extent did you tell the other person that you were concerned because of your offence?," "To what extent did you tell the other person that you were sorry?," "To what extent did you try make things better with the other person?," "To what extent did you express guilt for what you did to the other person?," "To what extent did you express regret for what you did to the other person?," "To what extent did

you voluntarily apologize for what happened to the other person?," and "Were you repentant?." All items were measured from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

## Procedure

Participants were recruited by asking students in an undergraduate psychology course to distribute the study to one woman and one man (unrelated from one another) by providing the study URL. Participants were entered into a draw for a \$100 gift card to a retailer of their choice for their participation. When participants visited the URL, they were told to reduce or eliminate distractions (e.g., turn off TV, put phone away, etc.) and were presented with an informed consent form. After consenting, participants completed demographic information and prescreen measures. For the current research, prescreen measures included trait social power, trait nonapology, and trait apology. Following this, participants were given the transgression stimuli and completed self-report items assessing their willingness to engage in nonapology and apology.

## Results and Discussion

All descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations for variables of interest in this study are presented in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. Based on positive relations between items, composite variables were created by averaging the seven-point scales for each variable, including trait social power, trait nonapology, trait apology, state nonapology, and state apology. Overall, the variable means were around the midpoint of the seven-point scale, with the trait and state nonapology means falling below the midpoint and the trait and state apology means falling above the midpoint. Next, we tested if transgressors' trait social power predicted both trait nonapology and trait apology. Participants who saw themselves as having more social power reported that they also tended to be more nonapologetic,  $t(208) = 2.84$ ,  $p = .014$ ,  $b = .18$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ , and less apologetic,  $t(208) = -2.49$ ,  $p = .014$ ,  $b = -.18$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ .

Participants who could not recall a time they committed a transgression ( $n = 41$ ) were excluded from subsequent analyses which focused on state nonapology and apology associated with participants' recalled transgressions. Participants reported transgressions that were rated as moderately severe ( $M = 4.23$ ;  $SD = 1.59$ ) and negative ( $M = 4.67$ ;  $SD = 1.52$ ) and that they felt responsible for ( $M = 4.76$ ;  $SD = 1.82$ ). To explore the relationship with trait social power and both nonapology and apology, social power was regressed separately on each. As predicted, a significant relation was found between trait social power and state nonapology,  $t(179) = 2.28$ ,  $p = .024$ ,  $b = 0.13$ ,  $SE = 0.06$ , but not state apology,  $t(179) = .18$ ,  $p = .86$ ,  $b = .01$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ .

**Table 1**

*Study 1: Descriptive Statistics*

| Variable         | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | $\alpha(r)$ |
|------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| Social power     | 3.20     | 1.49      | (.87)       |
| Trait Nonapology | 3.08     | 1.40      | .92         |
| Trait apology    | 4.71     | 1.61      | .88         |
| Nonapology       | 3.31     | 1.18      | .88         |
| Apology          | 4.45     | 1.66      | .97         |

**Table 2**

*Study 1: Zero-Order Correlation Among Key Variables*

| Variable | SP     | TN      | TA     | NA   |
|----------|--------|---------|--------|------|
| SP       | —      |         |        |      |
| TN       | .19**  | —       |        |      |
| TA       | -.18** | -.54*** | —      |      |
| NA       | .16*   | .21**   | -.21** | —    |
| A        | .05    | -.14*   | .23*** | -.11 |

*Note.* SP = social power; TN= trait nonapology; TA = trait apology; NA = nonapology; A = apology.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

In sum, Study 1 established the basic relation between transgressors' trait social power and their tendency to engage in nonapology and apology. It also demonstrated that having heightened social power predicted being more nonapologetic for a specific real-world transgression. Although the hypothesized relation between social power and nonapology was supported, having more social power did not predict being less apologetic. This could be due to several factors. Given that participants were asked to recall an unresolved transgression that they committed, the findings concerning the state measures suggest that nonapology might be the first response that transgressors have. Another factor might have been that the broad range of transgressions participants recalled was too diverse to detect a potentially weaker relation between trait social power and state apology.

## Study 2

To address these issues, Study 2 sought to systematically test the reliability of the findings by orchestrating the same transgression for all participants in a laboratory experiment. Using an experimental design, we were also able to test the causal relation between transgressors' social power and their nonapologetic and apologetic responses.

## Method

### Design and Participants

This study was preregistered (<https://osf.io/wqnuq/>). The purpose of Study 2 was to test the causal relationship between transgressors' social power and their motivation to engage in nonapology and apology. The design was a between-group experiment in which power was experimentally manipulated and participants were randomly assigned to either low- or high-power conditions. Based on our experience and typical effect sizes reported in the social psychological literature (Richard et al., 2003), a minimal meaningful effect size of  $d = 0.43$  was selected. An a priori power analysis with 80% power indicated 172 participants as the minimal sample size needed to detect an effect of  $d = 0.43$ . A total of 171 undergraduate students were recruited from the Department's undergraduate student research pool. Participants received course credit in exchange for their participation. In line with the preregistered data analytic plan, participants were excluded based on: (a) not completing the experimental manipulation correctly ( $n = 17$ ), (b) random responders as determined by the conscientious responders scale ( $n = 5$ ; Marjanovic et al., 2014), (c) participants who responded in

the negative when asked “did you complete this survey on a desktop or laptop computer?” and “should we include your data in our analyses?” ( $n = 18$ ), and (d) participants whose average apology ( $n = 3$ ) scores exceed 2.5 standard deviations from the group mean in their respective condition. The final sample was  $N = 128$  ( $M_{\text{age}} = 20.39$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 5.13$ ). A sensitivity power analysis indicated a sample this size would provide 80% power to detect an effect of  $d = 0.50$ . Most of the sample were women (77%) and culturally diverse: White (36%), South Asian (17%), Black (13%), Middle Eastern (12%), East Asian (8%), South-East Asian (6%), Latin American (5%), South American (2%), Mixed (2%), and Other (2%).

## Materials

### Measures and Stimuli

**Power Manipulation.** Participants were randomly assigned to the low- and high-power conditions. Power was manipulated using an episodic recall power paradigm from Galinsky et al. (2003). Participants assigned to the low-power condition were asked:

Please recall a particular incident in which someone else had power over you. By power, we mean a situation in which someone had control over your ability to get something you wanted or was in a position to evaluate you. Please describe this situation in which you did not have power—what happened, how you felt, etc. (Galinsky et al., 2003).

Participants in the high-power condition were asked to:

Please recall a particular incident in which you had power over another individual or individuals. By power, we mean a situation in which you controlled the ability of another person or persons to get something they wanted, or were in a position, to evaluate those individuals. Please describe this situation in which you had power—what happened, how you felt, etc. (Galinsky et al., 2003).

This power manipulation paradigm is used extensively in psychological research on power with a variety of adaptations showing it to be effective in temporarily activating a psychological sense of power (Galinsky et al., 2015).

**Transgression.** Participants were instructed to imagine a scenario in which they were the perpetrator of a transgression, with methods adopted from Woodyatt and Wenzel (2013). Participants were told they would engage in a thought experiment and should imagine themselves in the scenario. They were told to “read this passage like a book—try and imagine your surroundings—what you hear, smell, feel, think, and how you would behave.” They were then presented with the following vignette:

Imagine that you are in a long-term, committed relationship with your partner. One night you attend a party together. You each individually know a number of people there, so while at first you speak to people as a couple, you eventually socialize separately. As is often the case with such parties, you end up spending the majority of the night apart. Both of you are drinking. You spot your partner quite often throughout the night, sitting closely and talking at length to another person. You continue drinking and start to get drunk. Later in the night an individual who you find extremely attractive, but who dates someone you work with, approaches you and you begin to laugh together and eventually start to dance. You both start kissing. A few hours later the party starts to lose momentum; your partner finds you sitting on a sofa closely with

this other person and tells you they want to go home. You stand up and leave with your partner (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013).

**Transgression Severity.** One item assessed how severe participants thought the transgression was: “how severe do you think this event is?” on a seven-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

**Trait Social Power.** Participants’ social power was measured using two items, similar to Study 1: “I feel I have power to manage events in other people’s lives” and “I feel I have control to manage events in other people’s lives” (Struthers et al., 2019). Items were measured from 1 (*very little*) to 7 (*a great deal*).

**Trait Apology.** Participants’ dispositional tendency to apologize was measured using the eight-item Proclivity to Apologize Measure (PAM; Howell et al., 2011) from Study 1. To use the PAM as a measure of trait apology, all items were reversed scored. All items were measured from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

**Random Responders.** The Conscientious Responders Scale (CRS; Marjanovic et al., 2014) was used to detect random responders. The CRS is a five-item scale asking participants to select a specific response option, such as “please answer this question by choosing option number one, *strongly disagree*.” Participants who incorrectly responded to more than three items were identified as random responders and excluded from analyses.

**Nonapology.** Participants’ nonapology was measured with 12 items to capture six nonapologetic responses. These included: justifying the transgression “To what extent do you believe your actions were justified?” and “To what extent would you feel justified in how you behaved?,” victim blaming “To what extent do you blame the other person for your actions?” and “To what extent would you think that your partner “had it coming” to them?,” diminishing responsibility “To what extent would you think your hurtful actions aren’t a big deal?” and “To what extent would you downplay the event or your behavior?,” denial “To what extent would you like to deny you did anything wrong?” and “To what extent do you see your actions as hurtful?” (reverse scored), lash out “To what extent would you engage in similar behavior again?” and “To what extent would you lash out if your partner confronted you?,” and making excuses “To what extent would you excuse what happened?” and “To what extent would you think what happened is excusable?.” Items were measured from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

**Apology.** Participants’ apology was measured using 10 items to assess various apology components, including: acknowledge wrongdoing “to what extent would you acknowledge what you did?,” express remorse “to what extent would you feel remorse for what happened?,” apologize “to what extent would you feel apologetic?,” admit responsibility “to what extent would you admit your role in what happened?,” say “sorry” “to what extent would you tell partner you are sorry?,” remedy “to what extent would you try to make things better with your partner?,” express guilt “to what extent would you express guilt to your partner?,” express regret “to what extent would you express regret to your partner for your actions?,” forbearance “to what extent would you assure your partner you would not do this again?,” and motivation to reconcile “how motivated would you be to make things better with your partner?.” Items were measured from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

## Procedure

After signing up via the University participant pool, participants were given a URL to complete the study materials online. After accessing the website, participants completed demographic information (e.g., age, gender, etc.) and prescreen items including trait social power and trait apology. Following the prescreen, participants were randomly assigned to the low- and high-power conditions and completed the power paradigm manipulation. Following the experimental manipulation, participants read the transgression stimuli and completed the nonapology and apology measures. Finally, participants were thanked and debriefed.

## Results and Discussion

### Preliminary Analyses

Based on positive correlations and acceptable levels of internal consistency among respective variables, items used to create composite variables were averaged. Descriptive statistics and correlations among key variables are found in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

Next, to determine the level of severity of the transgression and if random assignment had the desired effect, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted on our power manipulation and transgression severity, trait social power, and trait apology. No significant difference was found on transgression severity,  $M = 6.46$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ,  $F(1, 126) = 1.53$ ,  $p = .219$ , trait social power,  $F(1, 126) = 0.20$ ,  $p = .655$ , or trait apology,  $F(1, 126) = 0.26$ ,  $p = .609$ , suggesting that the transgression was moderately severe and that random assignment was successful. To determine if the experimental manipulation of power was effective, coders blind to experimental conditions rated the written responses of participants from 1 (*low-power*) to 7 (*high-power*). Coders agreed ( $r = .79$ ,  $p < .001$ ) those in the high-power condition reported greater power ( $M = 4.89$ ,  $SD = 1.12$ ) than those in the low-power condition ( $M = 1.69$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ),  $F(1, 126) = 357.85$ ,  $p < .001$ .

### Main Analyses

Next, whether transgressors' social power causally impacted their motivation to apologize or not was tested. As predicted, those in the high power condition were more motivated to engage in a nonapology,  $F(1, 126) = 4.64$ ,  $p = .033$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .04$  (Figure 1), and less motivated to apologize,  $F(1, 126) = 7.36$ ,  $p < .008$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .06$  (Figure 2). Overall, the effect sizes were medium, and both sets of means were in the expected direction: low-power,  $M_s = 1.92$  ( $SD = 0.79$ ) and 6.51 ( $SD = 0.55$ ), respectively, and high-power:  $M_s = 2.27$  ( $SD = 0.99$ ) and 6.16 ( $SD = 0.87$ ), respectively.

In sum, Study 2 was an experimental test of the causal relationship between transgressors' power and their motivation to apologize

**Table 3**

*Study 2: Descriptive Statistics*

| Variable      | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | $\alpha(r)$ |
|---------------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| Social power  | 3.03     | 1.41      | (.75)       |
| Trait apology | 2.94     | 1.15      | .89         |
| Nonapology    | 2.11     | 0.91      | .86         |
| Apology       | 6.33     | 0.76      | .89         |

**Table 4**

*Study 2: Zero-Order Correlation Among Key Variables*

| Variable | SP     | TA      | NA      |
|----------|--------|---------|---------|
| SP       | —      |         |         |
| TA       | -.22** | —       |         |
| NA       | .07    | -.34*** | —       |
| A        | -.05   | .36***  | -.70*** |

*Note.* SP = social power; TA = trait apology; NA = nonapology; A = Apology. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

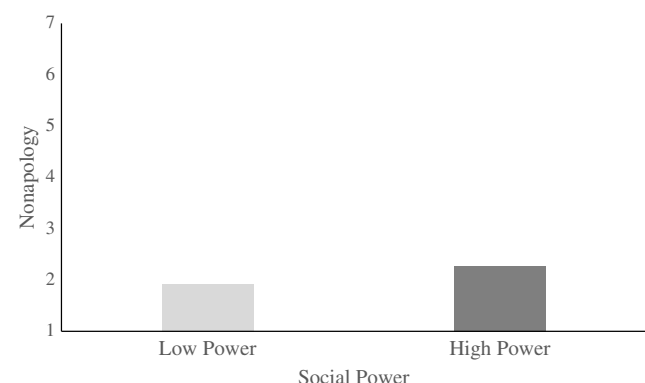
or respond with nonapology. Participants were randomly assigned to high- and low-power conditions (Galinsky et al., 2003), imagined themselves committing a transgression against a partner (Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013), and their apology and nonapology were measured. Results confirmed hypotheses that high-power transgressors were less motivated to apologize and more likely to engage in nonapology compared to transgressors who felt powerless. The results of Studies 1 and 2 established the association between transgressors' power and their willingness to apologize or not. Specifically, Study 1 established a relationship between transgressors' power and their motivation to apologize or not was confirmed as directional in Study 2. In the next study, we wanted to test why this may be the case. Power approach theory provides an explanation for why power influences goal pursuit. According to the theory, social power activates a focus on one's self because power provides the resources and freedom to use those resources to achieve one's goals. Therefore, we empirically test the role of self-other focus as a theoretically relevant mediating variable in the relationship between social power and both nonapology and apology in Study 3.

### Study 3

The primary aim of Study 3 was to test the theoretical mechanism self-other focus to determine if it mediated the relation between transgressors' social power and their motivation to engage in nonapology and apology. We used a community sample of nonstudent adults and a nonexperimental design in which we measured participants' trait social power, had them recall an unresolved transgression they committed against another individual, and

**Figure 1**

*Study 2: Effect of Power on Nonapology*



assessed their self-other focus and their motivation to engage in nonapology and apology. We predicted that transgressors' self-focus would explain the relation with nonapology, whereas other-focus would explain the relation with apology.

## Method

### Design and Participants

In Study 3, we used a nonexperimental design to assess the direct and indirect relations between transgressors' social power, self-other focus, and motivation to apologize or not. Like Study 1, a snowball sampling technique was used to recruit a sample of 198 adults from the broader community. The original sample was reduced by 19 participants who presented a distracted response pattern according to their scores on the Conscientious Response Scale (Marjanovic et al., 2014). Using the same data analytic approach from Study 2, no outliers were noted. The final sample included 179 participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 34.52$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.43$ ). The participants were part of a larger study assessing demographic and individual differences related to interpersonal transgressions. The sample was made up of equal numbers of women (51%) and men (48%, with 1% prefer not to specify) and was culturally diverse: White (27%), South Asian (17%), Black (13%), Middle Eastern (11%), South-East Asian (10%), South Asian (13%), Mixed (4%), Other (3%), Indigenous (1%), and South American (1%). As in Study 1, our sample size was determined by our access to a course of undergraduate students who were asked to distribute a URL with the study material to one nonstudent woman and one, unrelated, nonstudent male.

## Materials

### Measures and Stimuli

**Trait Social Power.** Two items were used to assess participants' social power: "I feel I have power to affect events in other people's lives" and "I feel I have control over events in other people's lives" (Struthers et al., 2019), measured from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

**Random Responders.** The Conscientious Responders Scale (CRS; Marjanovic et al., 2014) used in Study 2 was used to detect random responders. Participants who incorrectly responded to more

than three items were identified as random responders and excluded from analyses.

**Transgression Recall.** An episodic recall technique as in Study 1 was used to activate recall of an actual transgression. Participants were given the following instructions:

Please take a moment to think about a time in the last 6 months in which a negative event occurred between you and another person. Think about when you committed a transgression by hurting the other person (physically, psychologically, emotionally, etc.) and the conflict was left unresolved. If you cannot recall such an event in the past 6 months, then please think about the most recent negative event you can. This other person could be a friend, family member, romantic partner, coworker, acquaintance, stranger, or someone else. The negative event could have been due to something you did or failed to do but it must have had a moderate to a severe impact on the other person. The negative event may relate to, but is not limited to, social issues (e.g., immigration and refugees), work issues (e.g., team project), or interpersonal issues (e.g., argument with significant other). Please describe what happened on the next page.

**Transgression Characteristics.** Three items were used to assess the negativity, severity, and impact of the transgression. The variables were measured on a seven-point scale, 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

**Self-Focus.** Participants responded to 13 items that assessed their self-focused cognitions and emotions. Example items included "It's not necessary to control myself to prevent the conflict from escalating" and "It's okay to show my anger even if there is a risk of rising hostility." All variables were measured on the same seven-point scale, 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

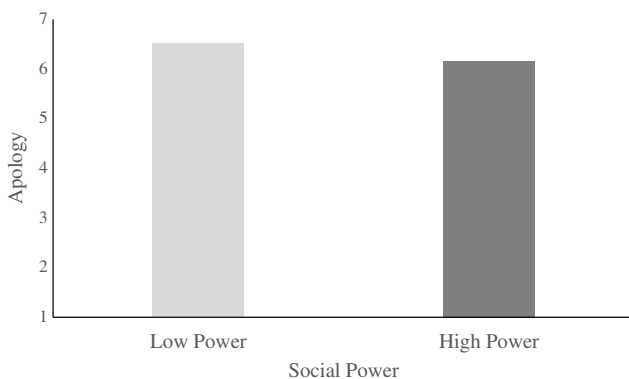
**Other-Focus.** Nine items were used to assess participants' other-focused cognitions and emotions. Example items included "cooperation with this person still must be maintained during this conflict" and "it's important to resolve interpersonal conflicts with this person immediately." All variables were measured on a seven-point scale, 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

**Nonapology.** Nonapology was measured using 10 items to capture various nonapology components. Example items include "To what extent do you believe your actions were justified?" and "to what extent do you blame the other person for your actions?." All items were assessed using a seven-point scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

**Apology.** Apology was measured with 11 items to capture various apology components. Example items include "To what extent would you like to tell the other person you are sorry?" and "I want to assure the other person I won't do this again." All items were measured from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

**Figure 2**

Study 2: Effect of Power on Apology



## Procedure

Participants were entered into a draw for a \$100 gift card to a retailer of their choice. When participants accessed the URL, they were told to reduce or eliminate distractions (e.g., put phone away), read, and respond to the informed consent form. After consenting, participants completed demographic information and prescreen measures including social power. Following the prescreen, participants were given the transgression stimuli and completed self-report items for self-other focus and their motivation to engage in nonapology or apologize. Participants were debriefed in writing at the end of the study.

## Results and Discussion

### Preliminary Analyses

The descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations for the key variables of interest are presented in Tables 5 and 6, respectively. Composite variables were created by averaging the seven-point scales for each variable: trait social power, self-focus, other-focus, nonapology, and apology. The zero-order relations between the variables were as expected and consistent with our theorizing.

### Primary Analyses

We used Hayes' (2012) PROCESS and bootstrapping procedure to test two theoretical models. The first model tested the simultaneous parallel mediational role of transgressors' self-focus and other-focus for the association between social power and nonapology (Model 4, Figure 3). The second model tested the simultaneous parallel mediational role of transgressors' self-focus and other-focus for the relation between social power and apology (Model 4, see Figure 4). The first model testing nonapologetic outcomes showed participants who reported greater trait social power were more nonapologetic,  $\beta = .13$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t = -2.11$ ,  $p = .036$ , which was mediated by transgressors' self-focus, *indirect effect* = .08,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI [.04, .14], but not other-focus. The second model testing apology outcomes showed having high-power predicted being less apologetic,  $\beta = -.08$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $t = -1.00$ ,  $p = .32$ , with the relation mediated by both transgressors' self- and other-focus, respectively, *indirect effect* =  $-.03$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI  $[-.095, -.002]$  and *indirect effect* =  $-.09$ ,  $SE = .05$ , 95% CI  $[-.17, -.02]$ . Notably, the indirect effect for other-focus was stronger than self-focus supporting the hypothesis for the apology outcome.

In sum, support was found for the mediational role of self- and other-focus for both nonapology and apology outcomes. When considering nonapologies, only self-focus mediated the relation between transgressors' social power and their motivation to engage in non-apology. In comparison, when considering apologies, both self- and other-focus mediated the relation between social power and apology, however, other-focus accounted for more of the variability. In Study 4, we set out to systematically replicate these findings by experimentally manipulating the theoretical mechanism in addition to social power.

### Study 4

The primary aim of Study 4 was to systematically test the mediational role of participants' self-other focus in explaining the causal relation between transgressors' social power and their motivation to apologize or not. Our primary goal was to establish the causal chain by manipulating both social power and self-other focus.

**Table 5**

*Study 3: Descriptive Statistics*

| Variable     | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | $\alpha(r)$ |
|--------------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| Social power | 4.06     | 1.40      | (.79)       |
| Self-focus   | 3.57     | 1.03      | .81         |
| Other-focus  | 4.73     | 1.23      | .86         |
| Nonapology   | 3.46     | 1.13      | .81         |
| Apology      | 4.01     | 1.47      | .92         |

**Table 6**

*Study 3: Zero-Order Correlation Among Key Variables*

| Variable | SP     | SF      | OF      | NA      |
|----------|--------|---------|---------|---------|
| SP       | —      |         |         |         |
| SF       | .23*** | —       |         |         |
| OF       | -.16*  | -.33*** | —       |         |
| NA       | .15*   | .46***  | -.29*** | —       |
| A        | -.08   | -.41*** | .59***  | -.32*** |

Note. SP = social power; SF = self-focus; OF = other-focus; NA = nonapology; A = apology.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Based on our theorizing, we predicted that transgressors with high-power coupled with an other-focus would be the most apologetic. Previous research has found the effects of power are moderated by variables that influence self-other focus, such that high-powered individuals who are other-focused become *more* prosocial compared to those who are low-powered (Chen et al., 2001; Gordon & Chen, 2013). Similarly, research exploring transgressions has found that high-powered victims in romantic relationships are more likely to forgive their transgressor, but only when they are other-focused on their partner (i.e., high in commitment, attentive to their needs; Karremans & Smith, 2010).

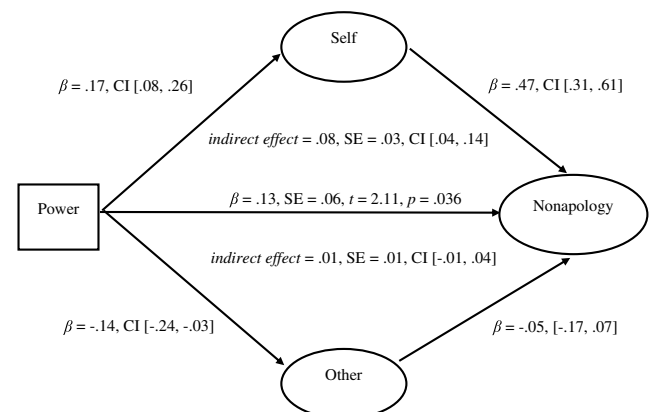
## Method

### Design and Participants

We used Spencer et al. (2005) causal chaining approach. We manipulated transgressors' social power (low, high) and focus (self, other) in a  $2 \times 2$  between-group factorial design and tested the interaction effect on motivation to apologize or not. Based on Studies 1–3, we anticipated a medium effect size of social power on apology. An a priori power analysis with 80% power indicated 128 participants as the minimal sample size to detect a medium effect. We oversampled due to anticipated exclusions, and initially tested 203 participants. However, we excluded 66 from our primary analysis because some could not recall a time they had committed an interpersonal transgression, did not want us to use their data when

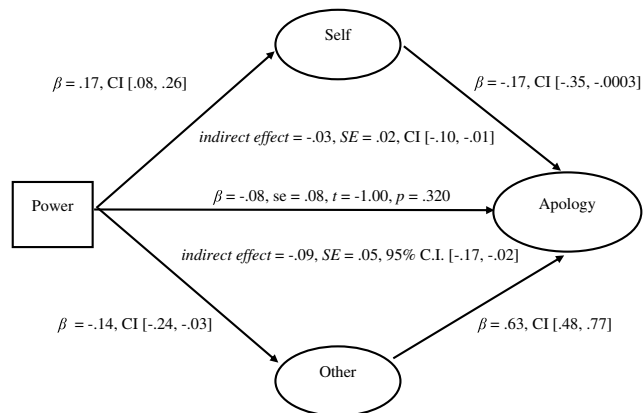
**Figure 3**

*Study 3: PROCESS Parallel Mediation Model of Power, Self-Other Focus, and Nonapology*





**Figure 4**  
Study 3: PROCESS Parallel Mediation Model of Power, Self-Other Focus, and Apology



asked to, or were outliers (see data analytic approach from Study 2). The final sample size after exclusions was 137 ( $M_{\text{age}} = 19.55$ ,  $SD_{\text{age}} = 3.50$ ). A sensitivity power analysis indicated that our final sample size provided 83% power to detect a medium effect. The sample was majority women (61%) and culturally diverse: South Asian (33%), European (18%), Middle Eastern (15%), African (8%), Other (8%), Bicultural (7%), East Asian (7%), South-East Asian (6%), and Latin American (4%).

## Materials

### Measures and Stimuli

**Trait Social Power.** Participants' social power was measured using 10 items, such as: "I feel I have power to manage events in other people's lives" and "I feel I have control to manage events in other people's lives." Items were measured from 1 (*very little*) to 7 (*a great deal*).

**Trait Apology.** Trait apology was measured using the same Proclivity to Apologize Measure (PAM; Howell et al., 2011) from Studies 1–3. All items were measured from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and reversed scored such that high scores reflect high trait apology.

**Transgression and Social Power and Focus Manipulation.** Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental social power (low, high) by focus (self, other) conditions. An episodic transgression recall and power paradigm from Galinsky et al. (2003) was adapted to manipulate power. Participants assigned to the low-power condition were asked:

Please take a moment to think about a time in the last 6 months in which an unresolved negative event occurred between you and another person who had power over you, in which you committed a transgression by hurting the other person (psychologically, emotionally, physically, etc.). If you cannot recall such an event in the past 6 months, then please think about the most recent unresolved negative event you can. This other person could be a friend, family member, romantic partner, coworker, acquaintance, stranger, or someone else, but you must feel as though the person had power over you. The negative event could have been due to something you did or failed to do but it must have had a moderate to severe impact on the other person.

Participants in the high-power condition were asked to:

Please take a moment to think about a time in the last 6 months in which an unresolved negative event occurred between you and another person who you had power over, in which you committed a transgression by hurting the other person (psychologically, emotionally, physically, etc.). If you cannot recall such an event in the past 6 months, then please think about the most recent unresolved negative event you can. This other person could be a friend, family member, romantic partner, coworker, acquaintance, stranger, or someone else, but you must feel as though you had power over this other person. The negative event could have been due to something you did or failed to do but it must have had a moderate to severe impact on the other person.

Following each of these transgression and power manipulations, participants described what happened, what they did, and how it made them feel from the perspective of the person they hurt (other focus) or from their own perspective (self-focus).

**Transgression Severity and Manipulation Checks.** Two items with a seven-point scale, 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*), were used to assess the negativity and severity of the transgression. Two items were used to assess the manipulation of power, "how much power did you have over this person?" and "how much power did this person have over you?" 1 (*very little*) to 7 (*a lot*). Finally, two items were used to determine the effectiveness of the focus manipulation, "I wrote about this incident from my own perspective" and "I wrote about this incident from the other person's perspective," 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

**Nonapology.** Participants' nonapology was measured using four items similar to those used in Studies 1–3. Two items assessed participants' motivation to justify their actions, for example, "To what extent do you believe your actions were justified?," and two items assessed participants' motivation to blame their victim, for example, "Do you blame the other person for what happened?" Items were measured from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

**Apology.** Participants' apology was measured using five items similar to those used in Studies 1–3, for example, "To what extent would you acknowledge what you did," from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much so*).

## Procedure

Participants received course credit in exchange for their participation. After signing up via the University participant pool, participants were given a URL to complete the study materials online. Participants first completed demographic information and prescreen items including trait social power and trait apology. Following the prescreen, participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions, recalled, and wrote about an unresolved transgression that they committed. Following the experimental manipulation, participants completed the manipulation check items and the nonapology and apology measures. Finally, participants were thanked and debriefed.

## Results and Discussion

### Preliminary Analyses

All descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations for variables of interest in this study are presented in Tables 7 and 8, respectively. Based on positive relations between items, composite variables were created by averaging the seven-point scales for each variable, trait

**Table 7**  
Study 4: Descriptive Statistics

| Variable      | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> | $\alpha(r)$ |
|---------------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| Social power  | 4.58     | 0.68      | .80         |
| Trait apology | 3.19     | 1.09      | .83         |
| Apology       | 4.71     | 1.49      | .83         |
| Blame         | 3.61     | 1.89      | (.64)       |
| Justify       | 4.81     | 1.34      | (.20)       |

social power ( $M = 4.58$ ,  $SD = 0.68$ ,  $\alpha = .80$ ), trait nonapology ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ,  $\alpha = .83$ ), state nonapology ( $M = 4.20$ ,  $SD = 1.35$ ,  $\alpha = .66$ ), and state apology ( $M = 4.91$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ,  $\alpha = .83$ ). Given that the nonapology items (i.e., 2 blame items, 2 justification items) had less than acceptable internal consistency, we decided to examine them separately as blame ( $M = 3.61$ ,  $SD = 1.89$ ,  $r = .64$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and justification ( $M = 4.81$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ,  $r = .20$ ,  $p < .02$ ). Overall, the variable means were around the midpoint of the seven-point scale.

Next, we tested the success of our manipulations. A significant effect for our power manipulation was found on how much power they held over this person,  $F(1, 136) = 20.75$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .14$  (low-power  $M = 3.24$ ,  $SD = 1.79$ , high-power  $M = 4.66$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ) and how much power this person held over them,  $F(1, 136) = 35.84$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .21$  (low-power  $M = 5.32$ ,  $SD = 1.55$ , high-power  $M = 3.57$ ,  $SD = 1.92$ ). We also found a main effect for focus on the two focus manipulation check items, "I wrote about the incident from my own perspective,"  $F(1, 136) = 35.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .21$  (self-focus  $M = 6.25$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ , other-focus  $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 1.83$ ) and "I wrote about the incident from the other person's perspective,"  $F(1, 136) = 22.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .15$  (self-focus  $M = 2.49$ ,  $SD = 1.62$ , other-focus  $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 1.90$ ). All manipulation check means for both manipulations were in the expected direction. Also as expected, no significant interaction effect was found for the transgression negativity item, trait social power, and trait apology, respectively,  $F(1, 136) = 2.79$ ,  $p = .098$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ ,  $F(1, 136) = 2.28$ ,  $p = .133$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ ,  $F(1, 136) = 2.77$ ,  $p = .098$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ , suggesting that all participants perceived the transgression as negative,  $M = 4.80$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ , and our random assignment procedure was effective in controlling for variations in trait social power and trait apology.

### Main Analysis

We used Spencer et al. (2005) causal chaining to test participants' focus as the theoretical mechanism. As expected, a significant power

**Table 8**  
Study 4: Zero-Order Correlation Among Key Variables

| Variable      | Social power | Trait apology | Apology | Blame  |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|---------|--------|
| Social power  | —            |               |         |        |
| Trait apology | -.03         | —             |         |        |
| Apology       | .13          | -.25*         | —       |        |
| Blame         | .06          | .02           | -.40*** | —      |
| Justify       | .04          | .11           | -.24**  | .36*** |

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

by focus interaction was found for justification but not for blame, respectively,  $F(1, 136) = 4.10$ ,  $p = .045$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .03$ ,  $F(1, 136) = 0.08$ ,  $p = .77$ ,  $\eta_p^2 < .01$ . Also as predicted, a significant interaction was found for apology,  $F(1, 136) = 4.47$ ,  $p = .036$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .033$ . To probe the significant interactions, we tested the simple effects of power at each level of focus and the simple effects of focus at each level of power (see Figures 5 and 6). We predicted that high-power coupled with a self-focus would cause greater nonapology/justification compared to low power. We also predicted that high-power coupled with an other-focus would cause greater apology.

**Simple Effects of Focus When Power Was High.** Transgressors who were higher in social power were less nonapologetic (i.e., likely to justify) and more apologetic when they were other-focused ( $M = 4.72$ , 5.40, respectively) compared to when they were self-focused ( $M = 5.03$ , 4.48, respectively), however, the simple effect was nonsignificant for nonapology,  $t(66) = -0.95$ ,  $p = .35$ , and significant for apology,  $t(66) = 2.58$ ,  $p = .01$ .

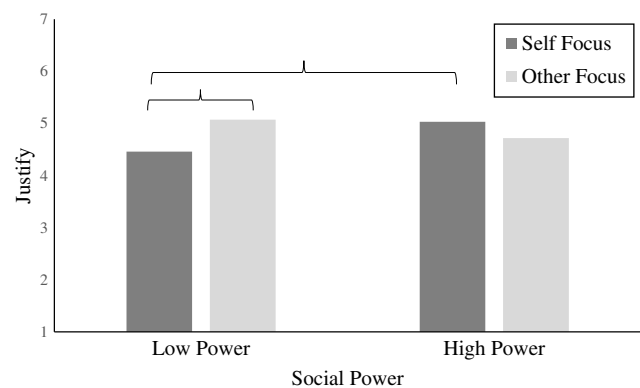
**Simple Effects of Focus When Power Was Low.** Unexpectedly, when power was low, an other-focus led to greater justification than a self-focus ( $M_s = 5.07$ , 4.46). However the difference was marginally nonsignificant,  $t(69) = 1.93$ ,  $p = .055$ .

**Simple Effects of Power When Focused on Self.** Transgressors who took a self-focus were more likely to justify their actions (i.e., nonapologetic) when they had high power ( $M = 5.03$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) compared to low power ( $M = 4.46$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ). Although in the predicted direction, the effect for power was marginally nonsignificant,  $t(64) = 1.75$ ,  $p = .085$ . As well, transgressors who took a self-focus were similarly apologetic when they had high power ( $M = 4.48$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ) compared to low power ( $M = 4.49$ ,  $SD = 1.61$ ),  $t(64) = -0.03$ ,  $p = .97$ .

### Simple Effects of Power When Focused on Other

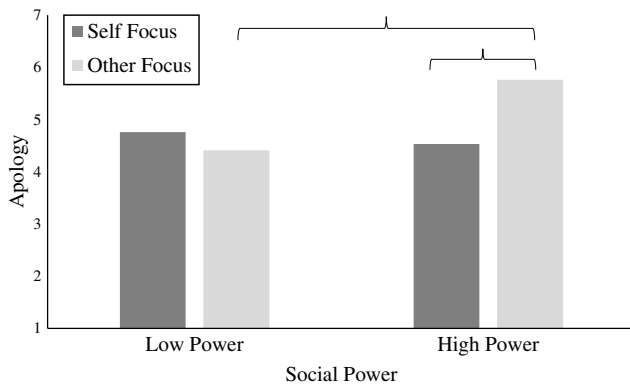
As predicted, transgressors who took an other-focus, were less nonapologetic (i.e., likely to justify) when they had high power ( $M = 4.72$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ) compared to low power ( $M = 5.07$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ), however, the simple effect was nonsignificant,  $t(71) = -1.11$ ,  $p = .27$ . In contrast, transgressors who took an other-focus were more apologetic when they had high power

**Figure 5**  
Effect of Power and Focus on Justify



Note. Brackets indicate statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ).

**Figure 6**  
Effect of Power and Focus on Apology



Note. Brackets indicate statistically significant difference ( $p < .05$ ).

( $M = 5.40$ ,  $SD = 1.15$ ) compared to when they had low power ( $M = 4.36$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ),  $t(71) = 3.04$ ,  $p = .003$ .

In sum, significant interactions were found for nonapology and apology. Although the means were largely in the predicted direction, not all simple effects were statistically significant. Notably, when the outcome was nonapology, the simple effect for power was significant with a self-focus (high-power participants were more nonapologetic than low-power participants) and the simple effect for focus was significant when the participants had low-power (though self-focused participants were less likely to justify their actions than other focused participants). In comparison, when the outcome was apology, the simple effect for power was significant with an other-focus (high-power participants were more apologetic than low-power participants) and the simple effect for focus was significant with high-power (self-focused participant were less apologetic than other focused participants). This supports our hypotheses that having social power with self-focus is related to nonapology whereas other-focus is related to apology. Of note, individuals with high social power who take an other-focus are more apologetic than those with low social power. This is consistent with previous research demonstrating that power acts as the gas pedal (i.e., approach motivation) whereas focus acts like the steering wheel, directing individuals to their (behavioral) destinations (Galinsky et al., 2014). This is theoretically consistent with the idea that power increases behavioral approach toward desired end states, if powerful individuals' goals are other-focused and prosocial, they have free rein to act in accordance with those goals.

### General Discussion

Many have experienced or witnessed powerful people acting in unscrupulous ways, uninhibited in the pursuit of their goals. Such uninhibited behavior often results in interpersonal transgressions that harm others in the development and maintenance of relationships. In the aftermath of such transgressions, apologies are instrumental in the repair of damaged relationships. Yet, powerful transgressors often resist or refuse to apologize and engage in nonapologetic responding instead. The current program of research tested whether transgressors' social power affects their motivation to apologize or not, and the extent to which their focus on themselves

versus their victims explain these associations. Based on power approach theory, we predicted that social power would relate to apology and nonapology. We predicted these relations would be causal and that the relation between social power and nonapology would be explained by transgressors' focus on themselves (i.e., self-focus) whereas the relation between social power and apology would be explained by transgressors' focus on their victim (i.e., other-focus). Four multimethod (nonexperimental, experimental) studies generally supported our predictions.

Study 1 used a nonexperimental design to demonstrate the basic relation between transgressors' trait social power and their trait nonapology and apology. Overall, transgressors who felt powerful over others tended to be more nonapologetic and less apologetic. However, when these participants recalled an actual unresolved transgression that they committed, a predicted significant positive relation was only found for their state nonapology.

In Study 2, we used an experimental design to directly test the causal relation between transgressors' social power and their willingness to engage in nonapology or apology. In this preregistered experiment, we manipulated social power and randomly assigned participants to the different conditions. Additionally, this study standardized the transgression by having participants imagine the same transgression scenario, thereby reducing variability in transgression recall and between-subject error. Results of this study established the causal role of transgressors' social power on their motivation to engage in nonapology and apology. Transgressors with high power were more motivated to engage in nonapology and less motivated to apologize than those with low power.

The purpose of Study 3 was to use a nonexperimental design to test one theoretical mechanism of power approach theory in explaining the relation between transgressors' social power and their motivation to engage in nonapology or apology, namely self-other focus. Power approach theory posits that powerful transgressors become approach oriented toward their self-focused needs and desires without concern for others such as their victims. In contrast, transgressors who are not powerful become inhibited in pursuit of their needs and desires and focus on others who may pose threats and uncertainty such as their victims. We had a community sample of adults complete a measure of trait social power, recall an unresolved transgression they committed against another individual, and assessed their focus on themselves and the victim as well as their motivation to not apologize or apologize. The mediational role of self- and other-focus for both nonapology and apology outcomes was confirmed. Participants' self-focus mediated the relation between their social power and their motivation to engage in nonapology. When apology was the outcome measure, both self- and other-focus mediated the relation between social power and apology, however, other-focus accounted for larger amount of the association.

In Study 4, we used an experimental design to systematically confirm these findings and test their causal relation by manipulating self-other focus as well as social power and randomly assigning participants to the different conditions. As predicted, a significant interaction was found for nonapology and apology. To unpack this interaction, we probed the simple effects for power on nonapology which was significant when the focus was on the self and nonsignificant when the focus was on the victim. In contrast, the simple effect for power on apology was significant when the focus was on the victim and nonsignificant when the focus was on the self. These

findings systematically replicated the results from Study 3 by showing the effect of social power on nonapology is explained by a self-focus, whereas the effect of social power on apology is explained by an other-focus.

Although, prior research has examined how social power affects victims' post transgression responses (Struthers et al., 2019), the present research provides unique insight into how social power directly affects transgressors' motivation to apologize or not. Prior research suggests that transgressors may be initially motivated to engage in nonapologies to protect themselves from threats before they apologize (Guilfoyle et al., 2019; Struthers et al., 2019). Our research builds on this idea by testing the role that social power plays in transgressors' motivation to be nonapologetic versus apologetic. Based on power approach theory, the present research demonstrated that high-power transgressors were more likely to engage in nonapologies and less likely to engage in apologies. It also showed that social power affects nonapologies by narrowing transgressors' focus on themselves. In addition, our research shows that transgressors with low-power were less likely to be nonapologetic and more likely to be apologetic. Moreover, we demonstrated that social power affects apologies by narrowing transgressors' focus on their victims.

These last results concerning the theoretical explanation for our findings suggest that encouraging high-power transgressors to focus on their victim can minimize the effect of power on nonapologies and instead enhances the transgressor's motivation to apologize. Our findings support prior research that has shown that power holders will act prosocially when an other-focused orientation is activated (Chen et al., 2001; Howard et al., 2007; Overbeck & Park, 2001). Insofar as valuable relationships are important to maintain, particularly after a transgression, these findings highlight one mechanism in the social motivation process whereby perspective taking interventions might apply. Future research concerning interventions that can alter transgressors' self-other focus would be an asset.

Our research also produced some unexpected findings. Social power impacted state nonapology but did not affect state apology when unresolved transgressions were recalled. To the extent that transgressors may be initially motivated to engage in acts of nonapology before they apologize (Guilfoyle et al., 2019), this finding makes sense. However, the current program of research was not designed to test the possibility that nonapologies and apologies change over time. We believe this could be another important line of future research. One fruitful avenue could be to assess whether nonapology and apology operate as a dual-process whereby transgressors automatically engage in nonapology and then apologize through a more controlled and effortful process. Research using longitudinal designs to study the real time social motivation process following a transgression would be a good place to begin. This research could help to explain the nonsignificant effect of social power on state apology.

Study 4 also revealed an unexpected finding. It showed that low-power transgressors who took the victim's perspective (i.e., other-focus) were motivated to engage in nonapologies, specifically justifying their actions. Although this finding was marginally nonsignificant, it raises interesting possibilities worthy of future research. Given that individuals with low-power tend to be other-focused and more attuned to threat, it is possible that controlling participants' perspective through robust experimental procedures resulted in an enhanced sense of threat.

Of note to the current program of research is our use of culturally diverse samples. Given that apologizing involves giving up one's agency, research has found transgressors from individualistic cultures (e.g., Western cultures) often find the apology process difficult and resist or refuse offering them (Schumann, 2014; Schumann & Dweck, 2014; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013). However, transgressors from collectivistic cultures (e.g., Eastern cultures) offer apologies more readily to save face and maintain socially harmonious relationships (Hamilton & Hagiwara, 1992; Itoi et al., 1996). Our research, which was conducted in a large multicultural Canadian city, allowed for greater ethnic diversity which we believe enables us to generalize our findings more broadly than studies conducted on WEIRD samples, that is, White, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (Henrich et al., 2010).

However, we did not include a measure of cultural orientation in our research and therefore future research should explore how social power and culture interact to produce outcomes on apology and nonapology.

Previous research has also found gender differences in apologizing with women reporting higher rates of apologies than men, even when controlling for how frequently one commits transgressions (Gonzalez et al., 1990; Schumann & Ross, 2010). However, research also shows when power is controlled, men and women apologize at similar rates (Holmes, 1989) suggesting the effect is driven by power and not gender. Insofar as the samples used in our research were majority women, future research exploring the relationship between social power and apology and nonapology should strive to use more gender balanced samples to ensure the effect is being driven by power.

## Implications of Research

Apologies can serve to repair relationships following a transgression by acknowledging the transgression, taking responsibility, expressing remorse, and assuring victims that the offense will not occur again (Lazare, 2004; Tavuchis, 1991). Despite this, transgressors may initially be motivated to engage in nonapologies by providing justifications or deflecting blame to avoid potentially negative consequences. However, this initial reaction can further damage relationships by signaling that the transgressor is not remorseful, does not value the relationship, and is more concerned about their own welfare than their victims' (Lazare, 2004; McCullough et al., 2008; Tavuchis, 1991), suggesting a more controlled apology process may be more conducive of relationship repair and maintenance (Davis & Gold, 2011; Fehr et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2009).

This research demonstrates that transgressors' social power influences their proclivity to engage in nonapologies. Specifically, high-power transgressors are more likely to engage in nonapologies compared to low-power transgressors. Furthermore, this research suggests that this effect is explained by high-power holders' tendency to be self-focused compared to low-power holders who are other-focused. However, as demonstrated in Study 4, encouraging power holders to focus on the victim's perspective can enhance their intention to be apologetic and possibly repair and maintain their valuable relationships after a transgression.

Although this research has implications for many different types of relationships, it has implications for understanding the social motivation process in relationships contextualized by power

imbalances such as employer–employee, lawyer–client, physician–patient, teacher–student, and government–citizen. Prior research suggests that power holders within these types of relationships can behave in a self-centered manner and pay little attention to the views and needs of others (Fiske, 1993), which can lead to deleterious consequences (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; De Cremer & Van Dijk, 2005; Inesi et al., 2012). A more nuanced understanding of how and why transgressors' social power affects their social motivation following transgressions can help practitioners to develop interventions that will mitigate the negative consequences of power-imbalances. One way of doing this is by encouraging perspective-taking among power holders. Previous research as well as the current research suggests that activating other-focused orientations can lead power holders to behave in a more attentive, empathetic, and prosocial manner (Chen et al., 2001; Howard et al., 2007). The current work builds on and extends this research to the context of interpersonal transgressions and conflict resolution.

### Conclusion

Given the benefit of apologies to the repair of relationships damaged by interpersonal transgressions and the cost of nonapologies to the potential escalation in conflict and dissolution of valued relationships, it is important to better understand the factors that influence transgressors' motivation to respond one way or the other. This research helps to provide a more nuanced understanding of transgressors' social motivation following transgressions by testing how and why their social power affects nonapologies and apologies. This research is important because it demonstrates transgressors can play a significant role in the reconciliation process by focusing on their victims and channeling their social power to repair the damage they potentially cause when they harm others. This research has implications for a variety of relationships such as romantic, sibling, friendship, and coworker, and applied domains such as social, organizational, sports, military, and government.

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