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TESIS DOCTORAL / DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

EL LADO OSCURO DE LOS BUENOS COMPORTAMIENTOS: ENSAYOS SOBRE COMO AYUDAR, AGRADECER Y DISCULPARSE /DARK SIDE OF GOOD BEHAVIORS: ESSAYS ON HELPING, THANKING, AND APOLOGIZING

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Doctoral Thesis Advisor: Kriti Jain, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the negative outcomes of three widely-studied prosocial behaviors: helping, thanking and apologizing, and aims at providing a broader understanding of when and why these behaviors fail to serve a prosocial function. Chapter 1 differentiates the effect of proactive (i.e., unsolicited) help vis-à-vis reactive (i.e., solicited) help on the helper's subsequent selfish behaviors, and investigates a novel mechanism—perceived cost of helping—underlying such relationship. In three experimental studies, I demonstrate that after providing reactive help (vis-à-vis proactive help), the helpers are more likely to engage in selfish behaviors for self-benefits, and this is because the disruptiveness of providing reactive help makes the helpers to perceive the cost of help (i.e., time, effort and resources invested in help) as higher, the effect of which is strengthened when helpers are more intolerant of under-reward. Chapter 2 investigates a ubiquitous yet unstudied phenomenon: when a benefactor solicits gratitude expression from a beneficiary after offering help, namely, gratitude expression solicitation. Based on the results from one pilot study and three experimental studies, I demonstrate the real-life instances of gratitude expression solicitation, how soliciting gratitude expression is different from soliciting other monetary and non-monetary resources in social exchanges, and how it can lead the beneficiary to avoid the benefactor more through perceived benefactor arrogance. I also examine the moderating effect of whether gratitude has been expressed before it is solicited, which jointly contribute to an in-depth understanding of soliciting gratitude expression. Last, in Chapter 3, I explore when apology may impair reconciliation process by exploring the situation when the alleged transgressor does not perceive any wrongdoing but still apologizes. Adopting a transgressor-

centric approach and using a mixed-approach design, I investigate the nature and the prevalence of apologizing with no felt transgression at the workplace, demonstrate its related affective and reconciliation outcomes from the transgressor's perspective, and illustrate the role of organizational conflict cultures in influencing employees' restoration efforts upon apologizing with no felt transgression.

RESUMEN

Esta disertación examina los resultados negativos de tres comportamientos prosociales ampliamente estudiados: ayudar, agradecer y disculparse, y tiene como objetivo proporcionar una comprensión más amplia de cuándo y por qué estos comportamientos no cumplen una función prosocial. El capítulo 1 diferencia el efecto de la ayuda proactiva (es decir, no solicitada) frente a la ayuda reactiva (es decir, solicitada) en los comportamientos egoístas posteriores del ayudante, e investiga un mecanismo novedoso, el costo percibido de la ayuda, que subyace a dicha relación. En tres estudios experimentales, demuestro que después de brindar ayuda reactiva (en comparación con la ayuda proactiva), es más probable que los ayudantes adopten comportamientos egoístas para beneficio propio, y esto se debe a que la disrupción de brindar ayuda reactiva hace que los ayudantes percibir el costo de la ayuda (es decir, tiempo, esfuerzo y recursos invertidos en la ayuda) como más alto, cuyo efecto se fortalece cuando los ayudantes son más intolerantes con la recompensa insuficiente. El capítulo 2 investiga un fenómeno omnipresente pero no estudiado: cuando un benefactor solicita una expresión de gratitud de un beneficiario después de ofrecer ayuda, es decir, solicitud de expresión de gratitud. Basándome en los resultados de un estudio piloto y cuatro estudios experimentales, demuestro los casos de la vida real de solicitud de expresión de gratitud, en qué se diferencia la solicitud de expresión de gratitud de la solicitud de otros recursos monetarios y no monetarios en los intercambios sociales, y cómo puede conducir a la beneficiario para evitar al benefactor más a través de la arrogancia del benefactor percibido. También examino el efecto moderador de si se ha expresado gratitud antes de solicitarla, lo que contribuye conjuntamente a una comprensión profunda de la solicitud de expresión de

gratitud. Por último, en el Capítulo 3, exploro cuándo la disculpa puede afectar el proceso de reconciliación al explorar la situación en la que el presunto transgresor no percibe ninguna irregularidad pero aun así se disculpa. Adoptando un enfoque centrado en el transgresor y utilizando un diseño de enfoque mixto, investigo la naturaleza y la prevalencia de disculparse sin una transgresión sentida en el lugar de trabajo, demuestro los resultados afectivos y de reconciliación relacionados desde la perspectiva del transgresor e ilustro el papel del conflicto organizacional culturas al influir en los esfuerzos de restauración de los empleados al disculparse sin sentir una transgresión.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation seeks to shed new light on organizational prosocial behaviors (e.g., Brief & Motowidlo, 1986) by unpacking negative outcomes of workplace helping, thanking, and apologizing. These behaviors are valued by organizational members as they facilitate positive interactions among employees and contribute to effective organizational functions (e.g., Smith et al., 1983; Fehr et al., 2017; Tomlinson et al., 2004). In fact, research has repeatedly pointed to the benefits of employees providing mutual assistance, expressing gratitude after receiving help, and apologizing when making a mistake.

In the current thesis, I aim to elucidate how and when such prosocial actions may yield undesirable yet understudied consequences, specifically, when helping can lead to helper's subsequent selfish behaviors and when thanking and apologizing can result in outcomes that impair relationship enhancement. Consequently, this dissertation consists of three chapters and each of them examines helping, thanking and apologizing, respectively.

Chapter 1 distinguishes the differential effect of proactive (i.e., unsolicited) help vis-à-vis reactive (i.e., solicited) help on the helper's subsequent selfish behaviors and investigates a novel mechanism—perceived cost of helping—underlying such relationship. Prior research has for long proposed possible distinctions between proactive and reactive help (e.g., Bolino & Grant, 2016; Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2013), yet the empirical examination on the different outcomes associated with proactive and reactive help has been limited. Building on the literature of fairness and equity, this chapter reveals how reactive helpers (vis-à-vis

proactive helpers) may perceive the cost of help higher, which further leads to selfish behavior even in an unethical manner.

Chapter 2 investigates the phenomenon of benefactors offering help but then soliciting gratitude expression from the beneficiary, and demonstrates that such gratitude expression solicitation can lead the beneficiary to avoid the benefactor more, which is contradictory to the widely accepted belief that gratitude expression is always beneficial for interpersonal relationships (e.g., Lambert et al., 2010; Lambert & Fincham, 2011; Algoe et al., 2013). Synthesizing the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the nascent responsibility exchange theory (Chaudhry & Loewenstein, 2019), I propose gratitude expression as an understudied resource in social exchanges and that it can lead to beneficiary avoidance through perceived benefactor arrogance above and beyond the effect of perceived benefactor instrumentality.

Chapter 3 studies when apology impairs reconciliation process by challenging one critical assumption underlying prior studies, which is the mutual agreement between the transgressor and the victim regarding the occurrence of a transgression (e.g., Fehr & Gelfand, 2010; Leunissen et al., 2013; Hodgins & Liebeskind, 2003), as in organizations employees may often find themselves apologizing while perceiving no responsibility for wrongdoings. Extending the current research on apology, I propose that when a transgressor apologizes without perceived transgression (vis-à-vis with perceived transgression), apologizing will lead the transgressor to withdraw their relationship restoration efforts towards the victim, which further damages, rather than reconciles, relationships.

Taken together, this dissertation contributes to the literature of organizational prosocial behavior by offering new perspectives regarding when and why such behavior may backfire.

It challenges some widely-accepted assumptions and reveals some unexamined mechanisms, and thus has the potential to provide interesting avenues for future research.

INTRODUCCIÓN

Esta disertación busca arrojar nueva luz sobre los comportamientos prosociales organizacionales (por ejemplo, Brief y Motowidlo, 1986) al analizar los resultados negativos de ayudar, agradecer y disculparse en el lugar de trabajo. Estos comportamientos son valorados por los miembros de la organización ya que facilitan las interacciones positivas entre los empleados y contribuyen a las funciones organizativas efectivas (por ejemplo, Smith et al., 1983; Fehr et al., 2017; Tomlinson et al., 2004). De hecho, la investigación ha señalado repetidamente los beneficios de que los empleados se brinden asistencia mutua, expresen gratitud después de recibir ayuda y se disculpen cuando cometen un error.

En la tesis actual, mi objetivo es dilucidar cómo y cuándo tales acciones prosociales pueden producir consecuencias indeseables pero poco estudiadas, específicamente, cuando ayudar puede conducir a comportamientos egoístas subsecuentes del ayudante y cuando agradecer y disculparse puede resultar en resultados que perjudiquen la mejora de la relación. En consecuencia, esta disertación consta de tres capítulos y cada uno de ellos examina ayudar, agradecer y disculparse, respectivamente.

El capítulo 1 distingue el efecto diferencial de la ayuda proactiva (es decir, no solicitada) frente a la ayuda reactiva (es decir, solicitada) en los comportamientos egoístas posteriores del ayudante e investiga un mecanismo novedoso, el costo percibido de la ayuda, que subyace a dicha relación. Investigaciones anteriores han propuesto durante mucho tiempo posibles distinciones entre ayuda proactiva y reactiva (por ejemplo, Bolino y Grant, 2016; Spitzmuller y Van Dyne, 2013), sin embargo, el examen empírico sobre los diferentes resultados asociados con la ayuda proactiva y reactiva ha sido limitado. Sobre la base de la

literatura sobre justicia y equidad, este capítulo revela cómo los ayudantes reactivos (frente a los ayudantes proactivos) pueden percibir que el costo de la ayuda es más alto, lo que conduce a un comportamiento egoísta incluso de manera poco ética.

El Capítulo 2 investiga el fenómeno de los benefactores que ofrecen ayuda pero luego solicitan una expresión de gratitud del beneficiario, y demuestra que tal solicitud de expresión de gratitud puede llevar al beneficiario a evitar más al benefactor, lo que contradice la creencia ampliamente aceptada de que la expresión de gratitud siempre es beneficiosa para relaciones interpersonales (p. ej., Lambert et al., 2010; Lambert & Fincham, 2011; Algoe et al., 2013). Sintetizando la teoría del intercambio social (Blau, 1964) y la naciente teoría del intercambio de responsabilidad (Chaudhry & Loewenstein, 2019), propongo la expresión de gratitud como un recurso poco estudiado en los intercambios sociales y que puede conducir a la evitación del beneficiario a través de la arrogancia percibida del benefactor por encima y más allá. el efecto de la instrumentalidad benefactora percibida.

El Capítulo 3 estudia cuándo la disculpa perjudica el proceso de reconciliación al cuestionar un supuesto crítico que subyace en los estudios previos, que es el acuerdo mutuo entre el transgresor y la víctima con respecto a la ocurrencia de una transgresión (p. Ej., Fehr y Gelfand, 2010; Leunissen et al., 2013; Hodgins & Liebeskind, 2003), ya que en las organizaciones, los empleados a menudo se disculpan sin percibir ninguna responsabilidad por las malas acciones. Ampliando la investigación actual sobre la disculpa, propongo que cuando un transgresor se disculpa sin una transgresión percibida (en comparación con la transgresión percibida), disculparse llevará al transgresor a retirar sus esfuerzos de

restauración de la relación hacia la víctima, lo que daña aún más, en lugar de reconciliar. , relaciones.

En conjunto, esta disertación contribuye a la literatura del comportamiento prosocial organizacional al ofrecer nuevas perspectivas sobre cuándo y por qué dicho comportamiento puede ser contraproducente. Desafía algunas suposiciones ampliamente aceptadas y revela algunos mecanismos no examinados, por lo que tiene el potencial de proporcionar vías interesantes para futuras investigaciones.

Chapter 1

When the Helping Hands Take More:

The Impact of Reactive versus Proactive Help on Selfish Behavior

Abstract

This chapter examines the differential effect of proactive (i.e., unsolicited) help vis-à-vis reactive (i.e., solicited) help on the helper's subsequent selfish behaviors. Drawing on the fairness theory and equity principle, we find that reactive (vs. proactive) helping can trigger the helper's subsequent selfish behaviors. The effect manifests because reactive helpers perceive a higher cost of help, thereby making them more likely to indulge in selfish behaviors (Study 1). We validate the proposed mechanism in Study 2 using the moderation-of-process approach. Then, in Study 3, we control for the moral licensing explanation and demonstrate that an individual's equity sensitivity moderates the mechanism of the perceived cost of helping on selfish behaviors. These results contribute to the scholarly understanding of the differences in the behavioral outcomes between proactive and reactive helping.

***Keywords**:* Proactive help; Reactive help; Selfish behavior; Perceived Cost; Equity; Fairness

Introduction

Workplace helping behavior is beneficial for organizations since it facilitates individual and team performance (e.g., Podsakoff et al., 1997; Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008) and creates economic value for organizations (Knack & Keefer, 1997; Sirola & Pitesa, 2017). Although organizations have been keen to encourage such helping behaviors (e.g., Hui et al., 2000; Allen, 2006), recent studies have revealed some undesirable outcomes of helping. For example, providing help interferes with the helper's task performance (Rapp et al., 2013), increases the helper's emotional exhaustion and depletion (e.g., Lanaj et al., 2016; Koopman et al., 2016), and importantly, leads to workplace deviance and counterproductive behavior (e.g., Loi et al., 2020; Yam et al., 2017; Koopman et al., 2020; Klotz & Bolino, 2013).

Although helping others may yield the potential negative consequences, we suggest that not all helping behaviors will result in such side-effects. The current paper differentiates between proactive help (i.e., *helping without being requested*) and reactive help (i.e., *helping in response to a request*) and examines helper's selfish behavior as an outcome of helping. Based on the fairness theory and the equity principle, we propose that reactive helpers will perceive the cost of help (i.e., the helper's valuable resources such as time, attention, and energy that could otherwise be devoted to more personally instrumental behaviors such as work or self-entertaining activities: Lanaj et al., 2016; Rapp et al., 2013) to be higher than proactive helpers. In turn, the higher perceived cost of help could motivate the reactive (more than proactive) helpers to indulge in selfish behavior to restore their sense of equity. By investigating the role of the genesis of help in influencing the helper's downstream selfish behaviors, we suggest that not all types of help have similar consequences: reactive help,

which frequently occurs in the workplace (Anderson & Williams, 1996), is more likely to lead to helper´s selfish behavior that might be detrimental to the organization's interests.

Theoretical Development

Proactive and Reactive Helping and Perceived Cost of Help

Providing help often requires resources (e.g., time, money, effort, etc.) that are typically considered costs for helpers in interpersonal exchanges (Adams, 1965; Zhang & Epley, 2009; Yin & Smith, 2021). For example, in an organizational context, these resources could be used by helpers to complete their own tasks (Koopman et al., 2016; Lanaj et al., 2016; Rapp et al., 2013) rather than helping others. Keeping objective costs of the help equal (e.g., actual time invested in the help), we propose that the perceived cost of helping would be higher for reactive helping vis-à-vis proactive helping based on the premise that the former is more disruptive for helpers than the latter. We elaborate on this next.

The disruptiveness of reactive help might drive the perceived cost of help as higher for two reasons. First, a help request might interfere with the helper's own goal progress. In their comprehensive literature review, Puranik et al. (2020) defined unexpectedness as a key attribute of work interruption, and such interruption includes incidents such as receiving emails or distracting coworker conversations. Given that a help request is often unexpected, reactive helping is likely to be perceived as an interruption that takes away the helper's own attention and time from their goal pursuit. The authors further suggested that if an event is pre-planned, then this event will not amount to an interruption. Proactive behavior, by its definition, comprises *anticipatory actions* that individuals take to influence themselves and/or

their environment (Grant & Ashford, 2008). Therefore, proactive (than reactive) help is less likely to be construed as a workplace interruption by helpers. Related studies have found that work interruptions hamper goal progress and lead to high time pressure and subsequent irritation (Baethge & Rigotti, 2013), less job satisfaction (Koopman et al., 2016), and negative affect (Gabriel et al., 2020). To the extent that reactive helping is more likely to be construed as an interruption to one's goal progress, helpers are more likely to feel that they are sacrificing their own interests to provide help, which would make the perceived cost of help higher.

Second, counterfactual comparisons may also play a role. Research suggests that reality is more mutable and counterfactuals are more easily generated when alternatives are readily accessible than when they are not (e.g., Byrne, 2016; Kahneman & Miller, 1986; Kahneman & Tversky, 1982; Medvec et al., 1995; Hafner et al., 2012). Since reactive helping is more disruptive for the helpers and interferes with the helper's schedule, the counterfactuals of helping might be more salient (e.g., "I could have spent more time with my family rather than helping!"). Contrarily, the decision of proactive helping is self-initiated (e.g., Den Hartog & Belschak, 2012; Parker et al., 2006; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2013). Given its anticipatory and self-initiating nature, proactive helping would not activate deliberation on the forgone alternatives to helping once the helpers decide to help. In other words, the reality of help is less mutable, and alternatives are less accessible for proactive (than reactive) helpers. Relatedly, Weiss and Kivetz (2019) found that people underestimated and even neglected the opportunity cost when they perceived their choice as immutable.

Therefore, we predict that proactive (than reactive) helpers would perceive a lower cost of helping. Stated formally,

H_1: Perceived cost of help is higher for reactive helpers than for proactive helpers.

Perceived Cost and Selfish Behavior

Human beings are innately concerned about fairness. According to Deutsch (1975), one fundamental rule people use to assess fairness is whether their received outcomes reflect their inputs (i.e., equity). Several studies have demonstrated the critical role of perceived equity in impacting individual behaviors. For example, in a workplace setting, research has found that employees carefully monitor their inputs and rewards received in their exchange relationship with the organizations, and that perceived effort-reward equity positively impacts job performance and satisfaction (Janssen, 2001) as well as innovation (Janssen, 2004). The rule of equity also has been found to stimulate individual productivity for a larger share of reward (Goncalo & Kim, 2010). Contrarily, a mismatch between input and outcome (i.e., inequity) can engender a sense of under-reward, which further motivates individuals to restore the sense of equity by altering their efforts or rewards, such as withdrawing from work or changing comparison dimensions (e.g., Adams, 1965).

One way to restore perceived inequity is to indulge in selfish behaviors (Austin & Walster, 1974; Harder, 1992). Therefore, according to the fairness and equity principle, we predict that when reactive helpers perceive that they have invested a lot in the helping action, they are more likely to subsequently engage in selfish behavior, as if they were entitled to be compensated (e.g., Zitek et al., 2010). Relatedly, ample evidence has shown that individuals

are more likely to indulge in self-serving behaviors to avoid or minimize losses (Leib et al., 2019;Schindler & Pfattheicher, 2017). Therefore, we predict:

H_2: Perceived cost of help mediates the relationship between reactive (vis-à-vis proactive) help and helper's selfish behavior.

The Moderating Role of Equity Sensitivity

We propose that an individual's equity sensitivity, a theoretically relevant trait, would moderate the effect of perceived cost on selfish behavior. Equity sensitivity refers to the extent to which an individual prefers different input and outcome combinations (Sauley & Bedeian, 2000). People differ in their equity sensitivity (Huseman et al., 1987) and can be categorized into three types (i.e., *benevolents*, *equity sensitives*, and *entitleds*). *Benevolents* are more tolerant to under-reward, *equity sensitives* are those who prefer combinations in which the balance of inputs to outcomes is proportionate, and *entitleds* are more intolerant to under-reward (King et al., 1993; Sauley & Bedeian, 2000). We predict that those who are innately intolerant of under-reward (i.e., entitleds) would be more likely to behave selfishly to restore equity.

H_3: The helper's equity sensitivity will moderate the relationship between perceived cost and selfish behavior, such that the relationship is stronger for those who are intolerant of under-reward.

In sum, we argue that reactive helpers (vis-à-vis proactive helpers) tend to perceive their help as more costly, which leads to selfish behaviors. In addition, we propose that the effect increases for individuals who are intolerant to under-reward. Therefore, we propose a moderated mediation model, such that the relationship between reactive helping and selfish

behavior through the perceived cost of help is stronger for those who are intolerant to under-reward. We, therefore, propose that:

H_4: The helper's equity sensitivity will moderate the indirect relationship between reactive help and selfish behavior via perceived cost of the help, such that the indirect effect is stronger for those who are intolerant of under-reward (i.e., entitleds).

Overview of Studies

We conducted three experimental studies to test our hypothesis. In Study 1, we examined the intention of selfish behavior in a workplace setting and provided initial support for our proposed mechanism. In Study 2, we validated our mechanism by manipulating both the genesis and the objective cost of help and examine their interactive effect on selfish and dishonest behavior. This study utilized the moderation-of-process approach (Spencer et al., 2005) to establish the psychological mechanism of the perceived cost of help. Then, in Study 3, we extended our investigation by examining the moderating influence of an individual's equity sensitivity. In addition, we tested for the perceived cost as a mechanism controlling for the moral licensing explanation (Blanken et al., 2015).

Study 1: Reactive Help, Perceived Cost, and Selfish Behavior Intentions

Our first study provides initial evidence for the influence of reactive help on selfish behavior through the mechanism of the perceived cost. Using an organization-based setting, we test how likely the participants would over-report their working hours, which is a common misconduct to serve one's self-interest (e.g.., Mitchell et al., 2018).

Participants

123 Mechanical Turk workers residing in the U.S. completed this study. We removed 14 participants who failed the attention check designed for the vignette and 1 participant with no working experience because this was a workplace-related vignette. Therefore, 108 responses were eligible for analysis (57 female, M_{age} = 36.93). This sample size allows us to detect an effect size *d* as small as 0.54.

Procedures and materials

Participants read a vignette and were randomly assigned to either *proactive* or *reactive help* conditions. They read that Lisa was their colleague at the HR department and was self-quarantining at home while they were working from the office. They read that they were familiar with Lisa's work tasks, and they knew that Lisa was having some trouble reaching out to the head of the Sales Department to collect the performance data for the nearly 70-member sales team. In the proactive help condition, participants read that they thought Lisa might need their help, and they proactively asked Lisa if they could help her, and Lisa agreed. In contrast, in the reactive help condition, participants read that Lisa called them to ask if they could help, and they agreed. Next, all participants read that they went to the Sales Department for the employee data. Finally, they collected all the data for Lisa after spending several hours, the time they could have spent on their tasks. As an attention check, participants answered whether Lisa has asked for their help (yes/no), and 14 responses were removed for failing this question.

Next, all participants read that their organization required them to enter the time they worked on different projects in a week-based timesheet. We told participants that they had spent 36 hours in total on three projects, and apart from doing their own projects, they spent

2-3 hours helping Lisa's task, which could not count for their own working time. Participants also read that their performance review was coming up, and they were keen to show their superiors that they were focusing all attention, effort, and time on their own deliverables. Participants responded to their likelihood to over-report their working time, perceived cost of helping Lisa, and shared the demographic information.

Measures

All items were measured from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree* unless otherwise stated.

Intention of selfish behavior. We measured the intention with two items rated from 1 = *extremely unlikely* to 7 = *extremely likely*: "exaggerate your own working time in the timesheet" and "falsely report your own working time by adding more hours", $\alpha = .88$.

Perceived cost. Following previous literature assessing perceived cost in an interpersonal exchange (Zhang & Epley, 2009), we asked participants how much they agreed that it would be a burden for them to help Lisa in terms of their extra time, effort, and energy, respectively, $\alpha = .87$.

Manipulation check. Participants responded to a single item measure on whether the help was solicited: "In the help scenario, I helped Lisa without being requested".

Results

Manipulation check

The results of an independent-samples *t*-test found that participants in the proactive help condition agreed more that their help was unsolicited ($M = 6.69$, $SD = 0.68$) than those in the reactive help condition ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 1.99$), $t(106) = 14.49$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.73$.

Perceived cost and over-reporting of working time

The results of an independent-samples *t*-test showed that participants in the reactive help condition ($M = 4.09$, $SD = 1.40$) perceived the cost of help as higher than participants in the proactive help condition ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.56$), $t(106) = 2.42$, $p = .02$, $d = 0.47$, supporting H_1. Participants in the reactive help condition ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.82$) also indicated higher likelihood to over-report working time than those in the proactive help condition ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.93$), $t(106) = 2.65$, $p = .009$, $d = 0.51$.

Mediation

We used the PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013), Model 4, to conduct a mediation analysis and calculated the 95% bootstrap confidence interval based on 5,000 iterations with perceived cost as the mediator (Fig. 1). The reactive help condition was coded as 1 and the proactive help condition as 0. There was a significant indirect effect of perceived cost, $b = 0.42$, $se = 0.20$, 95%*CI* [0.06, 0.85], supporting H_2. Specifically, reactive help was significantly correlated with perceived cost, $b = 0.69$, $se = 0.28$, $p = .02$, which significantly predicted selfish behavior intentions, $b = 0.61$, $se = 0.11$, $p < .001$.

Insert Figure 1 Here

Discussion

Study 1 provided preliminary evidence that reactive (vs. proactive) helpers tended to act more selfishly by over-reporting their working hours after granting help, and this was because reactive helpers perceived the cost of help as higher. One limitation of this study was that the

vignette explicitly reminded participants that their helping time could be spent on their own tasks. Therefore, participants may have been primed towards goal progress interruption and counterfactual thinking. In the next two studies, we avoided any such priming.

Study 2: Manipulating the Cost of Help

In this study, we extend our investigation by examining the participants' selfish and dishonest behavior (i.e., cheating for monetary gains) and experimentally manipulating the proposed mechanism. This approach follows the moderation-of-process design (e.g., Spencer et al., 2005; Vincent & Kouchaki, 2016) by manipulating the cost of help. To be specific, the difference between reactive help and proactive help on selfish behavior is expected to attenuate when the cost of help is low because the disruptiveness of such help is negligible. In contrast, when the cost of help is high, proactive helpers are likely to mentally forgo these costs while reactive helpers are likely to construe the help as disruptive. Therefore, according to our theorizing, the cost of help would moderate the effect of proactive (vs. reactive help) on the helper's selfish behavior. Furthermore, Study 2 used a classic behavioral task to measure selfish behavior, such that the participants could earn monetary rewards to maximize their self-benefit through cheating.

Participants

444 Mechanical Turk workers, residing in the U.S., were recruited to participate in this study. We removed 89 participants who failed to follow the study instructions (e.g., they put random/unrelated text when recalling and/or they failed attention check), and in the end, 355 responses were considered eligible for the analysis (213 females, M_{age} = 38.53).

Procedures and materials

This study employed a 2 (genesis of help: proactive vs. reactive) X 2 (cost of helping: low vs. high) between-subjects experimental design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. We asked participants to recall an instance of proactive (or reactive) help that either cost them a lot of time/resources/efforts (*high-cost* condition) or was a simple thing to do (*low-cost* condition). As an attention check, the participants were asked to report as to why they perceived the cost of helping to be either high or low.

Each participant then provided the name of the person they had helped. This name was piped into our subsequent questions to make the proactive (vs. reactive) help conditions more realistic and salient in the participant's mind. As a manipulation check, participants responded to single-item on proactive and reactive help with "[name] has requested for my help" on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), and three items on the perceived cost of helping with "It is costly to help [name] in terms of my time", "It is costly to help [name] in terms of my resources", and "It is costly to help [name] in terms of my efforts" rated from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 7 (*strongly disagree*, α = .93).

Subsequently, we measured the participants' selfish behavior through a matrix game, in which they could earn more money through cheating (e.g., Mazar et al., 2008; Vincent & Kouchaki, 2016). In this task, the participants saw seven matrices of 12 single-digit numbers with two decimal points (e.g., 5.29 or 1.69). The participants were told that they would earn $0.30 for each matrix in which they found two numbers that summed to the number 10.00. They had 30 seconds for identifying the numbers but were told that they did not need to specify the two numbers. Instead, they only needed to indicate whether they had found the

two numbers that added to ten for each matrix. In this way, all participants had the chance to over-report their performance for monetary gains. To avoid mistakes and mathematical anxiety (or math phobia), each participant was given access to an online calculator placed under the matrix. Participants practiced with one matrix and then finished the game with seven matrices. After each matrix, they had to indicate whether they had found the two numbers. Unbeknownst to the participants, five out of the seven matrices were unsolvable. The number of matrices that each participant claimed to solve for these five matrices served as our measure of unethical behavior for self-benefit (i.e., dependent variable).

Results

Manipulation check

A two-way ANOVA on the measure of proactive/ reactive help showed a significant main effect of help-type, $F(1, 351) = 280.94$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.45$, such that the participants in reactive help condition ($M = 6.14$, $SD = 1.15$) agreed more that their help was requested than participants in the proactive help condition ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 2.10$), $t(353) = 16.98$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.82$. There was also a significant main effect of cost, $F(1, 351) = 7.55$, $p = .006$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$, indicating that costly help was perceived to be more reactive. The interaction effect between the help condition and cost was significant, $F(1, 351) = 9.21$, $p = .003$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.03$. This analysis confirmed our first experimental manipulation of proactive (vs. reactive) help.

In addition, a two-way ANOVA on cost demonstrated a significant main effect of cost, $F(1, 351) = 598.47$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.63$, such that participants in the high-cost condition ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 1.31$) perceived the help as more costly than those assigned to the low-cost

condition (M = 2.01, SD = 1.25), $t(352) = 24.65$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.62$. There was no main effect of the help condition, $F(1, 351) = 0.33$, $p = .57$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.001$, and the interaction effect was not significant, $F(1, 351) = 2.86$, $p = .09$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.008$.

Matrices claimed to be solved

We conducted a two-way analysis of variance to examine the interactive effect of proactive (vs. reactive) help and low (vs. high) cost on the dependent variable. There was no main effect of the help condition, $F(1, 351) = 1.11$, $p = .29$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.003$, or a main effect of cost, $F(1, 351) = 0.02$, $p = .88$, partial $\eta^2 < 0.001$. Importantly, we found a significant interaction effect on cheating behavior (i.e., the number of matrices participants claimed to have successfully solved), $F(1, 351) = 5.40$, $p = .02$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$ (Fig. 2). Specifically, when the help was not costly, the reactive (M = 0.52, SD = 1.25) and the proactive helpers (M = 0.69, SD = 1.23) did not differ in the number of matrices they claimed to have solved, $t(193) = -0.96$, $p = .34$. However, when the help was costly, the reactive helpers (M = 0.85, SD = 1.42) exhibited more dishonest behavior than the proactive helpers (M = 0.40, SD = 1.06), $t(157) = 2.31$, $p = .02$, $d = 0.36$. Overall, the number of matrices participants claimed to solve is comparable with earlier studies using the number matrix task (e.g.,Yam et al., 2017).

Insert Figure 2 here

Discussion

The findings of study 2 replicated and extended the results from Study 1 by manipulating both the independent variable and the mediator. When the cost of help was

negligible, the effect of help-type on selfish behavior attenuated - such that there was no difference in cheating behavior between the proactive and reactive help conditions. However, when the help was perceived costly, reactive helpers cheated more than proactive helpers. These results suggested that the perceived cost of help mediated the relationship between reactive help and selfish behavior. In addition, the dishonest behavior here is unrelated to the help the participants recalled, which is in line with some findings that individuals who feel entitled to be compensated in one domain indulge in selfish behavior in a completely different domain (e.g., Zitek et al., 2010).

In the next study, we provide stronger support for our proposed mechanism. If the feelings of under-reward of reactive helpers led to more selfish behavior, then those who are less sensitive to under-reward would exhibit lower selfish behavior - even when the cost of helping is high. Additionally, we control for the moral licensing explanation (e.g., Blanken et al., 2015; Jordan et al., 2011).

Study 3: Role of Individual's Equity Sensitivity

This study provides a stronger inference of the mechanism by examining the moderating role of an individual's equity sensitivity. We test this hypothesis in a workplace scenario, in which the participants could falsely report the reimbursement amount more than they had spent. Furthermore, this study controlled for the explanation from the moral licensing theory (e.g., Klotz & Bolino, 2013; Blanken et al., 2015; Jordan et al., 2011), which posits that people would behave more unethically after initially engaging in a moral behavior through two paths, namely 'moral credits' and 'moral credentials' (Mullen & Monin, 2016). It is worth

noting that, in the current study, we do not pose any strong hypothesis regarding the effect of moral licensing: first, both proactive and reactive help conditions involve initial moral behavior; second, in recent literature, the effect of moral credentials on behavioral outcomes has not been straightforward and is even opposite to the effect of moral credits (Loi et al., 2020). Nevertheless, we controlled for these two paths and expect the effect of the perceived cost of helping to remain robust.

Participants

264 Mechanical Turk workers in the U.S. were recruited to participate in this study. We removed 40 participants who failed the attention check and 2 participants with zero years of working experience as the current study involve a workplace-related vignette, thereby making 222 responses eligible for analysis (109 females, M_{age} = 40.21).

Procedures and materials

We first measured the participants' equity sensitivity using a scale developed by Sauley and Bedeian (2000). Next, the participants read a workplace scenario and were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions: *proactive* vs. *reactive help*. In the scenario, they either proactively or reactively helped a colleague John who is unable to submit his project on time (see Appendix A for the details). As an attention check, participants responded to whether John had asked for their help (yes/no), and 40 responses were removed for failing this question. Next, they completed an expense report adapted from Hardin et al. (2020, Study 3). They imagined themselves on a business trip this week and were asked to complete a reimbursement report in which they could over-report their expenses. Specifically, participants were provided with a break-up of actual expenses that amounted to $42.75 for

that day but could exaggerate the expenses up to $100. The amount they reported minus 42.75 served as our dependent variable, reflecting the degree to which participants *over-reported* their expenses for self-gain. After this task, participants responded to the measures on perceived cost (mediator variable), moral credits and moral credentials (alternate explanation; as below), and demographic details.

Measures

All variables were measured from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree.*

Manipulation check. Two items served as our manipulation check: "In this scenario, John has asked for my help" and "In this scenario, I helped John in response to his request", α = .92.

Equity sensitivity. The 16-item scale from Sauley and Bedeian (2000) measured the participants' equity sensitivity. This scale comprised items such as "*Even if I received low wages and poor benefits from my employer, I would still try to do my best at my job*" and "*I feel obligated to do more than I am paid to do at work*", α = .91. A higher score on this measure indicates that a person is innately more tolerant to under-reward (i.e., benevolent).

Perceived cost. Following Study 1, participants responded to how much they agreed that it would be a burden for them to help John in terms of their extra time, efforts, and energy, respectively, α = .94.

Moral credits. We administered the 5-item scale (adapted from Lin et al., 2016) to measure moral credits. The items on this scale included "*I earn credit for helping John*" and "*My helping behavior earns me credit as a moral person*", α = .90.

Moral credentials. In addition, following previous studies (e.g., Loi et al., 2020), we measured moral credentials using the five-item internalization scale of moral self-regard (α = .80) from Aquino and Americus (2002). Participants were presented with nine moral characteristics (e.g., caring, compassionate, generous, etc.) and indicated whether they embodied these attributes.

Results

Manipulation check

The results of an independent-samples *t*-test confirmed our manipulation, such that participants in reactive help condition (M = 6.41, SD = 0.74) significantly agreed more that their help was solicited than participants in proactive help condition (M = 1.91, SD = 1.33), $t(220) = 30.03$, $p < .001$, $d = 4.18$.

Expense over-reporting

An independent-samples *t*-test demonstrated that participants in the reactive help condition (M = 3.81, SD = 3.06) perceived the cost of help to be higher than participants in the proactive help condition (M = 3.06, SD = 1.53), $t(220) = 3.39$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.45$, supporting H_1.

Regarding over-reporting, we first examined the degree of over-reporting in each condition by comparing the over-reported amount with zero (i.e., full honesty; not reporting any amount over $42.75). Two one-sample *t*-tests found that the over-reported amount in the proactive help condition did not significantly differ from zero (M = 1.44, SD = 11.51), $t(97) = 1.24$, $p = .22$, but the over-reported amount in the reactive help condition was significantly higher than zero (M = 12.83, SD = 24.26), $t(123) = 5.89$, $p < .001$. Next, an independent-

samples *t*-test found that participants in the reactive help condition over-reported their expenses than their counterparts in the proactive help condition, $t(220) = 4.62$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.60$. These results suggested that reactive (more than proactive) helpers not only exhibited selfish behavior but also did so to a significantly higher magnitude.

According to the reimbursement task instructions, the maximum total allowance that could be reported was $100. Therefore, as a robustness check, we removed 2 participants who reported more than $100 and 1 participant who did not report any expenses. Our results remained unchanged ($M_{reactive\ help} = 12.33$, $SD = 22.82$; $M_{proactive\ help} = 1.44$, $SD = 11.51$, $t(217) = 4.58$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.60$).

Mediation

As stated in Study 1, it is reiterated that our mediation analysis has limitations of correlational indirect analyses (Fiedler et al., 2018) and that causal relationship cannot be inferred based on only statistical results. We used the PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013), Model 4, to conduct a mediation analysis and calculated the 95% bootstrap confidence interval based on 5,000 iterations with perceived cost, moral credentials, and moral credits as simultaneous mediators (Fig. 3). Reactive help condition was coded as 1 and proactive help condition as 0.

After controlling for moral credits and moral credentials, we found a significant indirect effect of cost ($b = 1.45$, $se = 0.75$, 95% CI [0.24, 3.13]), supporting H_2[1]. As predicted, there was a significant correlation between help condition and cost, $b = 0.75$, $se = 0.22$, $p = .001$, which significantly predicted expense over-reporting, $b = 1.95$, $se = 0.87$, $p = .03$.

[1] The mediation effect of perceived cost held when keeping only perceived cost as the single mediator (indirect effect $b = 3.03$, $se = 1.12$, 95% CI [1.09, 5.42].

Albeit not the focus of the current study, we also examined the effect of moral licensing account. The indirect effect of moral credentials was significant (b = 1.77, se = 0.94, 95% *CI* [0.15, 3.80]) and the indirect effect of moral credits was not significant (b = 0.82, se = 0.53, 95% *CI* [-0.03, 2.02]). Specifically, there was a significant correlation between help condition and moral credits, b = 0.50, se = 0.18, p = .006, and a significant but negative correlation between help condition and moral credentials, b = -0.31, se = 0.14, p = .03. The correlation between moral credits and the amount reported was not significant, b = 1.63, se = 0.93, p = .08. In contrast, moral credentials were negatively associated with the amount reported, b = -5.75, se = 1.35, p < .001.

These findings on moral licensing are noteworthy. First, we found a significant and positive correlation between reactive help and moral credits, which had a marginally significant effect on subsequent selfish behavior. This finding is consistent with previous literature that when people reflect on immoral counterfactuals, they feel morally licensed to engage in negative behavior (Effron et al., 2012), and our theorizing that the counterfactuals of help might be more readily activated in reactive helpers. Second, we found a significant but negative correlation between reactive help and moral credentials, which significantly and negatively predicted selfish behavior. Although unexpected, this result is in line with the recent literature. For example, Loi et al. (2020, Study 1) found a negative indirect effect of moral credentials linking volunteering with workplace deviance, and Lin et al. (2016, Study 2) found a null effect of moral credentials on abusive leader behavior. In sum, the recent evidence suggests that the effect of moral credentials on negative behaviors is still unclear.

Insert Figure 3 here

Moderated mediation

We then used the PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013), Model 14, to conduct a moderated mediation analysis with 95% bootstrap confidence interval based on 5,000 iterations. This analysis had perceived cost as the mediator and equity sensitivity as the moderator. The interactive effect between cost and equity sensitivity on selfish behavior was significant, b = -1.70, se = 0.70, p = .02 (see Table 1), supporting H_3. The index of moderated mediation, which is used to test whether the indirect effect is linearly related to the moderator (Hayes, 2015), excluded zero: b = -1.27, se = 0.70, 95% CI [-3.01, -0.24], thereby indicating that the proposed mediation effect is moderated by the participants' equity sensitivity, supporting H_4.

Insert Table 1 here

To further illustrate the interaction, we analyzed the simple slopes of expense reporting at ±1 SD of equity preference (Fig. 4). The relationship between cost and over-expensing was insignificant for participants high on equity sensitivity (i.e., benevolent; b = 0.66, se = 1.26, p = .60) but was significant for participants low on equity sensitivity (i.e., entitled; b = 4.62, se = 1.12, p < .001).

Insert Figure 4 here

Discussion

This study found replicating support for our proposed mechanism and demonstrated that reactive (than proactive) helpers perceived the help as more costly. Additionally, this study provided evidence for the moderating effect of an individual's equity sensitivity, thereby demonstrating stronger evidence for our proposed mechanism. We found that for benevolents, the higher cost did not result in a greater claim of reimbursement. Only those who were intolerant to under-reward (i.e., more tending towards entitled) exhibited more selfish behavior.

In addition, after controlling for the moral licensing explanation, this study demonstrates that the perceived cost of helping is a significant mechanism after controlling for moral licensing. Perhaps, follow-up research can delve deeper into the motivations driving proactive (vs. reactive) help and the role of moral licensing.

General Discussion

To date, helper-centric research has left the empirical distinction between proactive and reactive help and its associated outcomes unclear. In the current research, we investigate the varying outcomes of proactive and reactive help - revealing that the genesis of help plays a critical role in affecting the helpers' subsequent selfish behaviors. Specifically, based on the overarching framework of fairness and equity theory and across three experiments, we find converging evidence suggesting that offering help upon being solicited may lead the helpers to exhibit more selfish intentions and behaviors. This effect occurs because reactive helpers perceive the cost of helping to be higher than proactive helpers. To support the proposed

mechanism, we utilized a moderation-of-process design in Study 2, examined the moderating effect of an individual's equity sensitivity (a theoretically relevant trait), and controlled for the moral licensing explanation in Study 3. In Studies 2 and 3, the selfish behaviors we examined were unrelated to the context in which the help was initially provided or the target who received the help. Therefore, our results point to a cross-domain effect that transcends a dyadic helper-receiver relationship.

Theoretical Implications

Our work contributes to the broad literature on prosocial and helping behavior in organizations by examining the distinct outcomes of the genesis of help. Although the previous literature highlights that there might be significant differences between proactive and reactive help (e.g., Bolino & Grant, 2016; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2013), and there is recent work showing that reactive helpers receive more gratitude from recipients than proactive helpers (Lee et al., 2019), empirical research on how these two geneses of help differ in terms of the potential negative outcomes has been somewhat limited. Extending this literature, we examine how the different geneses of help relate to the helper's subsequent selfish behavior. We suggest that although workplace helping creates value for firms, reactive help (more than proactive help) can paradoxically backfire. Our research demonstrates that reactive helpers are more likely to indulge in selfish behaviors themselves after providing such help, and this finding has organizational implications: more than half of the helping behaviors at workplaces are reactive (Anderson & Williams, 1996), and responding to other colleagues' requests is one of the most common cooperative endeavors (e.g., Bamberger, 2009; Grant & Hofmann, 2011). However, in Study 3, we found that

participants who reactively (than proactively) helped a coworker later over-reported their business expenses. This form of cheating behavior can be financially detrimental to organizations.

Our research also provides new insights into the psychological mechanism of the perceived cost of help and contributes to the literature on fairness and equity theory. Helping others often involves cost for the helpers themselves, and related study has found that cost of help plays an important role when observers judge a potential helper who accepts vis-à-vis rejects a help request (e.g., Yin & Smith, 2021).However, less is known about whether cost of the help impacts the helper's own downstream behaviors.. Our work illustrates that it is not the objective cost that drives the helper's subsequent selfish behavior. Rather, it is the subjective perception of cost that motivates them to indulge in selfish behaviors to restore the sense of equity. This finding is consistent with the recent evidence that the identical payoffs led to more selfish behaviors when such payoffs were framed as losses (vs. gains) (e.g., Leib et al., 2019), suggesting that the subjective sense of costs boosted individual's self-serving behavior. Besides, Study 3 suggests that this mediation effect is stronger for individuals who are less tolerant to under-reward (i.e., entitleds). Taken together, these research findings demonstrate a unique mechanism that links reactive help and the helper's subsequent selfish behavior – a mechanism that has been overlooked in the previous literature, and our work provides novel applications of the fairness theory.

Relatedly, our work sheds new light on costly prosocial behaviors and their moral outcomes by examining the role of the perceived cost of help. In contrast to the findings of Gneezy et al. (2012) suggesting that costly prosocial behaviors stimulate subsequent prosocial

behaviors, we demonstrate that this effect may depend on the genesis of help – with reactive help more likely to motivate selfish and unethical behaviors. Thus, our work reveals that the effect of costly prosocial behavior on moral outcomes may operate through different paths, depending on the genesis of help.

Additionally, our research speaks to the literature on equitable social exchanges (e.g., Walsteret al., 1978). It has long been recognized that perceived equity of social change relationships is important. Yet, how individuals develop their perception of cost and rewards in social exchanges remains less studied (Zhang & Epley, 2009). Our results highlight that even when proactive and reactive helpers provide the same help, the perceived cost is higher when the help is reactive vis-à-vis proactive in nature. As a result, reactive (than proactive) helpers might feel under-rewarded and are more likely to perceive this social exchange as inequitable. Therefore, our results highlight a possible antecedent to perceived inequity in social exchanges.

Practical Implications

This research also offers practical implications for organizations. First, our results suggest that reactive helping may be more costly for organizations, and this is because reactive helpers are likely to behave more selfishly after responding to a help request. The finding has organizational implications as more than half of the helping behaviors at workplaces are reactive (Anderson & Williams, 1996), and responding to other colleagues' requests is one of the most common cooperative endeavors (e.g., Bamberger, 2009; Grant & Hofmann, 2011). Therefore, managers promoting employee helping behaviors should exercise caution due to the potential organizational costs. For example, in Study 3, we found that

participants who reactively (than proactively) helped a coworker later over-reported their business expenses. Clearly, this form of selfish (cheating) behavior can be financially detrimental to any organization.

Furthermore, our results suggest that at least one reason for the relationship between initial reactive help and the consequent selfish behaviors is that reactive helpers tend to perceive their cost of helping as higher - rooted in the disruptive nature of reactive help. Therefore, it is also important for employees to realize that reactive help is more onerous than proactive help for both helpers and the organizations. This finding does not suggest that employees should refuse to help others or avoid asking for help, but any solicitation of help must be practiced while reducing its disruptive nature. For example, the helpers and beneficiaries could agree upon a quid-pro-quo (or mutually beneficial) helping arrangement, which reduces the perception of cost, even when the help is reactive or solicited.

Limitations and Future Directions

Besides the contributions, this research opens several avenues for future work. First, we have focused on perceived cost as the mechanism; yet the results from Study 3 suggested that other explanations might also play a role. Apart from moral licensing, previous research has found that proactive help can sometimes damage the receiver's felt competence and self-esteem because helpers lack a good understanding of the recipient's problems (e.g., Butler, 1998; Chou & Chang, 2017; Halabi et al., 2011). Therefore, proactive helpers may perceive their assistance as less valuable, thereby reducing their subsequent self-interested behaviors. In sum, the social dynamics between helpers and recipients in granting and receiving help may affect the helper's subsequent selfish behaviors.

Second, there might be significant differences in terms of the attributes of proactive and reactive help. For example, individuals might be more likely to offer proactive help (vis-à-vis reactive) help when the help itself is easier, is more meaningful, or when it is one's obligation to help (e.g., Spitzmuller & Van Dyne, 2013). While these aspects have not been explored in our research, future research might map the full domain of the differences between proactive and reactive help and their behavioral consequences.

Lastly, in the current work, we did not investigate whether helpers gain benefits from the help *per-se*. Previous literature suggests that prosocial behaviors can also be driven by self-interests such as the need for impression management (e.g., Grant & Mayer, 2009). In addition, helpers may gain satisfaction and enjoyment from helping others (intrinsic motivation: Deci & Ryan, 2000). Thus, such benefits may offset the detrimental effect of reactive help on selfish behaviors, and we encourage future research to investigate this possible argument.

Conclusion

Our research suggests that reactive helpers (vis-à-vis proactive helpers) are more likely to indulge in selfish behaviors following their help - explained by a heightened perception of the cost of help. We hope that the findings of this paper enhance the scholarly understanding of the distinct influence of proactive and reactive help on helper's downstream behaviors.

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Tables and Figures

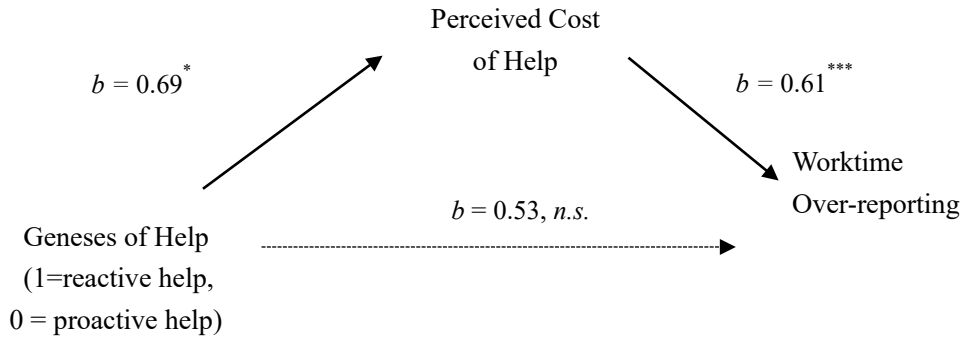

Fig. 1 Mediation from reactive help to worktime over-reporting intentions through perceived cost (Study 1).
$^{***}p < .001$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{*}p < .05$

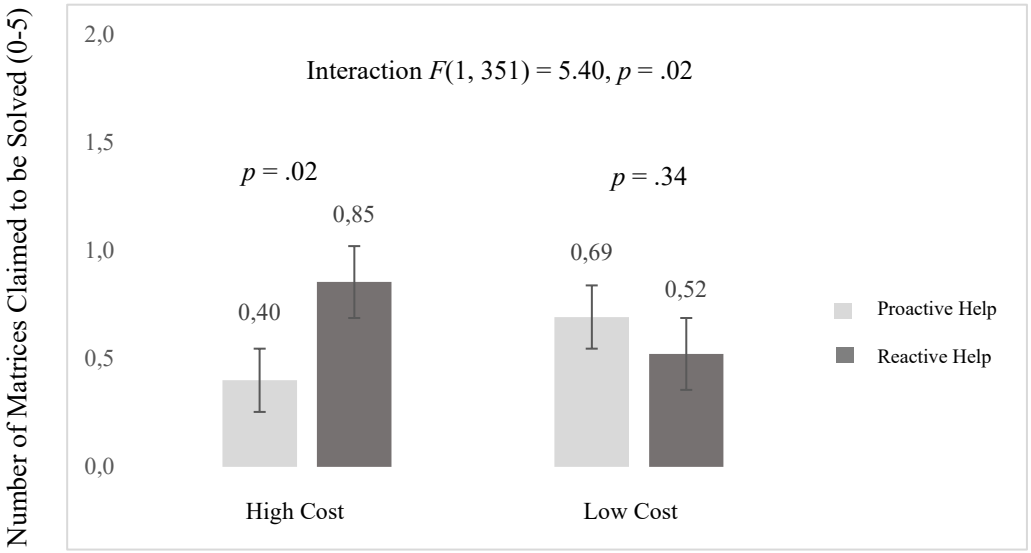

Fig. 2 Moderating effect of perceived cost on the number of unsolvable matrices participants claimed to solve (Study 2).
Note: Error bars represent standard errors

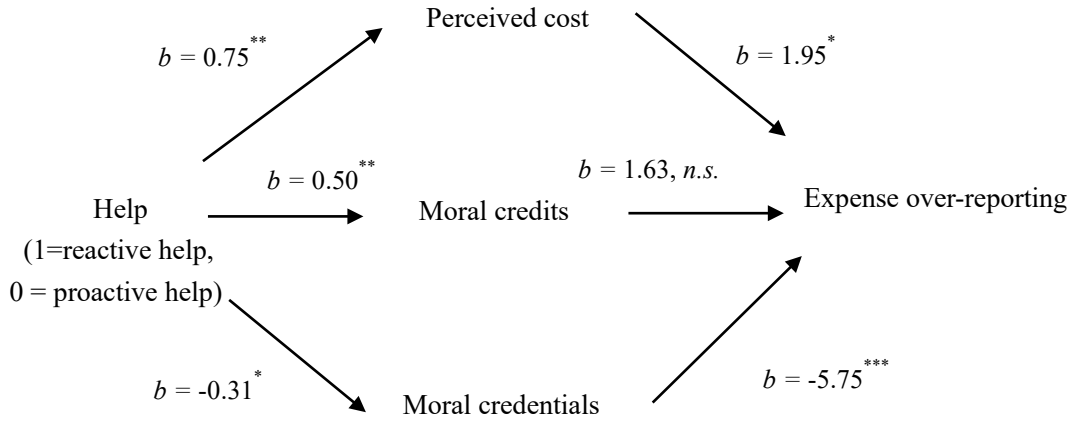

Fig. 3 Mediation from reactive help to expense over-reporting through perceived cost and moral licensing (Study 3).
$^{***}p < .001$, $^{**}p < .01$, $^{*}p < .05$

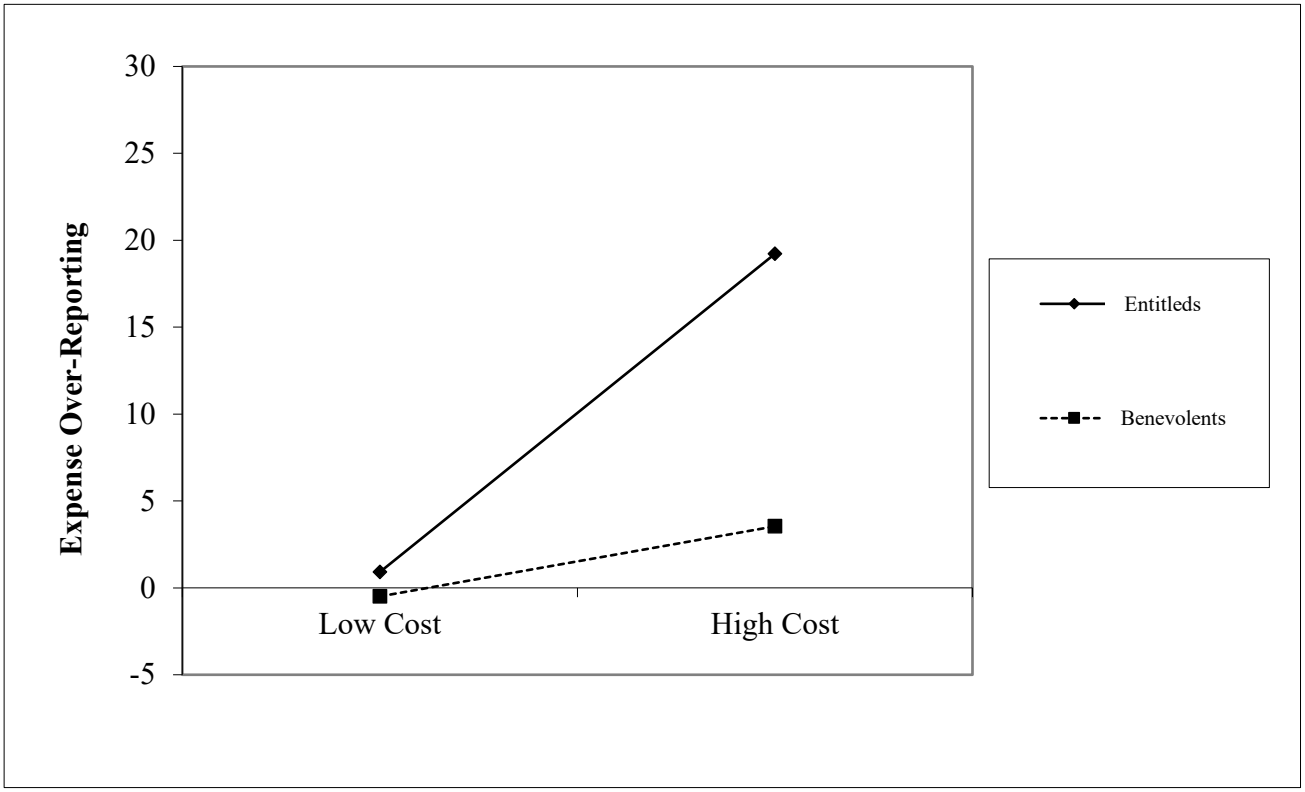

Fig. 4 Moderating effect of equity sensitivity on the relationship between perceived cost and expense over-reporting (Study 3).
The regression lines were plotted based ± 1 SD around equity sensitivity. Benevolents refer to participants with 1SD above the mean of equity sensitivity and Entitleds refer to participants with 1SD below the mean of equity sensitivity.

Table 1. Regression Results for perceived cost and expense over-reporting in Study 3

Predictors	**Perceived Cost**		**Expense over-reporting**	
	B	***SE***	***B***	***SE***
Constant	3.06***	0.17	-17.70	14.14
Reactive help	0.75**	0.22	8.12**	2.52
Perceived cost			11.17**	3.53
Equity sensitivity (ES)			1.96	2.57
Perceived cost × ES			-1.70*	0.70
R^2	0.05**		0.23***	
F	11.12**		16.25***	

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

$N = 222$. 1 = *reactive help* condition, 0 = *proactive help* condition.

Chapter 2

Thank Me! Soliciting Gratitude Expression Leads to Interpersonal Avoidance

Abstract

Gratitude expression has long been found to enhance interpersonal relationships, largely with the implicit assumption that the beneficiary is the initiator of gratitude expression and the benefactor is the passive receiver. We challenge this assumption by examining situations where benefactors may offer help but then solicit gratitude expression from the beneficiary. Based on the social exchange theory and the responsibility exchange theory, we predict that soliciting gratitude expression leads to perceived benefactor arrogance, which results in beneficiary's avoidance of the benefactor. A pilot study first established the prevalence of soliciting gratitude expression in everyday life. In Study 1, we show that soliciting gratitude expression is different from soliciting other monetary or non-monetary returns in terms of perceived benefactor arrogance. In Studies 2 and 3, we find that soliciting gratitude expression leads the beneficiary to avoid the benefactor more (vs. the control condition) through the mechanism of perceived benefactor arrogance after controlling for alternative mechanisms. Additionally, we study the moderating role of whether the beneficiary has already expressed gratitude before it is solicited on the effect of soliciting gratitude expression on interpersonal avoidance. These results contribute to a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of soliciting gratitude expression.

Keywords: Solicited gratitude; Avoidance; Arrogance; Social exchange; Self-promotion

Thank Me! Soliciting Gratitude Expression Leads to Interpersonal Avoidance

Introduction

Organizational scholars have increasingly recognized the importance of gratitude expression, and research from both psychology and sociology has repeatedly pointed to its benefits for one's well-being and interpersonal relationships (e.g., Lyubomirsky et al., 2011; Tangney et al., 2007; Lambert et al., 2010). An implicit assumption in most previous research has been that the beneficiary of help is the initiator of gratitude expression and the benefactor is the passive receiver. Yet, what would happen if gratitude expression was demanded?

After providing help, benefactors may expect some verbal acknowledgement from the beneficiary of the help and even explicitly point it out. For example, imagine you hesitantly asked a colleague to help cover for one of your night shifts. The next day you meet the helper and smile and nod your head in appreciation, but the helper says, "The least you can do is say thank you for yesterday". Soliciting gratitude expression from others, be it formally or jokingly, is not uncommon in our daily lives (e.g., Chaudhry & Loewenstein, 2019). However, to date there is very little, if any, research on solicitation of gratitude expression and its outcomes.

Here, we provide the first investigation of solicited gratitude expression and how it may lead beneficiaries to the negative interpersonal consequence of avoidance. Building on the responsibility exchange theory (Chaudhry & Loewenstein, 2019) and past perspectives on social exchange theory (e.g., Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005), we introduce gratitude expression as an understudied resource that conveys the meaning of conferral of

credit and could be demanded in social exchanges. We define gratitude expression solicitation as when a benefactor explicitly or implicitly solicits verbal appreciation (e.g., a thank-you) from their beneficiary. We first predict that, unlike soliciting other resources such as money or non-monetary favors, soliciting gratitude expression will lead to higher perceived arrogance of the benefactor. Furthermore, soliciting gratitude expression would leads the beneficiary to avoid the benefactor more (vs. the control condition) through the mechanism of perceived benefactor arrogance after controlling for alternative mechanisms (see Fig. 1 for the full research model).

Insert Figure 1 about here

The current research thus makes several noteworthy contributions. First, we contribute to the social exchange theory by identifying gratitude expression as an understudied resource that can be solicited in interpersonal exchanges, and we examine how soliciting gratitude expressions can result in interpersonal avoidance. While scholars have for long proposed incorporating emotions into social exchange theory (e.g., Lawler & Thye, 1999; Lawler, 2001), empirical research has yet to be progressed. We advance this underexplored field by demonstrating gratitude expression as a fairly common resource that a benefactor might solicit from a beneficiary in real-life interactions which, differently from soliciting other commonly examined resources in social exchanges (e.g., money: Foa & Foa, 1980; Bohns et al., 2016), leads to higher perceived arrogance of the benefactor.

We also extend the research on gratitude by incorporating the nascent responsibility exchange theory (Chaudhry & Loewenstein, 2019) and by investigating the situations when gratitude expression is solicited. The vast studies on gratitude and its relational consequences have typically focused on when gratitude is expressed by the beneficiary or when gratitude is received by the benefactor (e.g., Grant & Gino, 2010;Kumar & Epley, 2018;Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006;Algoe et al., 2008; 2019;Park et al., 2019;Algoe, 2012). However, the possibility that gratitude may be expressed because it was solicited by the benefactor has largely been overlooked. The responsibility exchange theory proposes that interpersonal communications such as thanking and apologizing relay information about credit or blame, and as a result such communication has the power to influence interpersonal relationships (Chaudhry & Loewenstein, 2019). Based on this theory, we suggest that soliciting gratitude expression could lead to a perception of arrogance of the benefactor and higher avoidance by the beneficiary. Our work thus provides an important qualifier for understanding situations in which gratitude expression is related to positive versus negative outcomes.

In addition, we enrich the literature on self-promotion by demonstrating solicitation of gratitude expression as a subtle way of self-promotion (e.g., Scopelliti et al., 2015; Powers & Zuroff, 1988; Tice et al., 1995;Berman et al., 2015). Past research has shown that people engage in self-promoting behaviors in various ways to highlight their good qualities or to establish a positive image, yet these attempts often fail as observers can perceive the self-promoters as arrogant (e.g., Sezer et al., 2018; Schlenker & Leary, 1982; Valsesia et al., 2021). The current study shows how individuals might self-promote about one's prosocial

behaviors, a context that has received limited attention in the current literature (e.g., Berman et al., 2015).

Last, we contribute to the emerging literature on conversations (e.g., Sun & Slepian, 2020; Truong et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2017) and illustrate that the conversational flow of gratitude expression matters for relationship development. In this regard, we highlight how, in the otherwise a positive context of helping (e.g., Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006), soliciting gratitude expression can result in the benefactor being perceived as arrogant and that this perception worsens when the beneficiary feels that they had already expressed gratitude before the benefactor's solicitation.

Theoretical Development

Soliciting Gratitude Expression and Perceived Arrogance

Past literature has typically examined outcomes when a beneficiary voluntarily expresses gratitude upon receiving help (e.g., Lambert et al., 2010; Lambert & Fincham, 2011; Algoe et al., 2013; Algoe, 2012; Grant & Gino, 2010). However, benefactors expect to receive gratitude after offering help (e.g., Zhang & Epley, 2009) and this can lead them to actively solicit gratitude expressions. In fact, in a live chat study, Chaudhry and Loewenstein (2019) found that a large proportion (around 59%) of benefactors prompted their beneficiaries to say thank-you when these benefactors started a chat with the beneficiaries after providing help. Although gratitude expression solicitation has been observed, scholars lack an understanding of its outcomes.

One of the basic function of thanking (i.e., gratitude expression) is the conferral of credit; in other words, gratitude expression is a communication from the beneficiary that gives the benefactor credit for a positive outcome (e.g., Chaudhry & Loewenstein, 2019; McCullough et al., 2001; Lawler & Thye, 1999). For example, You et al. (2020) found that after a service failure, service providers saying "sorry" highlighted their own faults whereas saying "thank you" to customers put focus on consumers' merits and contributions. In this sense, when a benefactor solicits gratitude expression from a beneficiary, the benefactor can be seen as claiming credit and highlighting their contribution, which might even be interpreted as a subtle manner of self-promotion such that the benefactor is attributing the reasons of the positive outcome to themselves (e.g., Rudman, 1998).

We hence predict that gratitude expression solicitation will increase the perception that the benefactor is arrogant, compared to when the benefactor solicits other resources or solicits nothing at all. Common conceptualizations of arrogance define it as an individual's belief of their own superiority (e.g., Johnson et al., 2010), and arrogant people tend to disparage others by exaggerating their own sense of self-importance (Silverman et al., 2012). Although arrogance is closely related to personality traits such as narcissism and overconfidence (e.g., Emmons, 1987; Hall & Livingston, 2012), there are important distinctions since arrogance is manifested in interpersonal context while these personality traits can manifest in the absence of others (e.g., Silverman et al., 2012). Relatedly, Hareli and Weiner (2000) found that people are seen as arrogant when they attribute success to positive qualities of themselves, such as high intelligence.

The implicit norm of politeness in favor exchanges explains the expectation that helpers

should be courteous and downplay their efforts entailed in the help (e.g., Flynn, 2003b; 2006). For example, helpers often make statements such as “it’s no big deal” and “it’s nothing” as a response to beneficiary’s gratitude for the help, to show modesty and politeness (e.g., McGuire, 2003;Bohns et al., 2016). Therefore, such social script could lead beneficiaries to expect the benefactor to demonstrate humility and modesty after providing help. Solicitation of gratitude expression, in contrast, implies that the benefactor attributes the positive outcome to their own contributions and efforts, and as such the benefactor is highlighting their self-importance. Similarly, Berman et al. (2015) suggested that bragging about one’s prosocial behaviors can be interpreted as claiming credit for the behavior. Such behavior would then go against the general expectation of modesty or politeness, and prompt the perception that the benefactor is arrogant.

H1: Soliciting gratitude expression will increase perceived arrogance of the benefactor.

Soliciting Gratitude Expression and Avoidance

We focus on avoidance as the main outcome because gratitude expression is studied as a tool to foster relationship development; yet to achieve any successful outcome of relational development, such as trust and cooperation, continuous interactions are crucial and necessary (e.g., McAllister, 1995; Williams, 2007). Therefore, avoidance would be detrimental to the formation of a high-quality relationship.

We predict that a beneficiary will avoid a benefactor more if they solicit gratitude expression and are hence perceived as arrogant. Research on self-promotion has consistently found that people dislike others who self-promote (e.g., Scopelliti et al., 2015; Powers & Zuroff, 1988; Tice et al., 1995; Schlenker & Leary, 1982; Berman et al., 2015) even if they

self-promote in a seemingly humble manner (Sezer et al., 2018). This is partially because people value modesty in social interactions (e.g., Weaver et al., 2017; Wosinska et al., 1996) while self-promoters are perceived as arrogant and boastful (e.g., Valsesia et al., 2021). Relatedly, research has found that people avoided others who demonstrated moral superiority (Adams et al., 2015).

H2: Perceived arrogance will mediate the relationship between soliciting gratitude expression and beneficiary avoidance of the benefactor.

Gratitude Already Expressed as a Moderator

Sometimes people may not immediately express gratitude after receiving help: first, due to the egocentric perspectives, beneficiaries may assume that the benefactor is already aware of their gratitude (e.g., Epley et al., 2004); second, the anticipation that expressing gratitude will be awkward (Kumar & Epley, 2018) can also lead the beneficiaries to withhold their gratitude expression. In addition, there are different non-verbal ways of gratitude expression that a beneficiary might adopt besides verbal appreciation (e.g., Chang & Algoe, 2019; Floyd et al., 2018). We thus predict that whether the beneficiary feels that gratitude has already been expressed will moderate the relationship between gratitude expression solicitation and perceived benefactor arrogance, such that a gratitude-soliciting benefactor will be perceived as more arrogant if the beneficiary feels that they have already expressed gratitude.

Apart from receiving credit, gratitude expression also has other functions that the benefactor may highly value. For example, in favor exchanges, it is an implicit expectation for benefactors to receive beneficiary's gratitude or appreciation (e.g., Converse & Fishbach, 2012; Flynn, 2003). Therefore, if the beneficiary did not express gratitude in the first place,

the intention behind a benefactor soliciting gratitude expression is ambiguous: gratitude expression solicitation could be interpreted as a reminder to the beneficiary to follow the social norm of being thankful in favor exchanges. However, if the beneficiary feels that they have already expressed gratitude and the social norm of being grateful has been followed, soliciting gratitude expression then clearly suggests that the benefactor is expecting credit for their own kind deeds (e.g., Berman et al., 2015). We hence predict that the effect of gratitude expression solicitation on perceived benefactor arrogance will be stronger if the beneficiary feels that they have already expressed gratitude (vis-à-vis when gratitude has not been expressed).

Taken together, we postulate that gratitude expression solicitation will lead the beneficiary to avoid the benefactor more, and this relationship is mediated by perceived benefactor arrogance. In addition, given the meaning of claiming credit conveyed by gratitude expression solicitation, we expect this mechanism to be stronger when the beneficiary has already expressed gratitude before it being solicited by the benefactor.

H3: Whether gratitude is already expressed will moderate the relationship between gratitude expression solicitation and perceived benefactor arrogance, and hence the indirect relationship between gratitude expression solicitation and avoidance through perceived benefactor arrogance, such that the indirect effect is stronger when gratitude is already expressed before it being solicited.

Possible Alternative Explanations

In this section we highlight two important alternative explanations that may also play a role in the relationship between gratitude expression solicitation and avoidance. First,

according to the instrumental perspective of social exchange theory (e.g., Liao et al., 2019; Eisenberger et al., 1987), the provision of resources could be strategically used for future self-gains because social exchanges are interdependent and the recipient of help is obliged to reciprocate (e.g., Cabral et al., 2014; Finan & Schechter, 2012). In this sense, a benefactor who solicits gratitude expression or even other types of returns after offering help might be perceived as being instrumental, such that the benefactor is expecting something in return. By instrumental we mean the extent to which the benefactor is offering help for self-interested reasons, which is in line with previous definition on instrumentality, namely the extent to which others are 'useful' to the focal actor's own goals and self-interests (e.g., Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008; Shah & Kruglanski, 2003; Gino et al., 2020). Hence, a beneficiary may avoid a benefactor who seems to offer help for instrumental but not altruistic reasons. Related studies have found that when a beneficiary perceived that the decision to help was driven by the benefactor's cost-benefit calculation, the beneficiary would want to avoid future interactions with this benefactor (Ames et al., 2004).

Second, it is also possible that soliciting gratitude expression or other returns would violate beneficiaries' autonomy and elicit psychological reactance, which is an aversive motivational state prompting people to restore their behavioral autonomy (e.g., Brehm, 1966). Autonomy is defined as a sense that one's actions "emanate from oneself and are one's own" (Deci & Ryan, 1987, p.1025), and this can be undermined when a behavior is perceived as being controlled by others (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000). When a benefactor solicits something, beneficiaries may feel their autonomy is being threatened and psychological reactance can emerge. As an example of psychological reactance, Lupoli et al. (2018) found that when

people were being lied to, they disliked the outcome that resulted from lying even if they would have liked the same outcome had it resulted from honesty, because being lied to violated people's autonomy. Similarly, if participants feel their autonomy to express gratitude is reduced when the benefactor solicits gratitude, beneficiaries may contradictorily reduce their desire to express gratitude and avoid the benefactor more.

Taken together, while soliciting gratitude expression or other resources might increase perceived instrumentality and violate beneficiaries' autonomy, we believe that soliciting gratitude expression will yield a unique effect on perceived benefactor arrogance based on the credit-claiming meaning it conveys, compared to soliciting other types of resources or not soliciting anything at all.

Overview of Studies

In one pilot study and three experiments, we demonstrated real-life instances of gratitude expression solicitation, established the relationship between soliciting gratitude expression and beneficiaries' avoidance through our proposed mechanism, and we explored the moderating role of whether gratitude has been expressed before it is solicited. The pilot study utilized a critical incident technique to prompt participants to generate micro-narratives of salient experiences when they were asked for gratitude or other returns after receiving help. Study 1 compared participants' perceived arrogance and instrumentality of the benefactor, as well as felt autonomy violations, between soliciting gratitude expression and soliciting monetary and other non-monetary favors in return. In Studies 2 and 3, we investigated the mediation effect of perceived arrogance on the relationship between gratitude expression solicitation and avoidance while controlling for alternative explanations. Studies 3 also

examined the moderating effect of whether the beneficiary has expressed gratitude before being solicited, and provided further evidence for our theorizing.

Pilot Study

To understand the prevalence and nature of this soliciting gratitude expression phenomenon in everyday life, we ran a pilot study with two different samples across the online platforms Amazon Mechanical Turk (sample A) and Prolific (sample B). In sample A, we employed a natural recall approach to first explore how prevalent soliciting gratitude expression might be. In sample B, we utilized random assignment across two conditions and participants were randomly assigned to either the soliciting gratitude condition or the control condition. In each sample we utilized a critical incident technique, whereby we asked participants to recall and write a micro-narrative (Adams & Inesi, 2016) about a time they were helped by someone and that person then solicited gratitude from the participant (in sample B, the control group simply recalled a time they received help). All text responses were content analyzed and inductively coded using the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti.

Participants

Sample A. 101 U.S.-based participants were invited to participate in Amazon Mechanical Turk, and 1 participant was removed for no response (42 women, M_{age} = 39.24).

Sample B. 130 English-speaking participants were recruited from Prolific.ac, and 26 participants could not recall such an instance, leaving 104 responses eligible for analysis (47

women, M_{age} = 31.04). The majority of the participants (68%) were from the U.K. and European countries.

Procedures and Materials

Sample A. Participants were first asked if they had been in a situation where they were offered help by someone and were then reminded by this benefactor to be grateful towards them for the help. They were then asked to describe the help they received, how gratitude was solicited, and how they felt about the recalled event. If participants could not recall receiving help and then being asked for gratitude, they were asked to describe an instance when they received help and how they felt. We purposefully kept our questions broad so as to gather an initial understanding of gratitude solicitation and what kinds of resources tend to be solicited.

Sample B. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions. In the *solicited gratitude condition*, participants were asked to recall and write about an instance when someone did something positive (useful/beneficial/kind) for them, and after that, the person asked them to express gratitude (n = 54). In the *control condition*, participants simply recalled an instance when someone did something positive (useful/beneficial/kind) for them (n = 50). Participants stated who this person was, described the help received, how the person solicited gratitude (only in the solicited gratitude condition), and reflected on how they felt about this instance.

Results

Sample A. Participants described a range of instances in which they received help, of which the most common were receiving money ("to help me pay off my credit card balance"), help with one's car or a ride to somewhere ("A neighbor offered help changing a flat tire

while I was stranded two blocks away from my home"), help with studies ("Someone helped me study before a final in college that I was extremely nervous about failing"), house chores ("My daughter offered to mow our backyard"), and moving ("I was offered help moving out of an old apartment"). The benefactors were typically friends or family members, but some participants also described receiving help from colleagues, neighbors, and strangers. Most notably, 69 of the 100 participants recalled having experienced a situation where the helper solicited some form of gratitude. Benefactors primarily asked participants to say "thank you" (39.73%), fulfill a non-monetary favor in return (24.66%), or give money (20.55%). Table 1 provides extracts from the text data describing how gratitude was solicited.

Insert Table 1 about here

At the broadest level, having gratitude expression solicited was strongly related to experiencing negative emotions. However, we also noticed some patterns concerning how gratitude/return was solicited and what impact this had on participants' perceptions of the benefactor. When money was sought, reactions were largely negative, such as one participant who said, "I was kind of shocked but I still gave him the money. I made a mental note to never ask anything from him again." When a non-monetary favor was solicited, reactions were more balanced between feeling negative or neutral, with statements such as "I was hurt because I wouldn't demand gratitude from my neighbor had I been the person that provided the help" but also reflections that "I felt fine as they earned it" or "I felt that it was reasonable". Having a verbal "thank you" solicited was associated with some positive and neutral reactions (such as feeling "happy to say it" and "I didn't feel bad because they

deserved it"), but a predominance of negative feelings emerged, such as "I felt a little annoyed at the tone" and "I felt it was a bit much. I understand and did thank them tremendously. But that demand was unnecessary."

Sample B. Similar patterns emerged regarding who the recalled benefactor was and the kind of help received.[2] Gratitude was primarily solicited by seeking a non-monetary favor in return (42.59%) or asking for a verbal "thank you" (38.89%). Participants expressed a range of reactions, but many felt positive when a non-monetary favor was sought and remarked, for example, "I felt as if it was a fair request and was happy to comply" and "I hate to be faced with situations outside of my control or being beholden to anyone so immediately being asked to do a favor in return balanced our relationship." However, some participants also felt "surprised by the outrageous demand" and "shocked he thought he needs to bring up the last night favor in order to help him". When being asked to say "thank you", some participants expressed positive reactions, such as "I felt happy she cared" and "I felt happy and grateful". However, negative reactions were most prevalent, with participants saying they felt "upset with the way he approached me" or "I felt shocked at first because it felt like an attack". Table 2 includes further extracts of reactions from participants who were asked to say "thank you", provide a non-monetary favor, and reactions from participants in the control condition.

Insert Table 2 about here

Discussion

[2] Across both conditions, help was received from a friend (30.95%), a family member (28.57%), a stranger (20.24%), or an acquaintance (e.g., colleague, peer, neighbor, etc.) (20.24%), primarily regarding money (15.15%%,), one's car (a ride, gas, or fix) (11.11%), work tasks (9.09%), receiving a gift or surprise (9.09%), emotional support (e.g., talking, hanging out, etc.) (9.09%), accommodation or a place to stay (7.07%), or personal tasks (e.g., babysitting, carrying groceries, etc.) (7.07%)

In sum, in sample A, 69% of participants could recall situations in which someone helped them and then solicited different forms of gratitude and returns (of which 39.73% were asked to express thanks). In sample B, 38.89% of participants in the solicited gratitude condition were asked to say "thank you", and it seemed that this was experienced as particularly negative in comparison to having a non-monetary favor solicited. These results suggest that solicitation of gratitude expression is a fairly common phenomenon.

Study 1: Comparing Soliciting Gratitude Expression vs. Other Returns after Providing Help

Study 1 used a vignette-based experiment and investigated the differences between soliciting gratitude expression and soliciting monetary and other non-monetary returns on perceived benefactor arrogance, perceived benefactor instrumentality, and the participants' felt autonomy violation. We chose soliciting money and non-monetary returns because we found these to be common resources demanded by a benefactor in our pilot study.

Participants

Two hundred and fifty-one participants from Prolific took part in this study. Two participants failed the comprehension test and were removed from the analysis, and therefore 249 responses were eligible for analysis (*female* = 189, M_{age} = 39.12).

Procedures and Materials

All participants read a scenario and imagined that one day a colleague named Ben gave them a ride home after work. Participants were then randomly assigned to one of the five conditions: in the *gratitude expression solicitation* condition, the next day when they met Ben

in the office Ben reminded them that he had spent fuel and time on the ride, and requested participants to say 'thank-you' towards him; in the *money solicitation* condition, Ben requested some money in return; in the *drink solicitation* condition, Ben asked for a drink in return; in the *favor* condition, Ben requested participants to help him with his project for an hour after office; and in the *control* condition, Ben said 'hello' to the participants and appeared to be his usual self. Next, participants responded to the comprehension check such that they were asked to describe what happened the next day when they met Ben in the office according to the scenario. Two participants failed this question and were removed from the analysis. Participants then responded to the measures of perceived arrogance of Ben, perceived instrumentality of Ben, felt autonomy violations, and provided their demographic information.

Measures

Perceived arrogance. Based on the previous definition of arrogance (e.g., Johnson et al., 2010), we asked participants to indicate how much they agreed that Ben "is arrogant", "has an inflated sense of self-importance" and "is conceited" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), $\alpha = .96$.

Instrumentality. We used three items to measure perceived benefactor instrumentality: "Ben has selfish intent behind his help", "Ben wants to obtain reciprocal benefits by helping me" and "Ben's help is driven by his self-interested motives" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), $\alpha = .94$.

Autonomy violations. Based on Lupoli et al. (2018) and Dillard and Shen (2005), we used 3 items to measure autonomy violations. Participants assessed their feelings regarding

what Ben said to them: “I felt I could not act on my free will”, “I felt my autonomy was violated”, and “He threatened my freedom to choose” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), $\alpha = .91$.

Manipulation check. One item assessed perceived gratitude expression solicitation: “In the scenario, Ben asked for gratitude expression from me for his favor” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

Results

The means and the standard deviations of the variables across the conditions are reported in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Manipulation Check

A one-way ANOVA on the manipulation check was significant, $F(4, 244) = 42.53$, $p < .001$, such that participants in the gratitude expression solicitation condition agreed more that gratitude expression was solicited than participants in the other four conditions, ps $< .001$, ds > 1.05.

Perceived Arrogance, Perceived Instrumentality, and Autonomy Violation

A one-way ANOVA on perceived arrogance of the benefactor was significant, $F(4, 244) = 40.44$, $p < .001$. While perceived arrogance was lower in the control condition than in the other four conditions, ps $< .001$, ds > 1.78, participants in the gratitude expression solicitation condition rated the benefactor as more arrogant than participants in other three solicitation conditions, ps $< .05$, ds > 0.45, supporting H1. The difference among the money solicitation

condition, the drink solicitation condition and the favor solicitation condition was not significant, *p*s > .56.

A one-way ANOVA on perceived instrumentality of the benefactor was significant, $F(4, 244) = 48.88$, $p < .001$. To be specific, participants in the control condition rated the benefactor as less instrumental than participants in other four solicitation conditions, *p*s < .001, $d \geqslant 2.13$ In addition, perceived benefactor instrumentality in the gratitude expression solicitation conditions was not different from the drink solicitation condition and the money solicitation condition, *p*s $\geqslant$ .60, and was significantly lower than the favor condition, $p = .05$, $d = 0.44$.

Last, a one-way ANOVA on felt autonomy violations was significant, $F(4, 244) = 27.17$, $p < .001$. Participants in the control condition felt significantly lower level of autonomy violations than participants in the other four conditions, *p*s < .001, *d*s > 1.36. In addition, felt autonomy violations in the gratitude expression condition was not different from the drink solicitation condition and the favor solicitation condition, *p*s $\geqslant$ .45 and was significantly higher than the money solicitation condition, $p = .04$, $d = 0.43$.

Discussion

Based on a vignette, Study 1 compared gratitude expression solicitation with soliciting monetary and other non-monetary returns, and our results lent strong support for our prediction that gratitude expression solicitation would lead to the highest level of perceived benefactor arrogance compared to soliciting other resources or not soliciting at all. In addition, we also tested other possible consequences, namely perceived instrumentality of the benefactor and the beneficiary's felt autonomy violations. The results demonstrated that while

soliciting gratitude expression indeed led to higher level of perceived instrumentality and felt autonomy violations relative to no solicitation, the boundaries between soliciting gratitude expression and other types of resources are fuzzy. In sum, Study 1 provided clear evidence that soliciting gratitude expression (vis-à-vis other types of returns) is uniquely related to perceived arrogance of the benefactor.

In the next study, we utilized a mini-dictator game to examine the relationship between gratitude expression solicitation and avoidance, mediated by perceived arrogance of the benefactor. Additionally, we also included perceived instrumentality and autonomy violations as alternative explanations.

Study 2: Gratitude Expression Solicitation in a Dictator Game

We conducted Study 2 in which we manipulated gratitude expression solicitation in the context of a mini-dictator game (e.g., Adams et al., 2015). In this game, the allocator had control over certain amount of money and faced two options to divide the money between themselves and the recipients: dividing the money equally or keeping 80% of the money for themselves. While allocators can be driven by self-interest and offer less than fifty percent of the resources to recipients, fairly allocating the resources between themselves and the recipients can be interpreted as being kind (Bolton et al., 1998), and thus the allocator might feel entitled to receive appreciation. We hence manipulated gratitude expression solicitation after the ostensible allocator chose the option of fair allocation.

Participants

Eighty-two graduate students from a European university participated in this study in

exchange for course credits. Two participants were removed for failing the comprehension test, and 79 responses were eligible for analysis (*female* = 36, M_{age} = 23.29).

Procedures and Materials

Participants entered the game and were told that they would be paired with another student to divide €10. They were told that they would be randomly assigned to either the role of allocator or the role of receiver, and allocators would be given €10 and asked to divide the money between themselves and the receiver. The receiver would have no say in the decision and would have to accept the allocator's decision. They were also told that after the decision was made, the allocator would need to send a message to the recipient, and the recipient would need to reply. In reality, all participants were assigned to the role of the receiver.

Next, participants were shown that the allocator faced two options (option A: €5 for the allocator and €5 for the recipient; option B: €8 for the allocator and €2 for the recipient) and were then notified that the allocator chose option A (i.e., dividing the money equally). We next told participants that they would now receive the allocator's decision, along with a message from the allocator, and they were asked to reply to the allocator. Participants were randomly assigned to either the *gratitude expression solicitation* condition or the *control* condition. In the gratitude expression solicitation condition, the message read: "Hi, here's my decision. Perhaps you should say thank you to me?", and in the control condition the message read: "Hi, here's my decision.". After sending a message back to the allocator[3], participants responded to our measures and provided demographic information. As a comprehension test,

[3] All participants send a message acknowledging the decision (e.g., 'thank you', 'fair decision', 'Great Team spirit'). There were no harsh words in the messages.

at the end of the survey we asked participants how much the allocator decided to divide to them, and 2 participants failed the question and were removed from subsequent analyses.

Measures

Avoidance. We operationalized avoidance in two ways. First, participants responded to the TRIM scale as in the Study 1, $\alpha = .89$. Additionally, we asked participants how much they would prefer to play with the same partner or a different partner if they were going to play this game again with an equal chance of being assigned to the role of allocator or recipient (1 = *strongly prefer the same partner*, 6 = *strongly prefer a different partner*).

Perceived arrogance. We used the same 3 items as in Study 1 (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), $\alpha = .94$.

Instrumentality. Participants responded to 3 items developed by Gino et al. (2020): "My partner's allocation of money was strategic / purposeful / instrumental" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), $\alpha = .79$.

Autonomy violations. We used the same 3 items as in Study 1 (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), $\alpha = .88$.

Manipulation check. One item assessed perceived gratitude expression solicitation: "My counterpart asked me to express gratitude towards him/her" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

Results

Manipulation Check

We found evidence that the manipulation was successful. Participants in the gratitude expression solicitation condition ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.05$) agreed more that their counterpart

solicited gratitude expression than participants in the control condition (M = 2.09, SD = 1.36), $t(77) = 8.39$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.96$.

Avoidance

We first examined the scores on the avoidance subscale. Participants in the gratitude expression solicitation condition (M = 1.91, SD = 0.71) wanted to avoid the counterpart more than participants in the control condition (M = 1.42, SD = 0.49), $t(77) = 3.58$, $p = .001$, d = 0.81.

We next examined participants preference for switching partners. Participants in the gratitude expression solicitation condition (M = 2.48, SD = 1.46) tended to switch their counterpart more than participants in the control condition (M = 2.00, SD = 1.28), but the difference did not reach significance, $t(77) = 1.52$, $p = .13$. Therefore, in the following mediation analysis we focused on the scores of the avoidance subscale as the main dependent variable.

Mediation

We examined the differences on perceived arrogance, instrumentality and autonomy violations between the two conditions. Participants in the gratitude expression solicitation condition (M = 3.00, SD = 1.16) perceived the counterpart as more arrogant than participants in the control condition (M = 2.17, SD = 1.16), $t(77) = 3.13$, $p = .002$, $d = 0.72$, supporting H1. There was no difference between the two conditions on instrumentality ($M_{gratitude\ solicitation}$ = 3.62, SD = 0.75; $M_{control}$ = 3.62, SD = 0.89), $p = 1.00$. Last, participants in the gratitude expression solicitation condition (M = 2.79, SD = 1.01) perceived more autonomy violations

than participants in the control condition (M = 1.87, SD = 0.87), $t(77) = 4.23$, $p < .001$, d = 0.98.

Because instrumentality was not significantly different between the two conditions, we only included perceived arrogance and autonomy violations as simultaneous mediators (see Fig.2 for the mediation results). The gratitude expression solicitation condition was coded as 1 and the control condition was coded as 0. To test for mediation, we used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) model 4 with 5,000 bootstrapped confidence interval iterations. The indirect effect of perceived arrogance excluded zero: b = 0.13, se = 0.07, 95%CI [0.01, 0.30], supporting H2, while the indirect effect of autonomy violations included zero: b = 0.04, se = 0.08, 95%CI [-0.13, 0.18]. The indirect effect of perceived benefactor arrogance held when removing autonomy violations, b = 0.14, se = 0.07, 95%CI [0.02, 0.29].

Insert Figure 2 about here

Discussion

Using a mini-dictator game, we found initial support for our predictions that gratitude expression solicitation could lead to interpersonal avoidance with perceived arrogance as an underlying mechanism, and we also tested two alternative explanations: perceived instrumentality of the benefactor and the beneficiary's felt autonomy violations. However, there are several limitations in this study: first, previous literature suggests that the salient concept of money can prime individuals with a more transactional and business-like mindset (e.g., Jiang et al., 2014; Vohs, 2015), and participants even in the control condition might have

already been primed with perceived instrumentality of the benefactor. Second, as this mini-dictator game only constituted one-time interaction, perceived instrumentality of the money allocation in the gratitude expression solicitation condition may have been reduced because there were no opportunities for future interactions. Last, an equal division of money in a dictator game can also imply that the allocator was being fair (vis-à-vis being kind) (e.g., Bolton et al., 1998), which may raise doubts in participants about whether the allocation was really a "favor". We addressed these concerns in the next study.

Study 3: Gratitude Expression as a Moderator

Study 3 extended Study 2 in several ways. First, we incorporated whether the beneficiary has already expressed gratitude as a moderator, and explored its effect on avoidance and the underlying mechanisms. Second, we utilized a vignette to describe a more personal context (vis-à-vis an organizational context in Study 1 and a dictator game in Study 2), because previous literature has found that organizational contexts and the concept of money can prime people with a more instrumental mindset (e.g., Belmi & Pfeffer, 2015; Vohs, 2015). Last, we also employed a different measure of perceived arrogance to better validate our results. This study is pre-registered at https://aspredicted.org/L3C_9VG.

Participants

Two hundred and twenty-one participants from the online platform Prolific participated in this study. Twenty-four participants were removed for failing the comprehension test, and 197 responses were eligible for analysis (*female* = 150, M_{age} = 40.56).

Procedures and Materials

The study utilized a 2 (solicitation vs. control) × 2 (gratitude expression vs. no expression) design, and participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions. All participants read a scenario adapted from Watkins et al. (2006, Study 1), where they met John during a course study and have known him for some time. One Saturday John helped the participant move to a new house. After all the work was done, in the *gratitude expression* condition, participants read that they immediately thanked John, while in the *no expression* condition, participants read that they wanted to thank John but were worried that it would make the situation awkward, therefore they didn't express their gratitude. Next, in the *solicitation* condition, participants read that the next week when they met John, John said: “I spared my Saturday to help you move. Do I get a 'thank-you'?”, while in the *control* condition, participants read that the next week when they met John in the class, as usual, they talked about how they spent their Sunday.

As a comprehension test, participants answered whether they have immediately thanked John after the help (yes/no), and 24 participants were removed for failing this question. Participants then responded to our measures and provided demographic information.

Measures

Avoidance. Participants responded to the same avoidance scale as in the Study 1, α = .95.

Perceived arrogance. We used 7 items from Ślaski et al. (2021). Participants responded to how much they agreed that John was arrogant / smug/ conceited / snobbish / egoistical / stuck-up /pompous (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), α = .98.

Perceived instrumentality. We used the same three items as used in Study 1 (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), $\alpha = .94$.

Autonomy violations. We used the same three items as in Study 1 (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*), $\alpha = .92$.

Manipulation check. One item assessed perceived gratitude expression solicitation: "John wanted me to express my gratitude to him" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Another item measured perceived expression of gratitude: "I have thanked John immediately after he helped me" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

Results

Means and standard deviations of all variables across conditions are presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

Manipulation Check

A two-way ANOVA on the manipulation measure of gratitude expression solicitation showed a significant main effect of the solicitation condition, $F(1, 193) = 226.88$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.54$, such that the participants in the solicitation condition ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 0.69$) agreed more that gratitude expression was solicited by the benefactor than participants in the control condition ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.14$). There was no main effect of the gratitude expression manipulation nor an interaction effect, $ps \geq .14$.

A two-way ANOVA on the manipulation check of gratitude expression demonstrated a significant main effect of gratitude expression, $F(1, 193) = 1714.44$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 =$

0.90, such that participants in the expression condition (M = 4.92, SD = 0.27) agreed more that they had already thanked the benefactor than participants in the no-expression condition (M = 1.33, SD = 0.84). There was no main effect of solicitation and no interaction effect, ps ≥ .28.

Avoidance

A two-way ANOVA on avoidance demonstrated a significant main effect of solicitation, $F(1, 193) = 74.54$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.28$, such that participants in the solicitation condition (M = 2.24, SD = 0.96) tended to avoid the benefactor more than those in the control condition (M = 1.31, SD = 0.61). There was also a main effect of gratitude expression, $F(1, 193) = 15.62$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.08$, such that participants in the expression condition (M = 1.96, SD = 1.06) tended to avoid the benefactor more than those in the no-expression condition (M = 1.56, SD = 0.68).

Importantly, we found a significant interaction, $F(1, 193) = 20.22$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.10$. Specifically, in the no-expression condition, participants tended to avoid the benefactor significantly more in the solicitation condition (vs. control), $p = .002$, $d = 0.67$; in the expression condition, this difference was magnified, $p < .001$, $d = 1.70$.

Perceived Arrogance, Instrumentality, and Autonomy Violations

A one-way ANOVA on perceived arrogance demonstrated a significant main effect of solicitation and gratitude expression, Fs(1, 193) ≥ 53.84, ps < .001, partial η^2s ≥ 0.22, such that participants in the solicitation condition (gratitude expression condition) perceived the benefactor as more arrogant than participants in the control condition (no expression condition). There was also a significant interaction, $F(1, 193) = 30.91$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 =$

0.14: in the no-expression condition, participants perceived the benefactor as more arrogant in the solicitation condition (vs. control), $p < .001$, $d = 0.82$; in the expression condition, this difference was magnified, $p < .001$, $d = 2.11$.

Another one-way ANOVA on perceived instrumentality demonstrated a significant main effect of solicitation and gratitude expression, Fs(1, 193) ≥ 42.89, ps < .001, partial η^2s ≥ 0.18, such that participants in the solicitation condition (gratitude expression condition) perceived the benefactor as more instrumental than participants in the control condition (no expression condition). There was also a significant interaction, $F(1, 193) = 22.45$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.10$: in the no-expression condition, participants perceived the benefactor as more instrumental in the solicitation condition (vs. control), $p = .001$, $d = 0.70$; in the expression condition, this difference was magnified, $p < .001$, $d = 1.96$.

Last, a one-way ANOVA on felt autonomy violations demonstrated a significant main effect of solicitation and gratitude expression, Fs(1, 193) ≥ 8.08, ps ⩽ .005, partial η^2s ≥ 0.04, such that participants in the solicitation condition (gratitude expression condition) felt more autonomy violations than participants in the control condition (no expression condition). There was also a significant interaction, $F(1, 193) = 4.05$, $p = .05$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$: in the no-expression condition, participants felt more autonomy violations in the solicitation condition (vs. control), $p = .001$, $d = 0.73$; in the expression condition, this difference was magnified, $p < .001$, $d = 1.15$.

Moderated Mediation on Avoidance

To test for moderated mediation, we used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2013) model 7 with 5,000 bootstrapped confidence interval iterations. Because all three potential

mechanisms had a significant interaction effect, we entered them as simultaneous mediators, and gratitude expression as the moderator. We found support for two mechanisms (see Table 5), such that the indirect effect of perceived arrogance and instrumentality was significant when gratitude was not expressed and when gratitude was already expressed (all 95%*CI* excluded zero). Specifically, solicitation was significantly correlated with perceived arrogance (B = 0.55, SE = 0.16, $p < .001$), perceived instrumentality (B = 0.60, SE = 0.18, $p = .001$), and autonomy violations (B = 0.62, SE = 0.19, $p = .001$). Perceived arrogance and instrumentality significantly predicted avoidance, ps < .01, while the correlation between autonomy violations and avoidance was not significant, $p = .06$.

Insert Table 5 about here

In addition, we found significant moderated mediation for perceived arrogance and instrumentality. Specifically, gratitude expression moderated the relationship between solicitation and perceived arrogance (interaction: B = 1.22, SE = 0.22, $p < .001$) and the relationship between solicitation and perceived instrumentality (interaction: B = 1.21, SE = 0.25, $p < .001$). The index of moderated mediation excluded zero for both mechanisms. In addition, expression also moderated the relationship between gratitude solicitation and autonomy violations, B = 0.53, SE = 0.27, $p = .05$, yet the index of moderated mediation for autonomy violations included zero. In sum, our results supported H1, H2 and H3, such that perceived arrogance mediated the relationship between soliciting gratitude expression and avoidance, and this effect was stronger when the beneficiary has already expressed gratitude.

Discussion

In this study, we replicated and extended the findings from Study 2 by investigating the moderating effect of whether gratitude has been expressed before being solicited. Our results demonstrated that while soliciting gratitude expression increased avoidance through perceived benefactor arrogance, the effect was strengthened when the beneficiary has already expressed gratitude.

However, unlike in Study 2, perceived instrumentality of benefactor also yielded a significant effect in this study. This might be because in more personal contexts people often hold less of a calculative mindset (e.g., Belmi & Pfeffer, 2015), which makes a gratitude expression-soliciting benefactor appear more instrumental. In other words, perceived instrumentality might be sensitive to the contexts. Nevertheless, our results showed consistent support for perceived arrogance of the benefactor as a significant mechanism.

General Discussion

In this paper, we examined a practically prevalent but theoretically under-studied phenomenon: benefactors' solicitation of gratitude expression from their beneficiary, and demonstrated how such solicitations might lead to higher perception of benefactor arrogance which, in turn, leads to higher avoidance from the beneficiary. We showed that gratitude expression is a unique resource that could be solicited after a benefactor provides help (pilot study), that soliciting gratitude expression led to higher level of perceived benefactor arrogance than soliciting other monetary or non-monetary returns (Study 1), and that soliciting gratitude expression increased beneficiary avoidance through the mechanism of perceived benefactor arrogance after controlling for the mechanisms of perceived benefactor

instrumentality and autonomy violations (Studies 2-3). In addition, we examined whether the beneficiary feels gratitude has already been expressed before gratitude expression is solicited as the moderator, and found further support for our theorizing.

Theoretical Contributions

We contribute to the literature in several ways. First, we contribute to the social exchange theory by investigating gratitude expression as a resource that can be solicited in social interactions. Previous literature on social exchange has for long proposed the need to incorporate emotions into social exchanges, and has implicitly assumed emotion and its expression as a consequence of social exchanges (e.g., Lawler & Thye, 1999; Lawler, 2001). However, the literature has neglected the possibility that emotion and its expression can also be exchanged as a resource (e.g., Foa & Foa, 1980). In the current work, we provide the first investigation of soliciting emotional expressions (i.e., gratitude expression) in social exchanges and its differences from soliciting other monetary and non-monetary resources, and we demonstrate how soliciting gratitude expression may impair interpersonal relationship by making the beneficiary avoid the benefactor more.

Second, we advance the nascent theory of responsibility exchange (e.g., Chaudhry & Loewenstein, 2019) by illustrating the relationship between gratitude expression solicitation and perceived arrogance. While past literature has pointed out that explicitly asking for reciprocation implies an instrumental approach of social exchange (e.g., Ames et al., 2004), the responsibility exchange theory further highlights the flow of credit for positive outcomes in social exchange and that gratitude expression conveys the conferral of credit from the beneficiary to the benefactor. In our research, we find that solicitation of gratitude expression

is distinct from soliciting other resources in exchange of help such that it leads to higher perceived arrogance (above and beyond perceived instrumentality) of the benefactor.

We also contribute to the literature on gratitude by revealing the detrimental effect of gratitude solicitation on interpersonal avoidance. The widely found positive effect of gratitude expression on interpersonal relationships in previous studies is largely based on a critical assumption that beneficiaries voluntarily express gratitude without being demanded to express gratitude (i.e., unsolicited gratitude expressions). For example, the find-remind-bind theory of gratitude suggests that gratitude expression increases relationship quality (e.g., Algoe, 2012; Algoe et al., 2008). However, our work shows that the conclusion that gratitude expression benefits interpersonal relationships is incomplete, and we challenge this view by introducing the act of gratitude solicitation and how it gives rise to interpersonal avoidance. Moreover, we also contribute to the emerging literature on interpersonal conversations (e.g., Sun & Slepian, 2020; Truong et al., 2020; Huang et al., 2017) by demonstrating that the flow of gratitude expression matters in enhancing interpersonal relationships.

Last, our work provides an interesting angle to study self-promotion and bragging in interpersonal communications (e.g., Godfrey et al., 1986; Berman et al., 2015; Scopelliti et al., 2015). People recognize the potential risk of being perceived as arrogant when explicitly self-promoting, and hence often choose more implicit and strategic ways to project their superiority such as humblebragging (Sezer et al., 2018) and being overconfident in the advice-giving context (Van Zant, 2021). However, despite such attempts, observers still perceive self-presenters as arrogant and like them less (e.g., Sezer et al., 2018; Steinmetz et al., 2017). In the current work we identify gratitude solicitation as a subtle way of self-

promotion particularly related to one's prosocial behaviors (e.g., Berman et al., 2015), and in line with previous literature, gratitude solicitation leads to perceived arrogance and interpersonal avoidance.

Practical Implications

Recent studies have underscored the positive role of expressing and receiving gratitude in the personal context and at the workplace, such as increased work engagement, organizational citizenship behaviors, and improved relationship quality (e.g., Lee et al., 2019; Grant & Gino, 2010; Algoe et al., 2019; Park et al., 2019). Indeed, organizations could benefit from gratitude expressions (Fehr et al., 2017), and some organizations have started to cultivate a culture of gratitude. However, the findings of our research suggest that there is a risk when organizational members are asked to express gratitude, such as when a coworker solicits gratitude after providing help, because it increases perceived arrogance of the helper and interpersonal avoidance, which has the potential of jeopardizing future collaborations and prosocial behaviors among employees.

The finding that soliciting gratitude expression when the beneficiary feels that they had already expressed it is even more detrimental to the interpersonal relationships has important implications. There are often miscalibrations between a benefactor and a beneficiary regarding when gratitude should be expressed and whether gratitude is expressed enough (e.g., Flynn, 2003; Kumar & Epley, 2018; Converse & Fishbach, 2012; Zhang & Epley, 2009), and therefore benefactors might sometimes feel entitled to receive gratitude even after being thanked. In addition, in many instances, because of the awkwardness of explicitly expressing gratitude (e.g., Kumar & Epley, 2018), the beneficiary might feel that they already

expressed it through body language such as a smile or nodding their head in appreciation. Under such situations, the miscalibration between the benefactor and the beneficiary regarding whether gratitude is expressed is more likely to occur. However, if the benefactor nudges the beneficiary to express gratitude while the beneficiary feels that the help was already acknowledged, then a positive interpersonal episode can lead to negative outcomes.

Limitations and Future Directions

Since there is not much existing research on gratitude expression solicitation, our work has limitations that open possibilities for future research. First, we have focused on interpersonal avoidance as the key outcome of gratitude expression solicitation, yet there are other consequences that could be explored further. For example, evidence has shown that individuals who are seen as braggers are liked less and leave their audience annoyed (e.g., Godfrey et al., 1986; Powers & Zuroff, 1988; Berman et al., 2015; Schlenker & Leary, 1982; Scopelliti et al., 2015). Accordingly, one could expect that gratitude expression solicitation would reduce the benefactor's likability and increase the negative emotions towards the beneficiary. Another closely related outcome is the beneficiary's reciprocation, as reciprocity is the basic norm in social exchanges (e.g., Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) and could also be motivated by gratitude (e.g., Ma et al., 2017). Moreover, our studies have focused on one-time interactions yet in real life people often develop long-term relationship with each other. As an outcome, avoidance could have implications on long-term outcomes such as interpersonal helping, collaboration, and trust (e.g., McAllister, 1995; Williams, 2007) and investigating such longitudinal effects would be beneficial.

Second, there are other possible explanations of why gratitude solicitation may lead to interpersonal avoidance. For example, upon being asked to express gratitude, beneficiaries may perceive an insinuation of being ungrateful and hence feel a threat to their moral self-image. Because people are motivated to perceive themselves as moral (e.g., Mazar et al., 2008; Bryan et al., 2013), they are likely to withdraw from social interactions when they feel a damaged self-image (e.g., Schmader & Lickel, 2006). In other words, while in the current paper we have focused on the perceptions of the benefactor as the main mechanism, beneficiary's perceptions about themselves may also play a role. Related, we believe it would be a fruitful direction to investigate the effect of gratitude expression solicitation on self-directed (e.g., shame) vs. other-directed (e.g., anger) emotions to better understand the differential effects of threat to moral self-image vs. perception of the benefactor and their interpersonal consequences.

Another possible underlying mechanism that is worth further exploration is the beneficiary's felt indebtedness. Felt indebtedness (e.g., Greenberg, 1980) is defined as "a state of obligation to repay another" (Greenberg, 1980, p.4) and is commonly studied in social exchange relationships (e.g., Tsang, 2006; Peng et al., 2018). While past literature suggests that the beneficiary's felt indebtedness can increase when the benefactor communicates an expectation of return (Watkins et al., 2006), the literature on psychological reactance contractively suggests that the level of indebtedness will decrease upon gratitude solicitation. For example, research has found that promotional health messages with controlling language resulted in exactly the opposite behaviors that were being advocated (Miller et al., 2007; Grandpre et al., 2003), suggesting that gratitude solicitation might alter beneficiary's

preference such that the help can be perceived as less gratitude-worthy and the felt indebtedness would accordingly reduce. In addition, while there is evidence that indebtedness can increase beneficiary's level of stress and avoidance (e.g., Brehm & Cole, 1966), it has also been found that indebtedness facilitates social exchanges and should motivate approaching behavior (e.g., Peng et al., 2018). In sum, the mixed evidence suggests there are dynamics regarding the effect of felt indebtedness, which might further depend on the context of gratitude expression solicitation such as the magnitude of help and whether the help is solicited or unsolicited (e.g., Watkins et al., 2006; (Peng et al., 2018).

There are also some important boundary conditions that may yield an influence on the relationship between gratitude solicitation and avoidance. For example, across our studies we have focused on when the benefactor explicitly solicits gratitude expression, yet from the pilot study we also observe instances when the benefactor implicitly prompts the beneficiary to say a 'thank-you'. For example, a benefactor might remind the beneficiary of the favor but not directly point out the expectation of receiving verbal appreciation. Nevertheless, we believe that while a benefactor implicitly demanding gratitude expression will be perceived as arrogant as a benefactor who explicitly solicits, it may further reduce perceived authenticity of the benefactor who 'prompts' (e.g., Sezer et al., 2018), and we encourage future research to investigate such intriguing effects.

Last, a pertinent question is why people may solicit gratitude expression from others. Although it is not the focus of the current paper, examining the motives behind gratitude expression solicitation will enable theoretical development and deepen scholar understanding of the role of gratitude expression in interpersonal relationships. Relatedly, people from

different cultures vary in the desirability, frequency, and form of gratitude expression (e.g., Corona et al., 2019). For example, the practice of saying “thank you” after receiving some sort of help has been found to be a predominantly Western cultural practice, with many languages around the world not even having a translation for “thank you” (Floyd et al., 2019). Therefore, investigating the cultural differences in gratitude expressions and their expectations would be a beneficial direction in deepening our knowledge of cross-cultural communication.

Conclusion

This research provided the first investigation of the phenomenon of gratitude expression solicitation. Across one pilot study and three experimental studies, we demonstrated real-life instances of soliciting gratitude expression, highlighted the differences of soliciting gratitude expression from soliciting monetary or other non-monetary returns, and explored the relationship between soliciting gratitude expression and beneficiary avoidance mediated by perceived benefactor arrogance. With these findings, we hope to provide an in-depth understanding of gratitude expression solicitation and underscore when and why soliciting gratitude expression could lead to interpersonal damage.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1.
Forms of soliciting gratitude/returns in pilot study, sample A.

Asking for a "thank you"	**Asking for a non-monetary favor in return**	**Asking for money**	**Implicitly prompting gratitude**
"They demanded validation and thanks"	"A few weeks later my neighbor asked if I would be treating him to dinner."	"if you take the money then return it in one week plus additional conditions."	"Lingering around and expecting a thank you"
"They yelled 'next time say thank you!'"	"She would hold this over our heads and have us do stuff for her since she helped us out."	"They wanted a tip"	"They frequently brought up that they were helping me out financially by providing me with work."
"She asked... 'Do I get a thank you?'"	"We no sooner got moved and he told me he had a yard project he wanted my help with the very next day."	"The person wanted payment in cash"	"They reminded me that there were other more 'enjoyable' things that they could be doing instead of caring for me."
"They pressured me to praise them and spoke down toward me saying how grateful I should be."	"They wanted me to drive their child somewhere in return."	"A few days after, he reminded me of the favor he did for me and then informed me that he wasted gas on me and that he needed $20 dollars."	"Received passive aggressive remarks about that assistance."
"She has reminded me multiple times to this day, and usually states something like 'you should be grateful for me and the money I gave you'"	"The help was preconditioned on a promise of future consideration. It is usually couched in the only slightly joking phrase, 'It's gonna cost you'."	"After she was done, she said that she needed money for gas. She then said, 'I mowed the lawn - you could pay me for it!'"	"They passively aggressive said you're welcome to me because I didn't say thank you right away."

Table 2.
Reactions of soliciting gratitude/returns in pilot study, sample B.

Solicited gratitude condition (n = 54) *How did you feel about receiving this help and also being asked to express gratitude?*		**Control condition (n = 50)** *How did you feel about receiving this help?*
Asked to say "thank you"	**Asked for a non-monetary favor**	
1. I am initially happy that the housework has been done, but when they ask for thanks I then feel frustrated because I do the housework a lot and don't ask for thanks, and often don't receive it. 2. I felt weird, I didn't expect that, because I was very sad and he knew that, I think was not the time for ask for gratitude. 3. Annoyed that he told me I had to say thank you, even though I already planned to 4. I appreciated his gesture to give me his seat but it was a bit rude to request acknowledgement for it. 5. I felt disgusted and wish I had never asked for helped. 6. I was grateful initially but then I felt patronized and belittled 7. I felt fine because the gratitude was warranted so I am not against expressing it but I didn't	1. It was fine, in all honesty I would have helped her even if I didn't owe her a favor. 2. I felt ok, I was going to invite him to go to the pub, but the thing that he asked me to do it it was strange 3. I felt very happy because I felt the real friendship between us, and I understood that we have to help each other. 4. I felt grateful that my daughter was being looked after as that is always my main concern and I didn't mind doing the same in the future for someone else's child 5. It felt really warming when he offered me the ride and I was shocked he thought he needs to bring up the last night favor in order to help him. 6. I felt as if it was a fair request and was happy to comply. 7. It made me feel part of a greater team that looks out	1. I was very grateful for her kindness and I still am today. I believe that it made our relationship stronger and I make sure to always repay her with smaller acts of kindness every opportunity that I can get. 2. I felt really cared for, and it was a really thoughtful gesture. I felt closer to my friend and I had just overall warm and comforting feelings. 3. As soon as a broke down in tears on the phone to mum about just how bad it was, I felt incredible relief, and so grateful to have someone in my life that was willing to put their life on hold to come look after me. 4. I felt very grateful that the person took time out of their day to make sure I was getting the training needed in the areas which I was lacking confidence. This made me more confident and helped me gain the role I had wanted. 5. I felt very grateful and surprised that this stranger would do this for me 6. I really appreciated the effort and care

like being pushed in that direction. I'm pretty sure I would have thanked them at the initial recommendation	for each other and assist even though they are not asked.	7. I felt weird then but I was very happy. it is not very often that someone helps me, which is why I fear that someone wants something from me in return.

Table 3

Means of variables across four conditions in Study 1. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

	Control condition	Drink solicitation	Favor solicitation	Money solicitation	Gratitude expression solicitation
Manipulation check	1.67(0.94)	3.44(1.38)	3.10(1.31)	2.48(1.34)	4.59(0.69)
Perceived arrogance	1.59(0.76)	3.31(1.13)	3.44(0.99)	3.40(1.07)	3.86(0.88)
Perceived instrumentality	1.81(0.81)	3.85(1.07)	4.27(0.85)	3.75(1.00)	3.86(1.03)
Autonomy violations	1.34(0.60)	2.94(1.18)	3.11(0.98)	2.49(1.03)	2.94(1.09)

Table 4

Means of variables across four conditions in Study 3. Standard deviations are in parentheses.

	Gratitude expressed		Gratitude not expressed	
	Solicitation	Control	Solicitation	Control
Avoidance	2.67(0.98)	1.28(0.61)	1.78(0.69)	1.34(0.61)
Arrogance	3.15(0.95)	1.38(0.71)	1.74(0.83)	1.19(0.48)
Instrumentality	3.73(0.88)	1.92(0.96)	2.29(1.01)	1.69(0.68)
Autonomy violations	2.68(1.08)	1.53(0.91)	2.04(1.03)	1.42(0.62)

Table 5

Moderated mediation analyses results from Study 3. The table signifies the coefficients and the lower-level and upper-level 95% confidence intervals around the indirect effect for the corresponding mediator in the first column. The model that was tested included all measures in the first column as simultaneous mediators, avoidance as the DV, and gratitude expression as the moderator. Bold numbers indicate confidence intervals that do not contain zero.

	Gratitude expressed	**Gratitude not expressed**	**Index of moderated mediation**
Arrogance	**0.41, 1.08**	**0.10, 0.39**	**0.24, 0.81**
Instrumentality	**0.04, 0.52**	**0.01, 0.21**	**0.03, 0.36**
Autonomy violations	-0.01, 0.28	-0.01, 0.15	-0.01, 0.18

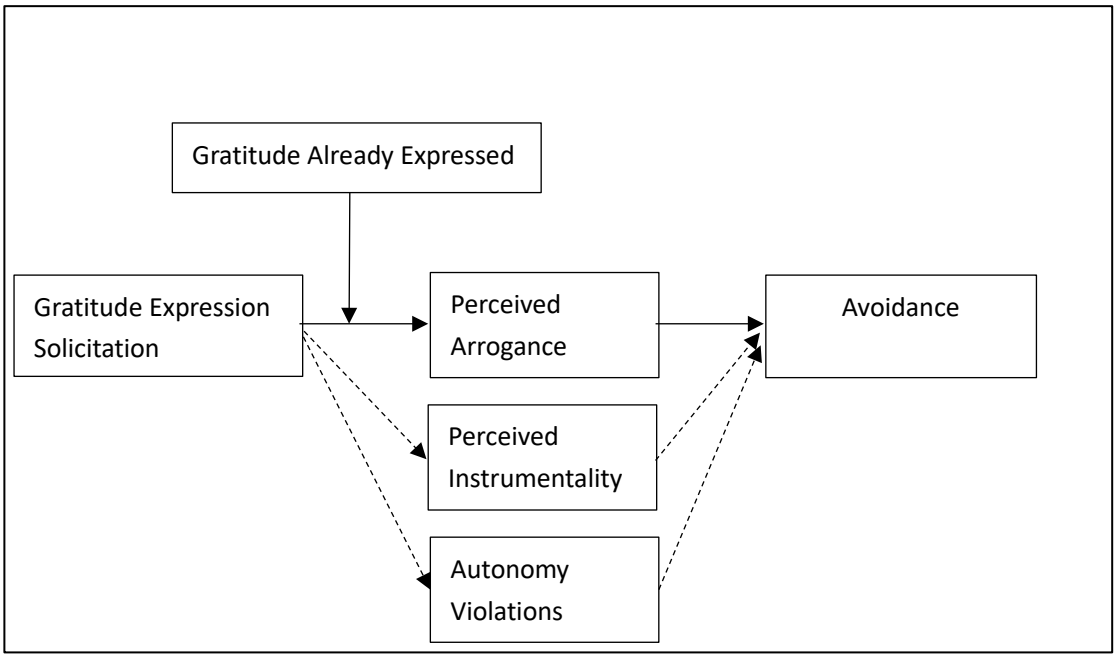

Figure 1. Research model. Dashed arrow represents alternative explanations.

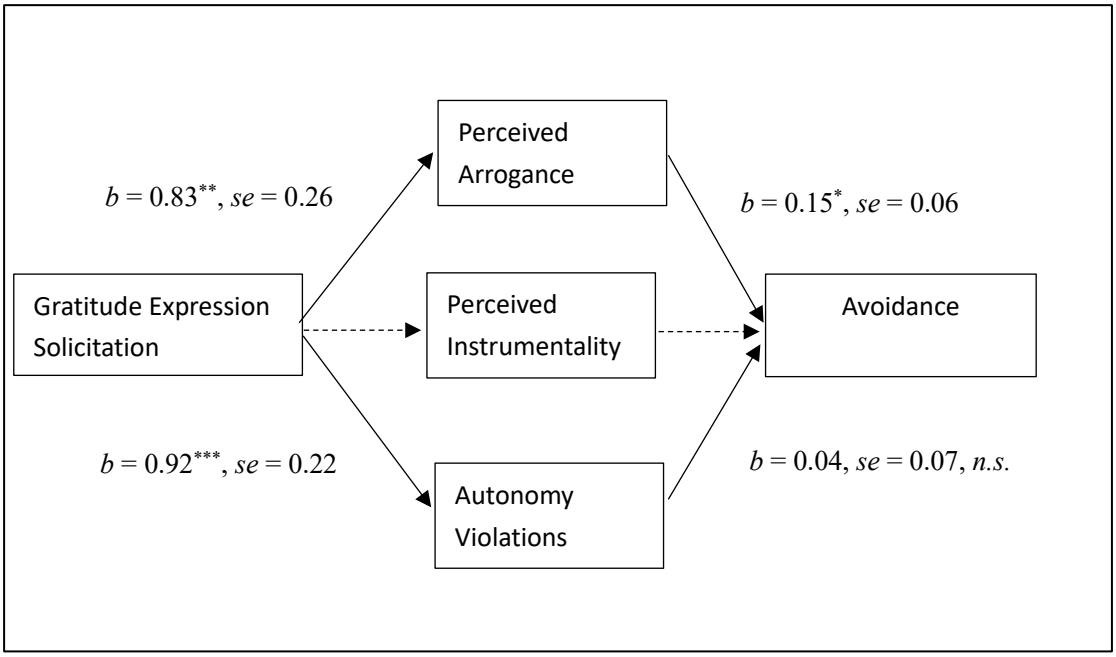

Fig. 2. Mediation analysis in Study 2. Perceived instrumentality was not included in the analysis.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Chapter 3

When Apologizing Hurts: Felt Transgression and Restoration Efforts

Abstract

Apologizing is important for conflict resolution and relationship reconciliation, yet apologies often fail to restore the damaged relationship. While much research has been devoted to investigating the victims' reactions upon receiving an apology, in this paper we adopt a transgressor-centric approach and explore the phenomenon of apologizing with no felt transgression (vis-à-vis when there is felt transgression) along with its affective and reconciliation outcomes for the transgressor. Based on Affective Events Theory, we predict that apologizing with no felt transgression will lead to reduced guilt and increased anger in the transgressor, which will result in a decreased level of their restoration efforts towards the victim. In addition, we further hypothesize about the role of organizational conflict cultures in influencing the relationship between apologizing and restoration efforts via guilt and anger. Study 1 uses a micro-narrative procedure and an inductive data analytic approach, Study 2 utilizes an experimental design, and Study 3 employs a critical incident approach in a field study to test our whole research model. Our hypotheses were largely supported across our studies. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

***Keywords*:** apology, felt transgression, restoration efforts, guilt, anger, conflict culture

When Apologizing Hurts: Felt Transgression and Restoration Efforts

Introduction

Apologizing is one of the most ubiquitous reactions after transgressing, and the extant literature has largely demonstrated the effectiveness of an apology in resolving interpersonal conflicts (e.g., Fehr et al., 2010; Fehr & Gelfand, 2010; Utikal & Fischbacher, 2010; Frantz & Bennigson, 2005). In particular, a transgressor's apology has been found to be a strong tool to elicit victim forgiveness and foster reconciliation between two parties (e.g., Struthers et al., 2008; Wallace et al., 2008; Kelln & Ellard, 1999).

However, while much research has been devoted to investigating the victim's reactions toward apologies, there is limited understanding with respect to the downstream consequences for the transgressors after apologizing (Leunissen et al., 2014). Perhaps more surprisingly, this emerging line of research suggests that apologizing may not always yield the optimal reconciliation outcomes from the transgressor's perspective (e.g., Exline et al., 2007; Okimoto et al., 2013; Mu & Bobocel, 2019). Accordingly, gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the transgressor's reactions after apologizing is important because the ultimate reconciliation is a process that involves both transgressors' and victims' efforts (e.g., Gollwitzer & Okimoto, 2021), and a successful reconciliation is crucial for healthy and fulfilling professional relationships.

Central to the question of why offering an apology might impair the reconciliation process from the transgressor's perspective is the possibility that transgressors may apologize even when they do not feel that they transgressed. Indeed, previous literature has shown that

transgressors and victims could interpret the transgression in a self-serving manner. Specifically, transgressors are more likely than victims to deny the negative consequences of a conflict and are more likely to attribute the causes of the event as being external (Baumeister et al., 1990). Therefore, when facing a conflict or accusation from the victim, the transgressor might believe that there is no harm caused or they bear no responsibility for the adverse event. Such asymmetries between transgressors and victims regarding the presence and severity of transgressions and the intentions behind it can cause miscalibrations (see a review from Adams, 2016) and thus it is crucial for research to investigate whether and how these asymmetries can hinder reconciliation processes. In the current research, we provide the first investigation of apologizing with *no felt transgression* (vis-à-vis when there is felt transgression) at the workplace and examine how this experience may affect the reconciliation process from the alleged transgressor's perspective, compared to when there is felt wrongdoing from the transgressor's perspective.

To examine apologizing with no felt transgression in interpersonal relationships within organizations, we adopted a mixed-method design and focused on the relationship between no felt transgression and the transgressor's relationship restoration efforts (e.g., Zheng & van Dijke, 2020) through guilt and anger as the mechanisms, with avoidant conflict cultures in the organizations as the moderator (see Fig.1 for the research model). Study 1 employed a micro-narrative procedure where participants recalled an instance at the workplace in which they either apologized when they felt they had done something wrong or had apologized when they had not transgressed. The text data was inductively coded, and the varied contexts and motives for apologizing as well as the different affective outcomes after apologizing were

identified. Study 2 employed an experimental design and examined two specific affective mechanisms: anger and guilt. Study 3 adopted a critical incident technique within a field study and tested our whole research model along with providing insights about the prevalence of apologizing with no felt transgression within the workplace context. The results provided support for our predictions and illustrated how apologizing with no felt transgression could lead the alleged transgressors to commit less to relationship reconciliation.

Insert Figure 1 here

Our research makes several important contributions. First, by adopting a transgressor-centric approach to the relationship between apology and reconciliation, we challenge the widely held perception that an apology is always beneficial for the reconciliation process. While workplace reconciliation has been defined as "an effort by the victim to extend acts of goodwill toward the offender in the hope of restoring the relationship" (Aquino et al., 2006, p.654), recently the literature has started to conceptualize reconciliation as a process that involves both transgressors' and victims' efforts, and has called for a more nuanced examination of transgressors' perspectives and the related barriers to the reconciliation process (e.g., Okimoto et al., 2013; Mu & Bobocel, 2019; Dhami, 2016; Zheng & van Dijke, 2020). Accordingly, the current research points towards the need to establish mutual agreement regarding the existence of a wrongdoing conducted by the transgressor before concluding apologies can be an all-purpose solution to interpersonal conflicts. Therefore, we

provide new insights to the literature regarding when apologizing could perpetuate, rather than resolve, conflicts (e.g., Mu & Bobocel, 2019; Zheng et al., 2016).

Second, we highlight that whether transgressors feel transgression or not is a crucial factor that influences transgressors' downstream emotions and behavior after apologizing. Previous studies have suggested that apologizing can elicit mixed feelings (e.g., Leunissen et al., 2014; Exline et al., 2007; Zaiser & Giner-Sorolla, 2013; Dhami, 2016) and varied reconciliation perceptions from the apologizer (Mu & Bobocel, 2019), yet less is known about why this might happen. Here we identify apologizing with or without felt transgression as a key factor that might help to explain the inconsistent findings from the extant literature. We suggest that apologizing with no felt transgression (vis-à-vis apologizing with felt transgression) will decrease transgressors' guilt and increase their anger toward the victim, which then result in reduced reconciliation efforts. Our work thus sheds new light on when and why apologizing is less effective in achieving reconciliation for transgressors.

Third, we identify conflict culture in organizations as a critical boundary condition that affects the restoration efforts of the transgressor after apologizing. Organizations differ in their social norms for how conflicts should be managed, and such norms serve as strong forces for employee conflict management styles (e.g., Gelfand et al., 2008). Of particular relevance here is when organizations adopt an *avoidant conflict culture*, namely a culture that advocates for conflict avoidance and harmonious relationships (e.g., Gelfand et al., 2012). By focusing on an organizational level factor, we provide new insights regarding how organizational conflict cultures influence interpersonal reconciliation outcomes.

Theoretical Development

Apology and Reconciliation

Apologies are defined as "admissions of blameworthiness and regret for an undesirable event that allow actors to try to obtain a pardon from audiences" (Schlenker & Darby, 1981, p.271), and often consist of a verbal expression of regret and acknowledgement of responsibility (Kim et al., 2004). As a costless gesture (e.g., Chaudhry & Loewenstein, 2019), apologizing has been found to be a powerful tool to facilitate victim forgiveness and restore trust (e.g., Utikal & Fischbacher, 2010; Risen & Gilovich, 2007; Schniter et al., 2013; Tabak et al., 2012). Indeed, apology serves several important social functions: by apologizing, the transgressor restores the standing of the victim (e.g., Ohbuchi & Sato, 1994), reaffirms the social rules that have been broken (e.g., Darby & Schlenker, 1982), and demonstrates willingness to recommit to the relationship (e.g., McCullough et al., 1998). As a result, there are ample studies examining when an apology is more likely to elicit forgiveness (e.g., Fehr & Gelfand, 2010; Frantz & Bennigson, 2005; Kim et al., 2004; Santelli et al., 2009; Struthers et al., 2008; Zheng et al., 2016).

While the literature has largely focused on victims' reactions toward an apology, research on the transgressor's perspective is more limited, and contrary to the beneficial effect of an apology on victims' perceptions of reconciliation, the effect of apologizing on transgressors is occasionally negative. For example, Exline et al. (2007) found that transgressors can feel regret after apologizing, and Okimoto et al. (2013) found that apologizing can reduce transgressors' feeling of control and self-esteem. More recently, Mu and Bobocel (2019) found that transgressors' perceptions of reconciliation can be impaired

depending on their motivation for apologizing. In sum, to develop a comprehensive understanding of the reconciliation process, research is still required to explore transgressors' reactions and behaviors after their apologizing.

Apology with No Felt Transgression, Guilt, and Anger

One factor that could cause inconsistent reactions in transgressors after apologizing is the possibility that they apologize even when they do not feel they have transgressed. A natural question then is why employees would apologize without any felt transgression. While it is reasonable to assume that employees might apologize to customers without felt transgression due to the display rules and the job demands (e.g., Grandey, 2003), we believe that it is also not uncommon for them to apologize to other organizational members such as their coworkers. First, cooperation and collective behaviors among organizational members are typically expected in organizations (e.g., Tjosvold & Tsao, 1989; Chen et al., 1998), and apologizing is a costless way to restore interpersonal trust (e.g., Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Ali et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2004). Given that harmonious relationships with organizational members bring potential benefits to employees such as task-related support and the fulfillment of their need for belongingness (e.g., Colbert et al., 2016), employees might be motivated to maintain interpersonal acceptance by offering apologies when faced with conflicts. Additionally, related literature on intraorganizational surface acting, a tactic often used to preserve social relationships (e.g., Gabriel et al., 2020), has found that employees do engage in surface acting towards other organizational members (e.g., Hu & Shi, 2015; Ozcelik, 2013; Gabriel et al., 2020). Thus, it is plausible that employees might apologize to other organizational members even when there is no felt transgression.

Regarding how transgressors might feel after apologizing with no felt transgression, we use Affective Events Theory (AET: Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) as our overall framework. AET proposes that specific events in the workplace serve as proximal causes of discrete emotions, which directly lead to behavioral consequences. We predict that apologizing without felt transgression will lead to less guilt and more anger in the transgressor (compared to when they apologize with felt transgression), and such feelings will lead the transgressor to commit less to the reconciliation process.

We predict that an apology with no felt transgression decreases the transgressor's guilt towards the victim. Guilt is a moral emotion that is elicited by interpersonal harm, and it stimulates the transgressors to repair the damaged relationship (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1994; Tangney et al., 2007). In interpersonal exchanges, the misconduct of the transgressor creates a kind of "debt" that they owe to the victims—the larger the transgression, the larger the debt (Exline et al., 2004; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008), and the emotion of guilt prompts the transgressor to offer compensations or other prosocial behaviors towards the victim with the aim to cancel the debt and restore the relational equilibrium. Relatedly, de Hooge (2012) found that a transgressor's feelings of guilt reduced only after the victim was compensated; in contrast, if the transgressor did not undertake any reparative actions, the transgressor was still likely to feel guilty (see also: Donohue & Tully, 2019). In a similar vein, when there is felt transgression, apologizing might not be sufficient to restore the relational equilibrium if there is harm caused, therefore transgressors are still likely to feel a certain level of guilt (de Hooge, 2012). However, in the absence of felt transgression, the "transgressor" might either perceive the harm caused as minimal or might not perceive any responsibility for it. As a result, the

transgressors are likely to believe they owe nothing to the victim. Therefore, we predict that when apologizing with no felt transgression (vis-à-vis when there is felt transgression), transgressors would feel lower levels of guilt.

H1a: Apologizing with no felt transgression (vis-à-vis apologizing with felt transgression) is negatively related to guilt.

For apologizers who did transgress, apologizing means nothing more than an admission of their wrongdoings and expression of regret. However, in situations where the apologizer feels that they have not transgressed, apologizing implies that they erroneously admit themselves as a transgressor and take on the responsibility for the false accusation. Given the detrimental outcomes of being perceived as a transgressor (e.g., damaged social image, Shnabel & Nadler, 2008; loss of trust from others, Kim et al., 2004), alleged transgressors can feel unjustly treated after apologizing. One negative emotion that is typically triggered by such aversive environmental conditions is anger (e.g., Porath & Pearson, 2012; Pillutla & Murnighan, 1996; Kuppens et al., 2003; Miller, 2001; Lindebaum & Geddes, 2016; Barclay & Skarlicki, 2009; Gibson & Callister, 2010) and it constitutes an appraisal of responsibility for the harm caused (e.g., someone to blame, Lazarus, 1991). At the workplace, one of the primary antecedents of anger is unjust treatment (see a review from Gibson & Callister, 2010), and in the apology context, the alleged transgressor takes on the undeserved responsibility for a false accusation, which can lead to feelings of unjust treatment (Mikula et al., 1990). Accordingly, we predict that such apologizing with no felt transgression will increase the apologizer's anger.

H1b: Apologizing with no felt transgression (vis-à-vis apologizing with felt transgression) is positively related to anger.

Guilt, Anger, and Restoration Efforts

Relationship restoration efforts are what transgressors offer to a victim in order to obtain the victim's forgiveness and repair the damaged relationship (e.g., Ren & Gray, 2009; Tabak et al., 2012). While providing an apology is often a common step, relationship restoration efforts also encompass additional actions, such as compensation, that are focused on achieving forgiveness. We expect that relationship restoration efforts will reduce when the transgressor feels less guilt towards the target. Research has consistently found that guilt is an adaptive emotion in its role of relationship maintenance (e.g., Ausubel, 1955), and it stimulates transgressors to take reparative actions such as compensation, cooperation and compliance (e.g., Lewis, 1971; de Hooge et al., 2007; Ketelaar & Tung Au, 2003; Lindasy-Hartz, 1984; Freedman & Fraser, 1966; Baumeister et al., 1994). In fact, elicited by guilt, the urge to repair a damaged relationship can be strong enough that a transgressor might appease the victim by violating important moral norms (e.g., de Hooge et al., 2011; Li & Jain, 2021). Therefore, we expect that a decreased level of guilt will reduce the transgressor's motivation to engage in the relationship restoration efforts towards the victim.

H2a: Guilt will mediate the relationship between apologizing with no felt transgression and restoration efforts.

Although anger has been characterized as an emotion that motivates confrontation and hostility (see a review from Carver & Harmon-Jones, 2009), Geddes et al. (2020) suggested that workplace anger rarely turns into aggression: employees are more likely to suppress their

anger rather than direct it towards violence or confrontation. Related literature has found that anger suppression is frequent in organizations (e.g., Begley, 1994; Geddes & Callister, 2007; Booth et al., 2017), and Cortina and Magley (2009) found that employees adopted different strategies to cope with anger and workplace injustice such as avoiding the target of anger (see also Linden et al., 2003). Relatedly, Spencer and Rupp (2009) point out that, when facing customer injustice, employees who were angry engaged in emotional labor because anger expression was inappropriate (see also Rupp & Spencer, 2006). Hence, we predict that, at the workplace, angry transgressors are likely to suppress their anger and withdraw from the interactions with the victim, hence reducing their restoration efforts.

H2b: Anger will mediate the relationship between apologizing with no felt transgression and restoration efforts.

The Moderating Role of Organizational Conflict Culture

Organizations differ in their shared norms that specify how workplace conflicts should be managed. While employees might hold distinct preferences for conflict management strategies, organizational conflict culture serves as a strong external force that shapes employee reactions to conflicts (Johns, 2006). Scholars have identified three distinct organizational conflict cultures, namely, dominating conflict cultures (i.e., cultures that encourage active confrontation in order to publicly win conflicts), collaborative conflict cultures (i.e., cultures that encourage active and cooperative discussion of conflicts) and avoidant conflict cultures (i.e., cultures that encourage passive and agreeable employee reactions to conflicts) (e.g., Gelfand et al., 2012; Choi, 2013).

Of particular relevance to employee restoration efforts is the *avoidant conflict culture*, which emphasizes harmonious relationships in the workplace (Gelfand et al., 2012). Under such a culture, conflicts are assumed to be dangerous and organizational members are expected to suppress expressions that may lead to conflict as well as indulge in behaviors that may reduce instead of escalate active confrontation or discussion of conflicts (Gelfand et al., 2012). Therefore, while we believe that apologizing with no felt transgression will lead to increased anger and decreased guilt in the transgressor, we predict that an avoidant culture of conflict management will affect how these emotions shape the transgressor's restoration efforts.

We expect avoidant conflict cultures to amplify the positive relationship between guilt and restoration efforts. Guilt stimulates transgressors to proactively take actions to restore the damaged relationship (e.g., Amodio et al., 2007; Baumeister et al., 1994; Schmader & Lickel, 2006). More broadly, guilt motivates individuals to reinforce the communal norms that are characterized by mutual concerns and positive treatments (e.g., Baumeister et al., 1994). Therefore, interpersonal harmony might be achieved by the guilty transgressor's desire and their efforts to reconcile with the victim. Relatedly, under avoidant conflict cultures where conflicts are expected to be avoided and where relational harmony is the key (e.g., Kozan, 1997; Choi, 2013), guilty transgressors should be more motivated to repair the relationship and prevent further conflicts in future interactions with the victim.

H3a: Avoidant conflict culture will moderate the positive relationship between guilt and restoration efforts, such that the relationship is stronger when avoidant conflict culture is high.

Additionally, previous literature has found that the likelihood of employees expressing anger is reduced when the organizational norm is less confrontational (Aquino et al., 2004). As such we would expect that when organizations have avoidant conflict cultures, under which confrontational behaviors are not rewarded and employees are supposed to collectively shy away from addressing conflicts (e.g., Zhang & Wei, 2017; Gelfand et al., 2012), employees would be less likely to act with passive or active hostility. Instead, employees would be incentivized to seek and create harmony, reducing overt or implicit expressions of anger and potentially increasing restoration efforts. Accordingly, when perceived avoidant conflict culture is high, we believe that our previously hypothesized negative relationship between anger and restoration efforts should be weakened.

H3b: Avoidant conflict culture will moderate the negative relationship between anger and restoration efforts, such that the relationship is weaker when avoidant conflict culture is high.

To be clear, we do not expect avoidant conflict cultures to influence the transgressor's inner feelings of anger and guilt. As noted by Gelfand et al. (2012), employees in organizations that adopt avoidant conflict cultures demonstrate agreeable gestures when they in fact could not disagree more (Perlow, 2003). Therefore, avoidant conflict cultures are expected to regulate employees' expressions of conflicts, rather than employees' internal feelings toward the conflicts. Bringing together our arguments above, we postulate that apologizing with no felt transgression reduces the transgressor's restoration efforts through decreased guilt and increased anger. In addition, we expect the mediation effects to be moderated by organizational avoidant conflict cultures:

H4a: Avoidant conflict cultures will moderate the indirect relationship between apologizing with no felt transgression and restoration efforts through guilt, such that the indirect effect is stronger when the level of avoidant conflict culture is high.

H4b: Avoidant conflict cultures will moderate the indirect relationship between apologizing with no felt transgression and restoration efforts through anger, such that the indirect effect is weaker when the level of avoidant conflict culture is high.

Overview of Studies

In the current paper, we adopted a mixed-methods design to tackle our research questions. Study 1 used a micro-narrative procedure where participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions and were asked to recall a time they apologized with or with no felt transgression at the workplace. We inductively coded this data to systematically compare the differences between apologizing with and with no felt transgression from the transgressor's perspective, such as the different incidents and motivations of their apologizing behavior. Study 2 utilized an experimental design in which we provided a workplace scenario and measured the two affective mechanisms of guilt and anger along with participants' intentions towards restoration efforts. In Study 3, to better establish the prevalence of apologizing with no felt transgression at the workplace, as well as to incorporate the role of organizational conflict cultures, we adopted a critical incident technique in a field study where participants freely recalled the last time they apologized to other organizational members and self-identified their felt transgression, along with other variables of interests.

Study 1: Exploring the Phenomenon of Apologizing with No Felt Transgression

Participants and Procedure

Since most research on apologies has not taken into consideration that disagreement could exist between the transgressor and the victim on the existence of the transgression, no studies have investigated the differential effects of apologizing with vs. without felt transgression at the workplace. Therefore, we first collected qualitative data to systematically compare the differences between apologizing with and with no felt transgression at the workplace. In total, 253 participants were invited to participate in this study via the online platform Prolific. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: in the *no felt transgression* condition, participants were instructed to recall and write about an instance from their workplace where they had apologized to a colleague or a coworker at work even though they believed they did not do anything wrong, and in the *felt transgression* condition participants were instructed to recall and write about an instance where they had apologized to a colleague or coworker at work after they felt that they did something wrong. After writing about such an event, all participants responded to the questions of why they apologized and how they felt after apologizing.

Two participants who could not recall such an instance were removed from the analysis, resulting in a final sample of 251 participants (95 females, M_{age} = 35.52; no felt transgression condition: n = 122, felt transgression condition: n = 129), residing and working as full-time employees (M_{tenure} = 14.61 years) in a variety of industries in the U.K. The majority of participants worked in services (60.8%), followed by retail (11.2%), public administration (7.2%), finance/real estate (6.8%), manufacturing (5.2%), and transportation/utilities (4%).

The micro-narratives were then qualitatively coded following an inductive approach to capture the range of responses regarding the incident, to whom the participant apologized, why the participant apologized, and how the participant felt towards the other person. Participants' affective reactions were grouped to capture those that expressed only negative feelings, only positive feelings, neutral feelings, and a mix of both positive and negative feelings. Incidents and stated reasons for apologizing that were broadly similar were grouped together, but the inductive analysis focused on staying as close to participants' words as possible, such that the results reflect the diverse range of incidents and stated reasons for apologizing that were present in the data.

Study 1: Results

The majority of participants recalled apologizing to colleagues (69.29%) and superiors (25.20%), but participants also recalled apologizing to customers or clients, friends, and subordinates. Table 1 shows that participants in the felt transgression condition most frequently mentioned incidents in which they made some sort of mistake in their work and subsequently apologized for it (37.21%). Participants in the no felt transgression condition most frequently mentioned incidents in which they were blamed or decided to take responsibility for someone else's mistake (27.87%) or incidents that involved causing unintentional damage in the relationship with the other person (21.31%) which included events such as accidentally offending the other person (e.g., in a joke), getting involved in office gossip, or inadvertently taking another person's food, drink, or desk. The third most frequently mentioned kind of incident in the no felt transgression condition involved disagreements with the other person (15.57%), which included instances of having differing

opinions with a superior or colleague or having requested something of a colleague that the colleague did not understand or comply with. Thus, the micro-narrative data provides diverse illustrations of situations in which employees are wrongly accused, end up taking the blame for someone else, or unintentionally inconvenience others, among other incidents, for which the individual then apologizes although they perceive they are not at fault. It is also worth noting that even for the same type of transgression (e.g., unintentional damage in the relationship), there were disagreements regarding felt transgression, which again points to the subjectivity of such interpretations.

Insert Table 1 here

Participants also explained in their micro-narratives why they had apologized, as shown in Table 2. The majority (62.79%) of participants in the felt transgression condition said they apologized because they recognized their own fault or that they were in the wrong; the other most frequently stated reasons were because they had caused difficulties or delays for their colleagues (10.85%) or because they felt bad or guilty (9.30%). As for those who apologized despite feeling they had not transgressed, a variety of motivations were expressed, of which the most commonly stated reason was to maintain peace (27.05%). It can also be noted that desires to maintain peace may be related to feeling that apologizing is easier than arguing (6.56%), although we kept these separate to maintain the diversity in participants' responses. Besides this, other commonly mentioned reasons were because the participant decided to take responsibility for the incident (13.11%) (e.g., on behalf of a colleague or one's team), because

it was perceived to be the professionally right thing to do (9.84%) (while another 7.38% felt it was more broadly the right thing to do), or because the other person felt offended or hurt so the participant apologized (9.02%). This micro-narrative data thus illustrated that people may apologize even when they do not feel they have done something wrong to maintain peace, follow implicit social norms, or to appease the offended party.

Insert Table 2 here

Comparing the two conditions, apologizing with no felt transgression was related to many more negative feelings towards the other person: while only 33.33% (n = 43) of those who felt they did transgress expressed solely negative feelings, 67.21% (n = 82) of those who felt they had not transgressed expressed only negative feelings. Conversely, 30.23% (n = 39) of those who felt they had transgressed expressed positive feelings towards the other person, while only 7.38% (n = 9) of those who felt they had not transgressed expressed positive feelings towards the other person. The most frequently mentioned negative feelings in the felt transgression condition were guilt (37.21%) and embarrassment (16.28%); in the no felt transgression condition, participants reported having a worsened perception of the other (34.15%), feeling annoyed (23.17%), and angry (17.07%), which are shown in Table 3. It is also noteworthy that no participants in the no felt transgression condition mentioned any feelings of guilt, while no participants in the felt transgression condition expressed any anger.

Insert Table 3 here

Finally, Table 4 provides additional illustrative extracts from the data regarding participants' different reactions to apologizing with and with no felt transgression. Certain interesting relational dynamics are worth noting. Participants in the no felt transgression condition did not feel personal responsibility for the incident or perceived no harm caused, but where mixed or neutral feelings were expressed, these were often in reference to recognizing that the incident was stressful or tense. Nonetheless, negative reactions were most common when apologizing with no felt transgression. In many cases, the participant's perception of the other person worsened, including feeling the other "was a cow", "immature", "sensitive", or "petty and controlling." Fourteen participants expressed anger, frustration, irritation, resentment, and even animosity. Another participant admitted, "I try to avoid them as much as possible," and another pointed out, "I now don't rush to help if asked, now see him being lazy and petty for no reason."

Insert Table 4 here

Study 1: Discussion

By randomly allocating participants to either the apologizing *with no felt transgression* or the apologizing *with felt transgression*, a diversity of micro-narratives was collected that shed further light on apologies an the workplace. These findings illustrated that the interpretation of a transgression can be ambiguous and also supported previous research that transgressors may apologize due to different motives (Mu & Bobocel, 2019). Additionally, Study 1

provided preliminary evidence that apologizing with no perceived transgression may result in worsened affective outcomes and impede the reconciliation process.

Next, we ran an experimental scenario-based study to establish the causal relationship and to better control for the incident and the context of the apologizing behavior. In this study we measured the specific affective mechanisms of guilt and anger, along with participants' restoration efforts towards the target of their apology as outcomes.

Study 2: Comparing Apologizing with and with no Felt Transgression

Participants and Procedure

Overall, 176 participants from Prolific participated in this study. Eight participants were removed for failing the attention check designed for the scenario (described below), and three participants without any working experience were also removed as this is a workplace-related vignette. Thereby, in total 165 responses were included in the final analysis (104 females, M_{age} = 36.05).

Participants read a workplace scenario and were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: *felt transgression vs. no felt transgression* (see Appendix A for the full description of the scenarios). Participants imagined themselves in a workplace scenario in which one of their colleagues had presented the wrong department numbers at a full-day office offsite meeting. Tensions arose the next day in the office as team members discussed that presenting the wrong numbers had reflected poorly on the department, and that the participant had made the mistake of presenting those numbers. In the no felt transgression condition, the participants read that they felt they had done nothing wrong because it was another colleague

that had presented those numbers but apologized anyways to the team by saying sorry. The participants in the felt transgression condition instead read that they felt that they had made a mistake as they were the ones to present the wrong numbers and thereby apologized to the team by saying sorry. As an attention check, all participants responded to whether they made a mistake by presenting the wrong numbers, and eight participants were removed for failing this question in the corresponding condition (e.g., those who believed they made a mistake in the no felt transgression condition). After reading this scenario, participants responded to our measures, followed by questions about their demographic information.

Measures

Manipulation check. One item assessed the participant's perceived transgression: "According to this scenario, I feel that I had made a mistake at the offsite," rated from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree.*

Relationship restoration effort. We used three items from the Transgression Appeasement and Reconciliation Checklist developed by Tabak et al. (2012) that are common conciliatory gestures from a transgressor (see also Zheng & van Dijke, 2020). The original checklist contains 19 items, and we selected three items based on face validity considering the vignette. Participants indicated how likely they are going to conduct the following behaviors to their colleagues: "show concern for their condition", "show concern for the relationship" and "offer them a gift or a favor" after apologizing, rated from 1 = *extremely unlikely* to 7 = *extremely likely* (α = .76).

Guilt. Previous literature suggested that feelings of guilt are often accompanied with regret and self-blaming (Zeelenberg & Breugelmans, 2008). Therefore, participants responded

to how they would feel towards their team members on three items: guilty, self-blame and regret from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely* (α = .90).

Anger. Following Yip and Schweitzer (2019)**,** we used three items to assess anger. Participants responded to how they would feel towards their colleagues on three items: angry, annoyed, and irritated from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely* (α = .91).

Study 2: Results

Table 5 demonstrates summary statistics, correlations, and reliabilities across all variables.

Insert Table 5 here

Manipulation Check. An independent-samples *t*-test was used to assess whether the manipulation of the different conditions was successful. Participants in the felt transgression condition (M = 5.93, SD = 1.10) significantly agreed more that they had made a mistake at the offsite meeting than the no felt transgression condition (M = 3.05, SD = 1.85), $t(163) = 12.49$, $p < .001$, d = 1.89.

Guilt, Anger, and Restoration Efforts. Independent-samples *t*-tests were used to assess the difference between the two conditions for guilt, anger, and restoration efforts. Participants in the no felt transgression condition showed significantly less guilt (M = 2.00, SD = 0.88) than participants in the felt transgression condition (M = 3.60, SD = 1.09), $t(163) = -9.98$, $p < .001$, d = 1.61. Participants in the no felt transgression condition also showed significantly

more anger (M = 3.21, SD = 1.05) than participants in the felt transgression condition (M = 2.24, SD = 1.13), $t(163) = 5.70$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.89$.

Importantly, participants in the no felt transgression condition showed significantly less restoration efforts (M = 3.76, SD = 1.12) than participants in the felt transgression condition (M = 4.47, SD = 1.24), $t(163) = -3.55$, $p = .001$, $d = 0.56$.

Mediation. A mediation analysis was conducted using the PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2013), Model 4. We calculated the 95% bootstrap confidence interval based on 5,000 iterations with anger and guilt as the simultaneous mediators. The no felt transgression condition was coded as 1 and the felt transgression condition as 0. There was a significant correlation between no felt transgression and the two emotions (guilt: b = -1.60, se = 0.15, $p < .001$; anger: b = 0.97, se = 0.17, $p < .001$), supporting H1a and H1b. Next, both emotions significantly predicted restoration efforts (guilt: b = 0.42, se = 0.09, $p < .001$; anger: b = -0.48, se = 0.08, $p < .001$). In addition, the indirect effect of the two emotions was significant (guilt: b = -0.67, se = 0.16, 95%CI[-1.00, -0.36]; anger: b = -0.47, se = 0.13, 95%CI[-0.74, -0.25]), supporting H2a and H2b.

Study 2: Discussion

Study 2 provided support for our proposed effect of apologizing with no felt transgression (vis-à-vis apologizing with felt transgression) on transgressors' reduced restoration efforts and demonstrated the mediation effect of guilt and anger. However, there are several limitations in Studies 1 and 2: first, both studies are experimental designs where participants were randomly assigned to one condition, therefore the results provided limited insights regarding the frequency of apologizing with no felt transgression at the workplace;

second, contextual influences (i.e., avoidant conflict cultures) have yet to be explored. Study 3 addressed these limitations by adopting a critical incident technique in a field study where participants freely recalled the last time they apologized at the workplace, along with their self-identified felt transgression, emotional reactions, restoration efforts and the conflict culture in their organization.

Study 3: The Role of Avoidant Conflict Culture

Participants and Procedure

Via the online platform Prolific, 200 participants were invited to participate in this study. To avoid recall bias, we instructed participants to write about the last time they apologized to someone (e.g., coworker, leader, subordinate, etc.) at the workplace regardless of whether it was their fault for causing this event. Participants then responded to measures such as felt transgression and their organizational conflict cultures, and they were also asked to write down the initials of the victim's name which were then piped into the measure of restoration efforts. Last, as an exploratory question, we asked participants to indicate what percentage (0-100%) of their apologies at the workplace were done with the feeling that they did not do anything wrong.

All participants were able to recall such an event, and among these 200 participants, 13 participants self-identified the victim as outsiders of the organization (e.g., customers, family members) and were thus removed from the analysis. The final sample contained 187 participants (146 females, M_{age} = 32.01). They had an average tenure of 12.40 years, with 61% having no less than 10 years of working experiences. They came from different

industries, with 56.85% working in services, 11.17% in retail trade, 10.15% in public administration, 9.64% in finance, insurance, and real estate, and 6.60% in transportation, communications, electric, gas, and sanitary services.

Measures

Felt transgression. According to our theorizing and the results from Study 1, a transgressor might feel no transgression because they perceive minimum harm or because they believe it was not their responsibility for the adverse event. We therefore used three items to capture felt transgression. Participants responded to what extent they agree that "I felt fully responsible for causing this incident", "I felt it was my fault for causing this incident" and "I caused harm in this incident" from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree* (α = .70).

Guilt. Participants indicated how guilty they were after apologizing using the same items as in Study 2, from 1 = *none at all* to 5 = *a great deal* (α = .89).

Anger. Participants indicated how angry they were after apologizing using the same items as in Study 2, from 1 = *none at all* to 5 = *a great deal* (α = .87).

***Restoration efforts*.** We used the same items from Study 2 and two additional items from the checklist (Tabak et al., 2012) that described restoration behaviors towards the victim. Participants indicated how often they conducted these behaviors: "offered (the victim) a gift or a favor", "showed concern for (the victim)'s condition", "showed concern for the relationship" "asked for forgiveness" and "assured (the victim) that you are trustworthy" from 1 = *never* to 5 = *always* (α = .77).

***Avoidant conflict cultures*.** We adapted three items developed by Gelfand et al. (2012) to assess avoidant conflict cultures. The original items are used to assess leaders' conflict

management styles, and we adapted the items to measure the shared norm of how organizational members address conflicts: “at my workplace, we will not discuss issues that may lead to conflict”, “at my workplace, we will cut off discussion as soon as conflicts arise” and “at my workplace, we will avoid getting involved in conflicts” from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* (α = .80).

Controls. Following the recommendation from Bernerth and Aguinis (2016), we controlled for several factors that might influence the relationship between apologizing with no felt transgression and restoration efforts. First, we controlled for gender as studies have found that males are less likely to apologize (e.g., Schumann & Ross, 2010). Second, we controlled for relational closeness between the participants and the victim as individuals are more likely to reconcile with a close other (Riek, 2010). Relational closeness was measured by the Inclusion of Other in the Self (IOS) Scale from Aron and Fraley (1999) such that participants selected one picture that best described their relationship with the victim.

Lastly, we controlled for victim power as employees might reduce their restoration efforts towards a victim with more power (e.g., Zheng & van Dijke, 2020). Following Aquino et al. (2006), we assessed structural power and let participants self-identify whether the victim was as a supervisor/manager/administrator (categorized as high power), a peer (categorized as equal power), or a subordinate (categorized as low power). Participants who reported the victim as “other” were asked to specify whom this person was. Two independent coders classified participants who indicated “other” (n = 11) into one of the categories based on their description. There was no disagreement in terms of classification.

Study 3: Results

Table 6 demonstrates summary statistics, correlations, and reliabilities across all variables. The average rating of felt transgression was 3.33 (*SD* = 1.19), with 41% participants having a rating equal to 3 or below, meaning that they at least somewhat disagreed that they had transgressed. In addition, among 187 responses, 45% of the participants recalled apologizing to a victim with higher power, 37% recalled apologizing to a victim with equal power, and 18% recalled apologizing to a victim with lower power. In the cases where participants felt low levels of transgression (i.e., responses with a rating of 3 or less on felt transgression scale), 39% apologized to a victim with higher power, 39% apologized to a victim with equal power, and 22% apologized to a victim with lower power[4].

A wide range of incidents of apologizing were mentioned, such as making a mistake in a work task (e.g., "I accidently send some confidential information to one of our customers"), being rude or angry (e.g., "Verbally snapping at a colleague, we were short staffed and tensions were high"), increasing others' workloads (e.g., "I apologized to the team I work with for the amount of work I had been asked to get them to do in a short time"), experiencing a delay or shortage (e.g., "I apologized to my manager for not having time to complete some work due to staff sickness"), and being the bearer of bad news (e.g., "I apologized to a colleague when I found out somebody had been given a promotion instead of them"). Lastly, when participants were asked to indicate what percentage of their apologies they believed were offered without the feeling of felt transgression in our exploratory question, the average

[4] A larger (smaller) proportion of participants in Study 3 indicated apologizing to superiors (coworkers) than in Study 1. This could emerge from the difference in instructions provided to the participants in the two studies. In Study 3, participants were explicitly asked to recall their *most recent* apology made to someone in the workplace (*e.g., coworker, leader, subordinate, etc.)* while in Study 1, participants were asked to recall an apology made to a colleague or coworker.

answer was around 48%, further supporting that apologizing with no felt transgression at the workplace is a common experience.

Insert Table 6 here

Confirmatory factor analysis. The results of a confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) using RStudio (package "lavaan") suggested that the 5-factor model (i.e., felt transgression, restoration efforts, guilt, anger and avoidant conflict culture) demonstrated the best fit to the data (χ^2[109] = 189.04; CFI = .95; TLI = .94; RMSEA = .06), which is significantly better than alternative models, such as the 4-factor model combining guilt and anger as one factor (χ^2[113] = 593.09; CFI = .69; TLI = .63; RMSEA = .15, $\Delta\chi^2$[4] = 404.05; $p < .001$), the 4-factor model combing felt transgression and restoration efforts as one factor (χ^2[113] = 441.44; CFI = .79; TLI = .75; RMSEA = .13, $\Delta\chi^2$[4] = 252.04; $p < .001$), the 4-factor model combing restoration efforts and conflict culture as one factor (χ^2[113] = 388.67; CFI = .82; TLI = .79; RMSEA = .11, $\Delta\chi^2$[4] = 199.63; $p < .001$), or the 3-factor model combining felt transgression, restoration efforts and conflict culture as one factor (χ^2[116] = 640.69; CFI = .66; TLI = .60; RMSEA = .16, $\Delta\chi^2$[7] = 451.65; $p < .001$).

Hypotheses testing. To test our hypotheses and for the ease of interpretation, the ratings on felt transgression was reverse-coded and averaged such that a higher score means higher perceptions of no felt transgression. Including the control variables did not change our results, therefore below we report the analysis without the control variables. Table 7 depicts the regression results conducted to test our hypotheses. The results revealed that no felt

transgression was negatively related to guilt (b = -0.40, se = 0.07, p < .001; see Model 1 in Table 7) and positively related to anger (b = 0.12, se = 0.05, p = .02; see Model 2 in Table 7), supporting H1a and H1b. Next, guilt was significantly positively related to restoration efforts (b = 0.33, se = 0.05, p < .001) while anger was marginally negatively related to restoration efforts (b = -0.14, se = 0.07, p = .06). To assess the mediation effect, we employed the SPSS macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) using a bootstrapping procedure (with 5,000 resamples). The analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of guilt (b = -0.13, se = 0.03, 95%CI [-0.20, -0.08]) while the indirect effect of anger included zero (b = -0.02, se = 0.01, 95%CI [-0.047, 0.001]), supporting H2a but not H2b.

Insert Table 7 here

H3a and H4a predicted that avoidant conflict cultures will moderate the relationship between guilt and restoration efforts, as well as the mediation effect. The result showed that the interaction term (see Model 3 in Table 7) of guilt and avoidant conflict culture was significant (b = 0.10, se = 0.05, p = .05), and the index of the moderated mediation (Hayes, 2015) excluded zero (b = -0.04, se = 0.02, 95% CI [-0.087, -0.003], supporting H4a and H4b. Figure 2 shows the simple slopes of restoration efforts at ± 1SD of avoidant conflict cultures. The relationship between guilt and restoration efforts was stronger when avoidant conflict culture was high (b = 0.45, se = 0.08, p < .001) as opposed to low avoidant conflict culture (b = 0.22, se = 0.08, p = .006).

Insert Figure 2 here

H3b and H4b predicted that avoidant conflict cultures will moderate the relationship between anger and restoration efforts, as well as the mediation effect between no felt transgression and restoration efforts through anger. The result from the SPSS macro PROCESS with 5,000 bootstrap samples showed that the interaction term (see Model 3 in Table 7) of anger and avoidant conflict culture was not significant (b= -0.07, se = 0.06, p = .26). The index of the moderated mediation (Hayes, 2015) included zero (b = -0.01, se = 0.01, 95% CI [-0.028, 0.005]. Therefore, our results failed to support H3b and H4b.

Study 3: Discussion

Study 3 replicated and expanded the results from Study 1 and Study 2 in multiple ways: first, using a field survey, we demonstrated apologizing with no felt transgression is a ubiquitous phenomenon in real workplaces. In Study 3, almost half of our participants believed that they had not transgressed the last time they apologized to someone at work, and participants reported that nearly half of their workplace apologies were offered without feelings of transgression. Since participants drew on their most recent apology and reflected on their apologies at the workplace more broadly, these findings shed light on how prevalent such behavior can be in organizations. Second, we investigated the role of organizational conflict culture, and our results showed that avoidant conflict cultures strengthened the relationship between guilt and restoration efforts. However, in the current study, the mediation effect was not significant for anger.

General Discussion

In the current research, we investigate a ubiquitous phenomenon at the workplace: when employees apologize without feeling that they have transgressed. Previous studies on apology and reconciliation have mostly focused on situations without taking into consideration that there could be disagreement on the existence of a transgression, and there is little prior research examining outcomes when there is ambiguity regarding the occurrence of a transgression in the first place (for an exception, see Adams et al., 2015). Using a mixed-method design, we investigate the nature and the prevalence of apologizing with no felt transgression at the workplace, demonstrate its related affective and reconciliation outcomes from the transgressor's perspective, and illustrate the role of organizational conflict cultures in influencing employees' restoration efforts upon apologizing with no felt transgression.

Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. We provide the first investigation of workplace apologies when employees do not perceive any wrongdoing. When examining the effect of an apology on reconciliation outcomes, the extant literature is largely based on one critical assumption that the transgressor recognizes their personal responsibility or the harm caused. However, interpersonal transgressions are complex and ambiguous in nature. Accordingly, the current research challenges this widely held assumption by demonstrating that employees can often find themselves apologizing with no felt transgression. Our work can thus enhance future theories on apologies and reconciliation by highlighting this under-studied context.

We also contribute to the apology literature by delineating one critical boundary condition that makes an apology less effective in restoring interpersonal relationships. Past research has identified various factors that make victims more likely to accept an apology and hence forgive the transgressor (e.g., Fehr & Gelfand, 2010; Santelli et al., 2009; Utikal & Fischbacher, 2010), yet there is limited knowledge on when offering an apology helps to enhance the relationship from the transgressor's perspective. By adopting a transgressor-centric approach, our work directly answers the call to investigate transgressor-specific antecedents in shaping the reconciliation process (e.g., Mu & Bobocel, 2019), and examines how no felt transgression can yield negative reconciliation outcomes for the relationship.

Furthermore, by examining the affective outcomes of guilt and anger, this work enriches AET by showing how specific emotions might stimulate or inhibit the transgressor's commitment to the relationship repairment. Prior research has demonstrated that apologizing can engender mixed feelings in the transgressor (e.g., Zaiser & Giner-Sorolla, 2013; Zechmeister et al., 2004; Exline et al., 2007), yet less is known about why this occurs and how it influences the transgressor's downstream behaviors upon feeling these emotions. Given that a reconciliation is ultimately a process that requires efforts from both parties (i.e., the transgressor and the victim), exploring the role of emotions in affecting transgressor restoration efforts will offer new insights to the research on interpersonal relationships at the workplace (e.g., Ganegoda & Bordia, 2019; Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017; Clark et al., 2019).

Finally, our work investigates the role of organizational conflict cultures in shaping the reconciliation process among organizational members. Conflict is a fundamental aspect in organizational life (e.g., Argyris, 1971;Walton et al., 1969), and organizations develop distinct

norms of conflict management (Gelfand et al., 2012). While organizational conflict cultures have been shown to influence employee well-being and organizational performance (e.g., Gelfand et al., 2012; Way et al., 2016; Choi, 2013; Chen et al., 2005; DeChurch & Marks, 2001), surprisingly little research has been devoted to directly examine how conflict cultures might impact the reconciliation process. In the current work, we found that under an avoidant conflict culture, guilty transgressors could increase their restoration efforts toward the victim for relational harmony.

Practical Implications

The finding that apologizing with no felt transgression (vis-à-vis apologizing with felt transgression) engenders negative affective outcomes and impedes reconciliation processes offers practical implications for managers who aim to cultivate peaceful and harmonious employee relationships. Given the importance of relational reconciliation after conflicts, caution needs to be exercised by managers who intervene in conflicts between employees. Our results suggest that apologizing cannot be used as a solution for all conflicts, because the transgressor's reaction after the apology is dependent on their perception of the transgression in the first place. Therefore, when dealing with a workplace conflict, managers might need to clarify whether a transgression indeed happened, and whether the "transgressor" recognizes their responsibility before expecting an apology in a non- threatening way.

In addition, although peaceful relationships might be desirable for organizations, managers also need to differentiate between superficial harmony and real harmony (e.g., Zhang & Wei, 2017). For example, a transgressor in conflict avoidant organizational cultures might engage in restoration behaviors to maintain superficial harmony, yet essentially the

conflict is not solved and the relationship is not reconciled; only if a transgressor truly desires to repair the relationship, workplace harmony can be achieved under a culture that advocates for peaceful relationships. Therefore, to effectively manage conflicts, managers might need to emphasize the importance of harmony but at the same time encourage open discussion. Under such conditions, apology is less likely to engender feelings of injustice and resentment.

Limitations and Future Directions

Since there is not much existing research on apologizing with no felt transgression, our work has limitations that open possibilities for future research. First, future work could examine whether different motivations for apologizing would predict distinct reconciliation outcomes. For example, Mu and Bobocel (2019) found that different motivations to apologize at the workplace vary in their relationship with transgressor perceptions of victim forgiveness and relationship reconciliation. Similarly, it is possible that different reasons for apologizing with no felt transgression may vary in their strength in linking apologies with reconciliation efforts exerted by transgressors.

Second, our studies yield inconsistent results on the effect of anger: while anger was significantly related to the likelihood of restoration efforts in the experimental design of Study 2, it was not associated with the frequency of the restoration efforts when participants recalled an actual instance of apologizing. One possible reason is that time plays an important role in influencing the effect of anger on reconciliation. For example, Fischer and Roseman (2007) found that anger is characterized by short-term attack responses but long-term reconciliation. Indeed, there are multiple ways to release anger without hurting other people (e.g., Fitzgibbons, 1986), and anger might only prompt avoidance tendencies in the short term. That

said, it would be interesting for future research to study these longitudinal and complex effects of anger on reconciliation outcomes.

Relatedly, there are other possible emotions that could result from apologizing with no felt transgression. In Study 1, we observed various responses from apologizing with no felt transgression such as worsened perceptions of the victim, which can be related to the feelings of empathy (e.g., Clark et al., 2019). Indeed, empathy often results from observing others' suffering (e.g., Stellar et al., 2019; Fultz et al., 1988), and we would expect the level of the transgressors' empathy to also reduce when they believe they have caused no harm (i.e., no felt transgression). Therefore, future research might extend our work by mapping out other affective mechanisms that link apologizing behavior with reconciliation outcomes.

Lastly, there are possible variables that may moderate the effect of apologizing with no felt transgression on reconciliation outcomes. For example, in our qualitative data, many participants mentioned how they apologized to a superior without feeling at fault. Relatedly, previous literature has investigated how power and status influence the reconciliation processes (e.g., Zheng & van Dijke, 2020; Walfisch et al., 2013; Zheng et al., 2016). Therefore, it would be interesting for future research to explore whether and, if so, how power and status affect the relationship between an apology with no felt transgression and reconciliation outcomes. Types of transgressions (e.g., integrity-based vs. competence-based transgression, Kim et al., 2004) may also play a role in affecting such outcomes. In sum, more research will enrich our understanding of the phenomenon of apology with no felt transgression.

Conclusion

This research examined the phenomenon of apologizing with no felt transgression at the workplace. Using a mixed-method design, we illustrate when, why, and how frequently such apologizing behaviors occur at the workplace. In addition, we examine two affective mechanisms (i.e., guilt and anger) in linking apologizing with no felt transgression with the transgressor's restoration efforts and explore the role of organizational conflict cultures. With these findings, we hope to provide a better understanding of workplace apologizing behavior when there is disagreement regarding the occurrence of a transgression, and we underscore possible negative outcomes associated with such apologizing behavior.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1. Study 1: Apologizing Incidents

Incident	**Apologizing with *no* *felt* transgression**	**Apologizing *with* felt transgression**
Accused of not following policy/acting inappropriately	16 (13.11%)	1 (0.78%)
Blamed/took responsibility for other's mistake	34 (27.87%)	2 (1.55%)
Disagreement with the other person	19 (15.57%)	5 (3.88%)
Made mistake at work	5 (4.10%)	48 (37.21%)
Unintentional damage in relationship	26 (21.31%)	30 (23.26%)
Unintentionally caused delay/inconvenience at work	6 (4.92%)	8 (6.20%)
Wrongly blamed colleague of mistake	3 (2.46%)	11 (8.53%)
Yelled/rude at work	13 (10.66%)	24 (18.60%)
Totals	**122 (100%)**	**129 (100%)**

Table 2. Study 1: Motivations for Apologizing

Why participant apologized	**Apologizing with *no felt* transgression**	**Apologizing *with* felt transgression**
Accused by someone else	3 (2.46%)	1 (0.78%)
Asked by someone else	8 (6.56%)	0
Avoid punishment	5 (4.10%)	1 (0.78%)
Caused difficulties/delays for colleagues	2 (1.64%)	14 (10.85%)
Easier than arguing	8 (6.56%)	0
Felt bad/guilty	6 (4.92%)	12 (9.30%)
Maintain peace	33 (27.05%)	0
Other was offended/hurt	11 (9.02%)	5 (3.88%)
Other was superior rank	2 (1.64%)	0
Professionally right thing to do	12 (9.84%)	8 (6.20%)
Recognized own fault/wrong	7 (5.74%)	81 (62.79%)
Right thing to do	9 (7.38%)	4 (3.10%)
Took responsibility for incident	16 (13.11%)	3 (2.33%)
Totals	**122 (100%)**	**129 (100%)**

Table 3. Study 1: Range of Negative Emotions Expressed

Negative emotions expressed	**Apologizing with *no felt* transgression**	**Apologizing *with* felt transgression**
Angry	14 (17.07%)	0
Annoyed	19 (23.17%)	6 (13.95%)
Bad	11 (13.41%)	6 (13.95%)
Disappointed	4 (4.88%)	1 (2.33%)
Embarrassed	1 (1.22%)	7 (16.28%)
Guilty	0	16 (37.21%)
Misunderstood/worried	4 (4.88%)	2 (4.65%)
Perception of other worsened	28 (34.15%)	4 (9.30%)
Unappreciated	1 (1.22%)	1 (2.33%)
Totals	**82 (100%)**	**43 (100%)**

Note: This table reflects data only from participants who expressed solely negative feelings (N=125, 49.80% of the full sample).

Table 4. Study 1: Illustrative Extracts of How Participants Felt About Apologizing

Illustrative extracts	**Apologizing with *no felt* transgression**	**Apologizing *with* felt transgression**
Positive	They were my supervisor so I had a respectful relationship with them anyway. I wanted to get into their good books again so they'd think better of me.	I respected them more, they could of been very angry at what I did but they instead were understanding.
	I still believe I was in the right however having apologised I still maintain a good relationship with this person, so ultimately it was the right thing to do	I felt relieved, because I had done my best to clarify the situation (before perhaps a complaint was made against me).
Negative	I felt resentment and lost a lot of respect. The response to my apology was used as an opportunity to further berate me and claim I was unprofessional. It was incredibly patronising and so I didn't waste my time trying to help her in future.	I felt nervous that this lateness would be held against me during our rescheduled meeting.
	I felt angry as it was clear he just wanted to blame someone and that person was me.	I felt sorry for them and I felt a little upset that perhaps I had caused for some trust to have been broken between us.
Mixed positive & negative	I felt like I apologised for something that wasn't wrong but that it was reassuring for the other person	[I felt] a bit silly and embarrassed but better to apologise and not let it fester
	I was happy that the situation was over with if I'm honest. It was a very stressful event.	I felt better for being honest but still frustrated with myself that I had made the error in the first place.
Neutral/no change	I felt fine and hopefully the situation will not occur again.	[I felt] fine, we all knew it was just stress related and I had never done anything like this before
	[I felt] like we were on even ground, we both understood where the other was coming from	I felt the same as usual, we went back to our usual interaction. We are all human and will always make mistakes or interpretations that are incorrect.

Table 5. Study 2: Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1.Felt transgression manipulation	4.24	2.12				
2.Guilt	2.66	1.25	0.65***	(*.90*)		
3.Anger	2.81	1.18	-0.43***	-0.25**	(*.91*)	
4.Restoration efforts	4.05	1.31	0.29***	0.41***	-0.47***	(*.76*)

Note: n =165. A higher score on felt transgression manipulation indicates higher perception of transgression. Coefficient alpha reliabilities are reported on the main diagonal in parentheses.

** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 6. Study 3: Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Gender	0.22	0.41								
2.Closeness	3.75	1.76	-0.05							
3.Power	2.29	0.74	0.00	0.12						
4.Felt transgression	3.33	1.19	0.10	0.13	0.13	(*.70*)				
5.Guilt	2.45	1.21	-0.02	0.13	0.18*	0.40***	(*.89*)			
6.Anger	1.45	0.83	-0.01	-0.15*	0.01	-0.18*	0.08	(*.87*)		
7.Restoration efforts	2.14	0.91	-0.06	0.07	-0.17*	0.23**	0.44***	-0.10	(*.77*)	
8.Avoidant culture	2.48	0.99	0.04	-0.02	-0.06	0.01	0.02	0.20**	-0.06	(*.80*)

Note: n =187. Gender was coded 0 for *female* and 1 for *male*. Power was coded 1 for *low power*, 2 for *equal power* and 3 for *high power*. Coefficient alpha reliabilities are reported on the main diagonal in parentheses.
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 7. OLS Regression Results of Study 3

	Outcome: guilt (Model 1)		Outcome: anger (Model 2)		Outcome: restoration efforts (Model 3)	
Predictor	***b***	***se***	***b***	***se***	***b***	***se***
Constant	3.94***	0.27	1.00***	0.20	2.01***	0.52
NFT	-0.40***	0.07	0.12*	0.05	-0.03	0.06
Guilt					0.09	0.14
Anger					0.06	0.20
AC					-0.16	0.16
Guilt ×AC					0.10*	0.05
Anger ×AC					-0.07	0.06
R^2	0.16***		0.03*		0.24***	

Note: n =187. NFT = No felt transgression. NFT was calculated by reserve-coding and averaging the ratings of felt transgression. AC = Avoidant culture.

*$p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .001$

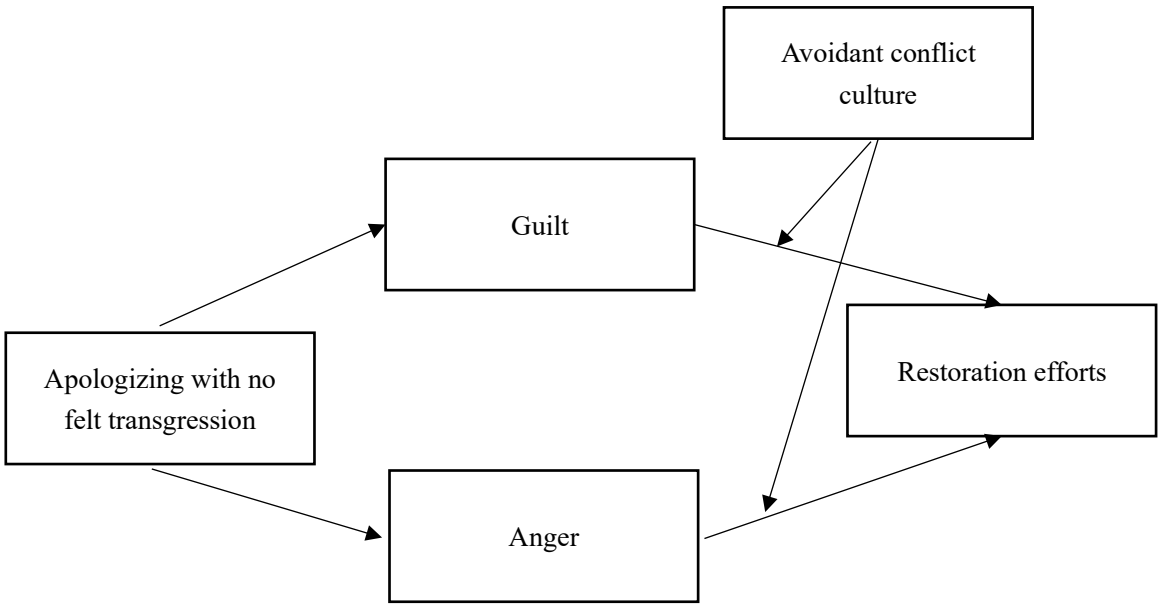
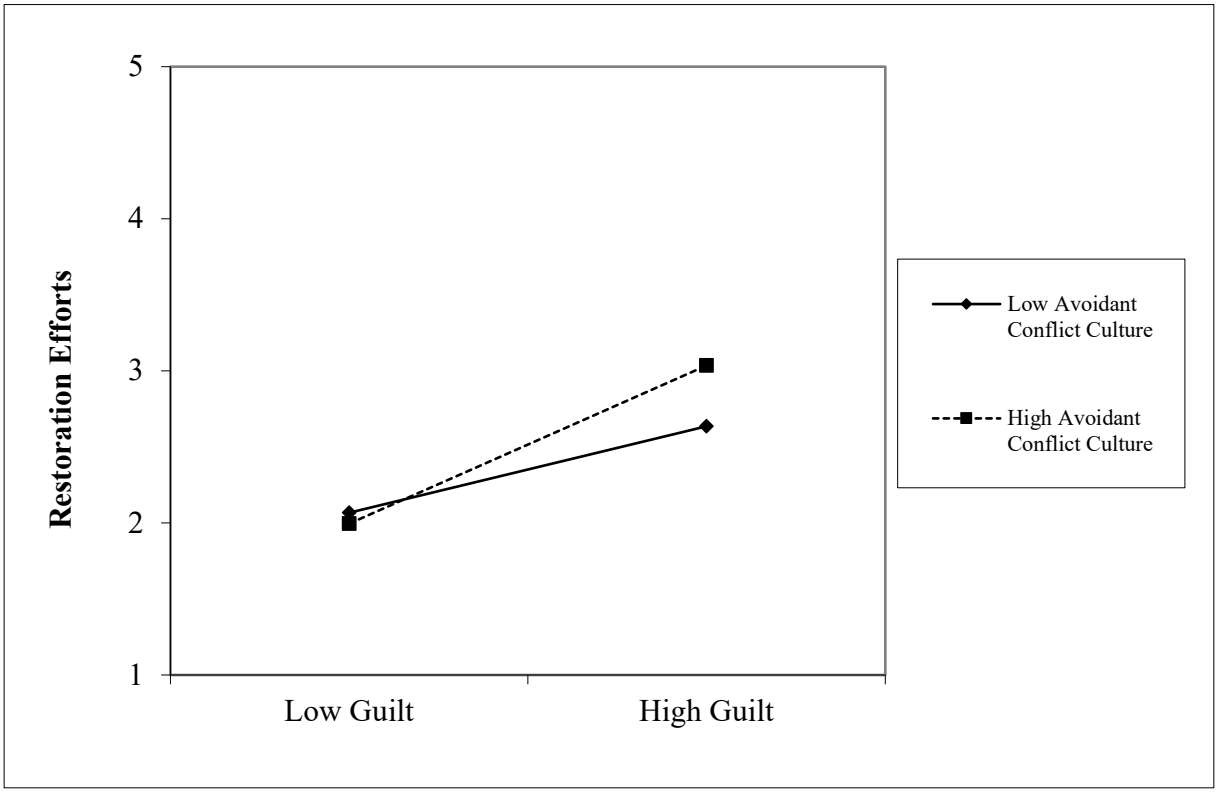


Fig.1 Research model

Fig.2 Study 3: Interaction between Guilt and Avoidant Conflict Culture on Transgressor's Restoration Efforts



CONCLUSION

This dissertation offers new perspectives on workplace prosocial behavior (i.e., helping, thanking and apologizing) and contributes to a better understanding of when and why such well-intended actions may backfire. The first chapter attempts to identity when helping behavior is more likely to result in helper's selfish behavior. By differentiating proactive help and reactive help, this chapter contributes to the literature by highlighting the factors that impact helper's post-help behavior, which has been neglected so far by extant literature. This chapter also provides insights to the link between initial helping and helper selfish behavior by exploring the role of perceived cost in explaining such effect, and demonstrates that reactive helpers are more likely to perceive the cost of help as higher and that the effect is stronger for those who are intolerant of under-reward. Taken together, this chapter highlights the potential differences between offering proactive and reactive help, and extends the related literature in meaningful ways.

The second chapter investigates a common yet understudied phenomenon—when a benefactor solicits gratitude expression from a beneficiary. The results suggested that soliciting gratitude expression leads to higher perceived benefactor arrogance than soliciting other resources in social exchanges, and such perception in turn increases beneficiary avoidance toward the benefactor. Taken as a whole, this chapter contributes to the social exchange theory, the nascent responsibility exchange theory, and the literature on gratitude by introducing gratitude expression as an understudied resource that is exchanged in interpersonal interactions, by demonstrating the unique implication of soliciting gratitude expression (vis-à-vis soliciting other resources) on perceived benefactor arrogance, and by

challenging the assumption that gratitude expression is always beneficial for interpersonal relationships.

The third chapter contributes to the scholar understanding of workplace apologizing behavior by illustrating when apologizing may disrupt reconciliation process. This chapter challenges the implicit assumption in the extant literature that the apologizer always admits the existence of a transgression, and proposes that when the apologizers do not perceive any transgression, they will withdraw their reconciliation efforts after apologizing. This chapter thus broadens the literature by underscoring perceived transgression as a critical factor in influencing transgressor post-apologizing behaviors and the reconciliation outcomes, and sheds new light on the literature of conflict management. Instead of adopting a victim-centric approach, this chapter investigates transgressor-specific antecedents and outcomes and thus offers a more balanced view to the literature.

As a whole, this dissertation unveils some understudied aspects of workplace prosocial behavior and provides a lens into potential future research opportunities.

CONCLUSIÓN

Esta disertación ofrece nuevas perspectivas sobre el comportamiento prosocial en el lugar de trabajo (es decir, ayudar, agradecer y disculparse) y contribuye a una mejor comprensión de cuándo y por qué acciones tan bien intencionadas pueden ser contraproducentes. El primer capítulo intenta identificar cuándo es más probable que el comportamiento de ayuda resulte en un comportamiento egoísta del ayudante. Al diferenciar la ayuda proactiva y la ayuda reactiva, este capítulo contribuye a la literatura al resaltar los factores que impactan el comportamiento posterior a la ayuda del ayudante, que hasta ahora ha sido descuidado por la literatura existente. Este capítulo también proporciona información sobre el vínculo entre la ayuda inicial y el comportamiento egoísta del ayudante al explorar el papel del costo percibido para explicar dicho efecto, y demuestra que los ayudantes reactivos tienen más probabilidades de percibir el costo de la ayuda como más alto y que el efecto es más fuerte para aquellos que son intolerantes con la recompensa insuficiente. En conjunto, este capítulo destaca las posibles diferencias entre ofrecer ayuda proactiva y reactiva, y amplía la literatura relacionada de manera significativa.

El segundo capítulo investiga un fenómeno común pero poco estudiado: cuando un benefactor solicita una expresión de gratitud de un beneficiario. Los resultados sugirieron que solicitar la expresión de gratitud conduce a una mayor arrogancia del benefactor percibido que solicitar otros recursos en los intercambios sociales, y tal percepción, a su vez, aumenta la evitación del beneficiario hacia el benefactor. En conjunto, este capítulo contribuye a la teoría del intercambio social, la naciente teoría del intercambio de responsabilidad y la literatura sobre la gratitud al presentar la expresión de gratitud como un recurso poco estudiado que se

intercambia en interacciones interpersonales, al demostrar la implicación única de solicitar la expresión de gratitud (frente a solicitar otros recursos) sobre la arrogancia del benefactor percibida, y desafiando la suposición de que la expresión de gratitud siempre es beneficiosa para las relaciones interpersonales.

El tercer capítulo contribuye a la comprensión académica del comportamiento de disculparse en el lugar de trabajo al ilustrar cuándo disculparse puede interrumpir el proceso de reconciliación. Este capítulo desafía el supuesto implícito en la literatura existente de que el que pide perdón siempre admite la existencia de una transgresión, y propone que cuando los que se disculpan no perciben ninguna transgresión, retirarán sus esfuerzos de reconciliación después de disculparse. Por lo tanto, este capítulo amplía la literatura al subrayar la transgresión percibida como un factor crítico para influir en los comportamientos del transgresor después de pedir disculpas y los resultados de la reconciliación, y arroja nueva luz sobre la literatura sobre el manejo de conflictos. En lugar de adoptar un enfoque centrado en la víctima, este capítulo investiga antecedentes y resultados específicos del transgresor y, por lo tanto, ofrece una visión más equilibrada de la literatura.

En su conjunto, esta tesis revela algunos aspectos poco estudiados del comportamiento prosocial en el lugar de trabajo y proporciona una perspectiva de posibles oportunidades de investigación futuras.