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## It's Personal and Not Just Business: The Effects of Admitting Transgressions on the Perception of Transgressors

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IT'S PERSONAL AND NOT JUST BUSINESS: THE EFFECTS OF ADMITTING  
TRANSGRESSIONS ON THE PERCEPTION OF TRANSGRESSORS

By

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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## Abstract

Three experiments examined how a transgressor's response, once accused of a wrongdoing, alters other's perceptions of transgressor. Study 1 investigated how a baseball player's response to steroid usage accusations affected fans' perceptions of him. Participants thought of the athlete more positively when he apologized for his drug usage as compared to when he denied it or provided no comment. Study 2 examined if the effects of a transgressor's response are moderated by the transgressor's reputation. Participants were predicted to prefer apologies over denials if they had a pre-existing positive view of the transgressor (i.e., the person was a friend and not a stranger or someone known for being lazy). Results showed that, similar to Study 1, participants respected the transgressor and thought he handled the situation better when he apologized instead of denied the transgression, but contrary to predictions, the transgressor's reputation did not have an effect on participants' reactions to a transgressor's responses. Study 3 examined whether feelings of *schadenfreude* (i.e., positive affect resulting from another's misfortune) mitigated negative feelings toward a transgressor who denied the transgression. After participants witnessed a transgression, they then had to work with the transgressor on a task. When the transgressor performed the task incompetently, participants were predicted to feel *schadenfreude* and therefore not feel it was as important to hear the transgressor admit to his wrongdoing. Results indicated that participants felt more negatively toward an incompetent transgressor than one who contributed equally to the task, regardless of whether he denied or apologized for the transgression. Furthermore, contrary to the results of Studies 1 and 2, participants did not have increased positive feelings toward transgressors who apologized. Overall, these studies provide evidence that apologizing and expressing ownership for a transgression is the best method to respond with to facilitate relationship repair within multiple situations.

## It is Personal and Not Just Business

Lance Armstrong was once considered the ultimate story of overcoming adversity. He was diagnosed with cancer in 1996 and was forced to undergo surgery to be given a chance to survive (Martin & Rowen, 2013). However, despite being given less than a 40% chance to live, he was declared cancer free one year later and went on to win seven consecutive Tour de France titles (Badenhausen, 2012). Today his medals have been stripped away and he is considered one of the most hated men in the athletic world (Konty, 2013). How could someone so loved fall so far? The answer is due to how he handled accusations of using performance-enhancing drugs. He was first accused of doping in 2004 to which he responded by denying the accusation (Martin & Rowen, 2013). However, in 2013, he admitted not only to using steroids but also to using them to win all seven of his consecutive titles. He broke the public's trust and expectations by continuously denying his drug use for over 9 years. However, what might have occurred if he had admitted to the transgression in 2004? In addition, will society ever forgive Lance Armstrong for his transgressions? The current studies were designed to answer questions similar to these by examining how the responses provided by transgressors affect how they are perceived within a relationship.

Trust begins immediately after people meet each other (McKnight, Cummings, & Chervany, 1998). In fact, development of trust begins so easily that a person can even have a trusting relationship with a celebrity or TV character he or she has never met before (Schiappa, Allen, & Gregg, 2007). Despite the quick start, research has shown that trust develops slowly and methodically through multiple social interactions (Boon & Holmes, 1991; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Lewicki & Weithoff, 2000; Lindsold, 1978; Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer, 1996; Pilisuk & Skolnick 1968; Weithoff & Lewicki, 2005). However, sometimes people violate our

expectations and perform a transgression. The current research defines a transgression as the violation of a positive expectation that is held by at least one member of a relationship. For example, a professor may not expect a student to cheat on an exam. If the student does cheat, however, then a transgression is committed. Alternatively, if a professor expects a student to cheat and the student does not, a transgression has not been performed. Although the student who did not cheat violated the professor's expectation, it cannot be considered a transgression, according to the current research's operationalization because the violation was from a negative perspective. Once a transgression occurs, trust quickly slips away (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Tomlinson, Dineen, & Lewicki, 2004). Obviously, it would be best if we could ensure that transgressions never happen. However, transgressions are a common and frequent occurrence (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996; Feldman, Forrest, & Happ, 2002; Tyler & Feldman, 2006).

After a transgression takes place, negative effects may occur within relationships. For instance, the wrongdoing may cause people to become angry at their favorite TV personality or cause close friends to stop speaking to each other. Some relationships, however, are able to survive the occurrence of transgressions and can recover over time. What causes some relationships to mend after a transgression while others do not? Previous research (described below) has found that it depends on how the transgressor responds to transgression accusations. The transgressors can apologize for what they have done or deny that they have performed a transgression at all. Apologizing is a statement that expresses ownership of the transgression as well as an inherent regret for doing something wrong. Alternatively, denial provides no ownership or regret and refutes that the transgression even occurred.

There is mixed evidence as to which method best facilitates relationship repair. Some researchers have found that apologizing is the best option for a transgressor. Although an apology admits guilt, it also establishes an acknowledgement that the transgressor will not perform the transgression in the future (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Ohbuchi & Sato, 1994; Tomlinson et al., 2004). However, other research suggests that denial responses might be better. An apology's acknowledgment that a transgression was committed can overshadow regret and result in a highly damaged relationship that remorse cannot help (Sigal, Hsu, Foodim, & Betman, 1988). Impression management theorists report that relationship damage is detrimental to the impression formation process and must be avoided. Therefore, denial becomes the best course of action for transgressors by mitigating any of the damage to their image (Gardner & Martinko, 1988; Schlenker, 1980).

Kim, Ferrin, Cooper, and Dirks (2004) conducted research to explain the conflicting evidence for relationship repair responses. They examined different situations to determine in which circumstance apologizing or denying was the best course of action to lead to positive perceptions of the transgressor. In their study, participants watched a recorded interview of a potential employee who was suspected of committing a transgression at his previous company. Each participant decided if the applicant should be hired after viewing the interview. The results suggest that increased willingness to hire hinged on the type of transgression that the applicant was accused of committing. When the transgression was based on the transgressor's competence (i.e., the job candidate was not aware that what he was doing was wrong), it was best for the transgressor to apologize for his actions. In contrast, when the incident was a matter of integrity (i.e., the job candidate was fully aware of the transgression and performed the deed intentionally), the transgressor needed to utilize the denial strategy. A subsequent study

replicated the moderating effect of violation type on transgression accusation responses even when further evidence proved the transgressor's innocence or guilt. Denial of an integrity-based transgression when coupled with evidence to show guilt caused increased damage to trust when compared to a transgressor who apologized for the same transgression.

Additional research has continued to replicate the effects of apologizing and denying responses for competence and integrity transgressions while also extending the literature. Reticence, defined as refusing to provide any comment to the veracity of a transgression accusation, was considered a possible third response to the accusation of a transgression (Ferrin, Kim, Cooper, & Dirks, 2007). A response of "no comment" caused participants to rate job candidates worse than the inferior response, while also replicating prior violations of competency and integrity response research. In other words, an applicant who apologized for an integrity transgression was more likely to be hired than one who provided "no comment".

Substantial actions to express remorse (e.g., working extra hours to make up for missing a paper deadline) were also examined as possible responses to a transgression (Dirks, Kim, Ferrin, & Cooper, 2011). Participants watched news clips reporting on a CEO who pledged to decrease his own wages along with employees' salaries. The report then revealed that the CEO did not receive a pay cut while his employees did. The reasons for why he performed the transgression were due to competence or integrity. In a later news report, the participants were informed the CEO apologized for the transgression and attempted to make up for it in a substantial way to indicate his full regret. He either punished himself harshly (referred to as penance) or he instituted a policy of checks and balances to make sure future CEOs, including himself, could not get away with this transgression (referred to as regulation). The results indicated that both penance and regulation responses were found to increase trust towards the

transgressor after the violation compared to a regular apology. However, participants perceived more repentance (indicating full regret for the transgression) from the CEO when he provided substantial remorseful actions for competency-based instead of integrity-based violations.

Lastly, previous research was designed to examine the effect apologies containing internal or external attributions may have on transgressor perceptions (Tomlinson et al., 2004). External attributions blame the transgression on events that are outside the transgressor's control (e.g., I was late to work because traffic was terrible this morning). Meanwhile, internal attributions blame the transgression on events that are directly controlled by the transgressor (e.g., I was late for work this morning because I stayed out late last night). Tomlinson and colleagues' (2004) work suggests that internal attributions lead to greater relationship repair than external attributions. However, Kim, Dirks, Cooper, and Ferrin (2006) report that external attributions can provide relationship repair for integrity violations as well. Consistent with Tomlinson et al. (2004), the study's findings suggest that when a transgression is competency based, it is best for the transgressor to apologize with an internal attribution. Alternatively, if the transgression is integrity based, the transgressor who apologized with an external attribution was able to induce higher levels of trust.

While the previous studies provide evidence that transgressions resulting from low integrity or competency can account for the conflicting differences in relationship repair, these findings cannot fully generalize to all applications of the concept. To the best of my knowledge, research specifically targeting transgressor responses based upon integrity and competency violations to facilitate relationship repair is only found within studies considering business applications. Although business settings contain personal relationships, people consistently attempt to keep relationships out of the workplace to avoid dealing with transgressions and

relationship repair. Evidence of this phenomenon is expressed by the common idiom, "It's not personal, it's just business." As all previous studies on responses after transgressions only examined relationship repair in a business setting, it is difficult to generalize these results to a context of personal social exchanges, such as relationships with friends or famous people.

Additionally, previous research scenarios asked participants to make judgments about a transgressor who performed a wrongdoing towards someone else in a hypothetical scenario that would not affect the participant personally. Within interpersonal relationships, transgressions that specifically target the trusting party may cause different reactions towards the transgressor than what previous results have indicated for business contexts. For example, a person may be less likely to repair a relationship with a roommate who apologizes for gambling away the rent check because he did not understand the rules of poker (competency-based transgression) due to how the transgression equally causes both the person and the transgressor to suffer. It is therefore important to analyze relationship repair due to transgressions on a directly interpersonal level.

Furthermore, Ferrin et al. (2007) and Kim et al. (2006) use hearsay to accuse the transgressor of a wrongdoing. Within each study, participants were provided with suspicions of how a transgressor had violated expectations. The participants were then asked about their trusting beliefs and trusting intentions toward the transgressor. A lack of substantial evidence may be the cause for higher levels of trust following apology or denial responses, allowing some participants to believe that the transgressor is not actually guilty. However, if the evidence is indicating that the transgressor committed a violation, a person may be less inclined to trust a transgressor who denies committing the transgression. Kim et al. (2004) found that providing direct evidence of whether the transgression was performed does affect the participant's trusting intentions and trusting beliefs. However, by revealing the truth, participants may not feel the

need to confront the transgressor and will never allow him to defend himself. Therefore, it is important for research to ensure that while substantial evidence is provided for a transgression, veracity of the wrongdoing is not.

Additionally, it is important to extend and uncover novel findings within relationship repair processes. To ensure my studies expand the literature, I simplified the experimental design and examined only integrity-based transgressions. By examining one form of a transgression, I was able to focus on the specific processes that allowed positive perceptions to function when harmed by a transgressor's integrity violation. Furthermore, many people treat integrity as a form of honor. Thus, it can be inferred that integrity is held in high regard and others will maintain more punishing judgments towards integrity-based transgressions. By examining the worst forms of transgressions, the current studies analyzed how an individual can positively perceive a transgressor for seemingly unforgivable actions.

Therefore, the purpose of the following studies was three-fold. First, I aimed to increase the generalizability of relationship repair findings to interpersonal contexts using various forms of relationships and making the transgression personally relevant. Second, I aimed to assess possible motivations to perceive a transgressor positively after substantial evidence was provided to indicate the transgressor's wrongdoing. Third, I focused analysis on integrity based-transgressions to uncover how individuals maintain a positive perception of transgressors in worst-case interpersonal scenarios. In Study 1, I examined a fan's reaction to a baseball player's apology or denial after the player was accused of an integrity violation of using steroids. I examined the content of the apologies and denials to determine which response led to the most positive perception of the transgressor. In Study 2, to investigate why certain responses from the transgressor led to increased positive reactions, I varied the relationship between the transgressor

and participant to see whether apologies mattered more if there was a positive pre-existing relationship. Finally, Study 3 examined if additional factors mitigated a person's frustration towards a transgressor in addition to an apologetic response. Specifically, I attempted to produce feelings of schadenfreude within participants. Then, I determined if participants felt it was still necessary to hear a transgressor admit and express remorse for a transgression.

### **Study 1**

Study 1 examined how a baseball player's response to accusations of using steroids may affect how his fans perceive him. The relationship a sports fan has with an athlete is a parasocial relationship, and previous research suggests it is similar to a normal interpersonal relationship (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Parasocial relationships are defined as the social exchanges that television viewers perceive between themselves and a media figure (Schiappa et al., 2007). This form of a relationship is due to the brain processing interactions with media personalities as if it were interacting with real people (Kanazawa, 2002).

Additionally, consistent with the current research's goals, the participants were provided with evidence of the transgressor's guilt in such a way that it seemed likely that the athlete used performance-enhancing drugs. However, the participants were not given verification revealing whether the transgression was actually performed. The athlete provided one response out of various forms of apologizing, denying, and reticence for his integrity-based transgression. By comparing the differing responses to each other within one study, I was able to assess how each additional aspect of apologizing and denial contributed to the fan's perception.

As mentioned previously, apologizing is a statement that expresses ownership and the regret of a transgression. However, it is possible for a transgressor to express ownership for a

violation without apologizing or expressing regret. Due to the lack of remorse from the transgressor, I anticipated that solely admitting to a transgression would cause participants to view the transgressor less favorably than a transgressor who admitted and apologized or provided an explanation for the transgression with remorse. To the best of my knowledge, research has not been performed analyzing a wrongdoer only admitting to a transgression and its effects on the transgressor's image. However, I also predicted that any form of admitting to a transgression would produce more favorable responses towards the transgressor than any other response.

In addition to my three admitting conditions, I examined the effects of varying responses of denial. First, I had the transgressor use the most common form of denial within previous research: denying a transgression without any explanation. Despite its use within previous methodologies, it is not a common way to socially deny a transgression. Usually, a transgressor will try to convince a person of their innocence and provide some form of explanation. Therefore, I also included a denial condition with the transgressor providing an external explanation for how the transgression accusation is false.

I predicted that explanations, regardless of the response type, would cause participants to be more likely to think positively of the transgressor as compared to other forms of responding because it provided additional information as to why the transgressor may be innocent or guilty. By providing additional details, transgressors may be seen as more trustworthy. The transgressor provided an external attribution to remain consistent with previous research findings that providing external blame is the optimal attribution for integrity-based transgressions (Kim et al., 2006).

Finally, I included reticence as a possible response for the transgressor. Despite previous research considering it a possible third response, I believed it was most often used as a form of denial. This is evident when one considers the conceptual definition of denial. Reticence, much like a denial response, does not provide ownership of a transgression or express regret. Due to these similarities, I predicted that denial and reticence responses would cause participants to react in similar ways.

In summary, I examined the following hypotheses (Hs) within Study 1:

**H1:** Solely admitting to a transgression causes less favorable affect when compared to a transgressor who admits and apologizes or provides an explanation with remorse.

**H2:** Any form of admitting to a transgression produces more favorable responses towards the transgressor than any denial response.

**H3:** External explanations, regardless of the transgressor's response type, cause participants to think more positively of the transgressor as compared to other forms of responding.

**H4:** Denial and reticence responses produce similar reactions to the transgressor.

## **Method**

**Participants and materials.** One hundred four undergraduate students (41 males, 63 females) from a West Coast university completed a survey as part of a package of multiple surveys for pay. The mean age of participants was 21 with age ranging from 18-54. The sample comprised of 33.61% Caucasian, 31.15% Asian, 15.57% African American, 13.93% Hispanic and the remaining 5% considered themselves a different ethnicity than the choices provided. All surveys included in the study were completed on a computer.

## Procedure

**Survey.** Participants were asked to read a fictional story about a baseball player named Joe. Within the vignette, Joe was suspected of using steroids and was confronted by the media with evidence that he has used drugs in the past (See Appendix A for full prompt of each of the transgressor's responses). Joe responded to the accusation in one of six possible ways: he admitted to the transgression, admitted with an apology, admitted with an apology while also providing an explanation, provided "no comment," denied, or denied with an explanation.

**Measures.** Participants were then asked to rate their agreement to several seven-point Likert scales ranging from *strong disagreement* (1) to *strong agreement* (7). Three items were used to identify positive feelings towards Joe. Participants were asked to rate their agreement to the following statements: "I respect Joe", "I like Joe", and "Joe is handling the situation in the right way." Two items were used to identify negative feelings towards Joe. Participants were asked to rate their agreement to the following statements: "Joe's sponsors (e.g., Nike) should drop him" and "Joe's team should punish him."

## Results

First, each dependent measure was examined to satisfy statistical assumptions of variance. Using Levene's test of homogeneity, both respect and liking the transgressor's variances between each condition were found to be significantly different,  $p's \leq .03$ . Due to a positive skew, respect was transformed using a base-10 logarithm providing equal variances,  $p = .14$ . Liking could not be transformed to produce equal variances, therefore further examinations on liking were conducted using statistical analyses that did not require the use of equal variances.

Next, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean responses for each item across the six possible responses the athlete provided. There was a significant effect for how

much the participants respected Joe ( $F(5,98) = 3.64, p = .005$ ) and for how well they thought Joe was handling the situation ( $F(5,98) = 14.35, p < .001$ ). A marginally significant effect was also found for how much the participant's liked Joe,  $F(5,98) = 2.08, p = .075$ . Neither punishment nor dropping the sponsor produced any significant differences due to response type given by the transgressor,  $p$ 's  $\geq .60$ . Using LSD post-hoc analysis, participants' respect was found to be significantly higher when Joe apologized with remorse or provided an external attribution with an apology compared to solely denying the transgression or reticence (Table 1). Participants also thought the baseball player was handling the situation better when he admitted to the transgression in any way when compared to any form of denial. Lastly, using Tamhane's T2 post hoc analysis to account for unequal variances, how much a participant liked the athlete was found to be marginally higher when he provided an apology with an external attribution compared to a response of no comment or denying while providing an explanation. Additionally, contrasts were performed to examine evidence for each hypothesis separately.

Table 1. Means and Standard deviations for each significant condition

	Respect (Lg10)	Like	Handle
Admit	.474 (0.21)	3.63 (1.20)	5.88 (0.81)
Admit/Apologize	.542 (0.23)	3.72 (1.57)	5.50 (1.58)
Admit/Apologize & Explain	.584 (0.15)	4.05 (0.76)	5.45 (1.36)
No Comment	.421 (0.20)	3.07(1.16)	3.20 (1.61)
Deny	.376 (0.12)	3.20 (0.86)	3.27 (0.88)
Deny & Explain	.457 (0.20)	3.21 (0.98)	3.40 (1.70)

**H1: Solely Admitting Compared to Apologizing.** Apologizing with and without an explanation did increase participant's respect and liking of the transgressor compared to when Joe only admitted to the transgression, however these differences were not found to be significant,  $p \geq .12$ .

**H2: Any admitting compared to any denial.** Any form of admitting produced significantly more positive responses from the participants than any form of denial. Participants respected Joe ( $t(98) = 3.07, p = .003$ ), liked the athlete ( $t(77.01) = 2.88, p = .005$ ), and thought the athlete was handling the situation better ( $t(98) = 8.45, p < .001$ ) when he admitted to the transgression in any way compared to any form of denial.

**H3: Any Explanation Compared to Other Responses.** Any form of explanation was not found to be significantly better than other responses,  $p > .10$ .

**H4: Reticence Compared to Denial.** Reticence was compared to the two other forms of denial. No significant differences were found between the three responses indicating that participants viewed the response of “no comment” as a similar form of denying the transgression,  $p$ 's  $\geq .93$ .

## **Discussion**

The results from Study 1 produced support for hypotheses two and four. Any form of apologizing for a transgression led to increased positive affect towards the transgressor compared to any form of denial. Additionally, participants reacted similarly to the athlete when he denied or responded with reticence to the accusation.

Although significant evidence was not found for hypothesis one, I still believe there is evidence that apologizing produces more positive affect towards the transgressor. According to the ANOVA, admitting alone caused participants to think Joe was handling the situation in the right way compared to any form of denying the transgression; it did not lead to increased respect or liking of the transgressor. Due to an increase in only one form of response, this is not a full indication of forgiveness and seems to be the least effective admitting strategy for a transgressor.

Despite the strength of admitting over denial responses, apologizing seems to be the major force that drove participants to perceive Joe in a positive manner.

Additionally, there was no evidence to support my third hypothesis that external explanations were a better response strategy than any other form of responding. Although apologizing with an explanation was found to produce more positive feelings than denying with an explanation, an apologetic external attribution was not found to increase positive attitudes significantly more than other admitting responses. I believe this is further evidence of how strong an effect providing an apology created for Joe.

Study 1 indicates a transgressor's best response after being accused of performing a transgression is to express remorse for his actions. Use of an apology for integrity-based transgressions is consistent only with prior research that provided evidence to indicate a transgressor's guiltiness (Kim et al., 2004). I believe this consistency is due to the substantial evidence provided to participants, which may have caused them to believe Joe was guilty despite not being told if the transgression was actually performed. However, I did not directly ask participants if they thought Joe was guilty of the transgression. Therefore, further research must be conducted to examine whether people consider transgressors guilty after substantial evidence has been provided.

Additionally, since a parasocial relationship can be formed between people and TV personalities (Schiappa et al., 2007), I believe more favorable responses are due to the interpersonal nature of the relationship between a baseball fan and player. Despite not directly asking participants how much they like baseball or how much they follow the sport, participants may have envisioned baseball players as maintaining a level of high integrity. This positive view of Joe could be based upon media interviews seen on television and may have caused

participants to expect Joe to come clean for his integrity-based transgression. Furthermore, based upon a participant's pre-existing knowledge about baseball players, due to other parasocial relationships and the importance of baseball within one's life, the participant may have created positive expectations towards Joe that were fulfilled when he apologized but placed him in a more negative light when he denied using steroids. However, the ad hoc ideas produced from examining the results of Study 1 raise further questions as to why an apologetic response was effective, such as: What if Joe was not a baseball player who used steroids to excel but a random recreational steroid user who uses it to work out effectively? Would the effect of apologizing have been found as strongly? The goal of Study 2 was to examine how different forms of pre-existing relationships may affect a person's response to a transgressor's apologies or denials.

## **Study 2**

The act of building a reputation and planning to meet someone again in the future causes a person to react differently than if it is only a one-time correspondence (Glick & Croson, 2001; Hertzog & Hertzog, 1979; Tyler & Feldman, 2006). This prior knowledge based upon a person's reputation, may lead others to perceive a transgressor differently than one who is considered a stranger. Study 2 examined how prior knowledge of an interpersonal relationship may affect a person's perception of a transgressor after providing a response to a transgression accusation.

Over time, a person will create a positive image of a relationship member based upon their reputation. Evidence suggests that the image created as relationship members become closer is overly positive (Murray, Holmes, & Griffin, 1996). However these positive illusions have benefits, such as increased satisfaction towards the relationship and partner. Therefore, a person who views a transgressor in a positive manner would be motivated to maintain these

benefits and the positive view. I predicted, due to this motivation, that once a transgression occurred, a transgressor who is associated with positive, prior knowledge would produce more positive affect than a negatively perceived or unknown transgressor.

Additionally, to replicate Study 1, transgressors also responded by either apologizing or denying with an external explanation for the transgression. I predicted a transgressor's response would interact with the participant's positive image. Specifically, I predicted that participants would prefer apologies over denials only when a pre-existing positive view of the transgressor existed. Whereas, if a person had negative or no prior knowledge of the transgressor, then any form of responding would not produce positive affect. However, if an interaction did not occur, based upon my findings within Study 1, I hypothesized that a participant would perceive a transgressor who apologized more positively compared to a transgressor who denied the accusation.

In summary, I examined the following hypotheses within Study 2:

- H1:** Positive prior knowledge causes a transgressor to be perceived more positively than a negatively perceived or unknown transgressor after substantial evidence indicates a transgression has occurred.
- H2:** Prior knowledge of the transgressor and his response to a transgression accusation would interact. Specifically, participants would prefer apologies over denials more when a pre-existing positive view of the transgressor exists.
- H3:** The transgressor would be perceived more positively if he or she provided an apologetic response when compared to one who denied the accusation.

## Method

**Participants and materials.** Three hundred forty four participants (149 males, 195 females) from a Southeastern university were asked to complete a survey for course credit or candy. The mean age of participants was 24 with ages ranging from 18-69. The sample comprised of 61% Caucasians, 10.5% Asians, 16.3% African Americans, 8.4% Hispanics and the remaining 3.8% considered themselves a different ethnicity than the choices provided. Experimenters gathered survey responses in one of two possible ways. The first method was part of a package of multiple surveys for course credit. Surveys were presented in a random order to eliminate carryover effects from other questionnaires within the package. All participants recruited were students of the university. The second method had experimenters approach prospective participants around the university's campus. Participants who were engaged this way comprised of anyone found on campus, including parents, faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. The sample was gathered this way to increase heterogeneity of the sample beyond a student population.

**Survey.** Participants were randomly assigned to read one of six vignettes where they imagined needing help moving into a new apartment. A participant was told to imagine either asking a friend (positive prior knowledge), a friend who was known to skip out on work (negative prior knowledge), or a stranger (no prior knowledge) to help. The person agreed to help and even claimed he would arrive early. However, on the day of the move, the helper claimed to be sick and could not assist anymore. Later in the story, the participant finished moving alone and went to the beach where the person that was asked to help is found. The participant is told to imagine confronting the transgressor to which he responds by admitting or

denying the transgression with an external attribution. Refer to Appendix B for the specific prompt for each condition.

**Measures.** Participants were asked to rate their agreement on several seven-point Likert scales ranging from *strong disagreement* (1) to *strong agreement* (7). To remain consistent with Study 1, items were used to identify if the participant perceived the transgressor positively or negatively. The statements participants were asked are as follows: “I am frustrated with my friend.”; “I respect my friend.”; “My friend is handling this situation in the right way.”; “I will not maintain this friendship.”; and “I will ask my friend for help later.” For the stranger conditions the word “friend” was replaced with “friend of a friend.”

**Manipulation checks.** Within the questionnaire, participants were also asked, “Once at the beach, did the person who agreed to help you lie or apologize to you?” The answer participants provided allowed us to determine which response the participant thought the transgressor used instead of basing the analysis on the participants placement within each condition. By using this delineation, the research more accurately reflected a real-life scenario. Within transgressional situations, a person does not fully know the truth and must decide as to whether or not a transgression occurred. While the answer to this decision may often be wrong, perceptions of the transgressor are, nevertheless, based on how a person perceived the situation.

Participants could answer the manipulation check by responding with, “Apologize”, “Lie”, or “I do not know”. An answer of “Apologize” is self-explanatory to how the participant perceived the transgressor’s response. However, I believe that the answers “Lie” or “I do not know” indicated two forms of denying responses provided by the transgressor. When participants provided the “Lie” option, I believe this showed that participants were fully aware the transgressor was denying the wrongdoing and had caught them in another transgression.

Participants who answered, "I do not know", on the other hand, did not seem to be aware of the transgressor's denial or apology. This indicated that regardless of the transgressor's response, the transgressor got away with it. Due to the responses participants provided, I created an additional condition examining how participants perceived the transgressor as if he had gotten away with the transgression based off participants who responded to the manipulation check with "I do not know." Therefore, the analyses are based upon a 3 (prior knowledge: positive, negative, or no image associated with transgressor) x 3 (perceived beach response: apologize, getting caught denying, or getting away with the transgression) between-subjects design.

A manipulation check was also included to ensure that participants were aware the helper transgressed against them by claiming to be sick. Before analysis of the data began, this manipulation check was used to filter out participants who were not aware that a transgression occurred when the helper claimed to be sick. Two hundred eighty participants (81% of the total) answered the manipulation check correctly and reported being aware that the transgressor had lied about becoming sick. All further analyses were performed using these 280 participants.

## **Results**

A 3x3 factorial ANOVA was performed to assess a participant's frustration towards the transgressor, how well the transgressor was handling the situation, a participant's amount of respect towards the transgressor, if the participant would ask the transgressor for help later, and if the participant would not maintain a relationship with the transgressor. Using Levene's test of homogeneity, transgressor's handle of the situation's variance between each condition was found to be significantly different,  $p's < .001$ . The dependent measure could not be transformed to produce equal variances; therefore, further examinations on handle of the situation were conducted using statistical analyses that did not require the use of equal variances. No significant

interactions were found for any questionnaire items ( $p$ 's  $> .12$ ) providing no support for my second hypothesis. The significant main effects from these factorial ANOVAs are described below.

**H1: Effect of prior knowledge.** Significant main effects were found for the type of prior knowledge participants had of the transgressor providing some evidence for my first hypothesis. Participants thought the transgressor was handling the situation ( $F(2,271) = 3.61, p = .028$ ), asked the transgressor for help later ( $F(2,271) = 8.27, p < .001$ ), and maintained a relationship ( $F(2,271) = 6.09, p = .003$ ) based upon the participants' prior knowledge of the transgressor. A marginally significant main effect based on relationship type was found for the amount of frustration participants had towards the transgressor ( $F(2,271) = 2.67, p = .071$ ). Respect did not produce a significant main effect based upon prior knowledge,  $p = .34$ . Refer to Table 3 for descriptive statistics of each dependent variable.

Positive prior knowledge of the transgressor was found to have marginal significance in increasing how likely the participant would ask for help again later compared to a transgressor who had negative prior knowledge,  $t(133.39) = 1.75, p = .083$ . However, all other contrasts between the positive and negative views of prior knowledge were found to be non-significant,  $p$ 's  $\geq .488$ . These findings indicate that participants viewed a transgressor similarly despite the difference in prior knowledge. Alternatively, both positive and negative prior knowledge of a transgressor caused participants to significantly be more frustrated ( $t(271) = 2.31, p = .022$ ), think the transgressor handled the situation worse ( $t(271) = -2.64, p = .009$ ), maintain a relationship ( $t(271) = -3.42, p = .001$ ), and ask the transgressor for help again later ( $t(47.61) = 4.23, p < .001$ ) compared to a transgressor who had no prior experience with the participant.

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics for significant main effects of prior knowledge for transgressor*

	Positive Knowledge	Negative Knowledge	No Knowledge
Frustration	5.51 (1.54)	5.33 (1.69)	4.69 (1.76)
Respect	3.31 (1.83)	3.17 (1.56)	2.87 (1.65)
Handle	2.20 (1.57)	2.23 (1.59)	2.82 (1.72)
Help Later	3.08 (2.04)	2.81 (1.82)	2.03 (1.39)
Not Maintain Relationship	3.42 (1.59)	3.48 (1.53)	4.25 (1.73)

**H3: Effect of transgressor's perceived response.** Significant main effects were found for the transgressors perceived response when confronted at the beach providing evidence for my third hypothesis. Participants respected the transgressor ( $F(2, 271) = 7.42, p = .001$ ), thought the transgressor handled the situation better ( $F(2,271) = 3.53, p = .031$ ), asked the transgressor for help later ( $F(2,271) = 5.12, p = .007$ ), were less frustrated ( $F(2, 271) = 4.70, p = .010$ ), and maintained a relationship ( $F(2,271) = 10.56, p < .001$ ) differently based upon how the transgressor's response was perceived. Refer to Table 2 for descriptive statistics of each dependent variable.

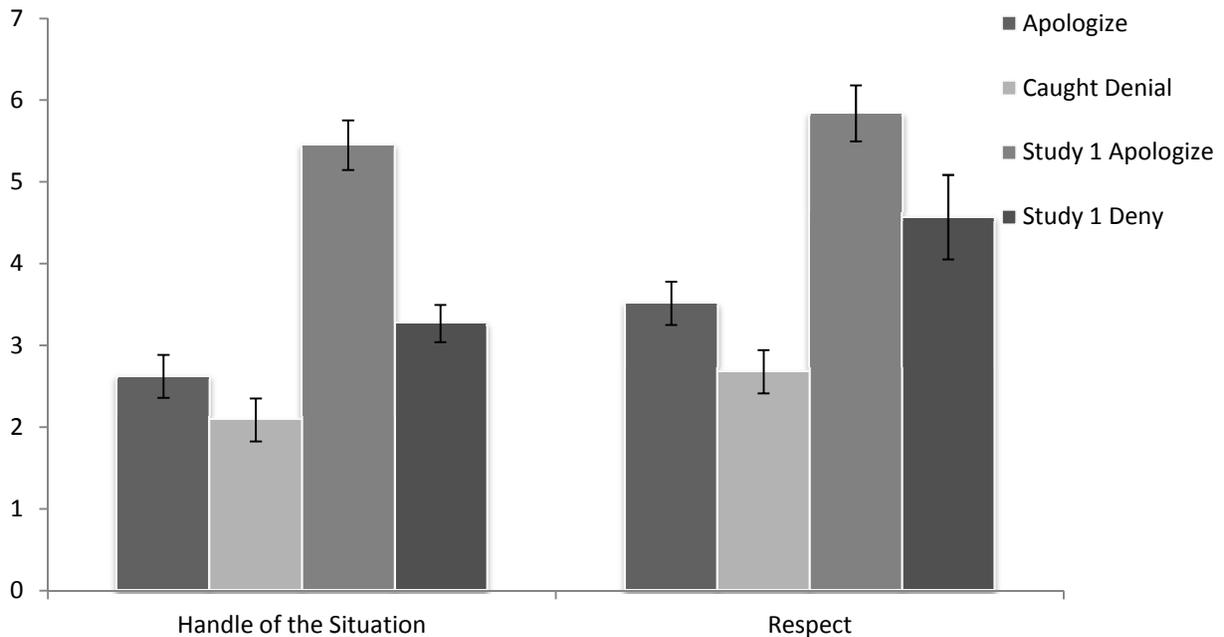
Transgressors who were perceived as apologizing were found significantly to be less frustrating ( $t(271) = -3.03, p = .003$ ), to be more respected ( $t(271) = 3.85, p < .001$ ), to handle the situation better ( $t(271) = 2.52, p = .012$ ), to maintain the relationship ( $t(271) = -4.58, p < .001$ ), and to be asked to help again later ( $t(202.25) = 3.20, p = .002$ ) when compared to a transgressor who was caught denying the transgression. As seen in Figure 1, these findings replicate the results of Study 1. Additionally, transgressors who were perceived as apologizing were not significantly different from a transgressor who got away with the transgression for any of the questionnaire items,  $p$ 's  $> .13$ . Participants significantly maintained a relationship ( $t(271) = 2.19, p = .029$ ) and marginally thought the transgressor was handling the situation better ( $t(271) = -1.78, p = .076$ ) when the transgressor got away with the transgression compared to one who got

caught denying. All other items between these two perceived responses were not significant,  $p$ 's > .098.

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics for significant main effects of perceived response*

	Apologize	Caught	Got Away
Frustration	4.89 (1.75)	5.58 (1.63)	5.09 (1.59)
Respect	3.50 (1.73)	2.70 (1.57)	3.06 (1.66)
Handle Better	2.64 (1.73)	2.08 (1.58)	2.51 (1.46)
Help Later	2.95 (1.99)	2.28 (1.62)	2.72 (1.70)
Not Maintain Relationship	3.33 (1.72)	4.21 (1.46)	3.70 (1.62)

Figure 1. *Visual comparison of replication from Study 1 and 2*



**Discussion**

Unfortunately, evidence for an interaction between prior knowledge and perceived transgressor responses was not found within my sample. I believe this could be due to the motivation of hearing the truth being stronger than considering who is denying or admitting. In other words, participants wanted to hear the transgressor apologize, and this was true regardless

of what the participant knew about the transgressor ahead of time. This conclusion is consistent with Study 1's findings (Figure 1) and confirms my third hypothesis.

However, researchers must be cautious of Type I errors when claiming significant differences between scale ratings that all fall above or below the median of the scale. As seen in Table 2 and 3 mean ratings between conditions were low. This problem could be due to the inherent floor and ceiling effects found within responding to items that gauge negative and positive emotions towards a transgressor. For example, it is difficult to rate how badly injured an individual feels after breaking a leg. If asked, "How much does it hurt?" the most common response would probably be, "A lot!", which translated to a rating scale would be indicated as the top score or a "7" within the current research. Therefore, any change in ratings that is attributed to the conditions within Study 2 should be considered a significant and meaningful effect. Additionally, Study 1 produced significant comparisons between scale ratings that fall above and below the median of the scale. Due to the replication and consistency with Study 1, significant effects within Study 2 are supported.

Despite these concerns, results indicate that within interpersonal contexts, apologizing seems to be the best response method for a transgressor who performs integrity-based transgressions. Previous research found that for transgressors who performed integrity-based transgressions and responded with a denial, not being caught was better than apologizing (Kim et al., 2004). Interestingly, this conclusion is inconsistent with my findings. Although getting away with the transgression was not found to be significantly different than transgressors who apologized, my data trends indicate getting away with denying the transgression increased participants' positive affect towards transgressors less than those who apologized. I believe this

is due to the directly interpersonal context of the relationship between the participant and the transgressor examined within the current research.

There is also some evidence that prior knowledge of the transgressor affects relationship repair. According to my sample, it does not matter if the prior knowledge of the transgressor is positive or negative. A person is more likely to ask for help later, maintain the relationship, and be more frustrated with a positively or negatively viewed friend than a stranger. Although this evidence indicates the transgressor's reputation is affecting how participants' perceive the transgressor, it is not enough to indicate increased positive affect from a motivation to maintain positive benefits, therefore disconfirming my first hypothesis.

However, my lack of evidence for positive views motivating repair may be due to a limitation of the experimental design. Participants were told to imagine asking a friend or a lazy friend to help but no other descriptions were provided. A lack of control over whom the participant was imagining may have allowed participants to envision many different levels of positively or negatively viewed transgressors and therefore may not have created a large difference between how people viewed the friend and lazy friend. In the future, I may be able to find evidence for motivation by experimentally controlling and providing exemplars for the transgressor that participants imagine.

Studies 1 and 2 found that hearing a transgressor admit to a transgression while also providing remorse helps one feel better and alleviates frustration. However, I believe apologetic responses help to mitigate frustration because a person is not sure of another method that will reduce negative affect towards the transgressor. Therefore, Study 3 seeks to examine a possible method to reduce frustration and increase positive affect towards a transgressor analogous to an apologetic response.

### Study 3

As transgressions occur, a natural reaction is to become frustrated. Among other psychological concepts, frustration may be a motivating factor for confronting a transgressor. This motivation occurs due to a natural drive to alleviate negative affect within our self. A common response to alleviate negative feelings is confronting the transgressor and getting her to admit and apologize for her wrongdoing. Evidence of this phenomenon is apparent in situations where a person knows the transgressor has performed a wrongdoing and yet the person still confronts a transgressor to see if he will admit the truth. For example, strong evidence indicated Lance Armstrong used performance enhancing drugs and yet the media still confronted him several times, asking him to admit his transgression. I believed that if a person's frustration is mitigated in another way, a person's motivation to discover the truth will be alleviated as well. Schadenfreude, by definition, alleviates negative affect due to the pleasure a person receives from viewing another's misfortune (Brigham, Kelso, Jackson, & Smith, 1997). Study 3 sought to examine whether feelings of schadenfreude may reduce a person's motivation to hear a transgressor admit to the transgression.

Previous research has found that feelings of schadenfreude are more likely to occur if an individual is envious of the person who receives the misfortune (Brigham et al., 1997; Sawada & Hayama, 2012). Therefore, the current study forced participants to work on a task with a transgressor who had an envious advantage due to their transgression. To ensure participants were envious of the transgressor, participants were required to bring a cell phone to receive full credit for the study. Within the experiment, the transgressor (a confederate) lied about not bringing a cell phone. The participant realized the confederate was transgressing when the confederate's hidden cell phone rang while they were performing a task together. However, the

experimenter was not aware of the transgression and rewarded the transgressor by allowing her to leave early while she still received full credit for participating. In sum, the transgressor was allowed to perform half of the work for all of the credit while the participant was still required to stay for the full amount of time.

Once a participant becomes envious, the transgressor must encounter a misfortune for feelings of schadenfreude to take place within the participant. In my study, the transgressor's misfortune was due to her incompetence at completing the task that she was forced to complete. While completing the task, the transgressor's hidden cell phone rang. Consequently, the transgressor provided an apology or denial response with an external explanation to the participant as to why the transgressor lied to the experimenter. I predicted an interaction between the effects of the transgressor's incompetence and response to a transgression accusation. Remaining consistent with the previous two studies, I predicted that when the transgressor was competent, participants would have increased positive affect for transgressors who respond with an apology compared to a transgressor who denies. In addition, I hypothesized that participants who worked with an incompetent transgressor would have increased positive affect and less frustration towards an incompetent transgressor, compared to competent transgressors, due to feelings of schadenfreude from the transgressor's misfortune. Additionally, the lack of frustration would then result in participants feeling less motivated to hear transgressors admit to their misdeed.

In summary, I examined the following hypotheses within Study 3:

**H1:** A lack of frustration would cause participants to feel less motivated to hear transgressors admit to the transgression.

**H2:** Competent transgressors would increase positive affect for transgressors who respond with an apology compared to a transgressor who denies, while an incompetent transgressor would increase positive affect compared to competent transgressors due to feelings of schadenfreude from the transgressors misfortune.

## **Method**

**Participants and materials.** One hundred one undergraduate students (21 males, 80 females) from a Southeastern institution participated in my experiment for course credit. The mean age of participants was 22.3 with age ranging from 18-54. The sample comprised of 61.4% Caucasians, 5% Asians, 15.8% African Americans, 14.9% Hispanics and the remaining 2.9% considered themselves a different ethnicity than the choices provided. Participants volunteered for the experiment through a university online system that provided course credit upon completion of the study.

## **Procedure**

Upon signing up, participants were instructed to bring a cell phone to complete the study and were led to believe they would be working with another participant. However, as mentioned earlier, the second participant was a confederate. Confederates were intentionally made blind to the study's hypotheses to decrease expectancy effects. Furthermore, the confederates were trained to act unsuspecting so participants would continue to believe the confederates were not associated with the study. Participants were randomly assigned to encounter one of four possible scenarios. The confederate would apologize and be incompetent, apologize and be competent, deny and be incompetent, or deny and be competent. Therefore, the experimental design consisted of a 2 (transgressor response) x 2 (competence level) between-subjects design.

When the study began, the experimenter explained the purpose of the study to establish a cover story (Refer to Appendix C and D for a full script for both the experimenter and confederate in each of the four conditions). The participant was told that the current research is interested in assessing how well partners work together on a task. Before describing what the task entailed, the experimenter asked if both the participant and confederate brought their cell phones. Once the participant responded, the confederate claimed to have left her cell phone at home. The experimenter pretended to consider how this setback affected the experiment and then told the participant to stay longer in order to complete the second half of the study for himself and the confederate. The confederate was told that she could leave after the first portion was completed since her partner would finish for her.

Next, the experimenter explained the first portion of the study, which was that the confederate and participant must finish a word search together. The word search consisted of 22 items that corresponded to the university, such as Florida, basketball, psychology, and the university's mascot name. The familiarity of the items ensured the words were recognizable to participants and facilitated completion of the task. Then, the experimenter explained that the word search must be performed together and the confederate and participant needed to find as many words as possible within ten minutes. After both subjects understood the instructions, the experimenter claimed to be performing multiple experiments simultaneously. Due to the additional studies, the experimenter would not be in the room while the confederate and participant worked on the task. The experimenter then began the timer for the word search and left the room. After the experimenter left, the confederate would ask the participant if he is good at word searches. No matter what the participant said, the confederate responded by saying that she is either good or bad at word searches depending on the competence level that is being used

in the scenario. If the confederate claimed to be bad at the task (i.e., incompetence), she only found two words during the entire study. Alternatively, if the confederate claimed to be good at word searches (i.e., competent), she found a word after every word the participant found; effectively finding the exact amount of words the participant found and being equally as productive.

As the participant and confederate worked on the word search, the experimenter called the confederate's hidden cell phone. The confederate, while looking embarrassed and trying to hide the phone, answered it. She quickly got off the phone after quietly telling the caller she cannot speak because she is in an experiment. After answering the phone, the confederate apologized or denied the transgression while also providing an explanation for the original lie (Refer to Appendix D for specific explanations). The confederate and participant continued working until the timer went off or all of the words had been found. Once time was up, the participant and confederate sat at their own computers and completed a survey about the scenario.

### **Survey**

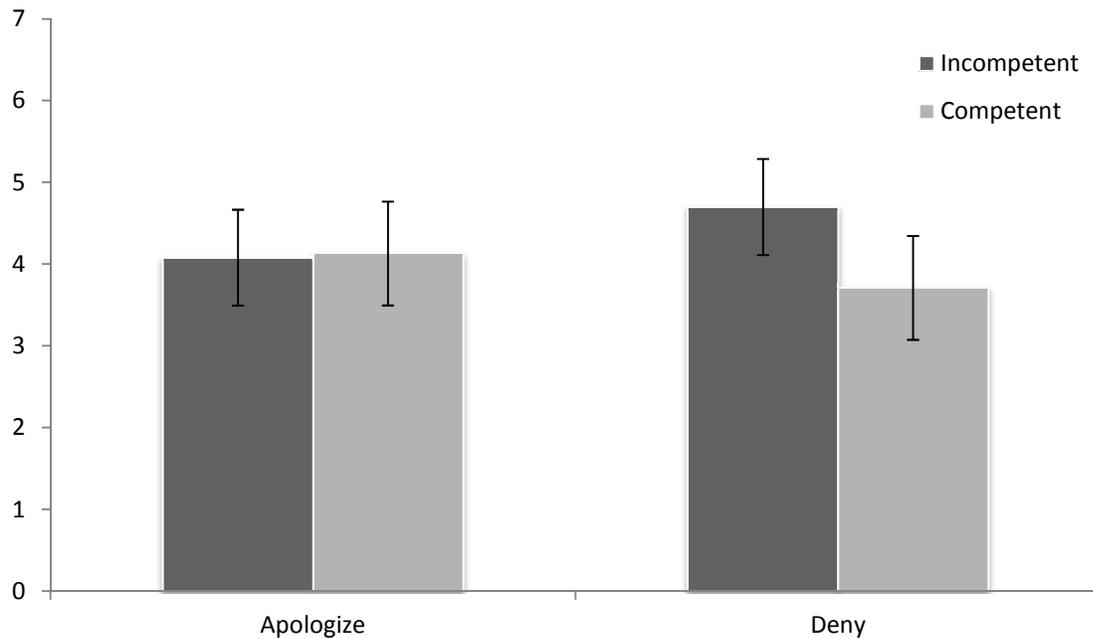
**Participant measures.** Participants were asked to rate their agreement on several seven-point Likert scales ranging from *strong disagreement* (1) to *strong agreement* (7). To remain consistent with my previous studies, participants were provided items that read, "I am frustrated with my partner."; "I respect my partner." and "I like my partner." Each item was used to measure the amount of positive affect participants had towards the transgressor. I also measured how well the participant felt he worked with the transgressor using three items ( $\alpha = .884$ ). Participants rated their agreement to the following statements: "I would work with this person again on a similar task"; "I worked well with my partner." and "I am glad I do not have to work

with my partner again.” (reverse coded). I measured participants’ feelings towards their partner’s performance on the task using three items ( $\alpha = .937$ ): “I am satisfied with my partner's performance.”; “My partner did well on the word search.” and “My partner tried hard on this task.” Next, I administered a warmth and competence scale to examine how warm and competent the transgressor was according to participants. Warmth ( $\alpha = .912$ ) consisted of good-natured, trustworthy, tolerant, friendly, sincere, and fair while competence ( $\alpha = .949$ ) consisted of capable, skillful, intelligent, confident, and a hard worker. Lastly, I asked participants to rate their agreement to the statement, “It is important for me to hear people admit when they lie.”

**Manipulation check.** Participants were asked to guess the hypothesis of the study. Participants who were able to correctly identify the nature of the study were removed from the analysis. Based upon these comments, 89 (88%) participants were not able to correctly identify the hypothesis. Distribution of those that correctly guessed the hypothesis was similar across all conditions, indicating that participants’ correct guesses were due to chance and not from any indication due to the condition. Therefore, all further analysis was performed using this total number of participants.

## Results

**H1: Admit to lying.** A 2x2 factorial ANOVA was performed to compare the mean responses for participant’s agreement to the statement, “I think it is important to hear someone admit when they lie”. No main effects or interaction were found to significantly influence participants agreement,  $p$ 's > .28. These findings disconfirm my second hypothesis and are inconsistent with Studies 1 and 2. Despite non-significance, differences were found between an incompetent and competent denying transgressor that were, unfortunately, in an opposite direction than hypothesized indicating that participants did not feel schadenfreude (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Non-significant differences between incompetent and competent transgressors*

**H2: Interaction between competence and transgressor response.** A 2x2 factorial ANOVA was also performed to compare the mean responses for each item. A main effect for transgressor response and interactions between both independent variables were found to be non-significant for every item measured ( $p$ 's > .13) disconfirming my second hypothesis. A significant main effect for competence level of the transgressor was found in the opposite direction than predicted disconfirming hypothesis one. Transgressors who were competent at the task were significantly liked more ( $F(1,85) = 11.91, p = .001$ ), respected more ( $F(1,85) = 7.39, p = .008$ ), thought to perform well ( $F(1,85) = 108.69, p < .001$ ), better to work with ( $F(1,85) = 44.42, p < .001$ ), thought to have higher amounts of warm characteristics ( $F(1,85) = 13.72, p < .001$ ), thought to have higher amounts of competent characteristics ( $F(1,85) = 37.88, p < .001$ ), and less frustrating ( $F(1,85) = 33.57, p < .001$ ) compared to transgressors who were incompetent regardless of how the transgressor responded.

Table 4. *Descriptive statistics for significant main effects of competence level*

	Incompetence	Competence
Frustration	2.82 (1.78)	1.18 (0.58)
Respect	5.40 (1.34)	6.16 (1.35)
Like	5.29 (1.41)	6.20 (1.03)
T. Performance	3.29 (1.69)	6.33 (0.90)
Working w/ T.	3.99 (1.10)	4.83 (0.55)
Warm Char.	4.96 (1.34)	5.94 (1.08)
Competent Char.	4.49 (1.44)	6.10 (0.91)

## Discussion

The results of Study 3 provided no support for my hypotheses. Participants felt more negatively towards a transgressor who was incompetent than one who contributed equally to the task, regardless of whether he denied or apologized for the transgression. Contrary to the results of Studies 1 and 2, participants did not have increased positive affect toward a transgressor who apologized compared to one who denied. Part of why my effects were so limited could be due to the effect size of my sample. It is common for experiments of low sample sizes per condition to have low power, often leading to Type II errors. In the future, I must have a larger sample size to increase the chance of detecting significant findings.

Due to the significant increase within frustration and negative affect towards an incompetent transgressor when compared to a competent one, it is clear that participants did not experience schadenfreude or think of incompetency as a misfortune that was pleasurable. A lack of schadenfreude may be due to the transgressor's misfortune providing no advantage to the participants. Any pleasure participants may have had disappeared when working with an incompetent partner if participants realized they must now work longer and harder on the task, while the transgressor still gets to leave early with full credit. For future research, results may turn out differently if schadenfreude was experienced by having the transgressors incompetence not affect the participant in a negative way.

Furthermore, my findings could also be due to participants viewing incompetency as another form of transgressing. Previous research has shown that incompetency is a strong cause to distrust another person (Gabaro, 1978; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Additionally, Butler and Cantrell (1984) asked participants to rate competence, integrity, loyalty, and openness characteristics of a subordinate. Their research indicated that competence and integrity were more important than loyalty and openness characteristics in trusting an individual. These findings indicate that the use of competency may have created a second transgression that was stronger than just performing an integrity-based transgression. Due to increased negative affect caused by a transgressor's incompetence, participants may have viewed incompetence in similar ways previous participants within Study 1 and 2 viewed a denying transgressor. However, there is no direct evidence of this comparison within my studies and additional research must be performed to examine the possible similarity between denying and incompetence.

### **General Discussion**

Overall, Studies 1 and 2 provided consistent evidence that participants think more positively of a transgressor who provided apologies in response to a transgression accusation than one who denied committing a transgression. Consistency across a variety of interpersonal relationships (i.e., parasocial, known, or unknown) and various samples from different areas of the country indicates high generalizability for my findings. Although Study 3 did not replicate my findings from Studies 1 and 2, this may only be due to how the study was designed and, once corrected, will potentially provide additional support for apologetic responses from transgressors.

Furthermore, my findings are consistent with previous research while also extending the literature. Similar to my findings, Dirks et al. (2011), Ferrin et al. (2007), and Kim et al. (2004,

2006) found that apologizing produced more positive perceptions of the transgressor than any other form of responding within business contexts that indirectly affected participants. However, within the current research, effects were found to be consistent through a variety of transgressions that directly (i.e., help moving) and indirectly (i.e., steroid use) affected the participant as well. Due to the consistency of evidence found within the current research and previous research, it seems that people perceive transgressors within interpersonal and business contexts similarly. Therefore, research indicates the common idiom is incorrect and that it is indeed personal and not just business.

Despite the generalizability to multiple forms of relationships, the current research cannot assess the effectiveness of an apologetic response at repairing relationships over time. Although evidence indicates that apologizing produces more positive affect than denying a transgression, thus implying a better chance at relationship repair, I cannot be sure how much more or less positive affect is created compared to the original trusting levels within each relationship. Future research must examine the relationship between a person and a transgressor prior to a transgression to fully understand the effects of responses to accusations and transgressions on relationships. However, this also assumes the transgressor wants to facilitate relationship repair. There may be times where a transgressor is not interested in repairing a relationship and therefore does not care about how the opposite relationship member perceives him. Due to the importance placed on the perception of the transgressor within the current research, it may be important to focus on a transgressor's perceptions of the relationship as well to assess the bi-directionality of relationship repair.

Interestingly, the results of the current research do not bode well for a transgressor who must transgress for positive reasons. There may be occasions where a transgressor must lie to

save face or to hide a surprise from another. In these cases, the transgressor is guilty of performing transgressions when confronted for not being truthful. However, the transgression is performed at the benefit of the other relationship member. The current studies' results indicate that if a transgressor is guilty, the best response is to apologize for performing a wrongdoing. However, apologizing for a lie that benefits the other person may be odd to admit and could lead to negative perceptions from others. For example, it may be considered strange to apologize for claiming to know nothing about a surprise gift that you helped buy. Due to this possible outcome, a future direction of research may be to assess the motivation behind a transgression. By examining the positive or negative outcomes of transgressions, a person's perception of a transgressor may change in unexpected ways than my results indicate.

In conclusion, according to my research, Lance Armstrong is perceived more negatively due to his responses to the media's transgression accusations. If he had admitted to steroid use when he was first accused, the perception held within society would probably not be as harsh. Unfortunately, according to my research, he chose the incorrect response for committing an integrity-based transgression and it is unclear how long his personal image will suffer due to it. Future research will be needed to assess how long an individual must maintain honesty about past and future transgressions before trust can begin again within the relationship.

## Appendix A

Prompt provided to participants in Study 1. Portion in bold was changed depending on the condition.

Admit to transgression conditions:

Suppose that there is a famous baseball player, Joe, who is suspected of using performance-enhancing drugs. Some of his former teammates state that they used steroids with him three years ago, and authorities have uncovered receipts documenting that some banned substances were mailed to his house two years ago. Joe's fans want to know if he has cheated his way to the top by using performance-enhancing drugs. When a reporter asks him about his use of performance-enhancing drugs, Joe **admits that he used them.**

Suppose that there is a famous baseball player, Joe, who is suspected of using performance-enhancing drugs. Some of his former teammates state that they used steroids with him three years ago, and authorities have uncovered receipts documenting that some banned substances were mailed to his house two years ago. Joe's fans want to know if he has cheated his way to the top by using performance-enhancing drugs. When a reporter asks him about his use of performance-enhancing drugs, Joe **admits that he used them. He says he regrets his decision to use performance-enhancing drugs and apologizes to his fans.**

Suppose that there is a famous baseball player, Joe, who is suspected of using performance-enhancing drugs. Some of his former teammates state that they used steroids with him three years ago, and authorities have uncovered receipts documenting that some banned substances were mailed to his house two years ago. Joe's fans want to know if he has cheated his way to the top by using performance-enhancing drugs. When a reporter asks him about his use of performance-enhancing drugs, Joe **admits that he used them. He says he regrets his decision to use performance-enhancing drugs and apologizes to his fans. He explains that he used them because he felt the pressure of competing with other players who were using.**

Transgression denial conditions:

Suppose that there is a famous baseball player, Joe, who is suspected of using performance-enhancing drugs. Some of his former teammates state that they used steroids with him three years ago, and authorities have uncovered receipts documenting that some banned substances were mailed to his house two years ago. Joe's fans want to know if he has cheated his way to the top by using performance-enhancing drugs. When a reporter asks him about his use of performance-enhancing drugs, Joe **denies that he used them.**

Suppose that there is a famous baseball player, Joe, who is suspected of using performance-enhancing drugs. Some of his former teammates state that they used steroids with him three years ago, and authorities have uncovered receipts documenting that some banned substances were mailed to his house two years ago. Joe's fans want to know if he has cheated his way to the top by using performance-enhancing drugs. When a reporter asks him about his use of performance-enhancing drugs, Joe **denies that he used them. He says that he has been set up by jealous people and is disappointed that people are lying about him.**

Suppose that there is a famous baseball player, Joe, who is suspected of using performance-enhancing drugs. Some of his former teammates state that they used steroids with him three years ago, and authorities have uncovered receipts documenting that some banned substances were mailed to his house two years ago. Joe's fans want to know if he has cheated his way to the top by using performance-enhancing drugs. **When a reporter asks him about his use of performance-enhancing drugs, Joe says he has no comment.**

## Appendix B

Prompt provided to participants in Study 2. Portion in bold was changed depending on the condition.

High positive image condition:

Imagine you are moving to a new apartment. You ask your **friend** to help you move your stuff, and he agrees. The day of your move arrives, and you get a text from your friend saying that he got sick and cannot make it out to help you. Luckily, you are still able to finish and have time to go to the beach in the afternoon.

Apologize:

While at the beach, you see your friend playing football and drinking. After a few hours, your friend notices you at the beach as well. **He comes up to you and apologizes for lying to you about not being able to help earlier that day. He explains that after he agreed to help, a friend from out of town called him and was only available to hang out today.**

Deny:

While at the beach, you see your friend playing football and drinking. After a few hours, your friend notices you at the beach as well. **He comes up to you and explains that he just arrived. He says that he really was sick this morning but as the day progressed he began to feel better and he is really lucky to be here today.**

Low positive image condition:

Imagine you are moving to a new apartment. **You ask your friends to help but the only person available is a friend who is known for skipping out on work.** However, to your surprise he agrees to help. The day of your move arrives, and you get a text from your friend saying that he got sick and cannot make it out to help you. Luckily, you are still able to finish and have time to go to the beach in the afternoon.

No image condition:

Imagine you are moving to a new apartment. **You ask your friends to help you move your stuff. Unfortunately, everyone you know seems to be busy. However, one of your friends says he knows someone who is not busy. Although you do not know this person, your friend's friend agrees to help.** The day of your move arrives, and you get a text from your friend's friend saying that he got sick and cannot make it out to help you. Luckily, you are still able to finish and have time to go to the beach in the afternoon.

## Appendix C

## Script for Experimenter in Study 3

The experimenter will take both participants into room 3426 and provide them both with informed consent forms. After they hand back their signed consent forms, the experimenter will say:

**“Welcome to the Partner Attitudes Study. Today we will be examining how well partners perform together when working towards a common goal. You will be given a task that you will work on together. Once you have completed the task, you will each be given a questionnaire that asks you to rate your partner. Your partner will never see your responses and all data collected will be confidential so please try to be honest. Before we begin, did both of you bring a cell phone?”**

The confederate will tell the experimenter that he forgot his phone. The experimenter says:

**“Well then you will have to stay longer and do the last part for both you and your partner. There is an additional survey that must be done over the phone. This is why we reminded both of you to bring your cell phone with you to the study. The phone survey should only take an additional 10 minutes.”**

The experimenter will then explain the task:

**“The task that you must complete today will be a word search based on UNF. The words that you must find will be listed at the bottom of the page and they are all in the letter scramble at the top of the page. The words can be found going backwards, forwards, horizontal, vertical, and diagonally. You will have 10 minutes to finish it. Please try to find as many as you can within the time given. If you finish the word search before the 10 minutes are completed please mark what time you finished on the sheet. If you do not finish before the alarm rings just write 10 at the top. While you are working, I will be running participants for another study in a room down the hall. I will probably still be busy with other studies before you are finished, so once the timer has rung please start the survey on the computer. After you (pointing to the confederate) finish your survey, if I have not come back you may leave. Do either of you have any questions? Alright, ready, begin.”**

The experimenter will then start a timer, leave the room, wait 30 seconds, call the confederate's cell phone and continue to call until the confederate answers the phone. Once the confederate answers the phone the experimenter will say: **“(Pause) Alright. Bye!”**

After the experimenter finishes the phone call they will then wait for the confederate to leave the room. As soon as the confederate leaves the room the experimenter will come back. The experimenter will then hand the participant a debriefing sheet and say:

**“The study is now over. There is no second part to this experiment that requires you to use your cell phone. You were only told that so our confederate could lie to you. Please read over this sheet of paper for more information about the study.”**

## Appendix D

Script for Confederate in Study 3.

The confederate will wait until the participant has answered and then say:

**“I forgot to bring it with me today.”**

The experimenter will tell the participant that they must stay for an additional 10 minutes then explain the task. The experimenter will then start a timer, leave the room, wait 30 seconds, and then call the confederate's cell phone.

*Meanwhile, in the lab...*

The confederate's phone will ring. The confederate will pretend to hide that they are answering the phone by leaning behind the divider and say:

**Hey. I will call you back; I am in a study and I lied about having a phone. See you later!**

The confederate will then say something to the participant. His comment will be different depending on what condition is being run.

**Lie:**

**“Umm...just so you know...this is not my phone. I actually found it on my way to here.”**

**Apologize** (This is the only time you are allowed to say “I'm sorry”!!):

**“Sorry, the last time one of these studies required me to bring something they ended up crashing my computer and losing all of my files. I did not want that to happen to my phone, so I lied about having it with me.”**

This all occurs while the confederate and the participant begin to work on the word search together. The amount of words the confederate finds will depend on the condition that is being run.

**Find one word for every word the participant finds** (mention how you are good at word searches) **or find only 2 words** (mention how you are not very good at word searches)

After 10 minutes has elapsed and the timer has rung, the participant and the confederate will begin the surveys on the computer. After the confederate has completed their survey he will leave the room.

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## Vita

Alexander Blandina was born . He was raised by his parents, Gary and Ilia Blandina. He received the honor of Eagle Scout in 2004 which provided large amounts of experience in accomplishing huge projects, such as a Master's thesis. He attended high school at Charles W. Flanagan in Pembroke Pines, Florida.

Alexander continued his education at the University of Florida where he received a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology with a minor in mass communication. He was awarded highest honors (Summa Cum Laude) for his exemplary performance in completing an undergraduate thesis examining the learning behaviors of dogs due to various forms of training. His thesis helped inspire his interest and tenacity in studying more advanced topics within social psychology. He was also a Florida Bright Futures Medallion recipient and a member of the University of Florida's Psi Chi Chapter.

After graduating, Alexander spent a year working within a Neuropsychological clinic providing psychometric examinations to various patients. Afterwards, Alexander pursued his Masters of Arts in General Psychology at the University of North Florida. During his graduate school career, Alexander's research was presented in multiple conferences nationwide. In addition, Alexander is a member of the Society for Social Psychology and Personality as well as the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. Alexander also served as a graduate teaching assistant and instructor for Research Methods Lab teaching undergraduate students basic statistical tests and interpretation. Currently, Alexander plans to continue his education at the Ph.D. level and hopes to become a published psychological researcher in the near future.