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Adams, G

(2016)

*Asymmetries between victims' and transgressors' perspectives following interpersonal transgressions.*

Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 10 (12). pp. 722-735. ISSN 1751-9004

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12291>

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<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/spc3.12...>

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Asymmetries Between Victims' and Transgressors' Perspectives  
Following Interpersonal Transgressions

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When interpersonal transgressions occur, the involved parties try to understand what occurred and how justice should be restored. However, research has documented that victims and transgressors often diverge in their accounts of what transpired. In this paper, I review and summarize empirical research on victims' and transgressors' asymmetric perceptions of interpersonal transgressions, and the different justice-restoring responses each party subsequently desires. By conceptualizing transgressions in terms of the social roles of victim and transgressor, I contend that justice responses can be thought of as attempts to correct inequitable distributions of material and symbolic resources. This social exchange perspective enables us to understand each parties' motives and how various justice responses might satisfy them. I argue that because of these asymmetric perspectives, reconciliation is difficult and conflict is liable to be perpetuated rather than resolved.

Keywords: interpersonal transgressions, victims, social exchange, perspective taking, guilt, blame, apologies, forgiveness, punishment, compensation

### Asymmetries Between Victims' and Transgressors' Perspectives Following Interpersonal Transgressions

Whether a broken promise, a hurtful comment, or even something as harsh as physical assault, interpersonal transgressions are unfortunately common occurrences in everyday life (e.g. Cortina et al., 2001; Nansel et al., 2001). In the wake of these situations, victims and transgressors try to make sense of what occurred and decide how the situation should be addressed. However, these two parties often disagree about what happened and how best to respond. The involved parties sometimes disagree not only about the magnitude of harm but also whether the event that occurred even constitutes a wrongdoing. They may also disagree about whether justice-restoring responses are appropriate or warranted, such as whether an apology is deserved. What gives rise to victims' and transgressors' divergent perceptions of interpersonal transgressions, and to the differences in justice-restoring responses they subsequently desire?

In this paper, I review the ways in which victims and transgressors differ in their perceptions of transgressions and subsequent desires for justice. I offer a conceptualization of interpersonal transgressions in terms of these two social roles (Section 1), and review the literature showing they are susceptible to different views of the transgression (Section 2), and therefore tend to have distinct emotional reactions (Section 3). I further contend that various responses aimed at correcting this injustice can be categorized in terms of whose needs they are meant to address (serving victims' or perpetrators' interests) but that these two parties diverge in their beliefs about how best to restore justice (Section 4). As a result, reconciliation is difficult at best, and conflict is liable to be perpetuated rather than resolved (Section 5). Finally, I argue that the study of divergent perspectives is an area that is ripe for future research (Section 6), and

ultimately, by understanding these asymmetries and each party's interests, we can obtain a better sense of how justice can be restored.

### **1. Interpersonal Transgressions and Social Exchange**

Transgressions entail the perceived violation of laws, rules, social norms, or expectations regarding others' behavior (Vidmar & Miller, 1980). Although I confine this review to perceived wrongdoing between only two identifiable people within specific social roles - the accused transgressor and purported victim - transgressions also occur between groups (e.g. Wohl & Branscombe, 2005; 2008) or involve parties who are difficult to identify (e.g. victimless crimes: Schur & Bedau, 1974; unidentifiable perpetrators: Small & Loewenstein, 2005).

Interpersonal transgressions occur in a wide variety of relationships, for example between employees in a workplace (Aquino & Thau, 2009), friends at school (MacEvoy & Asher, 2012), or partners in a romantic relationship (Luchies et al., 2013). When asked to recall experiences of everyday injustice, people most frequently recount experiences of disrespect (Miller, 2001). Indeed, in one study, college students most commonly mentioned unjustified accusations or blame, lack of recognition for effort or performance, and violations of promises or agreements (Mikula, 1986; Miller, 2001). In another study, 71% of public-sector employees reported having experienced incivility at work (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001), defined as rude and discourteous behavior that displays a lack of regard for others (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

These and other instances of interpersonal transgressions can be conceived of as *inequitable social exchanges* (Adams, 1965) in which transgressors appropriate resources from victims without their permission. According to Blau (1964), social exchange is the fundamental structure of interpersonal interactions (see also Homans, 1950; 1958) and concerns the process by which people transact with one another and cooperate to achieve better outcomes than they

could individually, thus yielding interdependence. In many social transactions, individuals aspire to achieve a balance of resources in their favor, although doing so comes at a cost to the other party. Thus, inequitable social exchanges yield unfair distributions of resources between two social roles: victim and transgressor (Exline et al., 2004; Kelln & Ellard, 1999; Miller, 2001; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). The resources at stake are not only material or financial assets, but also symbolic social or psychological resources, such as respect (Miller, 2001) or status within a group (Okimoto & Wenzel, 2008). For example, a racist remark poorly disguised as a joke can make victims feel devalued and excluded (Rattan & Dweck, 2010; Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Hill, 2006; Sue et al., 2007). Social exchange theory also yields a better understanding of an implicit motivation behind transgressors' intentions: by taking material or symbolic resources for themselves, they have appropriated power from victims (Blau, 1964).

From social exchange theory and research on the psychological strength of social roles (Flynn, 2011), we can begin to understand how these two roles make sense of what occurred, and why parties disagree about what transpired and how best to respond. In prosocial exchanges (e.g. gift giving or favor-doing), givers and receivers differ in their perceptions of the interaction, the value of the exchange, and the involved parties' expectations, and prosocial exchange researchers have studied why people with good intentions often mispredict their beneficiaries' reactions (Flynn & Adams, 2009; Flynn & Lake, 2008). Such asymmetries are particularly surprising given that people have frequent experience in both roles and often switch between them — the information and knowledge incurred from one role does not seem to easily translate to the other. By extending this work into the domain of antisocial exchanges, in keeping with traditional work on this perspective (Blau, 1964, Homans, 1950; 1958), a social exchange perspective contributes a better understanding of why reconciliation is difficult, and of how

interpersonal conflicts escalate: if these parties disagree about what occurred, the victim-transgressor relationship gives rise to attributions that detract from rather than contribute to resolution.

As a result of this conceptualization, two significant theoretical arguments can be made. First, justice restoration can be understood as a means of correcting imbalances in symbolic or material resources. Some responses such as punishment and compensation can be contrasted in terms of their victim- versus transgressor-focused approaches to rectifying inequitable distributions (Adams & Mullen, 2013; 2015). Other responses such as forgiveness demonstrate victims' motivation to repair the relationship and promote within-group cooperation, thus benefitting both the victim and the group and showing a willingness to forego short term gains to rectify the balance in the long-term (Bottom, Gibson, Daniels, & Murnighan, 2002; Karremans & Van Lange, 2004). Ultimately, then, under this exchange lens, interpersonal transgressions and justice restoration are about how effectively inequitable social exchanges can be corrected through the redistribution of symbolic and material resources or the foregoing of short-term resource in the service of long-term interests. Thus, this perspective provides a framework for which responses are effective depending on whose interests they serve.

The second contribution of a social exchange perspective on interpersonal transgressions is a better understanding of why victims and transgressors sometimes disagree about what occurred and how resolution can be achieved. In short, the social exchange perspective enables us to understand *why* the process of reconciliation is so fraught. Although sometimes both transgressors and victims agree there has been a violation, many inequitable exchanges yield perceptions of wrongdoing by only one party. For example, one researcher's failure to include a colleague as a co-author on a paper might only be perceived as wrong by the colleague who felt

slighted. For perceptions of wrongdoing to occur, victims and transgressors need not agree that resources were distributed inequitably or that an act was harmful: the cascade of judgments about intent and blame typically depend on only one party's belief that a wrongdoing has actually occurred. Similarly, beliefs that an inequitable exchange requires a response are often held only by the person who perceives there has been a transgression (more often, the victim). Regardless of who believes there has been a violation, the interdependence inherent to many relationships means that victims and transgressors cannot walk away from the conflict, but must find ways to resolve it.

From the social exchange perspective, interpersonal transgressions yield two different roles: victim versus transgressor. In the next 3 sections, I argue that these roles are associated with unique psychological interpretations of the transgression, and therefore yield different emotional reactions and needs for justice restoration.

## **2. Asymmetric Perceptions of the Transgression**

According to a growing body of research (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Leunissen, De Cremer, Reinders Folmer, & Van Dijke, 2013), the very roles that arise from transgressions yield different beliefs about the violation itself. Victims and transgressors sometimes do not even agree that a transgression occurred, and if they do, they may disagree about whether the transgressor intended it, how blameworthy the transgressor is, and how serious it was.

### **Intent, Responsibility, and Blameworthiness**

When wrongdoing occurs, victims try to understand why they were victimized (intent), who is responsible, and whether the person is morally culpable (blameworthy). Although these



are not the only judgments victims make, they are some of the most common attributions and certainly the most often-discussed in the literature on moral judgment (e.g. Fincham & Jaspers, 1980; Karlovac & Darley, 1988; McGraw, 1987). However, these attributions are prone to bias depending on perspective: in a series of studies that asked people to either imagine transgressions or recall transgressions they had actually committed, victims thought perpetrators intended to cause more harm than perpetrators reported having actually intended (Adams & Inesi, 2016). People may be especially prone to this error when transgressions are unintentional: when transgressors clearly decide to cause harm, victims have more complete information about the transgressors' actions and mindset (see Malle, Knobe, & Nelson, 2007).

Judgments of transgressors' intent are also related to attributions of blameworthiness: at least from a third-party perspective, the more transgressors are perceived to have intended harm, the more they are blamed and judged to be responsible (Cushman, 2008; Shaver, 1985; Shlenker et al., 1994). In one study on first-person micronarratives about interpersonal conflict, 33% of perpetrators indicated they felt the victim shared some part of the blame for the conflict, whereas only 4% of victims felt the same way (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990). Perpetrators characterize the victim as having provoked the incident, compared to victims' own beliefs (Zechmeister & Romero, 2002), and victims see the offending behavior as more immoral than transgressors do (Kearns & Fincham, 2005). Even when observers witnessed a transgression and thought they might be future transgressors (perpetrator-relevant participants), they minimized the responsibility of the original transgressor; victim-relevant participants reported thought they thought transgression they witnessed had not occurred by chance (Chaiken & Darley, 1973). In sum, victims tend to perceive greater intentionality and blameworthiness than transgressors do, and these attributions appear to vary systematically by social role.

## **Transgression Severity**

Victims and transgressors also make judgments about the magnitude of the violation, but research has consistently found that transgressors are more likely to downplay the amount of harm caused relative to victims. Such systematic discrepancies in estimates of severity have been termed ‘magnitude gaps’ (Baumeister, 1997; Baumeister & Campbell, 1999). For example, in the study of micronarratives, 16% of perpetrators’ stories included a denial of negative consequences of a conflict (no victims made this denial), and negative consequences were more apparent in victims’ stories than in perpetrators’ (Baumeister et al., 1990). Similarly, perpetrators are more likely than victims to portray their own actions as due to external or mitigating circumstances (Kearns & Fincham, 2005; Zechmeister and Romero, 2002).

Given these asymmetric perceptions of intent, blame, and severity, some conflicts will be exacerbated rather than resolved if the two roles cannot reach agreement about the transgression itself. These perceptions are likely to yield different reactions to the transgression and beliefs about how the conflict should be resolved. Therefore, the focus of the next two sections is on understanding how victims and transgressors react to transgressions and what they believe should be done to restore justice.

### **3. Asymmetric Emotional Reactions to Transgressions**

What are victims’ and transgressors’ emotional responses to transgressions, and how do they differ? Scholars have predominantly focused on victims’ reactions of anger and moral outrage (e.g. Darley & Pittman, 2003; Folger, Cropanzano, & Goldman, 2005; Mikula, 1986), which are particularly common after violations to personal autonomy (Rozin, Lowery, Imada, &

Haidt, 1999; Hutcherson & Gross, 2011).<sup>1</sup> Negative outcomes generate feelings of deservingness in victims which in turn have been linked to emotions such as resentment, particularly when the conflict is not resolved (Feather, 2006), and victims report experiencing greater anger after intentional than unintentional transgressions (Leunissen et al., 2013). However, victims are also prone to miscalculating the duration of their anger: victims think they will dislike transgressors longer after severe rather than trivial harm, but in reality, dislike lasts longer after minor transgressions than major ones since major transgressions trigger psychological defense processes (Gilbert, Lieberman, Morewedge, & Wilson, 2004).

Transgressors' emotional reactions are more complex. Transgressors sometimes do not think victims have the right to be angry. For example, even though victims reported still feeling angry after the transgression, perpetrators suppressed or even denied victims' anger (Baumeister et al., 1990). Transgressors also thought victims' anger was less justified than victims did, even when rated by an independent coder (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990). However, if transgressors accept responsibility for what happened, they are likely to experience guilt or even shame (Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011). Transgressors are more likely to feel guilty after unintentional than intentional transgressions because in the second instance, they mean to cause harm and therefore do not feel bad about the outcome (Leunissen et al., 2013). When participants were asked to imagine committing a transgression and were induced to believe such actions were morally wrong, they subsequently reported feeling greater guilt, a troubled conscience, and concern about how others were affected (Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002).

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<sup>1</sup> Other emotional reactions such as disgust, shame, and embarrassment have received attention in the literature (Keltner, 1996; Mikula, Scherer, & Athenstaedt, 1998; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996).

In sum, victims experience anger and although transgressors minimize victims' anger, they also feel guilty. Troublingly, neither party appears to accurately estimate the magnitude of these emotional reactions in their counterpart: when victims were asked to predict how much transgressors felt guilty about what they had done, they provided lower estimates than transgressors did, due to their increased estimates of transgressors' intentions to cause harm (Adams & Inesi, 2016). These asymmetric emotional reactions yield differing beliefs about what these parties think should be done to restore justice. Whereas victim anger has been linked to increased desires for compensation and retribution (Darley & Pittman, 2003; Miller, 2001), guilt has been linked to desires for forgiveness (Riek, 2010) and transgressor self-punishment (Nelissen & Zeelenberg, 2009). Therefore, in addition to surveying the literature on emotional reactions, I also consider each party's motives and needs in the wake of transgressions.

#### **4. Asymmetric Desires for Justice Restoration**

Following the social exchange perspective, the goal of justice restoration is to fully restore the system back to its pre-transgression state when taking into account the costliness of the transgression. In the event that standard cannot be achieved, attempts to partially resolve the inequity may establish a new baseline for the exchange. However, due to the asymmetric perceptions of transgressions and emotional reactions reviewed above, victims and transgressors diverge in their justice-related goals and motivations (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Drawing on this research, reconciliation can be thought of as a social exchange in which each parties' differing needs are addressed through mutual understanding of these divergent goals (Okimoto & Wenzel, 2008; 2014). Below, I review the various strategies that each role tends to adopt that are meant to serve that party's needs.

##### **Victims' Motives**

Transgressions threaten victims' power and status as valued members of a group, rendering them powerless and lowering their sense of control (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Thus, reconciliation is achieved by meeting their desires for empowerment (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Victims can feel empowered when transgressors apologize by acknowledging the harm they have caused and promising to make it right (Scher & Darley, 1997); such apologies empower victims by acknowledging the event and their right to victim status: "The perpetrators' acknowledgement of their responsibility for causing the injustice... returns control to victims who may determine whether to cancel the moral 'debt'." (Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009, p. 1022). Indeed, victims are most likely to want apologies after intentional rather than unintentional transgressions due to the anger they experience (Leunissen et al., 2013). However, there is also some evidence that victims overestimate the value of apologies: victims who were asked to imagine receiving an apology rated its value to be higher than when they actually received an apology (DeCremer, Pillutla, & Reinders Folmer, 2011).

Like apologies, compensation also constitutes a symbolic and material acknowledgement of wrongdoing and an attempt to repair it (Darley & Pittman, 2003), thus validating the fact that victims have been wronged. Victims' desires for compensation might be driven by perceptions of harm rather than self-interested desires for money. Miller (2001) noted that "the indignation with which people respond to unfavorable outcomes (e.g. lower than expected salary offers) often reflects the fact that their prestige or status has been threatened more than the fact that their purchasing power has been diminished." In contrast to victim-focused compensation, victim-enacted punishment is a transgressor-focused strategy can be seen as an attempt to reassert one's status/power (Wenzel, Okimoto, Feather, & Platow, 2008); when victims punish, it is also discussed in the literature as revenge (e.g. Carlsmith, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008). In support of the

notion that victim punishment of transgressors is empowering, research has shown that victims claim they want transgressors to be punished and find revenge satisfying (Gollwitzer & Denzler, 2009; Strelan & van Prooijen, 2013), and transgressor punishment is linked to victim mood improvement (Gollwitzer & Bushman, 2012), particularly when the transgressor understands why revenge is being taken (Gollwitzer, Meder, & Schmitt, 2011). Cooperator (victim) punishment of defectors (transgressors) in social dilemmas also promotes cooperation and fairness norms in future exchanges (Fehr & Gächter, 2002), thus making victims feel that the chance of a future violation is decreased. However, contrary to what victims might predict, revenge can yield increased rumination and negative affect instead of improving mood and bringing a sense of closure (Carlsmith, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008), unless transgressors acknowledge the victim's intentions in punishing (Funk et al., 2014). This therefore underscores the notion that victims value punishment based on its ability to motivate long-term cooperative exchange norms.

Finally and somewhat counterintuitively, victims can be empowered by forgoing punishment and releasing anger and instead choosing to forgive transgressors. Raj and Wiltermuth (2016, this issue) argue that victims experience substantial psychological barriers to forgiveness, and that they will be wary of forgiving if it makes them feel weak or appearing to condone the wrongdoing, again indicating that empowerment is an important concern for victims. However, their empirical work demonstrated that victimized participants who forgave their transgressor were more likely to experience a heightened sense of power over their transgressor than those who did not forgive (Raj & Wiltermuth, 2016), thus suggesting that victims may not appreciate the extent to which forgiveness empowers them. Therefore, forgiveness serves not only to make guilty transgressors feel better, it also re-empowers victims.

Taken together, this literature suggests that several responses (apologies, compensation, punishment, and forgiveness) might satisfy victims' need to feel empowered. However, victims may also overestimate the extent to which these responses will satisfy them. Furthermore, they may also be mistaken in their estimations of transgressors' willingness to engage in these behaviors and transgressors may not always understand victims' desires for these behaviors, a point which can be better understood by turning to transgressors' perspectives on these responses.

### **Transgressors' Motives**

In contrast to victims, transgressors are primarily concerned with their appearance as moral and their likelihood being socially excluded from a group following transgressions due to their perceived lack of integrity (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Therefore, perpetrators are most likely to reconcile with victims when they feel they are re-accepted as moral people. Perpetrators adopt strategies to restore their public image such as apologizing (Ten Brinke & Adams, 2015), offering compensation (Adams & Mullen, 2013), and even self-punishing (Nelissen & Zeelenberg, 2009). In one study on micro-narrative accounts of transgressions, perpetrators indicated that they regretted the incident and referenced making an apology (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990). In another study, transgressors reported that they did not intend to cause harm and that they did feel guilty and wanted forgiveness (Adams & Inesi, 2016). Such behaviors satisfy a transgressor's goals of alleviating guilt and of reacquiring a moral image because they enable the transgressor to present and view him/herself as appropriately remorseful and motivated to make things right. However, victims underestimate how guilty transgressors feel and their subsequent desires for forgiveness, despite transgressors reporting feeling guilty

and wanting to be forgiven (Adams & Inesi, 2016; see also Baumeister et al., 1990), thus suggesting that victims tend not to appreciate transgressors' guilty feelings and repair strategies.

Problematically, however, a transgressor's desire for a positive identity and image can also lead him or her to minimize or downplay responsibility for the magnitude of the harm. In that same micronarrative study by Baumeister and colleagues, perpetrators were also more likely than victims to report having been provoked, deny that their transgressions had negative consequences, and were less likely to believe that they had damaged the relationship (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990). By minimizing their blameworthiness and the magnitude of the wrongdoing, transgressors can still psychologically maintain a moral self-concept and present a public image of integrity.

Ultimately, after interpersonal transgressions, victims and transgressors enact behavior that will best meet their individual needs. This unilateral approach that each side adopts means that the other parties' needs are not necessarily well-served. Because conflict resolution is best achieved when both parties' needs are met, it is also important to understand how well each strategy meets the other role's goals (e.g. how well victims' strategies meet perpetrators' goals).

In the service of the empowerment and reacceptance motives, whereas transgressors minimize the emotional and physical damage that has occurred, victims tend to emphasize the amount of harm (Baumeister et al., 1990). This results in a *magnitude gap* (Exline & Baumeister, 2000), which means that many conflicts remain unaddressed when apologies or compensation could help (Tabak et al., 2012). This magnitude gap creates barriers to reconciliation as transgressors fail to repair transgressions in ways that are consistent with what victims want (see Table 1). For example, even though victims want apologies after intentional transgressions, perpetrators are actually more likely to apologize after unintentional rather than intentional



transgressions due to the guilt that they feel (Leunissen et al., 2013). Transgressors also overestimate how aversive it would be to apologize (Leunissen et al., 2014), suggesting that transgressors are reticent to apologize and even when they do, it is not necessarily when victims want it. Finally, victims underestimate transgressors' desires for forgiveness, and because victims' beliefs that transgressors want to be forgiven correlates with their actual propensity to forgive, such miscalibrations have important implications for eventual conflict resolution (Adams & Inesi, 2016).

Taken together, the literature suggests that victims and transgressors have different needs in the wake of transgressions, and that each party's strategies serve their own needs while often failing to address their counterpart's. Ultimately, if each party considers his or her own needs at the expense of the other, this makes it less likely that resolution will be achieved.

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## **5. Explanations, Implications, and Remedies**

Certainly, victims' and transgressors' divergent perspectives on transgressions can occur because of self-serving biases. For example, victims may be more motivated than transgressors to claim that a transgression is harmful because of the compensatory payout they stand to gain. Although each party's desired responses often align with self-interest, such explanations do not fully predict how each party actually behaves. For example, victims sometimes do not want apologies (Leunissen et al., 2013) and perpetrators do self-punish (Nelissen & Zeelenberg, 2009). Moreover, self-serving biases are less likely to occur in romantic relationships where both parties are satisfied with the quality of the relationship because in these cases, partners highly

satisfied with their relationships interpret transgressions in more benevolent ways (Kearns & Fincham, 2005).

Victims' attributions of intent and blameworthiness may also be due to actor-observer asymmetries in which victims fail to take into account the extent to which transgressors' actions are externally influenced, opting instead to ascribe them to transgressors' choice (Jones & Nisbett, 1971, but see Malle, 2006). Therefore, victims infer that transgressors' actions are voluntary and freely chosen, whereas transgressors can call to mind external factors and mitigating circumstances that influenced their actions (Ross, 1977). Indeed, the actor-observer asymmetry is more likely to emerge in the context of negative interactions (Malle, 2006) when actors' intentions are not transparent to observers, as is often the case in interpersonal transgressions. Even then, the actor-observer asymmetry does not fully explain some of the biases discussed above, such as why perpetrators underestimate how much victims want to be forgiven. The asymmetries reviewed here show that transgressions create strong social roles that yield unique, divergent beliefs about how best to respond; these beliefs stem from the self-protective motivation to view one's own transgressing actions as justified and legitimate.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a better understanding of why conflict is exacerbated and why relationships are sometimes destroyed rather than repaired: asymmetric perceptions preclude the ability to come to a mutual understanding of what occurred and how best to respond. If, for example, victims underestimate how much transgressors want to be forgiven, as in the case of one RAF pilot who withheld forgiveness from his German attackers for many years (Tate, 2010), it means that many relationships remain needlessly unrepaired (Adams & Inesi, 2016). However, if victims offer forgiveness when transgressors do not want to hear it, this would be particularly problematic for relationship repair. When victims expressed

forgiveness but transgressors felt they had not done anything wrong, transgressors viewed these victims as more morally self-righteous and wanted to avoid these people more (Adams, Zou, Inesi, & Pillutla, 2015). This means that under certain circumstances, reconciliation strategies yield the opposite response: instead of repairing relationships, they are further damaged.

One potential solution to these asymmetries could be increased perspective-taking by both parties. Prompting each party to think about past experiences in the other role or even to adopt the perspective of their counterpart could aid reconciliation. Indeed, restorative justice conferencing allows people to reduce the gap in perspectives and can create a shared understanding between victims and transgressors (Wenzel et al., 2008). This was the inspiration for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission created in the aftermath of apartheid in South Africa (Okimoto, Wenzel, & Platow, 2010). However, after transgressions occur, transgressors are relatively more powerful than victims (Shnabel & Nadler, 2008), and powerful people are less likely to perspective-take (Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2006). Therefore, people must be motivated to think about their counterpart's perspective. Even then, perspective-taking may not resolve these asymmetries (Stillwell & Baumeister, 1997). Although perspective-taking can help victims understand that transgressors do want to be forgiven (Adams & Inesi, 2016), such attempts will not succeed if each party cannot shake off their own biases to adopt the other party's perspective. Indeed, particularly in competitive contexts, taking the perspective of a counterpart could create self-protective motives (Pierce et al., 2013). Future research could explore the conditions under which perspective-taking occurs and helps resolve conflict.

Another insight and potential intervention comes from research that tests the Valuable Relationships Hypothesis. People are motivated to reconcile and return to positive interaction if they believe that their relationship possesses long-term value (McCullough, 2008; McCullough

et al., 2010) and forgiveness is more likely when participants are committed to making a relationship succeed (Finkel et al., 2002). However, if victims and transgressors differ in how much they value the relationship, this could create obstacles to reconciliation. Since part of the battle of reconciliation is motivating participants to want to resolve their differences, getting them to see the long-term value of their relationships may be one way to foster perspective-taking and ultimately, resolution.

## 6. Future Directions

Acknowledging victims' and transgressors' divergent perspectives is key to understanding and addressing interpersonal conflict. However, the empirical work on differences in this area stands to benefit from some additional considerations that are enumerated below.

### Other Roles and Perspectives

Research on decision-making biases has been applied to understanding the psychology of social justice (Carlsmith, Wilson, & Gilbert, 2008; Gilbert et al., 2004), highlighting a number of forecasting errors that both victims and transgressors makes. This work on asymmetries could be applied to understand when, for example, victims and transgressors are *differently* prone to forecasting errors; for example, victims might mispredict the value of forgiveness to transgressors. Moreover, although I have compared victim and transgressor perspectives, there is extensive literature on the perspectives of third-party observers (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Pizarro, Uhlmann, & Salovey, 2003) and even observer perceptions of third-party responders (Adams & Mullen, 2013) that could yield insight into which perspectives are likely to be biased.

Finally, there is substantial research on intergroup transgressions (e.g. Wohl et al., 2015, see also work on collective guilt (Branscombe & Doosje, 2004), and future research could

examine how individual-level asymmetric attributions contribute to group-level asymmetries and intergroup conflict and vice versa. The difficulties of understanding each party's perspective become even more complicated when multiple victims and/or transgressors are involved, and when transgressions are ongoing and long-term. Some asymmetries might hold when comparing victimized and transgressing groups, thus revealing why so many intergroup conflicts seem intractable. However, others have noted that the same processes that govern interpersonal interactions may not hold for intergroup relations (Insko et al., 2005); for example, apologies from individuals have been linked to increased forgiveness, but this effect does not hold for group apologies (Philpot & Hornsey, 2008).

Although sometimes it is clear who has transgressed against whom, this distinction is not always so clear. For instance, perpetrators sometimes believe victims share part of the blame for transgressions (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990). Moreover, in one-shot transgressions, each person occupies one role, but in many real-world conflicts, each person causes harm to the other over time so that the line between these roles becomes blurred and people become both victims and transgressors (SimanTov-Nachlieli & Shnabel, 2013). How, then, do victims' and transgressors' attributions change in these more dynamic and complex interactions in which the categorical lines are blurred and mutual influence is possible? One possibility is that after repeated transgressions, revenge against an original transgressor may be perceived as that transgressor's victimization, thus giving rise to the subsequent cascade of attributional asymmetries as the conflict cycle begins anew. Moreover, as both parties come to see themselves as victims, reconciliation may become less likely as arguments develop over who has suffered more. Thus, one intriguing implication is that asymmetries in initial conflicts engender long-term

conflict. As a result, questions about why victims and perpetrators disagree about what occurred might better be characterized as why victims and perpetrators ever reach agreement.

### **Interdependence Among Responses**

Although this paper has focused on asymmetries between victims' and transgressors' responses to injustice, there is a burgeoning body of work on the interdependence of these responses. In the real world, many responses occur in tandem with one another, and some studies have looked at the interplay between these responses. For example, from both the perspective of actual responders and third-party observers, punishment decrease desires for compensation because people's sense of justice is restored, but compensation does not decrease desires to punish (Adams & Mullen, 2015). Furthermore, when the perpetrator transgresses by making their counterpart incur a loss, compensation repairs trust more effectively than an apology, whereas when the perpetrator unfairly gains at the expense of another, apologies are more effective than compensation (DeCremer, 2010). Similarly, victims' reactions to transgressions influence transgressors' decisions to apologize and offer compensation (Desmet & Leunissen, 2014; Leunissen, De Cremer, & Reinders Folmer, 2012), and apologies in turn influence victim forgiveness (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). In other words, these responses tend not to occur in isolation of other responses. Thus, even as the lines between these two social roles tend to be blurred over time, their reactions to one another become non-independent.

Furthermore, responses to injustice ultimately depend not just on perspective, but also on any prior or co-occurring justice responses (e.g. apologies before or alongside compensation). One particularly interesting area for future research pertains to how these two roles think about multiple responses and the interplay between them. How do victims versus transgressors think

about the relationship between, for example, apologies and forgiveness, punishment and compensation, or other responses that often co-occur? One possibility is that victims feel obligated to forgive after an apology, whereas transgressors view their apologies as gifts and think victims are not obligated to forgive. Furthermore, victims might desire compensation even when the perpetrator has been punished, whereas transgressors might believe punishment has been enough and that they are not obliged to further compensate the victim. Understanding and assessing the success of any response must therefore be made with an awareness of the role and the context, including previous or co-occurring responses.

### **Conclusion**

Research on perceptions of, emotional reactions to, and responses to interpersonal transgressions benefits from understanding both victims' and transgressors' perspectives. It is clear that the involved parties do not always agree about what transpired, nor do they react to transgressions in similar ways. Each party has different needs in the wake of wrongdoing, and their perspective about what will restore justice tends not to be calibrated to the other party's expectations. Therefore, conflict resolution is best achieved when these two roles understand one another's perspectives.

Beliefs about what responses will restore justice should be grounded in a better understanding of the potential asymmetries between these two parties. From a theoretical perspective, approaches to justice research benefit from a comprehensive understanding of both parties' views. From a practical perspective, repair and reconciliation can only begin once victims and transgressors recognize that there are liable to be differences in their perspectives.

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Table 1

*Victims' and Transgressors' Perceptions of and Responses to Interpersonal Transgressions*

			Transgression Role	
			Victim	Transgressor
Perceptions of Transgression		Transgressor's Intent to Harm	Transgressor intended to harm	Lower intent to harm
		Transgressor Responsibility	Transgressor was responsible, is blameworthy	Tend to account for external, mitigating circumstances
		Transgression Severity	More severe	Less severe
Responses to Transgression	Emotional Reactions	Anger, Moral Outrage	Feels angry	Thinks victim's anger is not justified
		Guilt	Thinks transgressor does not feel guilty	Feels guilty (when transgression was intended)
	Actions Taken	Apology	Wants apology when transgression is intentional	Apologizes when unintentional
		Compensation	Greater desire for compensation	Less inclined to compensate
		Punishment	Greater desire for revenge, to see transgressor punished	Do not want victim to take revenge, do not want punishment
		Forgiveness	Underestimates transgressor's desire for forgiveness	Wants to be forgiven