



Child Development Labs
at the University of Virginia

“She Didn’t Even Say Sorry!” Children Remember When Transgressors Fail to Apologize

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Introduction

- Conflicts are inevitable and frequent among young children.
- Apologies can help restore the victim-transgressor relationship: Transgressors who apologize acknowledge having harmed the victim and (implicitly) promise not to do so again (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Schlenker, 1980).
- Children and adults who have been victims of a transgression prefer apologetic over unapologetic transgressors (Drell & Jaswal, 2013; Risen & Gilovich, 2007; Smith & Harris, 2012).
- Victims may perceive unapologetic transgressors as a continued threat that should be avoided.
- Research in other domains suggests that young children and adults seem to have a better memory for individuals they perceive as a threat (Kinzler & Shutts, 2008; Buchner, Bell, Mehl, & Musch, 2009).
- Do 6- and 7-year-olds ($N = 24$) remember transgressors who fail to apologize better than those who do?

References

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- Kinzler, K. D., & Shutts, K. (2008). Memory for “mean” over “nice”: The influence of threat on children's face memory. *Cognition*, 107, 775-783.
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- Smith, C. E., & Harris, P. L. (2012). *He didn't want me to feel sad: Children's reactions to disappointment and apology*. *Social Development*, 21(2), 215-228

Acknowledgments

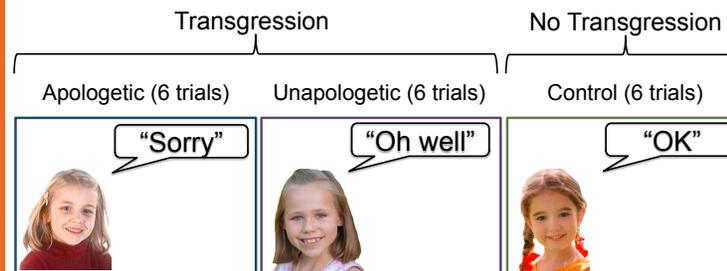
Thanks to the children and parents who participated in this research, and the research assistants in the Child Language & Learning Lab who helped collect the data.

Method

Study Phase

1) Presentation

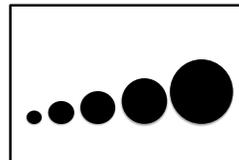
Example vignette: “This girl climbed on the kitchen counter and then heard her mom tell her to get down. When she jumped down.”



“she knocked a dish off the shelf and it broke. She turned to her mom and said ‘I’m sorry’/‘Oh well.’”

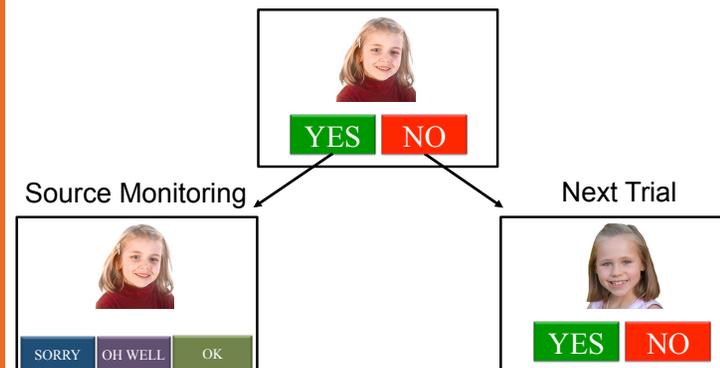
“she turned to her mom and said ‘OK.’”

2) Likeability Rating



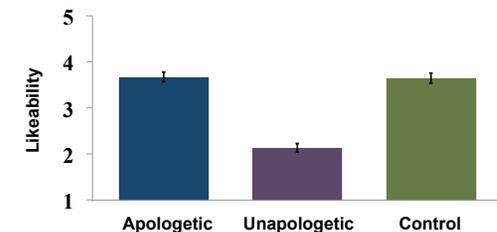
Test Phase

Old/New Distinction (36 trials)

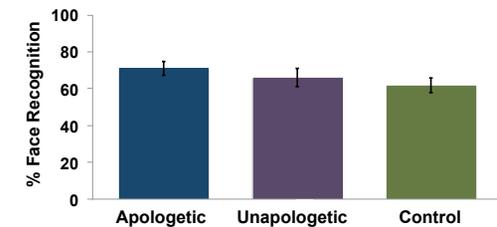


Results

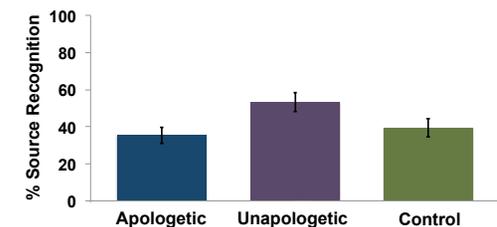
Children liked apologetic transgressors as much as characters who did not transgress, and more than unapologetic transgressors.



Children's ability to distinguish between old faces and new ones did not differ depending on condition.



But when they recognized a face as old, children were more accurate at remembering what unapologetic transgressors said than what apologetic transgressors or control characters said.



Unapologetic transgressors might represent a continued threat: Remembering that an individual failed to apologize for a transgression could help children avoid that person in the future.