Avoidant and defensive: Adult attachment and quality of apologies

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Abstract

After committing an offense, transgressors face an important decision regarding how to respond to the people they hurt. Do they make themselves emotionally vulnerable by offering high-quality, comprehensive apologies? Or do they seek to protect themselves with defensive strategies, such as justifications and excuses? In two studies, we examined the link between attachment styles and apology quality. We hypothesized that because people high in attachment avoidance are uncomfortable with emotional vulnerability and tend to defensively disengage from the emotional aspects of relationships, they would offer less comprehensive and more defensive apologies. In Study 1, participants imagined hurting a friend and then rated their likelihood of using each of eight apology elements and five defensive strategies. In Study 2, participants wrote a real e-mail to a person they had hurt. Our prediction was supported in both studies, suggesting that attachment avoidance plays an important role in how transgressors manage their offenses.

Keywords

Adult attachment, apologies, conflict resolution, defensive processes, empathy, interpersonal relationships

Conflict events represent pivotal points in interpersonal relationships. When one person harms another, such transgressions are sometimes detrimental to the relationship. They can cause lasting resentment, reduced satisfaction, or relationship dissolution. Other times, transgressions end up strengthening bonds by increasing closeness and cooperation between relationship partners following reconciliation. What guides people toward

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more constructive versus destructive responses in conflict contexts? The present research seeks to enhance our understanding of factors that shape transgressors' responses to the people they have hurt. Specifically, we apply an attachment theoretical perspective (Bowlby, 1969, 1973) to the understanding of when partners will engage in constructive conflict resolution strategies in the form of high-quality apologies and when they will employ more defensive strategies.

The Power of Apologies

After hurting or offending another person, transgressors are faced with a decision regarding how to respond to the person they harmed (i.e., the "victim"). Does the transgressor apologize, accept responsibility for the wrongdoing, and offer to repair the damage done? Does she or he defend his or her actions and push the blame onto the victim? Or perhaps she or he says nothing at all? Research suggests that the decision to apologize or not can have important consequences for the relationship with the victim. By apologizing, a transgressor is engaging in behavior designed to connect with the victim. Effective apologies communicate concern for the victim and a desire to preserve the relationship, and although people apologize for a variety of reasons, the ultimate goal is usually to restore the relationship to what it was before the offense occurred.

Fortunately for relationships, apologies are quite effective at achieving these ends. Among other benefits, apologies help victims feel validated, improve victims' evaluations of their transgressors, decrease victims' aggression toward their transgressors, and increase victims' empathy for and willingness to forgive their transgressors (Barkat, 2002; Eaton, 2006; Fehr, Gelfand, & Nag, 2010; McCullough et al., 1998; Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989). As such, apologies are considered one of the most powerful strategies that transgressors can use to promote reconciliation with a victim.

Although apologies are generally beneficial, the specific content of the apology is critically important. A growing number of studies demonstrate that more comprehensive apologies—those that include more apology elements—tend to be particularly effective at facilitating reconciliation (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Kirchhoff, Wagner, & Strack, 2012; Scher & Darley, 1997). Recently, Schumann (2014) provided a framework that integrated the apology elements described most commonly in previous work (e.g., Kirchhoff et al., 2012; Lazare, 2004; Scher & Darley, 1997). This framework comprises eight elements that one might include in an apology: expression of remorse, acceptance of responsibility, offer of repair, explanation, promise to behave better, acknowledgment of harm, admission of wrongdoing, and request for forgiveness (see Online Supplementary Materials for a description and example of each element). By including more of these elements, transgressors communicate a sincere attempt to take stock of their offense and restore their relationship with the victim, thereby reducing the victim's negative affect and encouraging forgiveness. Yet, even in the face of these benefits, people often fail to offer heartfelt, comprehensive apologies. Why might this be?

Recent research suggests that transgressors may avoid apologizing because they anticipate that it will feel humiliating and stressful (Leunissen, De Cremer, van Djike, & Reinders Folmer, 2014). Offering a more comprehensive apology can feel especially aversive, as it requires that transgressors do uncomfortable things, such as admit personal

flaws, promise to change, recognize the harmful nature of their actions, or make a plea for forgiveness (Schumann, 2014). These types of statements might make transgressors feel exposed—like they are putting themselves out on a limb, hoping that the victim will accept their apology, accept them despite their flaws, and respond with forgiveness. Apologizing comprehensively therefore requires that transgressors be willing to make themselves vulnerable to the victim, prioritizing the needs of the victim and the relationship over their own needs in that moment (Schumann, 2018). In so doing, they open themselves up to the possibility of rejection from the victim following their apology attempt.

Because it can be so difficult for transgressors to push past their discomfort and put themselves at risk by apologizing comprehensively, they may instead choose to defend themselves by making excuses, justifying their actions, minimizing or denying their offenses, or even blaming the victim (Schonbach, 1980; Schumann, 2014; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2014). These defensive strategies can feel good to the transgressor in the moment by helping them protect their self-image, but they often do so at the potential cost of hindering reconciliation (McLaughlin, Code, & O'Hair, 1983; Mead, 2008; Ohbuchi & Sato, 1993; Woodyatt & Wenzel, 2013). Defensive strategies thus tend to be self-preserving rather than relationship-preserving and are therefore likely used more frequently by people who protect themselves by disengaging from the emotional aspects of close relationships. We propose that attachment theory provides a valuable framework for understanding responses to interpersonal conflict and that the attachment style a transgressor has with a victim plays an important role in his or her apology behavior.

Attachment and Apologies

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973) has contributed deeply to our understanding of human relationships across the life span. Bowlby (1973) proposed that people construct mental representations (i.e., working models) that have two primary components: (1) a model of the self, which is derived from beliefs about how acceptable the self is in the eyes of one's attachment figures and (2) a model of others, which is derived from beliefs about how accessible and responsive attachment figures will be when needed. These working models of the self and others are initially formed in the context of the child-caregiver relationship and give rise to distinct attachment styles—organized along dimensions of avoidance and anxiety—that affect the way people construe their social environments and navigate the self within them (Bowlby, 1973; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Although attachment theory was originally developed to explain how infants become emotionally attached to primary caregivers and distressed when separated from them, Bowlby (1979) maintained that the attachment system continues into adulthood and includes other significant relationships—an idea that was further developed by Hazan and Shaver (1987).

People who are high in attachment avoidance do not trust that their attachment partner can be relied upon to be available and loving, so they defensively avoid dependence and intimacy (Bowlby, 1980; Simpson & Rholes, 2012). Highly avoidant people limit closeness to prevent emotional vulnerability (Pietromonaco & Feldman Barrett, 1997) and tend to use distancing strategies when they, their partners, or their relationships are distressed (Fraley, Davis, & Shaver, 1996; Shaver & Hazan, 1993). Because of this

emotional distancing, they tend to be less empathic toward people in need (Joireman, Needham, & Cummings, 2001; Wayment, 2006). Further, avoidant people tend to respond negatively to their partner's emotions because those emotions can signal that they need more attention and intimacy. For example, avoidant people are colder to partners who show distress or seek social support (Rholes, Simpson, & Oriña, 1999), respond with anger and defensiveness to negative emotions expressed by their partners during conflict discussions (Gaines et al., 1997; Overall, Fletcher, Simpson, & Fillo, 2015), and are generally less constructive in their conflict resolution style (e.g., less willing to compromise; Ben-Ari & Hirshberg, 2009; Cann, Norman, Welbourne, & Calhoun, 2008).

People who are high in attachment anxiety claim to be highly invested in their relationships and yearn to get closer to their attachment partners (Simpson & Rholes, 2012). However, because anxious people question their worth as relationship partners, they tend to worry about rejection and abandonment (Bowlby, 1980; Cassidy & Berlin, 1994). As a result, they are vigilant for and hypersensitive to rejection and become highly distressed when encountering relationship threats, such as during relationship conflict or when they feel poorly supported by their partner (Gallo & Smith, 2001; Rholes et al., 1999). They also tend to cope less effectively with negative emotions by ruminating on the source of the distress (Mikulincer & Florian, 1998) and responding with hostility or defensiveness to any signs that their partner might be rejecting them (Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Rholes, 2001; Gaines et al., 1997).

Attachment styles are therefore powerful predictors of a variety of connection behaviors, many of which require the type of emotional vulnerability and relationship prioritization that offering a comprehensive apology requires. Moreover, attachment theory posits that conflict situations are one of the three classes of situations that activate the attachment system (Simpson & Rholes, 2012). Conflict events may be particularly likely to reveal attachment processes because they act as stressors in the relationship, trigger strong emotional responses, and necessitate the use of intimate behaviors to work through the conflict (Pietromonaco, Greenwood, & Barrett, 2004; Simpson, Rholes, & Phillips, 1996).

Thus, it seems that adult attachment should be an especially important factor in determining how people choose to respond to the people they have hurt. Surprisingly, although a number of researchers have examined how people's attachment styles influence their general conflict resolution styles or their reactions to their partner's transgressions (e.g., Cann et al., 2008; Gaines et al., 1997; Overall et al., 2015), there has been little work focusing on whether attachment styles are associated with how people respond after committing an offense, and no research has yet examined the link between attachment and quality of apologies. This marks an important gap in our understanding of both attachment processes and apologies. The aim of the present research is to fill this important gap in knowledge by investigating the link between attachment styles and apologies in interpersonal relationships.

The Present Research

We investigate how attachment avoidance and anxiety relate to apology comprehensiveness and defensiveness. We hypothesize that, because people high in attachment

avoidance are less comfortable making themselves emotionally vulnerable to their attachment partners, are less empathic toward others, and are less willing to engage in constructive conflict resolution behaviors, they should be less willing to offer comprehensive apologies. Further, because avoidant people are more likely to respond to their attachment partner's negative emotions with hostility and defensiveness, we anticipate that they will include more defensive strategies in their responses.

We do not have clear predictions for attachment anxiety. On the one hand, because anxious people are vigilant for relationship threats and are highly motivated to preserve their relationships, we might expect them to offer more comprehensive apologies as a way of repairing the relationships they are so desperate to hold on to. On the other hand, because they fear rejection from their partners, they might avoid calling attention to behavior that sheds doubt on their worth as relationship partners and might be motivated to defend their behavior in the hopes of downplaying its negativity. We therefore include attachment anxiety as an exploratory predictor, with a less clear prediction regarding how it might relate to transgressors' responses.

We conducted two studies to test our predictions. Both studies measured relationship-specific attachment styles because research has determined that attachment styles are best understood as orientations toward a specific partner (Barry, Lakey, & Orehek, 2007; Cook, 2000; Fraley, Heffernan, Vicary, & Brumbaugh, 2011; Orehek, Vazeou-Nieuwenhuis, Quick, & Weaverling, 2017). In Study 1, participants imagined offending a friend and then indicated their likelihood of offering each of the eight apology elements and five defensive strategies that have been outlined in previous research (Schumann, 2014). In Study 2, participants recalled an offense they had committed and wrote a real e-mail to the victim. In both studies, we examined whether their victim-specific attachment style was associated with how comprehensive and defensive they were in their responses.

In an attempt to take an integrated approach to studying predictors of relationship processes, in both studies, we included several other potentially relevant predictors, including closeness, relational self-construal, and self-esteem. In so doing, we were able to assess whether attachment is a unique predictor of how transgressors respond to the people they have hurt.

Study 1

In Study 1, we conducted an initial test of our hypothesis using a hypothetical offense and response paradigm to optimize control over a variety of variables that could influence transgressors' responses (e.g., offense severity, type of offense, type of relationship). Participants imagined they had offended a close friend. From the adolescent years on, friendships become increasingly important and can serve as primary attachment relationships (Fraley & Davis, 1997; Furman, 2001; Welch & Houser, 2010). For college-age students, in particular, friends provide emotional support and meet needs similar to parental figures and romantic partners (Fraley & Davis, 1997), thus making friendships an especially appropriate relationship context for the college sample used in the present study. After imagining offending their friend, participants indicated how likely they would be to respond to this friend with each of the eight apology elements and

five defensive strategies. We predicted that participants with higher levels of attachment avoidance with their friend would report lower likelihood of responding with comprehensive apologies and greater likelihood of responding with defensiveness.

Study 1 had two secondary aims. First, past work has demonstrated a consistent and strong negative association between attachment avoidance and empathy (Britton & Fuendeling, 2005; Joireman et al., 2001; Wayment, 2006). Empathy, meanwhile, has been linked to a variety of constructive conflict behaviors, including greater willingness to apologize (Howell, Dopko, Turowski, & Buro, 2011; Howell, Turowski, & Buro, 2012). We therefore sought to explore whether avoidant transgressors would be less empathic toward their victims and whether these dampened empathic reactions would mediate the association between avoidance and transgressors' responses.

Second, we examined whether closeness to the victim and having a relational self-construal could account for any associations found between attachment and apologies. This allows us to test whether avoidant people simply feel less close to the victim and are therefore less motivated to repair the relationship and whether they simply care less about their relationships. While at first glance it may seem that attachment avoidance captures a lack of social connection, attachment theorizing is clear that it reflects a strategy for coping with strong social connection. To regulate the insecurity they feel with their close relationship partner, people with an avoidant attachment tend to disengage the attachment system during times of conflict as a way of protecting themselves from the potential emotional unavailability or rejection from their relationship partner (Simpson & Rholes, 2012). Thus, although attachment avoidance may be negatively associated with both closeness and having a relational self-construal, we expected it to predict unique variance in transgressors' responses to victims.

Method

Participants

We recruited 81 students (60 female, 21 male; $M_{age} = 19.20$, $SD = 1.73$) from a private university to complete an online study in exchange for course credit. A post hoc power analysis conducted in G*Power (version 3.1) (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) showed that based on sample size, an α probability of .05, and detection of a medium-sized effect ($r = .30$), power was sufficient (i.e., >.80).

Materials and procedure

Personality measures. Participants signed up for a study examining personality and responses to interpersonal events. To embed the relationship scales among other personality measures, participants first completed a 6-item measure of Implicit Theories of Personality (Levy, Stroessner, & Dweck, 1998; $\alpha = .90$). They then completed a 10-item measure of Relational-Interdependence Self-Construal, which assesses a general orientation toward seeing one's relationships as a central aspect of oneself (Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000; $\alpha = .90$).

Adult attachment. To assess friend-specific attachment orientation, participants were asked to enter the initials of their best friend and think about this person when responding

to the questions that followed. Participants then completed the Experiences in Close Relationships–Revised (ECR-R) Scale (Fraley, Waller, & Brennan, 2000). The ECR-R consists of two 18-item subscales assessing Avoidance and Anxiety, which we slightly adjusted to make applicable to a best friend instead of romantic partner (as in Orehek et al., 2017). Avoidance items assessed the degree to which participants are uncomfortable being close to their best friend and depending on them (e.g., "I prefer not to show my best friend how I feel deep down"), and anxiety items assessed the degree to which participants fear rejection and abandonment by their best friend (e.g., "I'm afraid that I will lose my best friend's love"). All 36 items were answered on a 7-point scale (1 = completely disagree, 7 = completely agree). Items were keyed so that higher scores represented greater attachment avoidance ($\alpha = .92$) and anxiety ($\alpha = .94$).

Closeness. To test closeness with their best friend, participants completed an adapted Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). Participants saw seven pairs of circles (one labeled "self" and one labeled "best friend") that varied in degree of overlap, ranging from completely nonoverlapping to mostly overlapping. Participants selected the pair of circles that best represented their relationship with their best friend. Higher scores on this measure indicated greater closeness with their friend.

Offense scenario. Next, participants were asked to imagine themselves in the following conflict situation with their best friend whose initials (e.g., DS) were embedded in the text to make it more vivid:

It is 4:50 p.m. on a Thursday and you are just finishing up at work. You have to leave no later than 5:00 p.m. today because you promised your good friend, DS, that you would pick them up from work at 5:10 p.m. to go out to dinner. DS doesn't have a cell phone right now, so you decide in advance on a convenient pick-up location outside by the gardens. Just as you are preparing to leave, your boss comes over and gives you another task to do. He says that the sooner you can get it done, the better, but that he understands he is springing it on you last minute. You look the task over and estimate that it will take you about 15 min to complete. Although you know this will make you late to pick up DS, you decide to stay and finish it. Unfortunately, it turns out that the task takes you much longer to finish than you originally expected and you only end up leaving the office at 5:30 pm. As you leave the building, you see that it is pouring rain outside. You arrive at the meeting spot 30 min late and see DS standing there, soaking wet and shivering in the rain. When DS gets in your car, they say "Where have you been? I've been waiting for you out here."

Empathic effort. Participants then responded to 6 items assessing their effort to empathize with their best friend in this situation (e.g., "How likely would you be to try to put yourself in your friend's shoes?"; Schumann, Zaki, & Dweck, 2014). These items were answered on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all likely, 7 = extremely likely) and formed a reliable measure of empathic effort ($\alpha = .95$).

Responses to victim. Next, participants saw a series of statements presented on separate pages and in random order, including one statement representing each of the eight apology elements and one statement representing each of the five defensive strategies (see Online Supplementary Materials for a list of the statements).[1] After viewing each

statement, participants indicated how likely they would be to say this to their friend on a 7-point scale (1 = *not at all likely*, 7 = *extremely likely*). Responses to the eight apology elements were summed to create an index of apology comprehensiveness, with higher scores indicating more comprehensive apologies (possible range: 8–56). Responses to the five defensive strategies were summed to create an index of defensiveness, with higher scores indicating more defensive responses (possible range: 5–35).[2] Finally, participants completed a series of demographic questions.

Results

We first assessed the bivariate correlations with attachment avoidance and found clear support for our predictions (see Table 1 for correlations, means, and standard deviations). Attachment avoidance was significantly negatively associated with apology comprehensiveness ($r = -.33$, $p = .002$), significantly positively associated with defensiveness ($r = .24$, $p = .034$), and significantly negatively associated with empathic effort ($r = -.26$, $p = .018$). By contrast, attachment anxiety, closeness, and relational self-construal were all unassociated with apology comprehensiveness, defensiveness, and empathic effort.

   Next, we assessed whether the associations between avoidance, comprehensiveness, defensiveness, and empathic effort remained significant when controlling for the influence of attachment anxiety (see Table 2, Model 1 for regression results). Including attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety in a linear regression model, attachment avoidance remained a significant negative predictor of apology comprehensiveness and empathic effort. However, its association with defensiveness dropped to nonsignificance.

   We next examined whether transgressors' attachment avoidance remained a significant predictor of their responses when controlling for closeness (see Table 2, Model 2). Including attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, and closeness in a linear regression model, attachment avoidance remained a significant negative predictor of apology comprehensiveness and reemerged as a significant positive predictor of defensiveness. However, its association with empathic effort dropped to nonsignificance. Finally, we tested whether transgressors' attachment avoidance remained a significant predictor of their responses when controlling for relational self-construal (Table 2, Model 3). Including attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, and relational self-construal in a linear regression model, attachment avoidance remained a significant negative predictor of apology comprehensiveness and empathic effort as well as a marginally significant positive predictor of defensiveness.

   Examining the regression results for attachment anxiety, we found that it now emerged as a marginally significant positive predictor of apology comprehensiveness in all three models (see Table 2, Models 1–3). In addition, closeness emerged as significant positive predictor of defensiveness (see Table 2, Model 2). No interactions emerged between attachment avoidance and anxiety or between attachment styles and the other predictors.

   Finally, we examined whether empathic effort mediated the association between avoidance and transgressors' responses. Using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro v2.13

Table 1. Study 1 correlations, means, and standard deviations.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Avoidance	—							
2. Anxiety	.61***	—						
3. Closeness	-.50***	-.17	—					
4. Relational self-construal	-.31**	-.17	.27*	—				
5. Implicit theories	.002	.03	.20†	.09	—			
6. Comprehensiveness	-.33**	-.05	.14	.13	-.05	—		
7. Defensiveness	.24*	.17	.08	.07	-.01	-.17	—	
8. Empathic effort	-.26*	-.12	.19†	.06	.14	.52***	-.31**	—
M (SD)	2.23 (.90)	2.42 (1.08)	4.88 (1.49)	5.30 (.85)	4.45 (1.19)	45.43 (6.56)	12.58 (3.36)	6.53 (.76)

Note. *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; †p < .10.

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Table 2. Regression analyses for Study 1.

Dependent measure Predictor	b	SE	95% CI	t	p
Model 1 (df = 78):					
Apology comprehensiveness					
(Constant)	45.43	.68	[44.08, 46.79]	66.72	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−3.54	.96	[−5.45, −1.63]	−3.68	<.001
Attachment anxiety	1.51	.80	[−0.09, 3.10]	1.88	.064
Defensiveness					
(Constant)	12.58	.37	[11.85, 13.31]	34.29	<.001
Attachment avoidance	.78	.52	[−0.25, 1.81]	1.51	.134
Attachment anxiety	.14	.43	[−0.73, .99]	.31	.756
Empathic effort					
(Constant)	6.53	.08	[6.37, 6.70]	79.26	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−.25	.12	[−0.48, −0.02]	−2.17	.033
Attachment anxiety	.04	.10	[−0.15, 0.24]	.45	.657
Model 2 (df = 77):					
Apology comprehensiveness					
(Constant)	45.43	.68	[44.07, 46.79]	66.46	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−3.89	1.12	[−6.12, −1.66]	−3.48	.001
Attachment anxiety	1.61	.82	[−0.03, 3.24]	1.96	.054
Closeness	−.34	.55	[−1.43, 0.74]	−.63	.533
Defensiveness					
(Constant)	12.58	.36	[11.87, 13.30]	35.03	<.001
Attachment avoidance	1.41	.59	[0.24, 2.58]	2.40	.019
Attachment anxiety	−.04	.43	[−0.90, 0.82]	−.09	.928
Closeness	.60	.29	[0.03, 1.17]	2.10	.039
Empathic effort					
(Constant)	6.53	.08	[6.37, 6.70]	78.91	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−.21	.14	[−0.48, 0.06]	−1.58	.119
Attachment anxiety	.03	.10	[−0.17, 0.23]	.33	.745
Closeness	.04	.07	[−0.09, 0.17]	.57	.572
Model 3 (df = 77):					
Apology comprehensiveness					
(Constant)	45.43	.69	[44.07, 46.80]	66.30	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−3.50	1.00	[−5.49, −1.50]	−3.48	.001
Attachment anxiety	1.51	.81	[−0.10, 3.11]	1.87	.066
Relational self-construal	.13	.86	[−1.57, 1.84]	.16	.876
Defensiveness					
(Constant)	12.58	.37	[11.85, 13.31]	34.49	<.001
Attachment avoidance	.98	.53	[−0.08, 2.05]	1.84	.070
Attachment anxiety	.12	.43	[−0.74, 0.98]	.28	.782
Relational self-construal	.63	.46	[−0.27, 1.54]	1.39	.168
Empathic effort					
(Constant)	6.53	.08	[6.37, 6.70]	78.78	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−.26	.12	[−0.50, −0.02]	−2.15	.035
Attachment anxiety	.04	.10	[−0.15, 0.24]	.45	.655
Relational self-construal	−.03	.10	[−0.23, 0.18]	−.25	.802

Note. All predictors are mean-centered.

for SPSS (Model 4, with 10,000 bootstrap samples), results provided evidence of an indirect path from avoidance to apology comprehensiveness through empathic effort (indirect effect without covariates $= -.89$, $SE = .50$, 95% CI [–2.0566, –.0867]) as well as an indirect path from avoidance to defensiveness through empathic effort (indirect effect without covariates $= .26$, $SE = .18$, 95% CI [.0239, .7713]).[3] Empathic effort did not mediate any other associations.

Discussion

Study 1 provides clear initial evidence for how transgressors' attachment avoidance with the person they hurt relates to how they respond to that person following an offense. Looking both at the bivariate and regression results, we found mostly robust associations between the participants' level of avoidance in their relationship with their friend and their likelihood of responding to their friend with less comprehensive and more defensive apologies. These findings are consistent with past work examining how avoidant people behave when their relationships are under threat: Rather than engaging in constructive behaviors aimed at protecting and repairing the relationship, people high in avoidance tend to distance themselves emotionally and engage in hostile and defensive behaviors aimed at protecting the self (Gaines et al., 1997; Overall et al., 2015). Further, the mediation findings provide preliminary evidence for the process by which avoidant people emotionally disengage: After harming someone, they invest less effort to understand their victim's feelings and perspectives. This dampened empathic effort, in turn, is associated with less constructive responses.

As anticipated, the findings for anxiously attached participants were less consistent. Although the bivariate correlations revealed no associations, the regression analyses suggested that anxious attachment might predict apology comprehensiveness once some of the variance associated with negative relational processes (i.e., that associated with avoidance) has been removed. We therefore conducted Study 2 to test whether the observed associations with attachment avoidance replicate and to clarify how attachment anxiety relates to transgressors' responses. In addition, we moved away from imagined responses and instead had participants construct real responses to people they had actually hurt.

Study 2

Hurting others is often an emotional experience. When people are asked to list shame and guilt-inducing events, offending others is one of the most commonly listed events (Smith, Webster, Parrott, & Eyre, 2002; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). Moreover, transgressors often fear being rejected from the moral community to which they belong and experience a strong need to feel accepted and forgiven (Adams & Inesi, 2016; Shnabel & Nadler, 2008). Because of the emotional nature of transgressing, it is important to put participants in a position to feel real emotional reactions to real offenses they have committed. To do so, in Study 2, we had participants recall an offense they had committed that was currently unresolved and then gave them an opportunity to write an ostensibly real e-mail to the victim. We then had trained observers code the e-mails for

the presence of apology elements and defensive strategies. In addition, to examine whether less comprehensive and more defensive e-mails actually come across as lower quality responses, we had a separate set of observers judge the e-mails on a variety of dimensions related to effectiveness (e.g., sincerity).

Study 2 had two additional aims. First, to ensure that completing the measure of attachment prior to responding to the victim was not artificially inflating the correlation between attachment avoidance and the quality of participants' responses (e.g., by making salient their desire to avoid closeness), in Study 2, we had participants complete the attachment measure after responding to the victim.

Second, we examined whether self-esteem might also emerge as an important predictor of transgressors' responses. The risk-regulation model (Murray, Holmes, & Collins, 2006) proposes a regulatory system that allows people to balance their desire to seek intimacy in their relationships with their desire to avoid social pain. When confronted with a relationship threat, the risk-regulation system prioritizes either self-protection or connectedness goals, depending on expectations about a partner's responsiveness. Those who are confident in their self-worth (i.e., people with high self-esteem) tend to put aside self-protection goals and seek connectedness. By contrast, people who doubt their self-worth (i.e., people with low self-esteem) tend to withdraw to avoid the anticipated sting of rejection (Murray, Bellavia, Rose, & Griffin, 2003). We therefore included a measure of self-esteem to examine whether transgressors with low self-esteem choose self-protection in the form of less comprehensive and more defensive responses to their victims and whether attachment avoidance predicts unique variance in these responses when taking self-esteem into account.

Participants

Using G*Power software (Faul et al., 2007), we determined that we needed a sample of at least 82 participants to detect a medium-sized effect ($r = .30$, $\alpha = .05$, $1 - \beta = .80$). Therefore, we recruited 87 students (64 female, 20 male, 3 unspecified; $M_{age} = 26.10$, $SD = 8.25$) from a community college to complete an online study in exchange for course credit. Seven participants did not follow instructions (five did not write an e-mail; one wrote about being victimized; one did not have victim's e-mail address) and thus were dropped from the analyses, leaving a sample of 80 students (63 female, 17 male; $M_{age} = 26.16$, $SD = 8.37$).

Materials and procedure

Personality measures. Participants signed up for an online study on personality and relationships. Participants first completed a measure of Self-Esteem (Rosenberg, 1965), which assesses global self-worth with 10 items (e.g., "I feel that I have a number of good qualities"; $\alpha = .88$), and the same measure of Implicit Theories of Personality (Levy et al., 1998) used in Study 1 ($\alpha = .78$) as a filler measure.

Offense recall, closeness to victim, and transgressor-rated severity. Next, participants were asked to think of something they had done that had offended or hurt somebody. They were told the offended person could be a friend, family member, colleague, or romantic

partner as long as it was someone they still had contact with and as long as the offense was currently unresolved—something that had not been fully reconciled or dealt with. Once participants had an offense in mind, they recorded their relationship to this person (e.g., mother; colleague; friend), inputted this person's initials, described the offense, and estimated when it had occurred. Next, on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*), they rated how close they were with this person at the time of the offense, the severity of the offense, how upset the victim was, and how responsible they were for the offense. The latter 3 items were combined to create an index of transgressor-rated offense severity ($\alpha = .63$).

Response to victim. Participants were then given the following instructions, with the victim's initials (e.g., DS) embedded:

We would now like you to write an e-mail to the person you hurt, DS. Please use this e-mail to address the offense that you committed against them, saying whatever it is that you would like to say to them about this event. At the end of the study, we will ask you to log in to your e-mail account and send the e-mail to DS.

Adult attachment. After writing their e-mail response, participants completed a victim-specific ECR-R attachment measure, with the victim's initials embedded in each scale item. Reliability was high for both attachment avoidance ($\alpha = .90$) and anxiety ($\alpha = .90$). Participants completed several other filler or exploratory measures[4] and then finished with a series of demographic questions.

Response coding. Following data collection, two independent observers coded the responses for each of the eight apology elements and the five defensive strategies. Interobserver reliability was high (average Cohen's $\kappa = .80$); discrepancies between coders were resolved through discussion. The total number of apology elements included in each response was summed to represent apology comprehensiveness. The total number of defensive strategies included in each response was summed to represent defensiveness.

To obtain independent judgments of apology effectiveness, four additional observers (who were not trained on coding apology elements and defensive strategies) were instructed to imagine they were the victim and then rated the responses for how sincere, satisfying, and aggravating (R) they were as well as how much they would forgive the transgressor after receiving their response. These 4 items were combined into an index of observer-rated response effectiveness (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$). The same four observers also rated the degree of closeness and vulnerability communicated in the responses, which were combined into an index of observer-rated transgressor vulnerability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$). Finally, the four observers rated the severity of the offenses, which were combined into an index of observer-rated offense severity (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$). All observer ratings were conducted on 7-point Likert-type scales.

Results

On average, participants rated the offenses they reported as being fairly severe, $M = 5.19$, $SD = 1.21$. The most common offenses were committed against family members

(35%) and past or present romantic partners (33.75%), followed by friends (21.25%), colleagues (8.75%), and acquaintances (1.25%). Nearly all offenses reported were relational in nature (e.g., insulting, lying, arguing, cheating, breaking the person's heart).

We first assessed the bivariate correlations with attachment avoidance and again found clear support for our predictions (see Table 3, for correlations, means, and standard deviations). Attachment avoidance was significantly negatively associated with apology comprehensiveness ($r = -.38$, $p = .001$) and positively associated with defensiveness ($r = .34$, $p = .002$).

Looking at observers' judgments of response quality, avoidance was negatively associated with observer-rated response effectiveness ($r = -.45$, $p < .001$), which was positively associated with apology comprehensiveness ($r = .59$, $p < .001$) and negatively associated with defensiveness ($r = -.27$, $p = .02$). Avoidance was also negatively associated with observer-rated transgressor vulnerability, which was positively associated with apology comprehensiveness ($r = .78$, $p < .001$).

Consistent with Study 1, attachment anxiety was unassociated with apology comprehensiveness and defensiveness. Anxiety was also unassociated with observer-rated response effectiveness and transgressor vulnerability.

Turning to self-esteem, we found that it was unassociated with attachment avoidance but marginally associated with attachment anxiety ($r = -.19$, $p = .087$). Like attachment anxiety, self-esteem was unassociated with apology comprehensiveness, defensiveness, observer-rated response effectiveness, and observer-rated transgressor vulnerability. Transgressor-rated closeness to the victim was positively associated with both apology comprehensiveness ($r = .23$, $p = .037$) and observer-rated transgressor vulnerability ($r = .31$, $p = .006$).

Next, we examined whether the associations with avoidance remained significant when controlling for the influence of attachment anxiety (see Table 4, Model 1 for regression results). Including attachment avoidance and anxiety in a linear regression model, attachment avoidance remained a significant predictor of apology comprehensiveness, defensiveness, response effectiveness, and transgressor vulnerability. We next examined whether transgressors' attachment avoidance remained a significant predictor of their responses when controlling for closeness (see Table 4, Model 2). Including attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, and closeness in a linear regression model, attachment avoidance remained a significant predictor of apology comprehensiveness, defensiveness, response effectiveness, and transgressor vulnerability. Finally, we tested whether transgressors' attachment avoidance remained a significant predictor of their responses when controlling for self-esteem (see Table 4, Model 3). Including attachment avoidance, attachment anxiety, and self-esteem in a linear regression model, attachment avoidance again remained a significant predictor of all four outcome variables. In all three models, controlling for either transgressor-rated severity or observer-rated severity did not meaningfully reduce any of the associations with avoidance, all ps < .01.

Examining the regression results for attachment anxiety, we found that no significant associations emerged in Models 1–3. Closeness was no longer associated with apology comprehensiveness or observer-rated transgressor vulnerability. However, as in Study 1, closeness emerged as a significant positive predictor of defensiveness.

Table 3. Study 2 correlations, means, and standard deviations.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Avoidance	I										
2. Anxiety	.04	I									
3. Self-esteem	.02	-.19†	I								
4. Closeness	-.63***	.21†	.18	I							
5. Implicit theories	-.10	.03	.01	.04	I						
6. Comprehensiveness	-.38**	.07	-.13	.23*	.07	I					
7. Defensiveness	.34**	-.02	.02	-.02	-.23*	.03	I				
8. OR effectiveness	-.45***	-.09	-.16	.17	.04	.59***	-.27*	I			
9. OR vulnerability	-.45***	.13	-.14	.31**	.05	.78***	-.13	.82***	I		
10. TR severity	-.19†	.19†	.07	.26*	-.01	.35**	.07	.03	.27*	I	
11. OR severity	-.04	.17	-.04	.03	-.02	.46***	.26*	-.004	.23*	.42***	I
M (SD)	3.29 (1.46)	3.04 (1.16)	4.95 (1.06)	5.60 (1.70)	3.92 (1.03)	4.78 (2.51)	.77 (1.41)	4.10 (1.11)	3.45 (1.10)	5.19 (1.21)	3.90 (1.00)

Note. OR = observer-rated; TR = transgressor-rated.
*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001; †p < .10.

Table 4. Regression analyses for Study 2.

Dependent measure Predictor	b	SE	95% CI	t	p
Model 1 (df = 77):					
Apology comprehensiveness					
(Constant)	4.76	.26	[4.24, 5.28]	18.19	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−0.66	.18	[−1.01, −0.29]	−3.63	.001
Attachment anxiety	0.18	.23	[−0.28, 0.63]	0.78	.438
Defensiveness					
(Constant)	0.77	.15	[0.47, 1.07]	5.14	<.001
Attachment avoidance	0.33	.10	[0.12, 0.54]	3.17	.002
Attachment anxiety	−0.03	.13	[−0.29, 0.24]	−0.21	.837
Response effectiveness					
(Constant)	4.09	.11	[3.86, 4.31]	36.40	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−0.34	.08	[−0.50, −0.19]	−4.43	<.001
Attachment anxiety	−0.06	.10	[−0.26, 0.13]	−0.65	.519
Transgressor vulnerability					
(Constant)	3.45	.11	[3.23, 3.66]	31.35	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−0.34	.08	[−0.49, −0.19]	−4.54	<.001
Attachment anxiety	0.14	.10	[−0.05, 0.33]	1.44	.153
Model 2 (df = 75):					
Apology comprehensiveness					
(Constant)	4.76	.26	[4.24, 5.29]	18.08	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−0.70	.24	[−1.18, −0.23]	−2.93	.004
Attachment anxiety	0.20	.24	[−0.28, 0.68]	0.83	.407
Closeness	−0.07	.21	[−0.48, 0.35]	−0.31	.757
Defensiveness					
(Constant)	0.78	.15	[0.49, 1.07]	5.36	<.001
Attachment avoidance	0.55	.13	[0.29, 0.82]	4.19	<.001
Attachment anxiety	−0.13	.13	[−0.40, 0.13]	−0.99	.324
Closeness	0.30	.12	[0.07, 0.53]	2.60	.011
Response effectiveness					
(Constant)	4.08	.11	[3.86, 4.31]	36.58	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−0.43	.10	[−0.64, −0.23]	−4.26	<.001
Attachment anxiety	−0.02	.09	[−0.22, 0.18]	−0.21	.834
Closeness	−.12	.09	[−0.30, 0.05]	−1.36	.177
Transgressor vulnerability					
(Constant)	3.45	.11	[3.23, 3.67]	31.15	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−0.35	.10	[−0.55, −0.15]	−3.50	.001
Attachment anxiety	0.14	.10	[−0.06, 0.34]	1.41	.162
Closeness	−0.01	.09	[−0.19, 0.16]	−0.15	.884
Model 3 (df = 75):					
Apology comprehensiveness					
(Constant)	4.76	.26	[4.24, 5.28]	18.20	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−0.65	.18	[−1.01, −0.29]	−3.61	.001
Attachment anxiety	0.13	.23	[−0.33, 0.59]	0.56	.576
Self-esteem	−0.27	.25	[−0.77, 0.24]	−1.06	.295

(continued)

Table 4. (continued)

Dependent measure Predictor	b	SE	95% CI	t	p
Defensiveness					
(Constant)	0.77	.15	[0.47, 1.07]	5.10	<.001
Attachment avoidance	0.33	.11	[0.12, 0.54]	3.15	.002
Attachment anxiety	−0.03	.14	[−0.30, 0.24]	−0.19	.848
Self-esteem	0.01	.15	[−0.28, 0.30]	0.05	.961
Response effectiveness					
(Constant)	4.09	.11	[3.86, 4.31]	36.81	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−0.34	.08	[−0.49, −0.19]	−4.44	<.001
Attachment anxiety	−0.10	.10	[−0.29, 0.10]	−0.97	.336
Self-esteem	−0.18	.11	[−0.39, 0.03]	−1.68	.098
Transgressor vulnerability					
(Constant)	3.45	.11	[3.23, 3.66]	31.36	<.001
Attachment avoidance	−0.34	.08	[−0.49, −0.19]	−4.51	<.001
Attachment anxiety	0.12	.10	[−0.08, 0.31]	1.22	.227
Self-esteem	−0.11	.11	[−0.32, 0.10]	−1.02	.310

Note. All predictors are mean-centered.

Finally, we examined whether any of the associations tested above were moderated by transgressor-rated severity, as it is possible that certain predictors only influence transgressors' responses as offenses become more severe. Including attachment avoidance (mean-centered), transgressor-rated severity (mean-centered), and their interaction term in a linear regression model, a significant interaction emerged on defensiveness, $B = .21$, $SE = .08$, $t(75) = 2.58$, $p = .012$, 95% CI $= [.05, .38]$, such that avoidance predicted defensiveness at high levels (+1 SD) of severity, $B = .61$, $SE = .14$, $t(75) = 4.30$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $= [.33, .90]$, but not at low levels (−1 SD) of severity, $p = .499$. Supporting the robustness of this moderation effect, a similar interaction pattern was found between avoidance and observer-rated transgressor severity, $B = .27$, $SE = .10$, $t(75) = 2.82$, $p = .006$, 95% CI $= [.07, .62]$. No Anxiety × Severity interactions emerged nor did any interactions between attachment styles and either closeness or self-esteem.

Discussion

Study 2 provides strong evidence for a link between transgressors' attachment avoidance and how they respond to the people they have hurt. In emails they wrote and intended to send to their victims, we found less frequent use of apology elements and more frequent use of defensive strategies among participants with higher levels of attachment avoidance with the victim. These emails were also judged by a separate group of coders as being less effective overall and as conveying less vulnerability to the victim. All of these associations were robust when controlling for a variety of other potential predictors and the severity of the offenses.

In addition to these key findings, we found an interaction between avoidance and offense severity on defensiveness, such that more avoidant transgressors were more

defensive in their responses only when they had committed severe offenses. This finding—although preliminary—suggests that a more severe stressor (e.g., a more angry victim; recognizing that one's behavior was quite harmful) might be required to trigger avoidant transgressors' defensive responses. This is consistent with past work demonstrating that the more that avoidant individuals perceived negative emotions in their partners, the more they displayed hostile and defensive behavior (Overall et al., 2015).

Another interesting finding was the unanticipated positive association between closeness and defensiveness when controlling for attachment styles, which we found in both studies. One possible explanation for this finding is that transgressors who feel close to their victims have a strong need to be viewed positively by that person, thereby motivating them to downplay the negativity of their actions. Future work should explore the role of closeness in transgressors' responses.

Although Study 1 found limited evidence for associations between attachment anxiety and transgressor responses, Study 2 did not replicate these associations. There are several methodological differences across studies that might have contributed to the observed differences. First, whereas Study 1 asked participants to imagine themselves offending a friend and then indicate their likelihood of saying various statements, Study 2 asked participants to recall a real offense they had committed and then write an ostensibly real e-mail to the person they had hurt. Although these complementary methods each have their strengths and limitations, Study 2 was likely more emotionally evocative and felt more psychologically threatening to participants. Thus, it is possible that, because they care about maintaining their close relationships, anxiously attached transgressors *believe* they will engage in relationship-promotive behaviors such as comprehensive apologies when *imagining* how they would respond (at least when controlling for avoidance). However, when they are actually faced with an opportunity to respond, their self-protective motives kick in and guide them toward less constructive behavior. Second, because the offenses recalled in Study 2 varied across many dimensions (e.g., type and severity of offense, type of relationship with victim), it is possible that anxiety affects responses for some types of offenses but not others. Future work might explore this possibility and continue to investigate the relationship between attachment anxiety and transgressors' responses.

However, overall the findings from both studies suggest that anxiety might not be tied to what transgressors say to the people they have hurt, at least not in a straightforward way. Similarly, counter to what might be predicted from the risk-regulation model (Murray et al., 2006), self-esteem was not associated with any transgressor responses. For both attachment anxiety and self-esteem, there are likely competing self-protective and relationship-protective motivations that are influencing transgressors' responses in opposite directions. If so, it is possible that their associations with transgressors' responses are moderated by an unmeasured variable that brings either the self-protective or relationship-protective motivation to the forefront. For example, transgressors who are anxiously attached or have low self-esteem might feel safe when they believe their victims will be highly responsive, thereby allowing them to engage in relationship-protective (rather than self-protective) processes (Forest & Wood, 2011; Reis, Clark, & Holmes, 2004). Future work should explore how features of the partner might affect these associations.

General Discussion

When one close relationship partner harms another, it presents a challenge to the relationship. The transgressor can facilitate reconciliation and constructive relationship repair processes by engaging in high-quality apologies but can also engage in defensive strategies. Because confronting wrongdoings and attempting to make amends leave the transgressor emotionally vulnerable, doing so requires the transgressor to prioritize the needs of the victim and relationship and to be willing to invest emotionally in the relationship. In the present research, we aimed to expand our understanding of relationship factors that might relate to the quality of transgressors' responses. Across two studies using complementary methods, we found that people who were higher in attachment avoidance offered less comprehensive and more defensive responses to the people they have hurt.

To optimize control over the type of offense and relationship with the victim, in Study 1, we used a hypothetical scenario paradigm and found that participants who had a more avoidant attachment to their best friend indicated lower likelihood of using eight apology statements and greater likelihood of using five defensive strategies in their responses. In Study 2, we had participants recall real, unresolved offenses they had committed and write an ostensibly real e-mail response to the victim. More avoidant participants wrote e-mails that included fewer apology elements and more defensive strategies. In addition, coders judged these e-mails as being less effective overall and as communicating less vulnerability, supporting the possibility that these e-mails would be less likely to promote reconciliation with the victim.

These studies complement and extend past research on the influence of attachment styles in the domain of interpersonal conflict resolution. To date, this work has focused primarily on how attachment styles relate to people's responses to their partner's transgressions or their general approaches to conflict. To our knowledge, this is the first work to provide a focused look at what people with differing attachment styles say after their harmful behavior has threatened the well-being of the relationship. Given what we know about how important apologies are to promoting forgiveness and reconciliation, avoidant people's less comprehensive and more defensive responses after harming their attachment partners might be a contributing factor to why they tend to have less satisfying relationships that often end prematurely (e.g., Butzer & Campbell, 2008; Feeney, 2008; Feeney & Noler, 1992; Pistole, 1989). Their low-quality responses might be especially problematic given their higher likelihood of engaging in relationship behaviors that might frustrate and upset their attachment partners, such as being distant, unempathic, or hostile (Joireman et al., 2001; Overall et al., 2015; Rholes et al., 1999). One might have even expected that avoidant people need to be fantastic apologizers to manage these poor behaviors, but unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case.

The current studies also extend a growing body of work looking to identify factors that influence the quality of responses from transgressors (Schumann, 2018). For example, recent research suggests that transgressors who feel protected from the threatening aspects of confronting one's offense—either through self-affirmation (Schumann, 2014) or because of their beliefs regarding the malleability of personality (Schumann & Dweck, 2014)—tend to offer higher quality responses. Our findings

complement this past work by revealing characteristics of the transgressor that might make them unwilling to expose themselves to this threat for the sake of the relationship. We believe this work is important not only because it helps us identify who might apologize well and who might not but also because it advances our understanding of the psychological experience of offending others and the emotional and cognitive barriers transgressors might face when deciding how to respond to the people they have hurt.

The present research also adds to evidence that suggests that apologizing (especially in a more comprehensive manner) is a relationship-serving behavior that requires concern for the well-being of the victim and the relationship (Lazare, 2004; Tavuchis, 1991). Indeed, the mediation findings from Study 1 suggest that an unwillingness to try to empathize with the victim was at least partially responsible for the association between attachment avoidance and lower quality responses. This finding points to a potential target for intervention. Past work suggests that when people experience barriers to feeling empathy, they can invest effort to turn up their empathy (Schumann et al., 2014). Future research might therefore examine whether people high in attachment avoidance can be trained to expend empathic effort during conflicts and whether this empathic effort, in turn, can improve the quality of their responses.

Future research might also try to pinpoint *why* transgressors who are higher in avoidance tend to offer lower quality responses to the people they hurt. Although the present research identified lower empathic effort as one mechanism, future work might examine whether avoidant transgressors also offer less constructive responses as a strategy for pushing their attachment partners away. That is, when avoidant people feel they are getting too close to someone, they might avoid responding constructively after an offense to create emotional distance. Although we found no interaction between avoidance and closeness in the present studies (suggesting that avoidance was associated with lower quality responses across all levels of closeness), future work might directly test this possibility.

Another direction for future work is to explore whether transgressors' responses depend on various characteristics of the relationship between the transgressor and victim. For example, it might be that avoidant transgressors who have highly responsive partners or who are in highly satisfying relationships learn to engage in more relationship-protective behaviors over time. Although past work suggests that an avoidant attachment style is not easily changed (Carnelley & Rowe, 2007), it might be possible to improve the way they manage their conflicts. Positive characteristics of the partner or relationship might be some of the factors that can produce those improvements.

Finally, future work might examine how victims receive the responses offered by avoidant transgressors. Are they angered upon receiving more perfunctory, defensive apologies? Or have they perhaps come to expect more emotionally distant, less constructive responses from their avoidant romantic partners, friends, family members, or colleagues? Although coders judged the e-mails written by avoidant transgressors in Study 2 as being less effective overall, transgressors did not actually send their e-mails and therefore we were unable to assess victims' reactions to these responses. A challenge for future work, then, is to examine whether avoidant transgressors' responses actually hinder the reconciliation process and whether their consistently poor responses to conflict result in lasting damage to their relationships.

Funding

Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. We also included two self-castigating statements and a statement of inaction. Self-castigation was also coded in Study 2. Please see Online Supplementary Materials for all analyses and discussion of these exploratory statements.
2. We did not compute αs for the comprehensiveness or defensiveness composites because using one element (or strategy) does not suggest that another would be included. In some cases, it could even be expected that the use of one element renders the use of another element unnecessary. Therefore, the sum across apology elements best captures the overall comprehensiveness of participants' responses, and the sum across defensive strategies best captures participants' overall defensiveness.
3. The indirect effect from avoidance to apology comprehensiveness with anxiety included as a covariate $= -1.00$, $SE = .50$, 95% CI [-2.1541, $-.1922$]; with anxiety and closeness included as covariates $= -.86$, $SE = .52$, 95% CI [-2.0541, $-.0122$]; and with anxiety and relational self-construal included as covariates $= -1.04$, $SE = .49$, 95% CI [-2.2118, $-.2324$]. The indirect effect from avoidance to defensiveness with anxiety included as a covariate $= .30$, $SE = .20$, 95% CI [.0468, .8509]; with anxiety and closeness included as covariates $= .27$, $SE = .19$, 95% CI [.0058, .7707]; and with anxiety and relational self-construal included as covariates $= .30$, $SE = .19$, 95% CI [.0397, .8136].
4. After writing their e-mails, participants completed several exploratory items tapping how they felt about their relationship with the victim. Attachment avoidance, anxiety, and self-esteem were all associated with seeing greater damage done to the relationship ($r = .30**$, $.32**$, and $.24*$, respectively). Avoidance was associated with rating the relationship and resolution of the conflict as less important ($r = -.62***$); anxiety was associated with rating the relationship and resolution as the conflict as more important ($r = .36**$). As a filler scale, participants completed the General Regulatory Focus Measure (Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002), including this filler scale in the regression analyses reported below does not alter any of the findings.

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