

2008

## Exploration of the Authentic Apology theory: An examination of the reasons why people reject an apology

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Running Head: THE AUTHENTIC APOLOGY THEORY AND APOLOGY REJECTION

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Exploration of the Authentic Apology Theory: An Examination of the Reasons Why People  
Reject an Apology  
Stephenie Bruce

A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor of  
Arts/Science (Psychology) Honours, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science,  
Edith Cowan University.  
Submitted: October 2008

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Running Head: THE REASONS FOR APOLOGY REJECTION

A Literature Review to Explore the Reasons Why People Reject an Apology

Stephenie Bruce

A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor  
of Arts Honours in Psychology, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science.

Edith Cowan University.

August 2008.

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Abstract

The aim of the present literature review was to explore the reasons why people reject an apology. A search of the literature revealed virtually no research focusing specifically on apology rejection, therefore, it was proposed that this lack of research may be due to the general reluctance of apology recipients to respond with rejection (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994; Bennett & Earwaker, 1994; Risen & Gilovich, 2007). Given the dearth of literature on apology rejection, it was imperative that the review also examined the literature on apology in general, in addition to literature on apology and forgiveness, in order to discover which factors influence the rejection of an apology. Overall, it was found that offender responsibility and event severity influenced the rejection of an apology specifically (Bennett & Earwaker, 1994), whereas, the literature on apology and forgiveness suggests that circumstances surrounding the receipt of an apology, including timing, spontaneity and sincerity, in addition to characteristics of the victim, including age, gender, religion and personality, may influence whether an apology will be rejected. Recommendations for future research include, exploring the peoples' real life experiences, looking at the effect of specific apology components on apology rejection and also examining the difference between public versus private apology rejection.

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Supervisor: Dr. Dianne McKillop

Submitted: August 2008

### A Literature Review To Explore The Reasons Why People Reject An Apology

In social interaction apologies are common utterances, which are routinely offered in response to a predicament or offence. According to Goffman's (1955) theory, the occurrence of a predicament is said to disrupt the social equilibrium between individuals, therefore, the offender proffers an apology or other remedial response to the victim in an attempt to re-establish equilibrium and correct for the offence. In addition to its importance in everyday interaction, apology is becoming increasingly important in psychology, law and justice. In the area of psychology, apology is considered extremely important because it is said to promote both physical health and psychological well being, through its ability to increase levels of forgiveness in victims (Petrucci, 2002). Moreover, forgiveness that arises from the receipt of an apology has been found to mitigate feelings of anger and aggression in victims (Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989; Zeichmeister, Garcia, Romero, & Vas, 2004), leading to a reduction in anxiety and depression (Kaminer, Stein, Mbanga, & Zungu-Dirwayi, 2001; McCullough & Worthington, 1995) and a sense of closure about the offence (Baumeister, Stillwell & Wotman, 1990; Zeichmeister & Romero, 2002). There is also strong empirical and theoretical support to suggest that forgiveness positively influences victim behaviour which results in more constructive behaviours being directed at the offender, such as reconciliation (Allan, 2007; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). In criminal law and justice, the proponents of therapeutic jurisprudence (e.g., Wexler, 2008) and restorative justice (e.g., Braithwaite, 2007) promote the use of apology for the purpose of maximising the positive therapeutic consequences of the judicial system, in addition to restoring relationships and bringing about reparation of harm (Petrucci, 2002). Presently, apology is also prominent in civil law and legislation has recently been reformed to allow wrongdoers to offer apologetic statements to their victims, which cannot be used in evidence as an admission of liability (Allan, 2007).

Although it has been established that apology may play an important role in both criminal and civil law, in addition to providing positive psychological outcomes, the construct of apology has not yet been operationally defined despite much research in the area. Throughout the literature, the word apology is used interchangeably with other terms such as accounts, concessions (Gonzales, Pederson, Manning, & Wetter, 1990; Gonzales, Manning, & Haugen, 1992; Hodgins, Liebeskind, & Schwartz, 1996) and sometimes confessions (Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1991) thus highlighting the importance of establishing apology as an operationally defined construct. Given that the majority of literature on apology comes from social psychology, apology is often referred to as a remedial strategy, which is simply a verbal attempt to rectify an offence situation and to restore the identity of both victim and offender (Gonzales et al., 1990). In this regard an apology is often termed a concession and is compared with other remedial strategies including excuses, justifications and refusals (Allan, Allan, Kaminer, & Stein, 2006; Gonzales et al., 1990). In contrast to the other remedial strategies, an apology is said to acknowledge the occurrence of the incident and to take full responsibility for the predicament and its consequences, as opposed to denying the occurrence of the predicament, ascribing blame to others or seeking to minimise the consequences of the incident (Gonzales et al., 1992).

In an attempt to define apology as a construct, a number of authors have put forth what they consider to be central or core components of an apology, however, throughout the literature there is inconsistency as to which components are necessary for a response to be considered an apology. There is some agreement that an apology should contain a perfunctory statement such as "I'm sorry" or "Excuse me", however, there is little consensus regarding the other suggested components. These include an expression of remorse, admission of responsibility or fault or damage, request for forgiveness, promise of forbearance and some offer of reparation, restitution

or compensation (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Scher & Darley, 1997; Schlenker & Darby, 1981; Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Förster, & Montada, 2004).

The lack of consensus regarding a definition of apology also extends to Australian law, whereby, legislation in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory allows for a regret-admission apology to be given, which constitutes an acknowledgement of responsibility and expression of remorse or regret (Allan, 2007). However, in all other states only an expression of regret is protected under legislation (Allan, 2007). Therefore, neither law nor scholarly literature has established an operational definition of apology. As a consequence, Allan and colleagues (2006) recommended that further empirical research be conducted in an attempt to establish apology as an operationally defined construct.

Acting on the recommendations of Allan and colleagues (2006), Slocum, Allan and Allan (2006) conducted a study to examine the difference between apology and true sorrow within intimate relationships. The study involved 23 participants aged 26 to 58 years who had experienced a serious wrongdoing (i.e., adultery or domestic violence) by their intimate partner in the last two years (Slocum et al., 2006). The study required participants to engage in an in-depth semi-structured interview, followed by completion of a brief questionnaire (Slocum et al., 2006). A qualitative analysis of participants' responses revealed that individuals were more forgiving when they received an apology and markedly more forgiving when they perceived true sorrow from their intimate partner (Slocum et al., 2006).

From the data obtained in Slocum and colleague's (2006) study, a two dimensional theoretical model of apologetic behaviour was developed, the Authentic Apology (AA) model. On the first dimension there were three components; affirmation, affect and action. The affirmation component was said to reflect the wrongdoer's admission of responsibility for the behaviour, whereas, the affect component referred to the wrongdoer's emotional response to the

behaviour (Slocum et al., 2006). Lastly, the action component incorporates the wrongdoer's efforts to repair the harm their behaviour has caused (Slocum et al., 2006). On the second dimension of the model, each of these components are said to operate along a continuum of self and self-other focus which indicates the extent to which the offender considers the impact of the offence on him/herself and on others (Slocum et al., 2006).

It can however be argued that the research conducted by Slocum and colleagues (2006) is limited, whereby, the researchers only explored the difference between an apology and true sorrow but did not explore the possible difference between what people perceive as an apology as opposed to no apology. In other words, they did not explore instances where the offender proffered a statement which did not constitute an apology as perceived by the victim. Consequently, there has been little or no attempt to explore situations where a response offered by an offender is not considered an apology or is deemed to be unacceptable and is therefore subsequently rejected by the recipient. Therefore, the aim of the literature review is to determine which factors influence whether an apology will be rejected.

An extensive search of the law, justice and psychology databases was conducted using the keywords "apology", "accounts" and "concessions" in combination with the terms "rejection", "rejected", "unacceptable", "unforgiveness" and "failed". The following databases were searched; Academic OneFile, Proquest Law, Proquest Social Sciences, Proquest 5000 International, Oxford Journals, PsychArticles, Sage Journals and Google Scholar. The search yielded virtually no literature addressing the specific area of apology rejection and it was discovered that there were only two articles focusing specifically on the reasons why apologies may be rejected. The two studies were those published by Bennett and Earwaker (1994) and Bennett and Dewberry (1994).

A possible reason for the lack of research on apology rejection may be that recipients of an apology are generally reluctant to reject an apology (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994; Bennett & Earwaker, 1994). In a study by Bennett and Dewberry (1994), university students aged between 18 and 46 years participated across two experiments involving hypothetical situations. It was found that explicit rejection of an apology was extremely rare, with only 8% of participants showing offense toward the apology (i.e., failure to accept) and the vast majority (88%) accepting the apology (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994). Research by Bennett and Earwaker (1994) also revealed that the likelihood of apology rejection was remarkably small, even with significant provocation and the absence of social consequences.

In light of the above findings, Bennett and Dewberry (1994) found that recipients were viewed least positively by others when they rejected an apology and that rejection was perceived as resulting in the greatest amount of damage to the relationship between victim and offender. Furthermore, it was found that even unconvincing apologies were less likely to be rejected because recipients perceived a risk of incurring negative attributions and that recipients with a strong desire to reject would still accept such apologies conditionally, whereby, the offender would have to meet some specified criteria (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994). Therefore, the emerging theme is that victims experience a powerful sense of constraint when receiving an apology and are more inclined to accept apologies even when provocation is high (Bennett & Earwaker, 1994) and they are perceived as unconvincing (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994).

Support for Bennett and Dewberry's (1994) findings is provided in a study by Risen and Gilovich (2007) who simulated predicaments in a laboratory setting using undergraduate students across five experiments. The results of the study indicated that recipients of an apology, referred to as targets, were more likely to accept rather than reject an apology even in circumstances where the apology was perceived as insincere (Risen & Gilovich, 2007). Possible reasons for

targets being more likely to accept rather than reject an apology may be that they desired to be perceived positively by others, wanted to feel good about themselves and were more constrained by social scripts (Risen & Gilovich, 2007). Expanding on the last point, when an apology is frequently and commonly accepted it creates a well practiced social script which subsequently constrains the recipient's ability to respond with rejection, even when they have a strong desire to do so (Risen & Gilovich, 2007). This suggests that apology acceptance may be a scripted, automatic event and thus corresponds to other findings which propose that the apology-forgiveness sequence may be such an ingrained part of social life that apologies are taken at face value without regard to other factors (Darby & Schlenker, 1989).

As evidenced by Bennett and Dewberry (1994) and Risen and Gilovich (2007), apologies have a powerful constraining effect and there is immense pressure on the recipient to accept them. Similarly, Goffman (1955) proposes that apology has a social function, whereby, it imposes constraints and negative consequences on its recipient. In accordance with Goffman's (1955) theory, when an apology is deemed unsatisfactory by the recipient and subsequently not accepted, the relationship between victim and offender remains at disequilibrium and the identity of both parties is not restored (Goffman, 1955). Furthermore, it is suggested that both a failure to accept an apology and explicit rejection of an apology leads to negative judgements about the victim because accepting an apology is viewed as normative behaviour (Goffman, 1955). Such theory supports the finding that explicit apology rejection is extremely rare based on the notion that recipients are generally reluctant to respond with rejection due to fear of the negative consequences that may ensue (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994; Bennett & Earwaker, 1994; Risen & Gilovich, 2007). Therefore, it is understandable why there is such a dearth of literature specifically on apology rejection given the overall lack of occurrence in explicit apology rejection.

Given the relative absence of literature focusing specifically on apology rejection, it is imperative that this review examines the general literature on apology, in addition to literature on apology and forgiveness, in an attempt to establish which factors influence whether an apology will be rejected. There is substantial evidence that apology functions to increase the likelihood of forgiveness in victims (McCullough, Fincham, & Tsang, 2003). As such, forgiveness refers to a motivational change, whereby, the offended person is less motivated to pursue revenge or avoidance behaviours and instead acts in a conciliatory and benevolent manner toward the wrong doer (McCullough et al., 1997). Therefore, research examining the link between apology and forgiveness is important in determining under what circumstances an apology actually fails and does not lead to forgiveness, which consequently may result in rejection. In light of this finding, the review will discuss characteristics of the apology and the victim, which are said to influence apology and forgiveness. Specifically, the review will look at circumstances surrounding the receipt of an apology (i.e., apology characteristics), such as timing, spontaneity and sincerity, as well as characteristics of the victim, including age, gender, religion and personality. Firstly, however, the review will discuss two factors, offender responsibility and event severity, which are said to influence apology rejection specifically.

### *Offender Responsibility and Event Severity*

In a study by Bennett and Earwaker (1994) the two factors, offender responsibility and event severity, were investigated with reference to their influence on the likelihood of an apology being rejected. The study involved 200 participants, aged between 17 and 47 years, evenly distributed between four experimental conditions manipulating levels of responsibility and severity (i.e., high vs. low). In their study, responsibility referred to the degree to which the offender could be blamed for the predicament (i.e., accidental vs. intentional), whereas, severity

referred to the level of harm or damage caused to the victim (i.e., damage/physical harm vs. no damage/ no physical harm). Following each scenario, participants were required to rate a number of items on a 7 point scale, including how much they would like to reject the apology and the likelihood that they would actually reject the apology (Bennett & Earwaker, 1994).

The results of the study revealed that both offender responsibility and event severity influenced both the desire to reject an apology and the actual likelihood of rejection, however, the likelihood of actual rejection was very small (i.e., approximately 8%). Overall, when both offender responsibility and event severity were high there was a greater inclination to reject the apology, a greater level of anger experienced and an increased likelihood that the victim would seek further justification for the behaviour (Bennett & Earwaker, 1994). Given that Bennett and Earwaker (1994) were able to establish that offender responsibility and event severity influence the likelihood of apology rejection, it was necessary to further explore which specific aspects of apology contribute to such a relationship. A consistent finding documented in other literature suggests that as responsibility and severity increase the more complete, elaborate or extensive an apology needs to be in order to reduce the negative consequences of the offence and to increase the likelihood of forgiveness (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Scher & Darley, 1997; Schlenker and Darby, 1981).

In a study involving 120 psychology students, Schlenker and Darby (1981) systematically manipulated the levels of offender responsibility and event severity, also referred to as consequences or harm, across two scenarios. The results of the study demonstrated that when both responsibility and severity were high, more complete apologies were required to bring about forgiveness in the victim (Schlenker & Darby, 1981). Similar results were documented by Darby and Schlenker (1982), who examined the influence of severity and responsibility on reducing the negative repercussions of social predicaments in a study involving children (from kindergarten to

grade seven), across two experiments employing vignettes. The findings revealed that, when both responsibility and consequences were high, a simple perfunctory apology was preferred over no apology and an “elaborate” apology resulted in the least negative repercussions for the offender (Darby & Schlenker, 1982). In this regard, an elaborate apology leads to the offender being punished less, blamed less, liked more, evaluated less negatively, viewed as genuinely sorry and forgiven more (Darby & Schlenker, 1982). Therefore, in circumstances where the offence is serious and the offender is highly responsible, it can be said that an apology will be more likely to be rejected if it is perceived as incomplete by the recipient, leading to greater negative consequences on the offender’s part and a lesser chance of forgiveness.

Interestingly, a study by Ohbuchi and colleagues (1989), which involved undergraduate students participating in two hypothetical situations, revealed that as the seriousness of the predicament increased the greater the desire in the victim to receive an apology. Moreover, the more severe the harm was, the more extensive the apology needed to be in order to mitigate feelings of anger and aggression in the victim (Ohbuchi et al., 1989). It can therefore be suggested that when an apology is proffered in response to a serious predicament and is not considered to be complex enough, it is more likely that the victim will respond with aggressive behaviour toward the offender subsequently leading to a greater likelihood that such an apology would be rejected in these circumstances.

Overall, both Darby and Schlenker (1982) and Schlenker and Darby (1981) proposed that an apology should contain an explicit statement of apology (i.e., “I’m sorry), an expression of remorse and offer of help or reparation in their conceptualisation of a complete or elaborate apology, with Schlenker & Darby (1981) suggesting an additional component of requesting forgiveness. In contrast, Ohbuchi and colleagues (1989) proposed that an extensive or complex apology consists of an explanation or account, acceptance of responsibility and consideration for

the victim. Such a contradiction provides support for the notion that there is little consensus regarding which components constitute what is considered to be a complete apology.

In an attempt to establish which components are necessary for an apology to have a positive impact on victim behaviour, Scher and Darley (1997) conducted a study which involved 32 university students responding to 8 possible scenarios, each of which involved an apology with a different combination of apologetic strategies. The study found that when an expression of responsibility, promise of forbearance and offer of repair were all absent from an apology it was seen as least appropriate or least acceptable and consequently the offender was blamed more, perceived as unapologetic and more likely to be sanctioned (Scher & Darley, 1997). From these findings similarities can be drawn, with Darby and Schlenker (1982) and Schlenker and Darby (1981) both proposing an offer of help or reparation as a necessary component, in addition to Ohbuchi and colleagues (1989) suggesting that an acceptance of responsibility must be present. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is some consistency in the literature suggesting that an expression of responsibility (Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Scher & Darley, 1997) and offer of repair (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Scher & Darley, 1997; Schlenker & Darby, 1981) are necessary components for an apology to be perceived as complete. As such, when event severity and offender responsibility are both high, it is likely that an apology which does not incorporate these two components will be perceived as incomplete and as a consequence there is a greater likelihood that the apology will be rejected in such circumstances.

#### *Apology Characteristics - Timing, Spontaneity and Sincerity*

In addition to factors such as responsibility and severity, it can be said that circumstances surrounding the receipt of an apology, such as whether it was spontaneous, immediate and sincere as opposed to coerced, delayed and insincere, also influence the likelihood of whether an

apology will be rejected. Specifically, the timing of an apology is said to influence its effectiveness, whereby, the longer someone waits to offer an apology the less likely that it will be accepted (Tavuchis, 1991, as cited in Petrucci, 2002). However, in the case of more serious and personal offences, Petrucci (2002) suggests that an apology is more likely to be accepted if the offender waits to proffer it, based on the finding that victims are generally more willing to participate in Victim Offender Mediation as the time after the offence increases (Wyrick & Costanzo, 1999). Although there is limited research exploring the link between timing and apology effectiveness, some attempts have been made to determine the effect of time on forgiveness. Research suggests that avoidance and revenge behaviours, which may lead to apology rejection, actually diminish over time (McCullough et al., 2003). More importantly, Frantz and Bennis (2005) were able to find convincing evidence that delayed apologies are more effective and thus more likely to be accepted in both real life and hypothetical situations.

The study by Frantz and Bennis (2005) involved university students across two experiments, with the first experiment involving completion of a questionnaire in relation to a real life conflict and the second experiment involving a hypothetical conflict, in which an apology was offered at one of three different conditions (i.e., immediate, delayed or no apology). The results showed that victims felt they had more time to be heard and understood by the offender if an apology was offered later in the conflict as opposed to immediately after, in which case the victim would perceive the offender as not fully knowing or understanding that what they did was wrong or the full extent of the consequences (Frantz & Bennis, 2005). This finding corresponds to theory proposed by Lazare (2004), who suggests that time is needed after a serious transgression for the offender to realise the extent of the harm or damage caused and to understand the consequences and impact of their behaviour on the victim. Importantly, Lazare (2004) also suggests that there is a possibility that a delayed apology is perceived by the victim as

a means to manipulate the situation, whereby, the offender hopes that with time the consequences of the offence have been mitigated. Therefore, it can be concluded that immediate apologies are more likely to be accepted in the case of minor transgressions (Tavuchis, 1991, as cited in Petrucci, 2002), however, in the case of serious and personal conflicts a delayed apology may be more likely to be accepted (Frantz & Bennis, 2005; Lazare, 2004; Petrucci, 2002). In this regard, as the seriousness of the offence increases, more time is needed until an apology is offered in order for the offender to fully realise and understand the consequences of their behaviour.

The effectiveness of an apology is not only influenced by the time at which it is offered but also depends on whether the apology is made prior to an accusation of guilt being made (i.e. spontaneous) or after an accusation has been made (i.e. coerced) (Petrucci, 2002). A study by Weiner and colleagues (1991), investigated the effect of confession on victim forgiveness and perceptions of the offender across four experiments. In the fourth experiment, 65 university students were asked to read two offence scenarios, which ended with one of three different types of confession; denial of the act, confession after accusation (i.e. coerced) and spontaneous confession. The confession employed in the study consisted of an admission of responsibility, a statement of "I'm sorry", an expression of regret and an offer of reparation, similar to that of a complete apology. It was found that, those who received a spontaneous confession viewed the offender as more trustworthy and moral and they expressed greater sympathy and forgiveness towards them, however, those who received a coerced confession perceived the offender to be more motivated by guilt and more concerned with impression management (Weiner et al., 1991). Such findings are contrary to those of Risen and Gilovich (2007) who found that recipients of a laboratory simulated apology responded similarly to both spontaneous and coerced apologies, in the presence of an observer. Moreover, both a spontaneous and coerced apology were preferred

over no apology suggesting that recipients felt that they should accept both types of apology in order to be perceived favourably by others (Risen & Gilovich, 2007). Therefore, it can be said that, in the presence of others, recipients will respond with acceptance to both a coerced and spontaneous apology (Risen & Gilovich, 2007), however, in other circumstances the recipient will be more likely to reject an apology if it is coerced by way of an accusation of guilt, as opposed to being offered voluntarily (Weiner et al., 1991).

Another possible factor influencing apology rejection has been highlighted in the literature on apology and forgiveness which proposes that an apology needs to be perceived as sincere or genuine for it to be accepted by the recipient (Gold & Weiner, 2000; Scheff, 1998; Schmitt et al., 2004; Zeichmeister et al., 2004). From a social psychology perspective, an apology needs to be sincere to signify to the victim that the offender has committed an immoral act but will not behave in this manner in future (Gold & Weiner, 2000). Research findings suggest that an apology needs to be interpreted as sincere to make forgiveness more likely (Zeichmeister et al., 2004) and to allow the victim to make favourable attributions about the offender (Schmitt et al., 2004). Furthermore, it is proposed that a genuine apology should express shame about the offence and that allows the victim to see the offender's "human side" thus creating a social bond between them which is a precursor to forgiveness (Scheff, 1998). It has also been found that an apology should acknowledge the offence through admission, but there needs to be some efforts to make amends or to pay for what has been done (Schmitt et al., 2004; Zeichmeister et al., 2004). Building on this point, Schmitt and colleagues (2004) found convincing evidence that an offer of compensation may be the most effective component in communicating sincerity because it implies conceptually and psychologically that all other components are present, including an admission of fault/damage, an expression of remorse and request for pardon. Therefore, it can be said that an apology is more likely to be rejected in circumstances where it is perceived as

insincere by the recipient. In this regard, an apology needs to contain efforts to compensate or make amends for the offence to avoid rejection and unforgiveness (Schmitt et al., 2004; Zeichmeister et al., 2004).

### *Victim Characteristics*

*Age.* In an attempt to address the factors that influence whether an apology will be rejected, the researcher reviewed literature examining the circumstances in which forgiveness would be more likely after receipt of an apology or other restorative response. Specifically, forgiveness is said to be influenced by characteristics of the offended person, therefore, the factors of age, gender, religion and personality are discussed in relation to the likelihood of forgiveness (Mullet, Houdbine, Laumonier, & Girard, 1998). Age in particular, has proven to be an influential factor on levels of forgiveness in those who receive an apology, with a developmental model of forgiveness established which proposes that forgiveness changes as a function of age in accordance with the individual's level of moral development (Azar, Mullet, & Vinsonneau, 1999). Support for the developmental model of forgiveness originated from an early study by Enright, Santos and Al-Mabuk (1989, as cited in Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000) which examined forgiveness in response to hypothetical dilemmas across two experiments involving a total of 119 children, adolescents, university students and adults.

The results suggested that for those participants considered children (aged 9 and 12 years), apology was considered extremely important and a necessary element to forgiveness especially in terms of compensation and restitution (Enright et al., 1989, as cited in Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). With age, however, forgiveness seemed more likely with adolescents (aged 15 years) being primarily concerned with pressure from others to forgive and the university students considering forgiveness important for restoring social harmony (Enright et al., 1989, as cited in Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Finally, those in the adult age group exhibited forgiveness

that was unconditional, which did not depend upon other circumstances such as an apology (Enright et al., 1989, as cited in Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Similar findings are reported by Girard and Mullet (1997), who found that elderly participants (74-96 years) were more likely to forgive in the absence of an apology than the adolescent group (15-17 years) were to forgive in the presence of an apology, which consisted of an expression of remorse and request for forgiveness (Girard & Mullet, 1997). Furthermore, adolescents were more concerned with the attitudes of others and restoration of harmony than both the adult and elderly groups (Girard & Mullet, 1997). Therefore, given that forgiveness increases with age it can be said that with decreasing age, there is a greater likelihood that an apology will be rejected. In this regard, children would be most likely to reject an apology especially if it did not offer some form of reparation (Enright et al., 1989, as cited in Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000), however, those in the adolescent to adult age bracket may have a lesser propensity to forgive hence a greater likelihood to reject an apology but respond with forgiveness and acceptance because they are concerned with damaging the relationship or what others may think (Enright et al., 1989; Girard & Mullet, 1997).

Contrary to the findings of Enright and colleagues (1989, as cited in Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000) and Girard and Mullet (1997), Sumner (2006) found that older age groups (50-69 years) were significantly less forgiving than younger age groups (20-29 years). The study employed two hypothetical scenarios and asked 100 participants to rate their perceptions of apology, true sorrow and likelihood of forgiveness (Sumner, 2006). In view of the findings, Sumner (2006) proposed that such a trend was related to the severity of the offence scenario, with the older participants rating the offence more seriously than the younger groups. Building on these findings, Slocum and colleagues (2006) found that older participants (41-58 years) were less likely to perceive true sorrow or accept an apology than younger participants (26-40 years)

in response to a serious wrongdoing committed by their intimate partner. Overall, these findings suggest that as the offence becomes more serious there is a lesser propensity for the victim to forgive the offender and perceive true sorrow or an apology in their response, with increasing age (Slocum et al., 2006; Sumner, 2006). As such, older age brackets would be more likely to reject an apology in response to a serious transgression, however, the opposite is true for minor transgressions with older age groups being less likely to reject an apology, given that they are considered unconditional forgivers (Enright et al., 1989, as cited in Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Girard & Mullet, 1997).

*Gender.* Research exploring the influence of gender on forgiveness is said to be somewhat contradictory with some research suggesting that gender influences forgiveness and others finding that it does not (Slocum et al., 2006). Research by both Allan and colleagues (2006) and Kaminer and colleagues (2001) found that women are significantly less forgiving than men in situations of human rights violations. Of most importance is the study by Allan et al. (2006) which explored the difference between forgiving in four types of restorative responses; excuses, guilt admissions, apology and true sorrow. Although the study did not yield a significant result indicating that gender influenced victim's forgiveness depending on the type of restorative response offered, it was found that females were less likely to believe that the wrongdoer was truly sorry across all responses (Allan et al., 2006).

On the contrary, Slocum and colleagues (2006) and Girard and Mullet (1997) failed to find a significant difference between gender and levels of forgiveness. Although, Slocum et al. (2006) did find that females were less likely to perceive apology and true sorrow compared with males, this result was not significant. Interestingly, Girard and Mullet (1997) found that men were more concerned with the attitudes of others compared with females. Overall it can be suggested that, although the finding was not significant in all studies, females seem to be less

forgiving based on the finding that they are less likely to perceive a response as an apology and are less concerned with what other people think (Girard & Mullet, 1997; Slocum et al., 2006). It can therefore be proposed that women would be more likely to reject an apology based on the finding that they are generally less forgiving than men in response to serious transgressions, such as human rights violations (Allan et al., 2006; Kaminer et al., 2001), because they are less likely to perceive a response as an apology, less likely to perceive that the offender is truly sorry and less concerned with the attitudes of others (Allan et al., 2006; Girard & Mullet, 1997; Slocum et al., 2006).

Speculating on the lack of consistency between the studies, it can be said that both Allan and colleagues (2006) and Kaminer and colleagues (2001) were able to find a significant relationship between gender and forgiveness based on the notion that the majority of females in their samples were actually secondary victims, whereby, the transgression had been inflicted on members of their family and not them personally. Given that the focus of this literature review is to look at the reasons why recipients (i.e., those who have personally experienced the wrongdoing) reject an apology, it is beyond the scope of this review to discuss the likelihood of apology rejection in secondary victims, although research in the area suggests that secondary victims may be less forgiving and hence more likely to reject an apology (see, e.g., Cooney, 2007). Future research should, however, investigate the two genders separately to gain insight into the differential processes of apology and forgiveness in males and females based on recommendations from Allan and colleagues (2006).

*Religion.* It has been established in the literature on forgiveness that those who are considered religious, value forgiveness more and have a greater willingness to forgive compared with non-religious individuals (Mullet et al., 1998; Subkoviak et al., 1995; Enright et al., 1989, as cited in Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000). Such research, however, is concerned with forgiveness in

general and there has been little effort to explore transgression specific forgiveness, which is said to be influenced by social-cognitive variables such as apology (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). In religious writings, however, apology is often referred to as repentance and involves similar behaviours to that required of a sincere apology including confession, humility, remorse, forbearance and reparation (Lazare, 2004).

In their research, Slocum and colleagues (2006) found that those with low religious belief were less likely to perceive true sorrow in a response and were less forgiving compared to those high in religious belief, however the results were not significant. Similarly, Mullet and colleagues (1998) did find some evidence that those high in religious belief and religious practice were less likely to seek revenge and more likely to forgive the offender. Furthermore, those high in religious belief and practice were more concerned with whether they received an apology from the offender and thus were more able to forgive when an apology was present (Mullet et al., 1998). Focusing on specific religions, both Jews and Christians consider apology or repentance as a prerequisite to forgiveness and despite their religion preaching the importance of forgiveness, some people are either unable or unwilling to forgive unless they receive an apology or repentance from the offender (Lazare, 2004). Remarkably, in Judaism and Hinduism victims are actually discouraged from forgiving an offender unless they show repentance or apologise, especially for serious offences, and there are strict rules which define when forgiveness can occur (Rye et al., 2000). These findings suggest that religion may encourage people to forgive and may create a greater willingness for people to forgive, however, religion itself does not provide the mechanisms for forgiveness to be achieved (McCullough & Worthington, 1999). In this regard, an apology in the form of repentance may be necessary before those who are religiously affiliated forgive an offender in response to a serious transgression. Therefore, when an apology is offered and does not constitute repentance (i.e., expressing remorse, an admission of responsibility,

promise of forbearance and acts of reparation), forgiveness is less likely to occur and subsequently there is a greater chance that the apology will be rejected.

*Personality.* Literature on apology and forgiveness has demonstrated that those with a narcissistic personality are less forgiving and have different perceptions of apology than those who are not (Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkell, 2004; Eaton, Struthers, Shomrony, & Santelli, 2007; McCullough, Emmons, Kilpatrick, & Mooney, 2003). In research by Jordan, Spencer, Zanna, Hoshino-Browne and Correll (2003), three groups of 57, 48 and 40 undergraduate students participated across three experiments respectively, it was found that those with high explicit and low implicit self esteem were more likely to behave in a defensive manner and were also highly narcissistic. In their study, explicit self esteem referred to those conscious and deliberate evaluations of self, which were measured through self-report on the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale, whereas, implicit self esteem was defined as unintentional evaluations of self that occur outside of awareness and were measured using the Implicit Associations Test, which measures the time taken to associate positive and negative concepts to self (Jordan et al., 2003). In a study by Eaton and colleagues (2007) it was revealed that those with low implicit and high explicit self esteem (i.e., defensive self esteem) were less forgiving when they received an apology and that the apology actually increased the likelihood of revenge and avoidance behaviours in these individuals (Eaton et al., 2007). Similarly, Exline and colleagues (2004) found that those with highly narcissistic personality (i.e., defensive self esteem) had a lower propensity to forgive in response to both hypothetical and real life offences. Moreover, it was also found that those with defensive self esteem were more likely to perceive the apology as confirmation that the transgressor had offended them and less likely to perceive remorse from the apology (Eaton et al., 2007). Therefore, drawing on these findings it can be said that those with a narcissistic personality (i.e., defensive self esteem) would be more likely to reject an apology,

given that apologies do not have their intended effect on these individuals leading to a lesser likelihood of forgiveness.

In other research on personality it has been found that narcissistic individuals are more likely to report a greater number of interpersonal transgressions in their everyday lives, are quicker to take offence to ambiguous situations (McCullough et al., 2003; Exline et al., 2004), are more likely to insist on some form of repayment (i.e., apology or concessions) before forgiving, are more likely to view unconditional forgiveness (i.e., forgiveness without repayment) as unfavourable, are less likely to believe that forgiveness is appropriate and are less likely to report receiving an apology (Exline et al., 2004). Overall, these findings suggest that narcissistic individuals would be more likely to reject an apology based on the notion that receiving an apology actually makes these individuals less forgiving and more motivated by revenge and retaliation, in addition to the fact that an apology is perceived simply as confirmation of the offence and does not encourage the victim to empathise with the offender through the expression of remorse (Eaton et al., 2007).

In conclusion, a search of the literature revealed virtually no research focusing specifically on apology rejection. A possible reason for the dearth of literature could be that recipients of an apology are generally reluctant to respond with explicit rejection, possibly due to the socially constraining effect of apologies and the perceived risk of incurring negative consequences (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994; Bennett & Earwaker, 1994; Risen & Gilovich, 2007). Research on apology rejection suggests that the desire to reject and the likelihood of actual rejection is influenced by two factors, offender responsibility and event severity (Bennett & Earwaker, 1994). Furthermore, there is a consistent finding that when both event severity and offender responsibility are high, an apology is more likely to be rejected if it is perceived as incomplete by the recipient, whereby, the apology needs to contain two important components,

an expression of responsibility (Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Scher & Darley, 1997) and offer of repair (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Scher & Darley, 1997; Schlenker & Darby, 1981).

Looking at the literature on apology in general, in addition to literature exploring the link between apology and forgiveness, suggests that a number of factors may influence apology rejection, including circumstances surrounding the receipt of an apology, such as timing, spontaneity and sincerity, as well as characteristics of the victim, including age, gender, religion and personality. The present review of the literature has revealed three directions for future research. Most importantly, further research is needed to establish apology as an operational definition. Secondly, researchers need to explore real life experiences in order to gain insight into the occurrence of apology rejection in everyday life, given that the majority of research thus far has employed hypothetical and laboratory simulated offences. Thirdly, research needs to investigate the unique effect of different components of apology on the likelihood of apology rejection, given that research has mainly looked at the effect of different combinations of components without looking at the effect of those components on their own. Lastly, future research should explore the influence of receiving an apology in public versus private settings in attempt to establish whether people are more likely to reject an apology in the presence of others (i.e., publicly) or on their own (i.e., privately), given that the literature thus far has not distinguished between the use of a public versus private setting in their research.

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Running Head: THE AUTHENTIC APOLOGY THEORY AND APOLOGY REJECTION

Exploration Of The Authentic Apology Theory: An Examination Of The Reasons Why People  
Reject An Apology  
Stephenie Bruce

A report submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Award of Bachelor  
of Arts Honours in Psychology, Faculty of Computing, Health and Science.

Edith Cowan University.

Submitted: October 2008.

I declare that this written assignment is my own work and does not include:

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### Abstract

In a study by Slocum and colleagues (2006) a theory of apologetic behaviour, named the Authentic Apology (AA) theory, was developed. This theory comprised three components of apologetic behaviour; affect, affirmation and action. To date there are no published studies which have attempted to test and develop this theory. Therefore, the aim of the present study was to explore the AA theory in a different context, based on the fact that Slocum et al. (2006) had explored the difference between apology and true sorrow with reference to intimate relationships. In doing so, the present study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the reasons why people deem an apology unacceptable and subsequently respond with rejection. The study involved semi structured interviews with seven participants, whereby, participants' described their personal experience of a serious transgression. A grounded theory analysis revealed the presence of four strong themes, two of which directly corresponded to the action and affirmation components of the AA theory. The remaining themes were also found to be consistent with the findings of Slocum et al. (2006), although not directly related to the AA theory. It was concluded from the present study, that the findings of Slocum et al. (2006) are replicable to different contexts (i.e., apology rejection) and to various offence situations, suggesting the generalisability of the AA theory in research.

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Submitted: October 2008

## An Exploration Of The Authentic Apology Theory: An Examination Of The Reasons Why People Reject An Apology

Apologies in everyday life are commonplace and they are frequently offered in response to trivial matters, such as bumping into someone on the train or arriving late to work. In theory, when such predicaments occur, it is proposed that a corrective interchange takes place, whereby, an apology is proffered by the offender in an attempt to re-establish social equilibrium, correct for the offence situation and to restore the identity of both victim and offender (Goffman, 1955). Therefore, in accordance with Goffman's theory (1955) apology is said to provide a social function given its ability to resolve conflicts between individuals. One of the most important functions of apology, however, is its ability to increase forgiveness in the recipient, which in turn leads to better physical health and psychological well being (Kaminer, Stein, Mbanga & Zungu-Dirwayi, 2001; McCullough & Worthington, 1995; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Petrucci, 2002). With reference to the definition of forgiveness, an apology is said to compel victims toward more constructive behaviours, such as reconciliation, rather than increasing their motivation to seek revenge or retaliation in response to the wrongful behaviour (Allan, 2007; McCullough & Worthington, 1995; McCullough et al., 1997). These positive influences have lead to apology becoming increasingly important in the areas of psychology, law and justice.

Research findings in the area of psychology promote the benefits of apology and it has been demonstrated that, through its ability to bring about forgiveness, an apology may mitigate feelings of anger and aggression in victims (Ohbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989; Zeichmeister, Garcia, Romero, & Vas, 2004), leading to a reduction in anxiety and depression (Kaminer et al., 2001; McCullough & Worthington, 1995) and an increased sense of closure about the offence (Baumeister, Stillwell & Wotman, 1990; Zeichmeister & Romero, 2002). In the area of law and justice, apology is important for the proponents of therapeutic jurisprudence (e.g., Wexler, 2008)

and restorative justice (e.g., Braithwaite, 2007) as apology is said to maximise the positive therapeutic consequences of the judicial system, whilst also restoring relationships and bringing about reparation of harm (Petrucci, 2002). More recently, apology has become prominent in the area of civil litigation, whereby, legislation has been reformed to allow wrongdoers to offer apologies to their victims without such statements being used as an admission of liability against them (Allan, 2007).

Despite a large body of research on apology and its influence on forgiveness, the question that still remains is how to operationally define apology? So far the majority of research has been conducted within the realms of social psychology, therefore, apology is often referred to as a remedial strategy and is compared with other strategies, such as excuses, justifications and refusals (Allan, Allan, Kaminer, & Stein, 2006; Gonzales, Pederson, Manning, & Wetter, 1990). In this regard, an apology is said to acknowledge and take full responsibility for the predicament and its consequences (Gonzales, Manning, & Haugen, 1992). In addition, many researchers have put forth what they consider to be essential components of an apology including an expression of remorse, request for forgiveness, promise of forbearance and some offer of reparation, restitution or compensation (Darby & Schlenker, 1982; Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Scher & Darley, 1997; Schlenker & Darby, 1981; Schmitt, Gollwitzer, Förster, & Montada, 2004), however, there is little consensus regarding these suggested components.

This apparent lack of definition is not bound to the field of psychology but also extends to the area of law, whereby, apology is yet to be established as an operationally defined construct under Australian legislation. In New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory a wrongdoer may proffer an apologetic statement which contains an acknowledgement of responsibility and expression of regret without the statement being used in evidence as an admission of liability, however, in all other states only an expression of regret is protected by law

(Allan, 2007). Given that apology functions to increase forgiveness in victims, in turn leading to better physical and psychological well being, as well as more constructive behaviours such as reconciliation, it is important to establish apology as an operationally defined construct which can be used in the areas of psychology, law and justice.

In an attempt to establish what constitutes an apology, Slocum, Allan and Allan (2006) developed a theory of apologetic behaviour named the Authentic Apology (AA) theory. The AA theory was developed following recommendations made by Allan and colleagues (2006) that an operational definition of apology should be established in future research. The AA theory was developed by Slocum et al. (2006) using a grounded theory approach and involved an investigation of the difference between apology and true sorrow within intimate relationships. The AA theory comprises of three components: affirmation, affect and action, which are said to operate along a continuum measuring the degree to which the offender has a self-focus or self-other focus. According to the model, the first component, affirmation, is said to constitute the verbal statements made by the offender in an attempt to admit to and acknowledge the wrongdoing whilst also providing explanation. Secondly, according to the affect component, the wrongdoer is said to provide their emotional response to the offence whereby the offender expresses regret, shame, remorse, sorrow and/or guilt. Lastly, the action component consists of behavioural attempts by the offender to restore the offence situation and to address the victim's needs through moves such as reparation, restitution and/or compensation. After exploring the difference between apology and true sorrow, Slocum et al. (2006) proposed that each of these components range in the degree to which the offender focuses on him/herself only (i.e., self-focus) and the degree to which they focus on themselves, as well as the needs of the victim (i.e., self-other focus).

To date there has only been one attempt to further develop the AA theory in research. In an unpublished study by Sumner (2006), it was demonstrated that experimentally manipulating the components of the AA theory influences how participants interpret a statement offered by a wrongdoer in a hypothetical situation. An alternative method for further developing, testing and modifying substantive theories, which are derived from grounded theory, is through continuous comparison with new data (Glaser, 1978). However, no published research has endeavoured to do this, therefore, the aim of the present study was to explore the AA theory by examining why people reject apologies. This is in contrast to Slocum et al. (2006) who focused on the difference between apology and true sorrow, in other words, the participants in their study were satisfied that what they had received was an apology and they were asked to consider whether what they had received was an indication of true sorrow. It is anticipated that participants may provide different information if they are asked why they did not accept a statement that was offered as an apology. Hence, it was important that the present study explored situations where a response, which is offered as an apology, is not actually perceived by the recipient to constitute an apology and is therefore deemed to be unacceptable and subsequently rejected.

Currently, there are only two studies which investigate apology rejection specifically, which are those conducted by Bennett and Dewberry (1994) and Bennett and Earwaker (1994). Aside from these studies little attempt has been made to explore the phenomenon of apology rejection and more importantly the factors which influence its occurrence. In their research, Bennett and Earwaker (1994) were able to establish that the likelihood of apology rejection is influenced by two factors, perceived offender responsibility and event severity. In the study, offender responsibility referred to the degree to which the offender was responsible for the predicament (i.e., accident vs. intentional), whereas, event severity referred to the seriousness of the offence (i.e., level of harm or damage) (Bennett & Earwaker, 1994). It was found that both

factors, offender responsibility and event severity, influenced the likelihood of apology rejection, however, the likelihood of explicit apology rejection was found to be remarkably small (Bennett & Earwaker, 1994). Similarly, Bennett and Dewberry (1994) discovered in their research that the likelihood of apology rejection is extremely rare and that people are generally reluctant to respond with explicit rejection, possibly due to the socially constraining effect that apologies have for their recipients. Based on this finding they speculated that people experience immense pressure to accept apologies to avoid the risk of incurring negative attributions and consequences should they choose to reject it (Bennett & Dewberry, 1994).

Despite Bennett and Earwaker (1994) and Bennett and Dewberry (1994) providing invaluable insight into the reasons and processes underlying apology rejection, the research was limited in that they both employed hypothetical scenarios and role playing, they only explored the effect of two apology components; remorse and reparation, and they only established the influence of two factors on apology; severity and responsibility. It has been suggested in research on apology in general, as well as research on the link between apology and forgiveness, that a number of other factors may also influence the likelihood of apology rejection. The research suggests that circumstances surrounding the apology, such as timing (Frantz & Bennis, 2005; Lazare, 2004), spontaneity (Risen & Gilovich, 2007; Weiner, Graham, Peter, & Zmuidinas, 1991) and sincerity or genuineness (Gold & Weiner, 2000; Scheff, 1998; Schmitt et al., 2004; Zeichmeister et al., 2004) influence the likelihood of apology acceptance and forgiveness, therefore, may also influence the likelihood of apology rejection. Furthermore, it has been suggested that characteristics of the victim, such as age (Enright et al., 1989, as cited in Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Girard & Mullet, 1997; Slocum et al., 2006; Sumner, 2006), gender (Allan et al., 2006; Girard & Mullet, 1997; Kaminer et al., 2001; Slocum et al., 2006), religion (Enright et al., 1989, as cited in Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Lazare, 2004; Mullet, Houdbine, Laumonier, &

Girard, 1998; Subkoviak et al., 1995). and personality (Eaton, Struthers, Shomrony, & Santelli, 2007; Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkell, 2004; McCullough, Emmons, Kilpatrick, & Mooney, 2003) may influence the likelihood of forgiveness hence may also influence the likelihood of apology rejection.

The aim of the present study was to explore the AA theory in a different context. In other words, the present research explored the AA theory in the context of apology rejection by examining the reasons why people reject an apology. Therefore, the research question being examined was; which factors influence whether an apology is deemed to be unacceptable and subsequently rejected by the recipient. Participants in the present study were required to consider a situation where they had received a response which they perceived did not constitute an apology thus was unacceptable. This is in contrast to the aim of Slocum et al. (2006) who explored the difference between apology and true sorrow, whereby, participants were asked to consider whether they perceived true sorrow from a response which they perceived to be an apology. It was anticipated that the present study could provide support for the AA theory if it was established that the reasons for apology rejection are consistent with those predicted by the theory (i.e., lack of action). However, it was also anticipated that the present study may be able to further develop the AA theory if it was established that the reasons for apology rejection were beyond the reasons predicted or proposed by the theory (i.e., timing, spontaneity, sincerity).

## Methodology

### *Design*

The present study employed a qualitative research design to explore the occurrence of apology rejection in real life offence situations, in an attempt to further develop the AA theory. The researcher chose to adopt a phenomenological approach in order to explore the unique and individual experiences of participants, with emphasis on that person's perspective and their interpretation of meaning (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Using this approach, participants are encouraged to share their personal experience through the use of open-ended and non-directive questions (Willig, 2001). This enabled the participant to provide a comprehensive description of the situation whilst also elaborating on what the experience meant for them (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Therefore, the phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to gain real world perspective on the reasons why people reject an apology, by exploring the meaning of people's lived experiences, which would not be feasible using hypothetical scenarios or vignettes (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

### *Participants*

The study involved a total of 7 participants, which fell short of the expected quota of between 10 and 15 participants. The participants were aged between 27 and 87 years (see Appendix A) and were recruited through community networking, whereby, friends, family and colleagues of the researcher were informed of the study and asked to pass on the relevant information to potential participants. Additional participants were invited through the distribution of a research flyer (see Appendix B), which was displayed on community, shopping centre and university notice boards. The use of the research flyer proved to be ineffective, as all participants were recruited through community networking. Of the sample, one participant was male and the remaining six were female (see Appendix A). To meet selection criteria for the study, participants

needed to be at least 18 years of age, preferably Anglo-Australian and have rejected an apology which they deemed unacceptable.

### *Procedure*

Participants in the study were interviewed individually by a female researcher who was completing an Honours degree in Psychology. Prior to commencement of the interview, participants were provided with an information letter (see Appendix C) regarding the study and were ensured that the information they gave would remain completely confidential. Participants were then asked to provide their written consent for the interview by signing the consent form (see appendix D). The interview was conducted using a semi structured format (see appendix E), whereby, the interviewer had a set of pre-determined questions and also employed the use of prompts. However, taking into account that all of the offence situations being described by participants were of a very serious nature (see Appendix A), the researcher found it useful to move away from the set questions and to encourage participants to elaborate on key points that were raised during the interview. Interviews lasted between 24 and 53 minutes and were conducted in a private room on the university campus or at a location deemed safe for both the researcher and the participant (i.e., their home or workplace). All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and once transcribed recordings were erased from the recording device and the researcher's computer. Digital copies of interview transcripts were then saved to a password protected file on the researcher's personal computer.

### *Data Collection*

Data collection commenced on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 2008 and was finalised by the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 2008. The collection of data took longer than anticipated due to the difficulty in recruiting potential participants. Data collection involved semi structured interviews with participants, where participants were asked to describe a situation in which they had received an

apology that they felt was unacceptable. In order to discern whether severity influenced apology rejection, participants were asked to rate the seriousness of the event on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being very serious and 1 being not very serious. Participants' ratings of offence situations were clustered around very serious, with all responses being between 8 and 10 (see Appendix A). Participants were also asked to rate their level of religious belief and practice on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being consistent practice/belief and 1 being not at all. During data collection, however, it was revealed from participants' responses that religion was not a key factor influencing apology rejection, thus this question was omitted and participants were only asked to give a rating of severity. In an attempt to ensure that information collected from participants during interviews was highly accurate and reliable, the researcher employed the use of a digital voice recorder rather than note-taking or relying upon memory (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005).

### *Ethical Considerations*

To ensure the confidentiality of participants in the study, each participant was identified by a number which simply represented the order in which they had been interviewed. For example, the first participant to be interviewed was recognised by P#1 and the second P#2 and so on. Given the serious nature of the apology situations described by all participants, the researcher felt it was necessary to ask participants whether they felt that they needed to talk to someone after participating in the study, in which case they would be provided with a list of counselling services (see Appendix F).

### *Data Analysis*

The analysis of data in the present study followed a grounded theory approach, which enabled the researcher to identify themes that arose throughout the collection of data (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Using this method of analysis the researcher was able to start drawing similarities between participants' responses and to categorise the interrelating themes

into possible reasons for apology rejection (Creswell, Hanson, Clark, & Morales, 2007). In addition, using the grounded theory method of analysis, the researcher was able to explore the AA theory by drawing comparisons between the emerging themes in the present study and the findings from Slocum et al.'s (2006) research (Wuest et al., 2006). In other words, the researcher was able to determine whether the reasons for apology rejection being described by participants were consistent with the AA theory or were beyond the scope of the AA theory thus providing rationale for further development.

Immediately after completion of each interview, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. In accordance with grounded theory analysis, transcriptions were initially read to identify any significant statements, sentences or quotes, which could provide understanding into the overall reasons for apology rejection and could be collapsed into broader themes (Creswell et al., 2007). In identifying these initial themes, further probing and questioning of particular issues described by participants could be employed in future interviews. Furthermore, this process of analysis enabled the researcher to assess whether saturation had been reached by documenting the emergence of any new themes during data collection (Willig, 2001).

Once data collection had ceased, the researcher analysed each participant's transcript using an open coding process, whereby, each transcript was read several times, line by line, to identify key themes relating to apology rejection (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During the data analysis, the researcher made detailed notes referencing key words and quotes from each participant's transcript, summarizing the key themes in the research (Willig, 2001). This method enabled the researcher to form a list of themes for each participant which were then compared and grouped according to the frequency in which they occurred. For example, those themes stated by four or more participants were categorized as strong, those from three or more participants as moderate and those from two or more participants as weak themes.

## **Results and Interpretation**

The qualitative analysis of participants' responses revealed that there were four strong themes, which provided information regarding participant's reasons for apology rejection. In addition, it was revealed that there were also three moderate themes and four weak themes, however, for the purposes of the research report only the strong themes will be discussed in detail. The remaining themes are summarised in table format, indicating which participants stated this theme (see Appendix G).

### *Action*

One of the most consistent findings in the present study was that participants expressed the importance of the offender doing something or offering something to prove that they were sorry. This theme was named action because it closely resembled the action component of Slocum et al.'s (2006) AA theory. According to the AA theory, action involves behavioural attempts by the offender to correct and restore the offence situation through moves such as reparations, thoughtful deeds, repayment, replacement or restitution (Slocum et al., 2006). Of the seven participants, five (#1, 3, 4, 6, 7) indicated that the apologies they received were not acceptable and subsequently rejected them because of the lack of an action component. This theme is summarised in the following quotes:

"You have to pay, you have to do something. The words are not strong enough" (P#1; 232).

"Apology can be initially, 'I'm sorry' but then actions and other words... give me some deeds and actions and kind of you prove it..." (P#3; 286-291).

“Actions speak louder than words....if you were truly remorseful and sorry, you wouldn’t be in their face at all, you’d go away, disappear” (P#4; 87-90).

Of the remaining two participants (#6, 7), it was particularly interesting that P#6 indicated that the type of action that he desired from the apology was reform, which involved the offender actually changing his behaviour. This finding is in accordance with Slocum et al.’s (2006) research, whereby, actions that denote behaviour change are said to constitute evidence that the offender has understood the offence. This finding in the present research is exemplified by the following quote, “So you’ve got nothing from him there and he will carry on going like he is. He’s got to be made to understand... there’s policies to be followed” (P#6; 349).

On the other hand, P#7 indicated the importance of thoughtful deeds (i.e., special treatment) coming from the offender, such as cutting the waiting time for appointments or fitting her daughter in where there is a cancellation (P#7; 275-277). P#7 goes on to describe her disappointment when the offender refused to offer her special treatment, indicating that the lack of action from the offender contributed to P#7 rejecting the apology she received.

The responses of participant’s in the present study are echoed in an assertion by Lazare (1995) who state that “sometimes words are not enough” and that an offer (i.e., financial compensation) or gift or favour (i.e., thoughtful deeds) may supplant the verbal apology because such actions are so symbolic in nature. On this last point, P#4 actually asserts that “responsibility comes from actions taken to prevent and restore... any chance in terms of how you can make up, if you’ve broken something or... where you can fix certain things, then fix them” (P#4; 285-294). This statement suggests that an offender can imply that they are responsible for their behaviour by engaging in reparative actions, which indicates the symbolic nature of actions. It can therefore be said that the first theme in the current research corresponds to the action component of Slocum

et al.'s (2006) AA theory, which demonstrates the importance of an offender providing actions, such as thoughtful deeds, restitution, reparation or compensation, to the victim in an attempt to amend the offence situation.

### *Affirmation*

The next most prominent theme in the present study was affirmation, which consisted of three sub themes; responsibility, acknowledgement and explanation. This theme was named after the affirmation component of the AA theory based on the similarities in findings between the present study and Slocum et al.'s (2006) research. In their research, Slocum et al. (2006) discovered that a full apology should contain a statement of "I'm sorry" which is accompanied by three verbal statements; an admission of responsibility (i.e., "I did it"), an acknowledgement of the impact and consequences of the offence (i.e., victim's hurt and suffering) and an explanation as to the reasons why the offence occurred. The following section will discuss each of the three subthemes, responsibility, acknowledgement and explanation separately and will then discuss the findings in relation to Slocum et al.'s (2006) research and the AA theory.

*Responsibility.* The results of the present study revealed that four (P#2, 4, 6, 7) of the seven participants indicated that the possible reason for their apology rejection was due to the fact that the offender had failed to take responsibility for the offence. This subtheme is summarised in the following quotes:

"She never took responsibility for it or anything and she didn't mention the seriousness of it"

(P#2; 122).

“Responsibility is a huge part... they need to accept full responsibility... you can’t keep justifying” (P#4; 275).

“They won’t admit any of this... it could have been anything they reckon... they should say, ‘we’re wrong, we’re sorry’ and they’re not... it’s not acceptable” (P#6; 40, 256-266).

“Things like, that it wasn’t their fault, that it was all human error and it wasn’t negligence...”  
(P#7; 319).

*Acknowledgement.* The second subtheme, acknowledgement, was conveyed by four (P#1, 2, 5, 7) of the seven participants and corresponds to the main theme of affirmation. Participants in the present study expressed the importance of the offender acknowledging the consequences of the offence and the impact that it had on the victim’s life. This subtheme is summarised by the following quotes:

“An apology and sorry would not help me to what I went through. It has to be more... some kind of acknowledgement... so I can look back and say that my suffering and pain was not wasted...”  
(P#1; 169, 174, 234).

“I don’t think he really understood how, how it hurt... I don’t think he got all the ramifications of it” (P#5; 27, 31).

It is interesting that both P#2 and P#7 expressed concern about the long term effects of the offence and a desire for the offender to acknowledge the impact of the wrongful act. For example, P#2 stated that “I think it came too soon after. Before they could consider the long term consequences... I even had to see a psychiatrist about it. He said I had post traumatic stress. And the nightmares, they were just horrible” (P#2; 108-112). Although this finding also corresponds

to the theme of timing, it seems to strongly communicate a theme of acknowledgement in accordance with the affirmation component of Slocum et al.'s (2006) AA theory. In addition, P#7 expressed concern about the risk of scarring and the psychological effects resulting from the offence against her daughter. In response, P#7 indicated her desire for the offender to offer her daughter treatment to reduce the potential scarring (P#7; 269) and to receive counselling for herself about how she can help her daughter overcome the trauma (P#7; 33) as a means of acknowledging the impact of the offence.

*Explanation.* The third subtheme under the affirmation theme, explanation, was expressed by three (P#2, 3, 5) of the seven participants. These participants communicated the desire to receive an explanation from the offender which is said to be a key component of a full apology in accordance with Slocum et al.'s (2006) research. Therefore, although this theme is not considered to be strong in the present study it is highly relevant to the affirmation component of the AA theory. This subtheme is summarised in the following quotes:

“...she didn’t give any explanation as to how or why such a thing could have happened...she just kept saying how sorry she was” (P#2; 137).

“...to me it was a word and it didn’t really mean anything... I wanted the explanation then the sorry... he couldn’t verbalise why he did it... that annoyed me... angered me” (P#3; 162-169).

“I still don’t know why he did it. He’s never tried to explain why, I don’t think he could” (P#5; 125).

The importance of receiving an explanation from the offender was expressed by both the participants in the present study and those in Slocum et al.'s (2006) research. Furthermore,

Slocum et al. (2006) suggested that knowing why the offence occurred may free the victim from any ambiguity and may also lead to the release of anger. Therefore, it is possible that the lack of explanation offered to participants in the present study actually increased their feelings of anger and uncertainty, as expressed by P#3 above, leading to their subsequent rejection of the apology.

From the findings discussed above, it can be concluded that participant's in the present study have expressed the desire to receive an admission of responsibility, acknowledgement and explanation for the offence and have indicated that the apologies they received were not acceptable and subsequently rejected because they lacked one or more of these three statements. This finding is in accordance with the affirmation component of Slocum et al.'s (2006) AA theory and the finding that a full apology is perceived when "I'm sorry" is accompanied by all three statements mentioned above (i.e., responsibility, acknowledgement and explanation).

Moreover, the finding that failing to admit responsibility and/or acknowledge the impact of the offence may influence the likelihood of an apology being deemed unacceptable and consequently rejected, is consistent not only with the affirmation component of the AA theory but also corresponds to other research, which suggests that accepting responsibility and acknowledging the offence are key components of an apology (Gonzales et al., 1990; Gonzales et al., 1992; Ohbuchi et al., 1989; Scher & Darley, 1997; Schmitt et al., 2004; Weiner, Graham, Peter & Zmuidinas, 1991). Therefore, in accordance with the AA theory and other literature, an admission of responsibility for the offence, acknowledgement of the consequences and impact of the offence and an explanation of the reasons why the offence occurred are considered to be important elements of an apology. Hence, when one or more of these statements are absent from the apology, there is an increased likelihood that the apology will be deemed unacceptable and subsequently rejected by the recipient.

*Excuses and Minimisation*

The next theme to be discussed was found to be a consistent theme expressed in four (P#2, 4, 5, 7) of the participants' responses. The main finding was that participants felt that the apology they had received was unacceptable because they perceived that the offender had tried to minimise the offence or had offered them excuses for their behaviour. This theme is demonstrated in the following quotes:

"The anaesthetist just said it was lucky she got oxygen to me otherwise I would have been brain damaged...she said that the excuse of her mother dying and that it's never happened before"

(P#2; 81, 127)

"I think he's always going to find a way to minimise the reality and the extent of what he's done... there can be no 'buts'... it's a straight up apology... don't justify or minimise..." (P#4;

161, 259, 509)

"...it happened so quickly, so his explanation was, I think he was trying to make an excuse"

(P#5; 124)

"You don't want to hear an excuse... it was justification... trying to excuse everything..." (P#7;

398, 410)

In accordance with account theory, an apology is said to acknowledge and take full responsibility for the offence and its consequences, whereas, an excuse is said to acknowledge the offence but at the same time the offender seeks to minimise personal responsibility by citing extenuating circumstances or situational factors (Gonzales et al., 1990; Gonzales et al., 1992). In their research, Slocum et al. (2006) discovered that participants in their study were angered when offered excuses and perceived it as an attempt by the offender to deny responsibility for the

offence altogether. Based on this finding, Slocum et al. (2006) suggested that excuses were actually considered to be aggravating strategies by participants, which contradicts the proposal by account theory that excuses are considered to be mitigating strategies (Gonzales et al., 1990; Gonzales et al., 1992). It can be said that the findings in the present study are consistent with the findings of Slocum et al. (2006) given that all of the participants who perceived excuses from the offender also considered the apology to be unacceptable and subsequently responded with rejection, indicating that the excuses were in fact aggravating. A closer examination of participants' responses reveals that, of those participants who perceived excuses and minimisation from the offender, three participants (P# 2, 4, 7) also perceived that the offender had failed to accept full responsibility for the offence. Therefore, it is possible that these participants perceived excuses as a denial of all responsibility from the offender, rather than mere minimisation of responsibility as suggested by account theorists (Gonzales et al., 1990; Gonzales et al., 1992). This finding, together with the findings of Slocum et al. (2006), suggests that excuses are likely to be considered as aggravating strategies by apology recipients. Furthermore, it can be said that an apology is more likely to be rejected if it contains excuses, based on the finding that excuses are likely to be perceived as an attempt by the offender to deny all responsibility for the offence.

### *Genuineness*

The final theme to be discussed was expressed in four (P#2, 4, 5, 7) of the seven participants' responses and suggests that an apology which is not perceived by the victim to be genuine is more likely to be deemed unacceptable and subsequently rejected. The following quotes represent this theme:

“I didn’t consider the apology to be genuine because I felt it was negligence... I felt that she wasn’t genuine and I didn’t accept it” (P#2; 10, 94).

“Genuine in his terms, yes. Genuine in my terms, no” (P#4; 162).

“I didn’t really believe him because if you love someone you don’t just forget about them like that... didn’t mean anything to me. Didn’t think he meant it” (P#5; 64, 256).

“But all we wanted was a real genuine apology” (P#7; 219).

The above findings are consistent with the research on apology and forgiveness, which suggests that an apology needs to be perceived as genuine or sincere for the victim to forgive the offender (Gold & Weiner, 2000; Scheff, 1998; Schmitt et al., 2004; Zeichmeister et al., 2004). Therefore, the current research demonstrates that when an apology is not perceived to be genuine, it is more likely to be rejected by the recipient and that there is a strong desire for victims to receive an apology which they consider to be genuine.

Further analysis of participants’ responses reveals that the genuineness theme also corresponds to a number of elements in Slocum et al.’s (2006) AA theory. For example, P#5 suggests that you can tell if somebody is genuine by their demeanour and she goes on to state the importance of body language and emotional displays, which she did not receive from the offender (P#5; 175-198). In addition, P#2 also makes reference to the offender’s demeanour, stating that the offender was “too gushing and casual” (P#2; 79), which lead her to perceive that the offender was not genuine and neither was the apology she offered. These findings correspond to the affect component of the AA theory, whereby, participants in Slocum et al.’s (2006) study suggested that an offender who is truly sorry will convey emotion (i.e., remorse, regret or sorrow) through body language and facial expressions. Therefore, a lack of appropriate affect or inability to observe the

offender's demeanour may result in the recipient being unable to assess the offender's genuineness which increases the likelihood of an apology being rejected in such circumstances.

Elaborating on the statement, "genuine in his terms" P#4 states that she perceived that her offender was genuinely sorry for himself because of the time he had missed out on with his daughter, indicating that the offender had a self-focus in accordance with the AA theory. Of particular interest with reference to the action component of the AA theory, is the finding that P#5 and P#7 suggest that a genuine apology should include thoughtful deeds from the offender. For example, P#5 expressed the desire for the offender to make an effort to come and see her, whereas, P#7 expected the offender to make a fuss over her daughter and made reference to the failure to offer something as simple as Panadol to ease her pain. This lack of effort from the offender lead both P#5 and P#7 to perceive that the offender was not genuine and thus they rejected the apology they had received.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of the current study was to explore the AA theory developed by Slocum et al. (2002) in the context of apology rejection. In doing so, the present research investigated which factors influence whether an apology is deemed to be unacceptable and subsequently rejected by the recipient. The results suggest that the most commonly cited reasons for apology rejection, by participants in the present study, are consistent with the findings of Slocum et al. (2006). More specifically, two strong themes in the present research directly correspond to the components of the AA theory; action and affirmation. Therefore, it can be said that both the action and affirmation components of the AA theory are applicable to other contexts, specifically the situation where an apology is deemed unacceptable and subsequently rejected.

It should be noted that the third component of the AA theory, affect, was not a strong theme in the present study, however, there was some evidence to suggest that emotion and demeanour were important in terms of assessing genuineness. This finding is consistent with Slocum et al.'s (2006) research and suggests that non verbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, may be important elements in determining whether an offender is genuinely or truly sorry.

With reference to the literature on apology in general, as well as literature exploring the link between apology and forgiveness, genuineness was found to be a strong theme in the present study, however, other apology characteristics, such as timing and spontaneity, were not strong themes. Although, it can be concluded that they did receive some mention by participants in the current study (see Appendix G). In relation to the victim characteristics of age, gender, religion and personality, these were not present as themes in the current research. However, it is possible that the absence of these factors as themes resulted from the limitations of the sample in the present study.

### *Limitations*

The most significant limitation of the present study was the small sample size. The total number of participants involved in the study was seven, which fell short of the anticipated quota of 10 to 15 participants. Reflecting on the lack of participants, it can be suggested that people felt a reluctance to identify with the research criteria, specifically the need for participants to have rejected an apology. This suggestion is consistent with the findings of both Bennett and Dewberry (1994) and Bennett and Earwaker (1994), who proposed that explicit rejection of an apology is extremely rare and that people are reluctant to respond with rejection due to the perceived risk of incurring negative attributions. The above suggestion is also supported by the finding that none of the participants in the present study were recruited as a result of the research flyer but were in fact acquired through constant liaison with family members and colleagues of the researcher. Unfortunately, due to the small sample size the researcher could not accurately assess whether saturation had been reached, which leaves open the possibility that some existing themes may have come through stronger or that some new themes may have emerged in subsequent interviews.

A second limitation of the present study was the lack of male participants that were involved in the study. Of the total seven participants, only one participant was male. This limitation prevented the researcher drawing comparisons between the two genders to establish whether apology rejection was influenced by different factors for males and females. In addition, the researcher could not draw similarities between the present study and the findings of Slocum et al. (2006) in relation to gender differences.

### *Strengths*

A major strength of the present study was the homogeneity of offence situations described by participants. More specifically, it was found that participants' ratings of seriousness for the

offence situations clustered around the 8 to 10 mark, indicating that all offences were considered to be very serious. Therefore, the present study has an advantage over the previous studies on apology rejection (i.e., Bennett & Dewberry, 1994; Bennett & Earwaker, 1994), which employed the use of hypothetical offence scenarios and role plays relating to minor transgressions.

### *Theoretical Implications*

Essentially, the present study demonstrates that the findings of Slocum et al. (2006) are transferable to different contexts and to various offence situations. In contrast to Slocum et al.'s (2006) research, the present study explored the reasons for apology rejection in relation to a variety of serious transgressions. Therefore, the present findings also demonstrate the generalisability of the AA theory to a small extent, whereby, it has been shown to apply to the context of apology rejection and various offence situations. In addition the present study has implications for account theory, given that both the present study and Slocum et al.'s (2006) research established the aggravating nature of excuses, which contradicts the suggestion by account theorists that excuses are actually mitigating strategies which seek to minimise personal responsibility (Gonzales et al., 1990; Gonzales et al., 1992).

### *Practical Implications*

It is anticipated that the present study may contribute to the development of apology as an operationally defined construct, through the provision of information regarding the reasons for apology rejection which are said to be consistent with the AA theory. Based on the finding that an apology may function to increase forgiveness in victims, leading to better health and psychological well being and more constructive behaviours such as reconciliation (Kaminer et al., 2001; McCullough & Worthington, 1995; McCullough et al., 1997; Petrucci, 2002), it is important that apology is established as an operationally defined construct that can be used in the areas of psychology, law and justice. For example, an operational definition of apology would

enable wrongdoers to offer apologetic statements to their victims without fear of being sued in a civil lawsuit. Alternatively, the AA theory may be used to reconcile close relationships in a counselling setting, by providing a framework for the offender to offer an effective apology.

#### *Future Research*

It is imperative that further research be conducted which aims to test and develop the AA theory developed by Slocum et al. (2006), in an attempt to establish apology as an operationally defined construct. In addition, it is essential that research be conducted in the area of apology rejection in an attempt to clarify the underlying reasons and processes influencing this phenomenon. Such research should be conducted using real life offence situations and should aim to employ a large sample of participants.

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## APPENDIX A

Summary of sample demographics and offence situation.

Participant	Age	Gender	Summary of Offence situation	Rating of Severity (1 = not very serious, 10 = very serious)
#1	56	Female	The participant immigrated to Australia when she was 15 years old and feel pregnant at 17. Arrangements were made through the Catholic Church for her baby to be adopted out and she was forced to sign the adoption papers against her will.	10
#2	87	Female	The participant underwent an operation 18 years ago during which she did not receive anaesthetic. The participant could hear and feel everything that was happening during her operation.	10
#3	54	Female	The participant was a victim of domestic violence 10 years ago. However, the offence was related to her father who she felt did not respond appropriately to the situation.	10
#4	37	Female	The participant was a victim of numerous domestic assaults and had even suffered attempted murder at the hands of her partner. The last incident occurred 10 years ago.	10
#5	27	Female	The participant's ex-partner was unfaithful to her 7 years ago. His infidelity was aired nationally on a reality television show.	8
#6	69	Male	The participant's wife, who was suffering from cancer, died in hospital 1 year ago as a result of medical malpractice. He was not informed of the hospitals' policies in regard to palliative care.	10
#7	29	Female	The participant's daughter suffered burns to her lower legs as a result of medical malpractice 1 year ago. Her daughter required the removal of plaster casts (used to treat the condition Talipes) in hospital which was performed by an inexperienced nurse instead of a specialist.	9

## APPENDIX B

### Research Flyer

# HAVE YOU EVER RECEIVED AN APOLOGY THAT YOU FELT WAS JUST NOT GOOD ENOUGH?

I am looking for Anglo-Australians aged 18 years or over to participate in a study which aims to explore **the reasons why people reject an apology**. The rationale for the study stems from findings that highlight the importance of apology in psychology, law and justice. Specifically, apology is said to increase forgiveness and decrease feelings of anger and aggression in victims, leading to more constructive behaviours, such as reconciliation. I am looking for individuals who I can interview in relation to an *apology* that they may have received in any given situation which they felt was *unacceptable* and subsequently may have *rejected*. The study can involve both victims of crime and the general population therefore the apology received does not have to be the result of a criminal act and can be from a more general situation, such as an intimate relationship for example.

Participation in the study will involve a 60 minute tape recorded interview with a female researcher who is completing an Honours thesis in Psychology.

Participation is entirely voluntary and your identity will remain completely confidential.

If you are interested in taking part in this study please contact myself, Stephenie Bruce on 0402 362 169 or at [sbruce@student.ecu.edu.au](mailto:sbruce@student.ecu.edu.au).

Alternatively, you may contact either of my supervisors:

Prof. Alfred Allan on (08) 6304 5536 or at [a.allan@ecu.edu.au](mailto:a.allan@ecu.edu.au) and  
Dr. Dianne McKillop on (08) 6304 5736 or at [d.mckillop@ecu.edu.au](mailto:d.mckillop@ecu.edu.au).

If you wish to speak to an independent person about this research please contact Dr Justine Dandy on (08) 6304 5105 or email her at [j.dandy@ecu.edu.au](mailto:j.dandy@ecu.edu.au).

## APPENDIX C

### Information Letter

JOONDALUP CAMPUS

100 Joondalup Drive,  
Joondalup  
Western Australia 6027  
Telephone 134 328  
Facsimile: (08) 9300 1257  
CRICOS 00279B

ABN 54 361 485 361

Dear Potential Participant,

My name is Stephenie Bruce and I am currently completing an Honours degree in Psychology at Edith Cowan University, Joondalup. The aim of my study is to explore a model of effective apology by qualitatively investigating the reasons why apologies are rejected.

In doing this research, I am looking for individuals who I can interview in relation to an apology that they may have received in any given situation which they felt was unacceptable and subsequently rejected.

Your participation in this study will involve a 60 minute interview. The interview will be conducted in a private room on the university campus and will be tape recorded for transcribing purposes. Participants must be aged 18 years or over and can be either male or female, but preferably Anglo-Australian.

It is important that you understand that your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to answer specific questions during the interview and are free to leave the study at any time.

The information provided by participants will be used in my Honours thesis. The names and any identifying information of participants will not be published. All information collected will be kept in a secure location and once transcribed any tapes will be erased. The signed consent forms will also be kept separate from transcriptions to ensure confidentiality.

If you wish to participate in the research please contact myself on the details listed below to arrange an interview time. This research has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Computing, Health and Science at Edith Cowan University. Should you wish to speak to an independent person about the research please contact Dr Justine Dandy on (08) 6304 5105 or email her at [j.dandy@ecu.edu.au](mailto:j.dandy@ecu.edu.au).

Sincerely,

Stephenie Bruce  
Phone: 0402 362 169  
Email: [sbruce@student.ecu.edu.au](mailto:sbruce@student.ecu.edu.au)

Supervisor: Prof. Alfred Allan  
Phone: (08) 6304 5536  
Email: [a.allan@ecu.edu.au](mailto:a.allan@ecu.edu.au)

Supervisor: Dr. Dianne McKillop  
Phone: (08) 6304 5736  
Email: [d.mckillop@ecu.edu.au](mailto:d.mckillop@ecu.edu.au)

**APPENDIX D****Consent Form**

I \_\_\_\_\_ have read the information letter provided and agree to participate in the research being conducted by Stephenie Bruce from Edith Cowan University. I have a clear understanding of what my participation involves and understand that this is completely voluntary. Any questions or concerns I had in regard to the study were answered and I give permission for the information I provide to be used for the purpose of research within Psychology. I acknowledge that, although the research may be published, my identifying information will not be disclosed. I understand that I am not required to answer any questions if I feel uncomfortable and that I may leave the study at any time. I give permission for the interview to be tape recorded and understand that the tape will be destroyed once transcribed.

Signed : \_\_\_\_\_ (participant) Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact details: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E

### Interview Schedule

Before we begin the interview I would like to thank you for your participation in the study, the information you provide is invaluable to our research.

1. Can you describe a situation where you were given an apology that you felt was unacceptable?
2. Can you rate the severity of the original event on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being very serious and 1 being not very serious?
3. What was it in the original situation that you felt required an apology to be given?
4. What did you feel was wrong with the apology you received?
5. In your opinion what is necessary in an apology for it to be deemed acceptable?
6. How did you feel when you received the apology and it was unacceptable?
- [7. Can you rate your level of religious practice on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being not at all and 10 being consistently practiced?] OMITTED

Note: prompts will be used to elicit further information following each response to the above questions. Delivery of the interview questions will be adapted to suit the essence of the individual interviews.

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Counselling Services**

The services listed below are available to West Australians who have experienced or are currently experiencing difficulty in their lives. Please do not hesitate to contact any of the listed numbers if you should feel any discomfort or distress as a result of the study or if you are having trouble coping or simply need someone to talk to.

Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636

Edith Cowan Psychology Services: (08) 9301 0011

Lifeline: 13 11 14

SANE Australia: 1800 187 263

# APPENDIX G

## Summary of Remaining Themes

Theme	P#1	P#2	P#3	P#4	P#5	P#6	P#7
Manipulation/Power	☆					☆	☆
Spontaneity			☆			☆	☆
Face to face interaction	☆				☆		☆
Timing			☆	☆			
Not taking it seriously		☆			☆		
Waiting for something better			☆		☆		
Body language					☆		☆

## **Australian Psychologist**

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The journal publishes work that is of direct professional relevance to psychologists or of general relevance within Australian psychology. This includes original contributions to scientific knowledge, state-of-the-art reviews of professional and applied areas and reviews and essays on matters of general relevance to psychologists, and manuscripts which address matters of general, professional and public relevance, techniques and approaches in psychological practice, professional development issues, and professional and public policy issues. Commentaries on matters arising from anything published in the journal may also be submitted for consideration for publication.

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The journal operates a policy of anonymous peer review, hence all author information should be included in the covering letter, while the manuscript itself should be blinded (i.e., no reference to authors should appear anywhere in the manuscript). Papers will normally be scrutinised and commented on by at least two independent expert referees (in addition to the Editor) although the Editor may process a paper at his or her discretion. The referees will not be aware of the identity of the author. The text should be free of authorship clues as identifiable self-citations, e.g. "In our earlier work...".

Manuscripts should be between 4,000 and 7,000 words in length, excluding references, figures and tables, and authors should clearly note ON THE TITLE PAGE the exact word count of their manuscript, excluding tables, etc. In preparing manuscripts, contributors should follow the rules set out in the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (fifth edition). An abstract of no more than 200 words should be included. Note especially the proper style for references, both in the text and in the reference list. Tables should be typed one to a page at the end of the article, with notations as to their appropriate placement in the text. Diagrams and figures must be of a professional quality. A margin of at least 3 cm should be left on all four sides.

Spelling should conform to the Macquarie Dictionary (third edition, revised). For other matters of style and spelling, the Style Manual for Authors, Editors and Printers (sixth edition, Wiley) should be consulted. Manuscripts that do not meet these standards may be returned without review.

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