Collective apology, hope, and forgiveness

Michael Wenzel Farid Anvari Melissa de Vel-Palumbo & Simon M. Bury

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Experimental Social Psychology

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jesp

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Collective apology
Intergroup apology
Hope
Forgiveness
Reconciliation

ABSTRACT

A notion of hope is adopted to analyse the effects of collective apologies on forgiveness. While apologies invoke the possibility of a more harmonious relationship, victims need to actually desire a reconciled future in order to seize the possibility. Hope results from the combination of possibility and desirability and, in turn, promotes forgiveness. Three online studies referring to international incidents were conducted. Studies 1 and 2 referred to Indonesia’s execution of two Australians found guilty of drug smuggling, an act considered an affront by many Australians. Study 3 referred to a (fabricated) incident of desecration of Australian war graves in the Philippines. In all three studies, an alleged apology from the offending country led to greater perceived possibility of reconciliation outcomes; possibility was positively related to hope particularly when the Australian participants regarded the reconciliation outcomes as desirable (measured in Study 1, manipulated in Studies 2 and 3); hope was positively related to forgiveness. The analysis in terms of hope illuminates limiting and enabling conditions of the conciliatory effects of collective apologies.

1. Introduction

Collective apologies have become exponentially more frequent in recent time (Brooks, 1999). Paradoxically, this means they have become more expected and desired following a wrongdoing but at the same time less satisfying (Okimoto, Hornsey, & Wenzel, 2015). Indeed, a cynical observer may be inclined to regard collective apologies as political stunts or empty gestures. However, we argue that apologies are commonly demanded or offered because of the promise they hold, namely that they might help parties to deal with their fractured past and restore their relationship. Take the example of the Australian government’s 2008 apology to the Stolen Generation (Indigenous children forcefully removed from their families over decades). In its coverage of the apology the Sydney Morning Herald wrote the following day that “many hope [the apology] will usher in a new era in Aboriginal reconciliation” (Gartrell, 2008; emphasis added). In the present research we argue that apologies can indeed instil hope, to the extent that recipients desire reconciliation and, thus, seize the promise of the apology and invest it with hope. In turn, hope may motivate conciliatory responses, including forgiveness.

1.1. Collective apologies

Apologies are, at a minimum, a communication or gesture by offenders through which they take responsibility for having committed a wrong and signal remorse for their actions (Lazare, 2004); more elaborate apologies may further acknowledge the harm done, offer repair, and/or promise to change (Blum-Kulka & Olsthtain, 1984; Steele & Blatz, 2014). In the case of collective apologies this is done by a group (or by individual members on its behalf) for a wrong that the group (or some of its members) committed against another group (Smith, 2008; Tavuchis, 1991). Apologies have been described as powerful devices that can reduce victims’ desire for vengeance, increase their willingness to engage with the offenders and reconcile, as well as increase their willingness to forgive (McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997; Obbuchi, Kameda, & Agarie, 1989; see Lazare, 2004). However, the power of apologies is certainly not unqualified. In interpersonal contexts positive effects have been found to depend on factors such as intentionality of the wrongdoing, perceived sincerity of the apology and its timing, as well as the closeness of the relationship (e.g., Allan, Allan, Kaminer, & Stein, 2006; Frantz & Bennigson, 2005; Schumann, 2012; Struthers, Eaton, Santelli, Uchiyama, & Shirvani, 2008).

In intergroup contexts the evidence specifically for the forgiveness-promoting effect of apologies has been particularly mixed (Hornsey & Wohl, 2013, for a review). Philpot and Hornsey (2008) established the problem clearly when they reported four studies in various contexts that found no evidence that collective apologies...
promoted intergroup forgiveness, despite creating what were meant to be conducive conditions (e.g., a primary victim advocating forgiveness). While some studies found that collective apologies can increase forgiveness (Brown, Wohl, & Exline, 2008; Leonard, Mackie, & Smith, 2011), other research, including qualitative studies in the context of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Chapman, 2007) and the Australian government’s apology to the Stolen Generation (South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2011), other research, including qualitative studies in the context of the Stolen Generation, suggests that collective apologies may not always be effective in promoting forgiveness (Brown, Wohl, & Exline, 2008; Leonard, Mackie, & Smith, 2011). This is because collective apologies may not always be perceived as sincere or representative of the group (Wenzel, Okimoto, Hornsey, Lawrence-Wood, & Coughlin, 2017).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlations</th>
<th>No apology M (SD)</th>
<th>Official apology M (SD)</th>
<th>Grassroots apology M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Desirability</td>
<td>5.09 (1.15)</td>
<td>5.21 (0.96)</td>
<td>5.19 (1.24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Possibility</td>
<td>4.08 (0.97)</td>
<td>4.76 (1.06)</td>
<td>3.93 (1.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hope</td>
<td>4.75 (1.18)</td>
<td>5.06 (1.21)</td>
<td>4.87 (1.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Forgiveness</td>
<td>3.97 (1.54)</td>
<td>4.74 (1.57)</td>
<td>4.34 (1.53)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < 0.05.
** p < 0.01.
*** p < 0.001.

Therefore, people turn to hope in situations of uncertainty, when prospects are less than probable, but merely possible (Bury et al., 2016; Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010). Hope may thus become a prime candidate for driving or unlocking efforts to resolve intergroup conflicts, given the many challenges these pose for reconciliation. Importantly, hope for reconciliation and peace can partly be elicited by communicative and attitudinal positivity in the face of uncertainty of a desired outcome. This is consistent with most views on hope that ascribe it an affective and motivational quality (e.g., Bruininks & Malle, 2005; Lazarus, 1999); however, what distinguishes these various views are the appraisals implicated in hope. Many hope researchers argue that the positivity derives from the reduction of uncertainty, for example, through an increased confidence that the outcome is probable (Stotland, 1969) or, more specifically, the perception of pathways and individual agency in achieving the desired outcome (Snyder, 2002). However, this view tends to conflate hope with expectation-based constructs such as self-efficacy, optimism, and control beliefs (Aspinwall & Leff, 2002). Instead, hope comes into play when the desired outcome is less than probable (Averill, Catlin, & Chon, 1990), and rather merely possible (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010; Nelissen, 2015). Without possibility there is no basis for hope; there would be hopelessness instead. But where there is a possibility, hope amounts to investing this possibility with positive affect (in a glass-is-half-full manner) and positive motivation, acting on this possibility “as if” there is a good chance of obtaining the desired outcome (Pettit, 2004). Acting “as if” does not imply greater confidence than is warranted; rather hope maintains the positive assessment that the outcome is still possible (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010), which allows one to make the most of the low odds (Pettit, 2004).

Thus, hope is investment in emerging possibility. The driver of this investment is the perceived desirability of the outcome (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2010). In fact, more than just desirability in terms of a detached valuation (“wouldn’t it be nice?”), it is the significance of the outcome for the hoper’s existence and/or identity that drives the investment (Bury, Wenzel, & Woodyatt, 2016). When the outcome is critical to one’s survival, one’s values, or who one is or wants to become, a failure to invest the possibility with hope might amount to a loss or betrayal of those values and identities. Consistent with this, Bury et al. found that, while optimism increases linearly with perceived likelihood of the outcome irrespective of its perceived desirability, hope has a curvilinear relationship to likelihood with a jump in hope at levels of emerging possibility, but only when the outcome is highly desirable and personally significant. This latching onto possibility is the characteristic feature of hope.
دریافت فوری متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات