

# The Role of Truth in Victim–Offender Mediation: Victims of Crime Who Feel They Know the “Whole” Truth Are More Receptive to Apologies

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**Objective:** We conducted three preregistered studies to examine whether victims of crime are more receptive to apologies in victim–offender mediation if they feel they know the “whole” truth about a crime. **Hypotheses:** We predicted that making salient the completeness (vs. incompleteness) of knowledge about a crime would lead victims to (a) have a greater sense of truth knowing and (b) view an apology more favorably. **Method:** Participants in Study 1 ( $N = 380$ ;  $M_{\text{age}} = 41.2$  years; 51% men; 78% White) and Study 2 ( $N = 550$ ;  $M_{\text{age}} = 41.0$  years; 65% women; 72% White) imagined being the victim of cybercrime. Participants in Study 3 ( $N = 670$ ;  $M_{\text{age}} = 42.7$  years; 52% men; 72% White) were real crime victims. Participants imagined taking part in victim–offender mediation during which the offender apologized, and then they evaluated the apology after answering questions that made salient what they either knew or did not know about the crime (complete knowledge salience vs. incomplete knowledge salience). Participants in Study 2 received additional information about the crime from either the offender or the police to test whether truth source acts as a moderator. **Results:** Participants in the complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience condition reported greater truth knowing (Study 1  $d = 1.40$ , Study 2  $d = 1.26$ , Study 3  $d = 0.58$ ), readiness for an apology (Study 1  $d = 0.25$ ; Study 2  $d = 0.23$ ; Study 3  $d = 0.09$ , nonsignificant), perceived completeness of an apology (Study 1  $d = 0.26$ , Study 2  $d = 0.31$ , Study 3  $d = 0.19$ ), and acceptance of an apology (Study 1  $d = 0.22$ ; Study 2  $d = 0.21$ ; Study 3  $d = 0.10$ , nonsignificant). In Study 2, truth source moderated the effect only on apology acceptance ( $\eta^2 = .009$ ). Across the three studies, complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience was indirectly positively related to apology readiness, apology completeness, and apology acceptance (nonsignificant in Study 3), via truth knowing. **Conclusions:** Instances of victim–offender mediation should ensure that victims’ need for truth is satisfied because this may increase the effectiveness of apologies.


## Public Significance Statement

Victim–offender mediation—a facilitated dialogue between victims of crime and offenders—has mixed success for the offer and acceptance of apology. Victims of crime are often motivated to participate in victim–offender mediation by a want for answers or “the truth” about what happened. This research investigated how participants would respond to an apology in imagined victim–offender mediation after focusing on either the completeness or incompleteness of their knowledge about a crime. When participants imagined experiencing crime, focusing on the completeness (vs. incompleteness) of knowledge caused them to report greater apology readiness, apology completeness, and apology satisfaction. When participants were self-reported crime victims, focusing on the completeness (vs. incompleteness) of knowledge caused them to report significantly greater apology completeness (but not apology readiness or apology satisfaction). Future research should further investigate the role of truth for real victims of crime and in real instances of victim–offender mediation.

**Keywords:** truth, restorative justice, victim–offender mediation, apology, crime victim

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*continued*

Whether being subject to physical assault, theft, scams, or other crimes, victims can find it difficult to recover from the experience as there can be psychological (or symbolic) losses that leave the victimized feeling wronged or violated, in addition to any tangible costs or harm (Woodyatt et al., 2022). The criminal justice system has typically taken a justice-as-punishment approach to restore justice after crime, with a secondary consideration that giving an offender their just deserts may also help victims to move on (Lerner, 1980; Wenzel et al., 2008). Yet, helping victims of crime to heal has evolved from age-old punitive procedures to new (or rediscovered) ways based in restorative justice, such as *victim–offender mediation*, which engages victim and offender in a two-way dialogue (Braithwaite, 2002). Bringing victim and offender together to discuss the crime seems a perilous task, and yet, victim–offender mediation can be successful (for a review, see Hansen & Umbreit, 2018). One of the major reasons that mediation can be successful is that mediation can lead to victims receiving an apology from the offender and successfully negotiating a plan for restitution (Umbreit & Armour, 2011).

However, it is not always the case that victim–offender mediation leads to apologies being accepted and restitution plans being negotiated. Indeed, victims have refused to accept apologies because they have not felt ready for an apology or did not perceive the apology to be “complete” (Choi & Gilbert, 2010). Also, sometimes mediation can result in a breakdown in talks, and victims have requested that the legal system decide suitable terms for compensation rather than work with the offender to come to a mutually agreed-on plan for restitution (Choi & Severson, 2009). Restorative justice practices favoring mediation are taking hold of criminal justice systems; however, we still do not fully understand why some instances of mediation have been effective or ineffective for the offer and acceptance of apologies and composing of restitution agreements (Choi et al., 2010).

One feature of intergroup restorative justice processes such as truth and reconciliation commissions has been the recognition that obtaining the full truth about wrongdoing may be a necessary condition for preparing victims for effective conflict resolution (de la Rey & Owens, 1998; Hamber, 2009). However, researchers have not studied whether victims feeling like they have the full truth about a crime can facilitate the effectiveness of restorative justice mediations at the interpersonal level. This omission may seem even more remarkable because one of the strongest motivations driving victims to participate in mediation is the expectation (or hope) that they will get answers, the full story, or “the truth” about what happened (Borton, 2009; Paul, 2015). Accordingly, the present studies examined whether victims perceiving to have complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge about the crime affords them a feeling of *truth knowing*—the subjective sense of having a complete account of what happened—which is of intrinsic value to victims (Quinney

et al., 2022). We investigated whether the subjective sense of truth helps to ready victims for the offer and acceptance of an apology and to perceive the apology as more complete and whether, through these, it increases the prospect of victim and offender negotiating a mutually agreed-on resolution.

## Restorative Justice and Victim–Offender Mediation

Restorative justice is based on a philosophy that the stakeholders in the offense should determine how to best correct for the harm caused by the offender and lay out a way forward (Zehr, 2015). Restorative justice advocates view victim–offender mediation as an opportunity for victims to receive an apology and for victim and offender to negotiate a mutually agreed-on plan for restitution (Sherman et al., 2005). The emphasis on bringing the two parties together to discuss the crime and negotiate a solution together presents a contrast to the conventional justice practices that determine and deliver punishment to the offender unilaterally (Okimoto et al., 2009). The focus of this article is on the outcomes for victims, but we acknowledge that restorative justice also focuses on the outcomes for offenders and that these needs can be interdependent (e.g., both victim and offender want to restore the relationship).


The most used restorative justice mechanism to establish a dialogue between victim and offender is termed victim–offender mediation (Umbreit & Armour, 2011), also known as victim–offender conferences (Paul & Schenck-Hamlin, 2018) and victim–offender reconciliation (Hansen & Umbreit, 2018). What is universal across these variations of victim–offender mediation is that there is a third party present who is trained to facilitate mediation in a neutral way (Choi & Gilbert, 2010). Mediation is court mandated but still voluntary and typically occurs after the justice system has convicted the offender of the crime. However, mediation can occur before the court delivers the offender’s sentence, and the severity of sentencing can depend on the outcome of mediation, such as whether the victim and offender complete a restitution agreement. Also, mediation is commonly reserved for relatively mild offenses such as property crime or minor assaults, but mediation has also been used in serious violent crime cases (Umbreit et al., 2003).

Victim–offender mediation is evidence based, and the evidence suggests that it can have benefits for both victims and offenders. For example, victim–offender mediation typically results in greater satisfaction for both parties, more restitution compliance, and less offender recidivism than more traditional court-based justice processes (Latimer et al., 2005; Nugent et al., 2004; Sherman et al., 2015). However, researchers have highlighted the need for experimental methods to better understand the successes (and failures) of victim–offender mediation as well as the role of apologies, in particular (Saulnier & Sivasubramaniam, 2015).


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## Apologies in Victim–Offender Mediation

The offer and acceptance of an apology are among the most valuable features of victim–offender mediation (Dhimi, 2012; Strang et al., 2006). Victims will often receive an apology from an offender in mediation (Dhimi, 2016a; Hansen & Umbreit, 2018), but the offer of an apology in victim–offender mediation does not always translate into apology acceptance (Choi & Gilbert, 2010), and victims may even outright reject apologies (Choi & Severson, 2009). One might expect a wealth of empirical research that examines key mechanisms or psychological processes explaining how victims come to their conclusions about an offender’s apology in the victim–offender mediation context, but there is a paucity of such evidence (Choi et al., 2010). Only recently has research started to elucidate possible mechanisms in victim–offender mediation. For example, Bonensteffen et al. (2020) used eye tracking to examine how victims direct their visual attention to evaluate an offender’s perceived sincerity when apologizing. Despite recent advances for understanding one mechanism of how victims receive apologies, our knowledge about other potential mechanisms remains incomplete.

One consideration from the broader apology literature for what might make apologies acceptable to victims in victim–offender mediation is that there must be a “ripeness” for conflict resolution (Coleman, 1997) or victims must feel a readiness for an apology. Empirical research highlights the importance of how the timing of the apology factors into how ready a victim feels for an apology (Hubbard et al., 2013). For example, Frantz and Bennigson (2005) conducted a study that asked participants to imagine a hypothetical wrongdoing and a discussion with the offender that resulted in receiving a delayed apology, an early apology, or no apology. Participants who received the delayed apology were ostensibly afforded the opportunity to voice their concerns to the offender and their perspective to be understood before receiving an apology, whereas in the early apology condition, the offender apologized before a discussion on the wrongdoing. It was found that the delayed apology led to significantly greater outcome satisfaction than both an early apology and no apology. This finding may suggest that meeting victims’ other needs or concerns may make them more ready for an apology in victim–offender mediation.

Other apology research has examined whether apology acceptance is an outcome of receiving a complete apology. An apology is considered complete if it includes a number of interlinked components such as expressing remorse for inflicting harm and a commitment to not repeat the behavior in the future (Scher & Darley, 1997; Schumann, 2014). This has led some researchers to investigate which of these apology components might be the most effective. For example, Lewicki et al. (2016) asked participants to evaluate the efficacy of different apology components and found that participants perceived acknowledgment of responsibility as the most important apology component.

Research has shown that the aims of apology recipients influence their reception of apologies. Victims in particular desire apologies that contain components that align with their beliefs and preferences for how wrongdoings should be dealt with (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). For example, some victims may believe that an offer of compensation is required in an apology for it to be complete and acceptable. Related research has found that victims perceive apologies that they request from offenders as equally sincere as apologies coming from offenders’ own volition (Robbennolt, 2013),

but victims feel greater forgiveness and less anger after receiving requested apologies (Peyton & Goei, 2013; cf. Allan et al., 2022). Findings such as these show that perceived apology sincerity and offenders’ remorse alone are not necessarily sufficient for apologies to serve a justice-restoring function (van Dijck, 2017). Instead, these findings highlight that an effective apology is contextual and contingent on the needs of individuals receiving apologies.

Translating the findings from the apology literature to understand what shapes apologies in the victim–offender mediation context suggests that meeting victims’ key motivations and needs may make them more ready to receive an apology. The research into what makes apologies complete may suggest that the offer and acceptance of an apology may require certain components (e.g., acknowledging responsibility), whereas the research on the aims of apology recipients suggests that apologies should contain components that align with victims’ expectations. But what motivations or needs are driving victims and what do victims expect to get out of victim–offender mediation? The current research is an investigation of whether apologies in victim–offender mediation may be more effective if victims perceive to know the full truth about an experienced crime.

## The Value of Truth Knowing for Apologies in Victim–Offender Mediation

Victims of crime seek answers or the full truth about what happened, and this need for truth appears to drive them to consider participating in victim–offender mediation (Paul, 2015; Van Camp & Wemmers, 2013). For example, Borton (2009) examined archival interviews of victims interested in meeting with the offender. Victims reported that their main motivation for wanting to speak to the offender was to ask questions and obtain answers (e.g., what happened to a loved one’s body). Similarly, Choi et al. (2010) conducted interviews with victims who had participated in mediation. These victims reported being motivated to speak with the offender to get further information about the crime from the offender. The pervasiveness of this need for the full truth has led some to recommend promoting mediation as a way of obtaining answers about what happened as a means to enhance victim participation in mediation (Paul, 2015).

Obtaining the full truth is a key motivation for victims engaging in mediation, so satisfying the need for truth may be necessary for the successful offer and acceptance of an apology in mediation. Victims may wish to know (or feel like they know) the full extent of what the offender is apologizing for before they feel ready to receive an apology, to perceive the apology as complete, and to consider accepting it. That is, victims may hold a strong preference or belief that mediation must bring the full truth to light, and this preference may affect their reception of an apology (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). Conversely, victims who perceive that the full truth has not been laid on the table may not feel ready to receive and accept an apology; they may see the apology as incomplete because there is—or could be—more to the story and the victim is left wanting the missing pieces.

Other restorative justice-based bodies have fiercely defended the value of truth for helping victims and offenders to reconcile after wrongdoing. In particular, the proliferation of truth and reconciliation commissions such as the one established in postapartheid South Africa brought the restorative value of truth into public discourse

(Allan & Allan, 2000). Postconflict societies such as South Africa established truth and reconciliation commissions on the premise that making the full truth available or constructing as complete a picture of the wrongdoing as possible is necessary to resolve past grievances and achieve healing (Rotberg & Thompson, 2000). In fact, some truth commissions have valued the pursuit of the “whole” truth so highly that they granted amnesty to some offenders in exchange for full descriptions of their wrongful acts so that victims would have the full truth (Mamdani, 2002).

Truth and reconciliation commissions are typically situated outside courts of law, so they do not possess the power of court to impart judicial decisions or punish offenders. Instead, like victim-offender mediation, truth and reconciliation commissions attempt to obtain a full description of the wrongdoing as a means to help victims to heal, develop recommendations to prevent future wrongdoing, and inform suitable restitution payments (Hayner, 2000). There is limited empirical evidence to suggest that truth and reconciliation commissions are successful in achieving these aims. Yet, some research has suggested that obtaining a record of the complete truth about wrongdoing might provide victims with an acknowledgment of their suffering and provide healing or empowerment (Abrams & Hayner, 2002; Brahm, 2007).

However, it remains unclear what effect the perceived availability of the full truth may have on conflict resolution at the interpersonal level, such as victim–offender mediation. There is some skepticism about the purported benefits of truth for helping victims and offenders to reconcile because of a lack of empirical investigation (Mendeloff, 2004, 2009). It is possible that there has been a constraint on research in this area because of a lack of methods, measures, and operationalizations for truth. Notably, there is a challenge to disentangle the effects of mere truth, per se, from those of particular pieces of information. However, recent research may provide a potential means to investigate the effect of perceived truth. Quinney et al. (2022) posited that the truth could help victims of crime to heal by providing a sense of truth knowing, a subjective sense of knowing the full account of what happened. In the Quinney et al. study, a manipulation made salient to victims of crime either the completeness or incompleteness of their knowledge about the crime by asking them to focus on what they knew (complete knowledge) or did not know (incomplete knowledge) about the crime. Crime victims who focused on the completeness (vs. incompleteness) of their knowledge reported a greater sense of truth knowing, greater psychological closure over the event, and less anger. There was also an indirect effect of complete knowledge salience on forgiveness via truth knowing. This research provides a means to examine the effect of perceived truth on victims’ assessment and acceptance of an apology in victim–offender mediation.

In sum, evaluations of victim–offender mediation have identified some evidence that apologies can satisfy victims, facilitating victim and offender to come to a mutually agreed-on plan for restitution (Umbreit & Armour, 2011). However, not all instances of mediation contain offers of apologies that are accepted or end in a consensus on reparations (Choi & Severson, 2009). As it stands, there is not a complete understanding of what contributes to the success of victim-offender mediation despite its widespread usage (Choi et al., 2010). Victims’ expressed need for the truth and the purported benefits of truth for repair at the intergroup level suggest that the appearance of knowing the full truth may also have value for interpersonal conflict resolution such as victim–offender mediation. Thus, the present

research considers whether making salient the completeness (vs. incompleteness) of knowledge affords victims the perception of having the whole truth (i.e., truth knowing; Quinney et al., 2022) and, consequently, makes them more ready for an apology, more inclined to perceive the apology as complete, more accepting of the apology, and more likely to negotiate restitution with an offender.

## The Present Research

This article includes three studies that tested the effects of a knowledge salience manipulation to produce perceived complete knowledge about the crime versus perceived incomplete knowledge about the crime. Studies 1 and 2 asked participants to imagine being the victim of a cybercrime, whereas Study 3 recruited real victims of crime. We asked all participants to imagine taking part in victim-offender mediation. We designed Study 2 to replicate Study 1 but also included a second manipulation to test whether the effects of complete knowledge depend on the source of the knowledge and truth (i.e., the offender compared with law enforcement). The theoretical case put forward in this article is that the benefits received from the truth are attributable to the perceived completeness and feeling of truth knowing; hence, we predicted that truth source would not act as a moderator. We designed Study 3 to test the external validity of the findings by recruiting real victims of crime. We hypothesized that if victims focused on the completeness of knowledge (vs. incompleteness), they would have a greater sense of truth knowing, show greater readiness for an apology, perceive the apology as more complete, and report greater acceptance of the apology.

We report all measures, manipulations, and exclusions in these studies. We recruited participants via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) using the CloudResearch recruitment platform (Litman et al., 2017). All participants were U.S. residents. We conducted the power and sensitivity analyses reported using G\*Power (Faul et al., 2009). All studies were likewise preregistered including study design, hypotheses, power analyses, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and preplanned primary analyses ([https://osf.io/jzarf/?view\\_only=47102f4446734b4faf99466a864df1f2](https://osf.io/jzarf/?view_only=47102f4446734b4faf99466a864df1f2); see this link also for the additional online materials). The Human Research Ethics Committee at Flinders University (Adelaide, Australia) approved all studies and protocols (Approval Code 8138).

## Study 1

We presented participants with a vignette asking them to imagine being the victim of cyber theft involving a local youth hacking their Amazon account and making expensive purchases. We decided to focus on a cybercrime that all participants could relate to, as we recruited all participants via MTurk. We decided on a nonviolent crime because the typical use of victim–offender mediation is for cases of lower severity of crime, usually property crime (Umbreit et al., 2004). The scenario further detailed that law enforcement had caught the offender, and the court had sentenced the offender to several years of probation. The court also requested that the offender engage in victim–offender mediation with the victim (i.e., the participant). The scenario constructed mediation between victim and offender by presenting participants with a description of a mediator conducting the session and asking the offender to provide their perspective of the crime (e.g., detailing how they hacked the

participant's account to make the fraudulent purchases) and apologize. The scenario ended after the offender's apology. The manipulation of knowledge salience (complete vs. incomplete) followed, and then participants completed the outcome measures of apology readiness, apology completeness, apology acceptance, and openness to further mediation. We predicted that participants in the complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience condition would report greater truth knowing and greater apology readiness, rate the apology as more complete, and indicate greater apology acceptance and greater openness to repair dialogue.

## Method

### Participants

We required 352 participants to have an 80% chance of detecting an effect ( $d$ ) of 0.30 when comparing two independent means (two-tailed,  $\alpha = .05$ ,  $\beta = 0.80$ ). Our effect size estimate was based on pilot data. We requested data from 20 additional participants for a total of 372 participants to account for the potential loss of data due to our preregistered exclusion criteria (<https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/WXPS8>). Participants were MTurk workers recruited via the CloudResearch recruitment platform (Litman et al., 2017). The advertisement on MTurk described the survey as involving people imagining being a victim of a cybercrime and examining how they would respond to the offender in a meeting. The advertisement stated that English fluency was a requirement, and we made the study available only to U.S. residents. Participants received \$0.70 for their participation. The final sample included 380 participants (192 male, 185 female, two nonbinary, one agender) ages 19–89 years ( $M = 41.2$  years). The higher number of participants than requested may have resulted from some participants not submitting their completion code to CloudResearch and thus not registering the collection of their data. The racial identities of the sample included 78% White, 10% Asian, 9% Black or African American, 2% multiracial, and 1% Native American or Alaska Native.

### Design and Procedure

Our study advertised that English fluency was a prerequisite for participation; accordingly, we screened sign-ups with an English proficiency test. The test comprised five English grammar questions with three response options (e.g., "Would you prefer lemonade or orange juice?" with response options of "Have you got anything else?" "If you like," and "Are you sure about that?"). The survey presented an ineligibility screen to sign-ups if fewer than four questions were answered correctly (a total of 12 sign-ups failed the English proficiency test). We counted the sign-ups who passed the screening as participants in the study. The survey then contained instructions to participants asking them to imagine being victims of a cybercrime that involved being charged with unauthorized purchases. The scenario informed participants that the police had arrested a local youth (the offender) responsible for the charges who later pleaded guilty to the crime, and the court had sentenced the offender to probation. The court also requested the offender to be part of a restorative justice program that included involvement in a meeting with the participant as part of their sentence. Our survey instructed participants to briefly describe the crime in an open text box, and our preregistered exclusion criteria stated that a

participant would be excluded if their response was not in English, the description did not accurately describe what happened in the transgression (e.g., described a different crime), the participant pasted the description from an online source, or the description was blank (we did not exclude any participants on the basis of this criterion). Participants then rated the severity of the wrongdoing to ensure that they perceived the crime as severe given the use of the vignette. The scenario then continued with participants reading a description of what participating in victim-offender mediation typically involves, according to Paul and Schenck-Hamlin (2018). The scenario then described that the participant had accepted the offer to meet with the offender and that the offender had described how they committed the crime and apologized during the victim-offender mediation.

After the scenario ended, we randomly allocated each participant to one of two sets of questions designed to make salient either the completeness or incompleteness of participants' knowledge about the crime. Participants in the complete knowledge salience condition ( $N = 186$ ) responded to three open-response questions asking what they knew about the crime. These questions included the following: "Describe anything about the crime that you know"; "What pieces of information have helped you to have a sense of knowing the truth about the crime? List two below"; and "Complete this sentence: I generally feel like I know enough about the crime because." Conversely, participants in the incomplete knowledge salience condition ( $N = 194$ ) responded to three similarly phrased open-ended questions, but instead asking what the participant did not know about the crime (e.g., "Describe anything about the crime that you do not know"). Participants then rated the dependent measures immediately after the manipulation (except the perceived severity of the transgression measure, as participants rated this before the manipulation). The survey ended by debriefing participants about the research aims.

### Dependent Measures

Every scale item was measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *somewhat disagree*, 4 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 5 = *somewhat agree*, 6 = *agree*, 7 = *strongly agree*), and items were averaged to create a single score.

**Perceived Severity of the Transgression.** We used three items from the study by Wenzel and Coughlin (2020) to measure how severe participants perceived the transgression/crime to be: "The other person's behavior pains me a lot," "I find the other person's behavior totally unacceptable," and "I find the other person's behavior very wrong" ( $\alpha = .79$ ).

**Truth Knowing.** Participants rated their level of truth knowing about the crime by responding to the four items from the study by Quinney et al. (2022): "I am satisfied that I know all I need to know about the incident," "I feel like I know the full story of the incident," "I feel like I have the complete picture of the incident," and "I feel like there is more to know about the incident" (reverse coded;  $\alpha = .91$ ).

**Apology Readiness.** Participants reported their apology readiness by responding to three items: "The timing of the apology felt right," "The offer of apology is timely," and "The apology is coming too soon" (reverse coded;  $\alpha = .80$ ).

**Complete Apology.** Participants provided their assessment of the completeness of the apology by responding to three items: "The

apology was complete,” “The apology was sufficient,” and “The apology was inadequate” (reverse coded;  $\alpha = .92$ ).

**Apology Acceptance.** Participants reported their level of apology acceptance by responding to three items: “I accept the apology,” “I appreciate the apology,” and “I reject the apology” (reverse coded;  $\alpha = .93$ ).

**Openness to Repair Dialogue.** Participants rated their willingness for repair mediation with four items: “I am willing to talk further with the youth about how they can make things right,” “I am open to discussions with the youth about how to put this behind us,” “I am prepared to engage in mediation with the youth about how to repair the situation,” and “I wish to have no further mediation with the youth” (reverse coded;  $\alpha = .95$ ).

## Results

We used a hybrid frequentist/Bayesian approach for our main between-groups analyses. We conducted traditional null hypothesis significance testing but also estimated Bayes factors (BFs) using JASP Version 0.14.1 with default priors (Jeffrey’s Amazing Statistics Program Team, 2020; van Doorn et al., 2021). The addition of BFs has several advantages, such as allowing for a comparison between alternative and null hypotheses (Wagenmakers et al., 2018). Moreover, a BF is a likelihood ratio, meaning the evidence is easily interpretable. For example, a  $BF_{10}$  of 10 would indicate that the data are 10 times more likely to occur under the alternative hypothesis versus the null hypothesis. Conversely, BFs less than 1 indicate support for the null hypothesis, whereas a BF of 1 indicates equal support for the null and alternative hypotheses. We report the BF that quantifies evidence for the null hypothesis ( $BF_{01}$ ) rather than the mathematical equivalent  $BF_{10}$  in cases in which  $BF_{10}$  is less than 1 because it is easier to interpret (e.g.,  $BF_{10} = 0.1$  inverted is  $BF_{01} = 10$ , which indicates that the data are 10 times more likely to occur under the null hypothesis). We use the descriptive labels from the study by Lee and Wagenmakers (2014) to describe the strength of the evidence suggested by the BFs (e.g.,  $BF_{01} = 10$  would suggest strong evidence in favor of the null hypothesis).

We asked participants to rate the perceived severity of the transgression to confirm that they viewed the crime as serious because if participants viewed the crime as trivial, this may have undermined the perceived appropriateness for victim–offender mediation and an apology. A one-sample  $t$  test confirmed that participants rated the perceived severity of the transgression significantly above the scale midpoint (4),  $M = 6.17$ ,  $SD = 0.84$ ,  $t(379) = 50.1$ ,  $p < .001$ .

We conducted both traditional (frequentist) independent  $t$  tests and Bayesian independent  $t$  tests considering directional hypotheses (i.e., the complete knowledge salience condition would be greater than the incomplete knowledge salience condition). Table 1 contains the results from these analyses. As predicted, participants in the complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience condition reported greater truth knowing (large effect size), greater apology readiness (small effect size), greater apology acceptance (small effect size), and a more complete apology (small effect size). However, contrary to our prediction, participants in the complete knowledge salience condition did not report greater openness to repair dialogue than participants in the incomplete knowledge salience condition.

## Mediation Analyses

Table 2 displays the bivariate correlations between the main variables. We used Process Model 4 to test for indirect effects with 95th percentile bootstraps set at 5,000 samples (Hayes, 2017). We have refrained from using causal language for the mediation analyses as there are limitations to using cross-sectional data for mediation (Fiedler et al., 2018). For brevity, we report here the mediation patterns but refer the reader to additional online materials at [https://osf.io/pu85b?view\\_only=47102f4446734b4faf99466a864df1f2](https://osf.io/pu85b?view_only=47102f4446734b4faf99466a864df1f2) for the relevant statistics. First, complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience was a predictor of truth knowing. In turn, truth knowing significantly positively related to apology readiness, apology completeness, apology acceptance, and openness to repair dialogue. There were significant, positive indirect effects of complete knowledge salience on apology readiness, and apology completeness, through truth knowing. However, the indirect effects of complete knowledge salience on apology acceptance, and openness to repair dialogue, via truth knowing, were not significant.

## Discussion

This study demonstrated that victims may be more prepared to receive and accept an apology in victim–offender mediation if they have the perception of having the full truth. As predicted, participants who focused on the completeness (vs. incompleteness) of their knowledge about the crime indicated greater truth knowing, greater apology readiness, greater apology completeness, and greater apology acceptance.

In contrast, there was moderate evidence for the null hypothesis when considering the completeness of knowledge effect on openness to repair mediation with the offender despite the increased

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Main Variables in Study 1*

Variable	Knowledge salience		$t(378)$	$p$	$d$ [95% CI]	Bayes factor (strength)
	Complete $M$ ( $SD$ )	Incomplete $M$ ( $SD$ )				
1. Truth knowing	5.03 (1.30)	3.24 (1.24)	−13.7	<.001	1.40 [1.18, 1.63]	$BF_{10} = 5.48 \times 10^{31}$ (extreme)
2. Apology readiness	5.07 (1.18)	4.77 (1.20)	−2.47	.014	0.25 [0.05, 0.46]	$BF_{10} = 4.17$ (moderate)
3. Apology completeness	4.44 (1.62)	4.04 (1.52)	−2.49	.013	0.26 [0.05, 0.46]	$BF_{10} = 4.36$ (moderate)
4. Apology acceptance	5.36 (1.47)	5.04 (1.42)	−2.15	.032	0.22 [0.02, 0.42]	$BF_{10} = 2.03$ (anecdotal)
5. Openness to repair	4.99 (1.71)	4.90 (1.60)	0.55	.585	0.06 [−0.26, 0.15]	$BF_{01} = 5.41$ (moderate)

*Note.* Bayes factor:  $BF_{10}$  = evidence for alternative hypothesis;  $BF_{01}$  = evidence for null hypothesis; CI = confidence interval.

**Table 2**  
*Bivariate Correlations for Main Variables in Study 1*

Variable	Correlation coefficient	1	2	3	4	5
1. Truth knowing	<i>r</i>	—	.25	.31	.15	.03
	<i>p</i>	—	(<.001)	(<.001)	(.003)	(.538)
2. Apology readiness	<i>r</i>	—	—	.63	.63	.34
	<i>p</i>	—	—	(<.001)	(<.001)	(<.001)
3. Apology completeness	<i>r</i>	—	—	—	.75	.37
	<i>p</i>	—	—	—	(<.001)	(<.001)
4. Apology acceptance	<i>r</i>	—	—	—	—	.59
	<i>p</i>	—	—	—	—	(<.001)
5. Openness to repair dialogue	<i>r</i>	—	—	—	—	—
	<i>p</i>	—	—	—	—	—

sense of truth knowing and general positive findings for the apology. There is evidence that apologies can lead to greater conciliatory efforts (Fehr et al., 2010); however, the apology literature also suggests that victims being satisfied with an apology does not always translate into downstream consequences such as forgiveness (Homsey & Wohl, 2013). Our findings may reflect a lack of a link between apology and the theorized downstream conciliatory efforts in the form of openness to repair dialogue. However, it is also possible that participants viewed repair dialogue as the most viable means to obtain restitution from the offender, rather than only a means of conciliation. Thus, participants in both groups might have been equally motivated to talk with the offender about how to repair the wrong because they simply wished to ensure that they would be reimbursed for the fraudulent costs.

A question that remained from Study 1 was whether it was key for the observed results that it was the offender who ostensibly provided the victims with the full truth or failed to provide the full truth. We theorized that it is the appearance of complete knowledge/truth itself that matters, but this could also depend on whether victims witness the offender providing the full truth. Accordingly, we conducted a follow-up study to test the possible influence of the offender providing the truth.

## Study 2

We conducted Study 2 to replicate the results of Study 1 and address an additional consideration. It is possible that it is not only the completeness of knowledge and perception of truth knowing that matters but also victims' knowledge of who they receive the truth from. We tested this proposition in Study 2 by manipulating the source of truth: We presented participants with further information about the crime that was provided either by law enforcement or by the offender themselves.

We replaced a measure and added two measures in Study 2. Specifically, we replaced the openness to repair dialogue measure used in Study 1 with a measure to tap into participants' motivation to establish consensus with the offender to incorporate a measure more explicitly framed to capture participants' motivation to revalidate violated values with the offender (see Wenzel et al., 2008). We also included a measure to assess whether our manipulations affect perceptions of how open and forthcoming the offender was in mediation. Finally, we included a dichotomous response question to examine participants' preferences for concrete restitution

obtainment options. We asked participants if they would like to either participate in further mediation with the offender to decide a plan for restitution or refer the case back to the district attorney's office for restitution to be decided in the adjudicatory process.

## Method

### Participants

We required 651 participants to have an 80% chance of detecting an effect size (*f*) of 0.11 (equivalent to *d* = 0.22) for an analysis of variance (ANOVA) considering main effects and interactions ( $\alpha = .05$ ,  $\beta = 0.80$ , four groups). Our effect size estimate (*d* = 0.22) was based on the results from Study 1. We requested data from 680 participants to account for potential exclusions due to our preregistered exclusion criteria. Participants were MTurk workers recruited via the CloudResearch recruitment platform (Litman et al., 2017). We used the same advertisement from Study 1 to recruit participants. Only U.S. residents were eligible to participate in the study, and participants received U.S.\$1.20 for their participation. We excluded data from three participants because of incomplete responses or incorrect descriptions of the hypothetical crime. We further excluded data from 127 participants because of incorrect identification of where they received further information about the crime. We had preregistered this strict exclusion criterion before data collection to rule out that participants responded to our measures without taking note of where they received the further information (<https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/YQEPF>). It was critical to rule out this alternative explanation given our predicted null hypotheses that there would be no moderating effect of truth source. A sensitivity analysis confirmed that the minimum effect size detectable (*f*) was .12 ( $\alpha = .05$ ,  $\beta = 0.80$ , four groups) with 550 cases for analysis. The final sample included 550 participants (355 female, 190 male, four nonbinary, one transgender) ages 18 to 82 years (*M* = 41.0 years). The racial identities of the sample included 72% White, 8% Asian, 8% Black or African American, 6% Hispanic or Latino, and 4% multiracial. The remaining 1% of the sample identified as Native American, Alaska Native, or other.

### Design and Procedure

We screened sign-ups with the same English proficiency test described in Study 1; the test screened out 20 sign-ups because they

answered fewer than four out of five questions correctly. After screening, we presented participants with the same hypothetical crime, and participants followed the same procedure as in Study 1. However, the scenario included an additional component that informed participants that they would receive further information about the crime. We then randomly allocated each participant to view either a police statement with further information about the crime or the offender providing further information about the crime during the imagined victim–offender mediation. The description of the crime was equal in content but had different referents: The police statement asserted that “this was the youth’s first offense,” and the offender statement indicated that “this was my first offense.” The same apology from Study 1 was issued by the offender following the description of the crime. Participants then completed the same knowledge salience manipulation used in Study 1 and responded to the dependent measures, and then the survey ended by debriefing participants about the aims of the study.

### Dependent Measures

We reused measures from Study 1, including the perceived severity of the transgression ( $\alpha = .78$ ), truth knowing ( $\alpha = .92$ ), apology readiness ( $\alpha = .76$ ), apology completeness ( $\alpha = .91$ ), and apology acceptance ( $\alpha = .91$ ). However, we included three additional measures, described below.

**Motivation to Establish Consensus.** Participants responded to four items: “I would like to talk with the youth so we can be on the same page on this issue,” “I would like to talk with the youth so we can see eye to eye on this issue,” “I would like to talk with the youth so we can agree on the values that were violated,” and “I would like to talk to the youth to come to a shared understanding of the wrongdoing” ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

**Perceived Offender Openness.** Participants rated how open they perceived the offender to be in the mediation with three items: “The youth was forthcoming in the process,” “The youth was an “open book” in the process,” and “The youth was unreserved in the process” ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

**Restitution Preference.** We asked participants to make a single choice regarding how they would like to pursue being compensated for the costs incurred to them by the offender. The imagined mediator explained to the participant that there were two options available, both with pros and cons. The first option was to work directly with the youth to come to an agreement about the frequency of repayments and repayment amounts. The second option was to refer the case back to the district attorney, meaning that there will be no further contact with the youth and the court will decide appropriate measures for repayment. In addition, the offender may face further legal consequences because the court will decide the outcomes (a possible result for unsuccessful mediation; Choi & Severson, 2009). We asked participants which option they would prefer, and they could select either working with the youth directly or referring the case back to the legal system.

## Results

A one-sample *t* test confirmed that participants rated the perceived severity of the transgression significantly above the scale midpoint (4),  $M = 6.27$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ,  $t(549) = 73.4$ ,  $p < .001$ . We conducted 2 (knowledge salience: complete, incomplete)  $\times$  2 (truth source:

police, offender) frequentist and Bayesian ANOVAs to test the between-subjects effects of knowledge salience and truth source on truth knowing, apology readiness, apology completeness, apology acceptance, consensus motivation, and perceived openness of the offender. There is a particular difficulty in considering support for null hypotheses when using traditional ANOVAs because being unable to reject the null statistically does not mean that there is evidence for the null (Gigerenzer et al., 2004). However, using Bayesian ANOVAs and the addition of BFs allowed us to quantify evidence in favor of the null hypothesis (Wagenmakers et al., 2018).

### Main Effects Testing

Table 3 contains the descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and BFs for the knowledge salience main effect models. As predicted, there were significant main effects of knowledge salience on truth knowing (large effect size), apology readiness (small effect size), apology completeness (small effect size), and apology acceptance (small effect size). Participants in the complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience condition reported greater truth knowing, apology readiness, apology completeness, and apology acceptance. However, contrary to predictions, there was no significant main effect for knowledge salience on consensus motivation. We made no predictions for the effect of knowledge salience on perceived openness, but we did observe a significant, small effect: Participants in the complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience condition perceived the offender as more open.

Table 4 includes the descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and BFs for the truth source main effect models. There were no significant main effects of truth source on truth knowing, apology readiness, apology completeness, apology acceptance, or consensus motivation. The BFs (i.e.,  $BF_{01}$ ) provided moderate to strong evidence for the null hypotheses. We made no predictions for the effect of truth source on perceived openness, but there was a significant, small effect: Participants who received the truth from the offender (vs. police) perceived the offender as more open.

### Knowledge Salience $\times$ Truth Source Interaction Testing

We predicted that truth source would not moderate the effects of knowledge salience on the outcome measures. We report here the frequentist null hypothesis testing (see Table 5), but the BFs that quantify evidence for the null hypothesis (i.e.,  $BF_{01}$ ) are more informative for our predicted null hypotheses. We isolated the interaction effects from the main effects of knowledge salience and truth source by adding these main effects to the null model. We performed this action so we could consider whether models that included only the two main effects predicted the data better vis-à-vis main effect models that also included the interaction term (Wagenmakers et al., 2018). That is, this method allowed us to quantify evidence for and against interaction models to test for the support of our predicted null hypotheses.

As predicted, there were no significant interaction effects on truth knowing, apology readiness, apology completeness, and consensus motivation. However, contrary to predictions, there was a small but significant interaction for apology acceptance (see Figure 1). Participants in the incomplete knowledge salience condition with the offender as the truth source reported lower apology acceptance ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ) than participants with the police as the truth



**Table 3**  
*Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Knowledge Salience Main Effect Models*

Variable	Knowledge salience		$F(1, 546)$	$p$	$\eta^2$	Bayes factor (strength)
	Complete	Incomplete				
	$M (SD)$ ( $N = 288$ )	$M (SD)$ ( $N = 262$ )				
1. Truth knowing	4.95 (1.26)	3.22 (1.48)	216.7	<.001	.28	$BF_{10} = 2.57 \times 10^{38}$ (extreme)
2. Apology readiness	4.93 (1.18)	4.66 (1.24)	7.37	.007	.01	$BF_{10} = 2.65$ (anecdotal)
3. Apology completeness	4.44 (1.60)	3.85 (1.53)	13.0	<.001	.02	$BF_{10} = 52.7$ (strong)
4. Apology acceptance	5.11 (1.43)	4.83 (1.53)	6.00	.015	.01	$BF_{10} = 1.29$ (anecdotal)
5. Consensus motivation	4.98 (1.66)	5.02 (1.69)	0.02	.901	<.001	$BF_{01} = 10.2$ (strong)
6. Perceived openness	4.58 (1.04)	4.13 (1.13)	23.3	<.001	.04	$BF_{10} = 7,460$ (extreme)

Note. Bayes factor:  $BF_{10}$  = evidence for alternative hypothesis;  $BF_{01}$  = evidence for null hypothesis.

source ( $M = 5.02, SD = 1.45$ ),  $F(1, 546) = 5.39, p = .02$ . In contrast, in the complete knowledge salience condition, apology acceptance did not differ for the offender as truth source ( $M = 5.19, SD = 1.41$ ) and the police as truth source ( $M = 5.05, SD = 1.45$ ),  $F(1, 546) = 0.66, p = .42$ .

There was also a small, significant interaction effect on perceived openness of the offender. Participants in the complete knowledge salience condition with the offender as the truth source reported greater mean perceived openness ( $M = 4.76, SD = 0.99$ ) than with the police as the truth source ( $M = 4.39, SD = 1.08$ ),  $F(1, 546) = 8.48, p = .004$ . In contrast, in the incomplete knowledge salience condition, perceived openness did not differ for the offender as truth source ( $M = 4.13, SD = 1.23$ ) and the police as truth source ( $M = 4.13, SD = 1.04$ ),  $F(1, 546) = 0.01, p = .99$ . However, a Bayesian ANOVA revealed “anecdotal” evidence (i.e., weak evidence; Lee & Wagenmakers, 2014) for the null, main effects model over the model that included the interaction term. Consistent with our interpretation of Bayesian statistics, we therefore considered the data to better support the null hypothesis.

### Mediation Analyses

Table 6 displays the bivariate correlations between all measured variables. We used Process Model 4 to test for indirect effects with 95th percentile bootstraps set at 5,000 samples (Hayes, 2017). For brevity, we report here the mediation patterns and provide the relevant statistics in the additional online materials at [https://osf.io/pu85b?view\\_only=47102f4446734b4faf99466a864df1f2](https://osf.io/pu85b?view_only=47102f4446734b4faf99466a864df1f2). First, complete (vs.

incomplete) knowledge salience was a predictor of truth knowing. In turn, truth knowing had a significant positive relationship with apology readiness, apology completeness, and apology acceptance. There were significant, positive indirect effects of complete knowledge salience on apology readiness, apology completeness, and apology acceptance, via truth knowing. However, contrary to predictions, truth knowing had a significant negative relationship with consensus motivation, and there was a significant, negative indirect effect of complete knowledge salience on consensus motivation through truth knowing. Finally, an exploratory mediation analysis revealed that truth knowing was a significant positive predictor of perceived openness and a significant indirect effect of complete knowledge salience on perceived openness through truth knowing.

### Restitution Preference Analysis

We conducted a binomial logistic regression to examine whether knowledge salience and truth source were predictors for participants' restitution preference. We included both knowledge salience and truth source as predictors as well as an interaction term computed using these predictors. There were two possible options for pursuing restitution: (a) referring the case back to the legal system and having no further mediation with the offender and (b) working with the offender to come to an agreement on a repayment plan. Results indicated that only knowledge salience was a significant predictor of restitution preference,  $B = 0.57$ ,  $Wald(1) = 5.23, p = .02$ , with an odds ratio of 0.56. We examined this finding further with a chi-square test of independence,  $\chi^2(1, N = 550) = 4.83, p = .03, \phi = .09$ .

**Table 4**  
*Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Truth Source Main Effect Models*

Variable	Truth source		$F(1, 546)$	$p$	$\eta^2$	Bayes factor (strength)
	Police	Offender				
	$M (SD)$ ( $N = 283$ )	$M (SD)$ ( $N = 267$ )				
1. Truth knowing	4.09 (1.61)	4.17 (1.62)	0.01	.939	<.001	$BF_{01} = 9.13$ (moderate)
2. Apology readiness	4.84 (1.19)	4.75 (1.24)	1.12	.290	.002	$BF_{01} = 7.41$ (moderate)
3. Apology completeness	4.08 (1.56)	4.12 (1.61)	0.01	.920	<.001	$BF_{01} = 10.1$ (strong)
4. Apology acceptance	5.03 (1.45)	4.92 (1.52)	1.26	.262	.002	$BF_{01} = 7.22$ (moderate)
5. Consensus motivation	5.09 (1.59)	4.90 (1.75)	1.83	.176	.003	$BF_{01} = 4.73$ (moderate)
6. Perceived openness	4.26 (1.07)	4.47 (1.15)	3.98	.046	.007	$BF_{10} = 1.24$ (anecdotal)

Note. Bayes factor:  $BF_{10}$  = evidence for alternative hypothesis,  $BF_{01}$  = evidence for null hypothesis.

**Table 5**  
*Inferential Statistics and Bayes Factors for Knowledge Salience × Truth Source Interactions*

Variable	Knowledge salience		Truth source		<i>F</i> (1, 546)	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$	Bayes factor (strength)
	Offender	Incomplete	Police	Offender				
	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) ( <i>N</i> = 288)	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) ( <i>N</i> = 262)	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) ( <i>N</i> = 283)	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> ) ( <i>N</i> = 267)				
1. Truth knowing	4.95 (1.26)	3.22 (1.48)	4.09 (1.61)	4.17 (1.62)	1.23	.268	.002	BF <sub>01</sub> = 3.22 (moderate)
2. Apology readiness	4.93 (1.18)	4.66 (1.24)	4.84 (1.19)	4.75 (1.24)	1.79	.182	.003	BF <sub>01</sub> = 3.61 (moderate)
3. Apology completeness	4.44 (1.60)	3.85 (1.53)	4.08 (1.56)	4.12 (1.61)	0.04	.847	<.001	BF <sub>01</sub> = 7.86 (moderate)
4. Apology acceptance	5.11 (1.43)	4.83 (1.53)	5.03 (1.45)	4.92 (1.52)	5.03	.025	.009	BF <sub>10</sub> = 1.75 (anecdotal)
5. Consensus motivation	4.98 (1.66)	5.02 (1.69)	5.09 (1.59)	4.90 (1.75)	2.77	.097	.005	BF <sub>01</sub> = 1.98 (anecdotal)
6. Perceived openness	4.58 (1.04)	4.13 (1.13)	4.26 (1.07)	4.47 (1.15)	4.06	.044	.007	BF <sub>01</sub> = 1.08 (anecdotal)

*Note.* Bayes factor: BF<sub>10</sub> = evidence for alternative hypothesis; BF<sub>01</sub> = evidence for null hypothesis.

The results indicated that participants in the complete knowledge salience condition preferred working with the offender toward a restitution plan more than referring the case back to the legal system to a greater extent than participants in the incomplete knowledge salience condition (see Table 7).

## Discussion

The purpose of Study 2 was to replicate the findings of Study 1 and investigate whether truth source would moderate the effects of the knowledge salience manipulation on apology readiness, apology completeness, apology acceptance, and motivation for consensus. First, the results of Study 2 replicated the findings of Study 1 by finding that participants who focused on the completeness (vs. incompleteness) of their knowledge about the crime reported a greater sense of truth knowing, greater apology readiness, greater apology completeness, and greater apology acceptance. Second, our Bayesian analyses for interaction effects provided evidence for our hypothesized null interactions between knowledge salience and truth source on apology outcomes. There was one exception with one Bayesian analysis indicating “anecdotal” evidence (i.e., weak evidence; Lee & Wagenmakers, 2014) for an interaction between

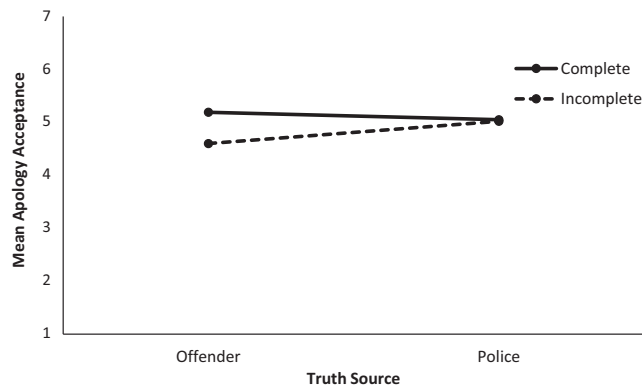
knowledge salience and truth source on apology acceptance. Third, both complete knowledge salience and the offender being the truth source increased the perceived openness of the offender. In addition, we found that the manipulation of knowledge salience affected participants’ preferred method for pursuing restitution. Participants who focused on the completeness (vs. incompleteness) of their knowledge favored working with the offender directly rather than reporting the case back to the legal system and having no further contact with the offender.

There was evidence that truth source moderated the effect of knowledge salience as apology acceptance was lower for participants who focused on the incompleteness of their knowledge when they received further information about the crime from the offender. It could be that incompleteness of knowledge and a lack of truth knowing are made particularly salient and unacceptable when the offender is the source of the truth. In turn, this may have made the offender’s apology seem less acceptable. This finding may seem to undermine our theorizing that it is the perception of truth that matters and not the truth coming from the offender. However, truth source moderated apology acceptance only on the basis of our Bayesian analyses, and it was a modest effect size. Nevertheless, this finding may suggest that there could be improvements in the acceptance of an apology in victim-offender mediation if offenders provide the full truth or if circumstances in which an offender provides an incomplete truth are avoided.

There was also an intuitive finding that participants perceived the offender as more open when they received further information from the offender compared with police as the truth source. Interestingly, irrespective of explicit source, participants in the complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience condition perceived the offender as more open. This might suggest that participants perceived the offender as being more forthcoming with the truth, either because of a “halo effect” (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977) from having the fuller truth or because participants generally assumed that information they were given (or not) about the incident was ultimately due to the offender cooperating and providing it (or not), without that necessarily being explicitly stated.

A further consideration for the general lack of truth source effect is that the alternative truth source to the offender was an authority figure (i.e., the police). It is possible that comparing the offender with the police may not have produced many observable differences because law enforcement is often (but not always) seen as legitimate/trustworthy, and participants may have seen the truth provision by

**Figure 1**  
*Mean Apology Acceptance by Knowledge Salience Condition and Truth Source*



*Note.* Apology acceptance was lower for incomplete knowledge with the offender as the truth source, but apology acceptance did not differ for complete knowledge.

**Table 6**  
*Bivariate Correlations for All Variables in Study 2*

Variable	Correlation coefficient	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Truth knowing	<i>r</i>	—	.25	.32	.18	-.10	.32	.06
	<i>p</i>	—	(<.001)	(<.001)	(<.001)	(.017)	(<.001)	(.192)
2. Apology readiness	<i>r</i>	—	—	.65	.66	.17	.44	.20
	<i>p</i>	—	—	(<.001)	(<.001)	(<.001)	(<.001)	(<.001)
3. Apology completeness	<i>r</i>	—	—	—	.77	.11	.53	.25
	<i>p</i>	—	—	—	(<.001)	(.009)	(<.001)	(<.001)
4. Apology acceptance	<i>r</i>	—	—	—	—	.26	.46	.32
	<i>p</i>	—	—	—	—	(<.001)	(<.001)	(<.001)
5. Consensus motivation	<i>r</i>	—	—	—	—	—	.16	.28
	<i>p</i>	—	—	—	—	—	(<.001)	(<.001)
6. Perceived openness	<i>r</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	.25
	<i>p</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	(<.001)
7. Restitution preference	<i>r</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	<i>p</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Note. Restitution preference was coded 1 = referring case to legal system, 2 = working with the offender.

the police as fair (Tyler, 2006). We did not measure participants’ attitudes toward the police, or perceptions of procedural fairness more broadly, but it is possible that there might be moderation depending on whether victims perceive the truth source as legitimate or illegitimate (Tyler et al., 2015).

The data also provided strong evidence for the null model over the knowledge salience model when considering participants’ motivation to establish consensus with the offender. Moreover, truth knowing negatively predicted motivation to establish consensus with the offender. On the one hand, this finding may be relatively benign and simply reflect that victims with a higher sense of truth knowing have no further need for truth/information via seeking consensus with the offender. On the other hand, it could be that there is a darker side to truth, with truth knowing feeding an avoidance of the offender. That is, victims who feel that they know the whole truth may perceive seeing eye to eye with the offender as unnecessary because they have made up their mind and they do not see the need to consider the offender’s perspective on the incident (e.g., Okimoto & Wenzel, 2011). It could also be that the sense of truth knowing satisfies a need for cognitive closure and, in turn, motivates victims to avoid anything that could introduce ambiguity, complexity, or new considerations that would disrupt their sense of closure (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996).

A finding with concrete implications for victim–offender mediation was that the manipulation of knowledge salience affected the preferred method for pursuing restitution, as participants in the complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience condition were more likely to work with the offender toward a restitution agreement than

refer the case back to the legal system. On the one hand, this could be because victims were more punitive toward the offender in the incompleteness condition, or less satisfied with mediation as a whole, so participants wanted to foreclose any future meeting. On the other hand, it could be that, generally, victims prefer the legal system to deal with establishing terms for restitution, but completeness of knowledge and a sense of truth knowing make victims more willing to work with the offender.

The two studies produced so far have an important limitation. Namely, asking people to imagine experiencing a crime can constrain confidence in the generalizability of the findings. We thus conducted a third study that recruited participants who had experienced crime to test whether we can generalize the insights of these two studies to real experiences of crime.

### Study 3

In the preceding studies, we used a crime scenario methodology, which has the advantage of control over the characteristics of the crime but also limits the external validity. Thus, in Study 3, we recruited participants who had experienced crime and then asked them to imagine participating in victim–offender mediation with the perpetrator of their experienced crime. We retained the same experimental approach as the preceding studies and asked participants to reflect on what they know (complete knowledge salience) or do not know (incomplete knowledge salience) about their experienced crime. We predicted that participants in the complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience condition would report greater truth knowing, greater apology readiness, greater apology completeness, and greater apology acceptance and be more likely to select working with the offender toward a restitution agreement than elect for the legal system to determine restitution. We preregistered the protocol for this study (<https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/7FSRJ>).

We included several measures to account for different crime characteristics given that participants could report on a variety of experienced crimes. Specifically, we included measures to capture how satisfied participants were with the information they had received about the crime, the amount of time since the crime happened, how well the participant knew the person who committed the crime, and whether the offender was convicted for the crime. We

**Table 7**  
*Number (and Percentage) of Restitution Preferences for Working With the Offender Versus Referring the Case to the Legal System by Knowledge Salience in Study 2*

Knowledge salience	Restitution preference	
	Work with offender	Legal system
Complete	149 (51.7%)	139 (48.3%)
Incomplete	111 (42.4%)	151 (57.6%)

also added two exploratory measures toward understanding why truth knowing was not associated with an increased openness to dialogue with the offender and was associated with a decreased motivation to establish consensus. We considered whether truth knowing may be associated with an increased avoidance of the offender and/or an increased readiness to draw a line under the experience and move on.

## Method

### Participants

We required 714 participants to have an 80% chance of detecting an effect size ( $d$ ) of 0.21 when comparing two independent means (two-tailed,  $\alpha = .05$ ,  $\beta = 0.80$ ). We based our effect size estimate on the effect size for apology acceptance observed in Study 2. We requested data from 750 participants to account for potential exclusions due to our preregistered exclusion criteria. Participants were MTurk workers recruited via the CloudResearch recruitment platform (Litman et al., 2017). Only U.S. residents were eligible to participate in the study. We advertised the study to MTurk workers who had an approval rating of 80% or greater. We paid them \$1.20 for their participation.

We excluded data from 70 participants because they provided either incomplete responses or a description of a time when they were not the victim of crime (e.g., either witnessing or committing a crime). Further, we excluded data from six participants because they described experiences of serious violent crime (e.g., sexual assault) and another four participants because they failed more than one of three attention checks. The final sample included 670 participants (349 male, 317 female, three nonbinary, one nondisclosed) ages 20 to 85 years ( $M = 42.7$  years). A sensitivity analysis confirmed that the minimum effect size detectable ( $d$ ) was 0.22 ( $\alpha = .05$ ,  $\beta = 0.80$ ) with 670 cases for analysis. The racial identities of the sample included 72% White, 13% Black or African American, 5% Asian, 4% Hispanic, 2% Latino, and 3% multiracial. The remaining 1% of the sample identified as Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Native American, or Alaska Native or did not disclose their racial identity.

### Design and Procedure

We advertised our study as recruiting participants who had experienced being the victim of a crime that was reported to law enforcement. We specified that we would not ask participants to report on certain violent crimes (e.g., sexual assault/rape, aggravated assault, domestic violence) given that victim–offender mediation is not typically used for these crimes. We excluded sign-ups to the study if they indicated that they had not experienced being the victim of a crime or if they, or somebody else, did not report the crime to law enforcement. Eligible participants then indicated the type of crime they experienced, provided a brief description of their experienced crime, rated the severity of the crime, indicated the time since the crime occurred, rated how satisfied they were with the level of information they had received about the crime, indicated how well they knew the offender, and indicated whether the offender was convicted for the crime.

Following the crime characteristics measures, we presented the victim–offender mediation scenario to participants. We slightly adapted how the offender apologized from previous studies by removing the offender stating that they believed that no one would

be hurt, as the offender may have inflicted deliberate injury on a participant (e.g., minor assault). Participants then completed the knowledge salience manipulation and responded to the dependent measures, and then we debriefed participants about the aims of the study.

### Dependent Measures

We reused measures from Studies 1 and 2, including the perceived severity of the transgression ( $\alpha = .68$ ), truth knowing ( $\alpha = .92$ ), apology completeness ( $\alpha = .92$ ), apology acceptance ( $\alpha = .94$ ), and restitution preference (single item). We added a reverse-coded item to the apology readiness scale (i.e., “The apology is coming too late”;  $\alpha = .57$ ). We note that the apology readiness scale’s internal consistency is poor and can be improved by dropping an item (i.e., “The apology is coming too soon”;  $\alpha = .85$ ). However, dropping this item does not alter the pattern of results, so we opted to retain the full scale as preregistered. We included a single item to serve as a manipulation check (“Please rate your level of knowledge about the crime”; 1 = *incomplete*, 7 = *complete*). We also included several crime characteristics measures to serve as covariates and two exploratory measures (i.e., avoidance, readiness to draw a line).

**Information Satisfaction.** Participants responded to the following: “How satisfied are you with the level of information that you have received about the crime?” (1 = *very dissatisfied*, 2 = *dissatisfied*, 3 = *somewhat dissatisfied*, 4 = *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied*, 5 = *somewhat satisfied*, 6 = *satisfied*, 7 = *very satisfied*).

**Time Since the Crime (Quinney et al., 2022).** Participants responded to the following: “Please indicate the most accurate amount of time since the crime occurred” (1 = *this week*, 2 = *between 1 week and 1 month ago*, 3 = *between 1 and 3 months ago*, 4 = *between 3 and 6 months ago*, 5 = *between 6 and 12 months ago*, 6 = *between 1 and 2 years ago*, 7 = *between 2 and 5 years ago*, 8 = *between 5 and 10 years ago*, 9 = *more than 10 years ago*).

**Victim’s Knowledge of the Offender.** Participants responded to the following: “How well do you know the person who committed the crime?” (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very well*).

**Offender’s Conviction Status.** Participants responded to the following: “Has the person who committed the crime been convicted for this crime?” (no/yes).

**Avoidance.** Participants responded to the following: “I would prefer to never hear from them again,” “I would live my life as though they do not exist,” and “I would try to keep a distance between us” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *somewhat disagree*, 4 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 5 = *somewhat agree*, 6 = *agree*, 7 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Readiness to Draw a Line.** Participants responded to the following: “I am ready to put an end to discussions about the issue,” “I am ready to “close the book” on the issue,” and “I am ready to draw a line under the issue” (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *somewhat disagree*, 4 = *neither agree nor disagree*, 5 = *somewhat agree*, 6 = *agree*, 7 = *strongly agree*;  $\alpha = .86$ ).

## Results

Participants indicated variety in the types of crimes they had experienced, including 53.2% property crime, 22.4% simple or minor assault, 16.9% robbery, and 7.5% white collar crime. A one-sample  $t$  test confirmed that participants rated the perceived severity

of their experienced crime as significantly above the scale midpoint (4),  $M = 6.29$ ,  $SD = 0.80$ ,  $t(669) = 74.3$ ,  $p < .001$ . An independent  $t$  test confirmed that participants in the complete knowledge salience condition perceived their knowledge as more complete ( $M = 4.98$ ,  $SD = 1.73$ ) than participants in the incomplete knowledge salience condition ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ),  $t(668) = -8.03$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.62$ , 95% confidence interval [0.47, 0.78].

In our preregistration, we anticipated that all apology items from our three scales (i.e., apology readiness, apology completeness, and apology acceptance) would load onto a single factor, which could reduce the need for multiple statistical tests. Accordingly, we conducted a principal component analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated that the correlation matrix was not random,  $\chi^2(45) = 5954.12$ ,  $p < .001$ , and the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin value was .89, above the minimum of .50. However, we did not observe our anticipated one component, and instead, we observed a two-component solution with eigenvalues greater than 1 and based on the scree plot. The first component explained 61% of the variance, and the second component explained 13% of the variance. In line with our preregistration, we opted to analyze the apology scales as three distinct subscales as we did not observe the anticipated single factor.

We conducted both frequentist independent  $t$  tests and Bayesian independent  $t$  tests using JASP with default priors (Jeffrey's Amazing Statistics Program Team, 2020; van Doorn et al., 2021). Table 8 contains the results from these analyses. In line with our predictions, participants in the complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience condition reported greater truth knowing (medium effect size) and a more complete apology (small effect size). However, contrary to our predictions, participants in the complete knowledge salience condition did not report greater apology readiness or greater apology acceptance than participants in the incomplete knowledge salience condition.

We also conducted exploratory frequentist analyses of covariance as well as Bayesian analyses of covariance with the single two-level factor of knowledge salience (complete knowledge salience vs. incomplete knowledge salience). We included information satisfaction, time since the crime occurred, victims' knowledge of the offender, and offenders' conviction status as covariates. We provide the results of these analyses in the additional online materials at [https://osf.io/pu85b?view\\_only=47102f4446734b4faf99466a864df1f2](https://osf.io/pu85b?view_only=47102f4446734b4faf99466a864df1f2), but the effect of knowledge salience (complete vs. incomplete) on truth knowing as well as apology completeness remained statistically significant after controlling for these covariates.

We conducted a chi-square test of independence to examine whether participants in the complete knowledge salience condition

would select working with the offender toward a restitution plan more than referring the case back to the legal system to a greater extent than participants in the incomplete knowledge salience condition. However, the results did not support our hypothesis,  $\chi^2(1, N = 670) = 0.33$ ,  $p = .57$ ,  $\phi = .02$ .

### Mediation Analyses

Table 9 displays the bivariate correlations between the main dependent measures and exploratory measures. We used Process Model 4 to test our indirect effect predictions with 95th percentile bootstraps set at 5,000 samples (Hayes, 2017). We report here the mediation patterns and provide the statistics in the additional online materials at [https://osf.io/pu85b?view\\_only=47102f4446734b4faf99466a864df1f2](https://osf.io/pu85b?view_only=47102f4446734b4faf99466a864df1f2). First, salience of complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge was positively associated with truth knowing. In turn, truth knowing was positively associated with apology readiness and apology completeness but not significantly associated with apology acceptance. There were significant, positive indirect effects of complete knowledge salience on apology readiness and apology completeness via truth knowing. However, the indirect effect of complete knowledge salience on apology acceptance was not significant.

We also conducted two exploratory mediation analyses using Process Model 4 to examine whether truth knowing might be associated with an increased avoidance of the offender and/or an increased readiness to draw a line under the event. First, truth knowing was not significantly associated with avoidance, and there was no significant indirect effect of complete knowledge salience on avoidance via truth knowing. However, truth knowing was significantly positively associated with a readiness to draw a line, and there was a significant, positive indirect effect of complete knowledge salience on readiness to draw a line, via truth knowing.

### Discussion

The previous studies had the limitation of using a scenario to ask participants to imagine experiencing a crime. Thus, we conducted Study 3 to examine whether real victims of crime who feel they know the whole truth are more receptive to apologies offered by offenders in victim–offender mediation. First, we partially replicated the results of the previous studies. We found that participants who focused on the completeness (vs. incompleteness) of their knowledge about the crime reported a greater sense of truth knowing and a greater apology completeness. In addition, we found indirect effects of complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience

**Table 8**  
*Descriptive and Inferential Statistics for Main Variables in Study 3*

Variable	Knowledge salience		$t(668)$	$p$	$d$ [95% CI]	Bayes factor (strength)
	Complete $M$ ( $SD$ )	Incomplete $M$ ( $SD$ )				
1. Truth knowing	4.41 (1.75)	3.43 (1.61)	-7.52	<.001	0.58 [0.43, 0.74]	$BF_{10} = 6.67 \times 10^{10}$ (extreme)
2. Apology readiness	3.45 (1.59)	3.31 (1.58)	-1.13	.259	0.09 [0.06, 0.24]	$BF_{01} = 3.58$ (moderate)
3. Apology completeness	3.68 (1.73)	3.36 (1.66)	-2.44	.015	0.19 [0.04, 0.34]	$BF_{10} = 3.09$ (moderate)
4. Apology acceptance	4.28 (1.86)	4.10 (1.79)	-1.30	.195	0.10 [0.05, 0.25]	$BF_{01} = 2.83$ (anecdotal)

Note. Bayes factor:  $BF_{10}$  = evidence for alternative hypothesis;  $BF_{01}$  = evidence for null hypothesis; CI = confidence interval.

**Table 9**  
*Bivariate Correlations for All Variables in Study 3*

Variable	Correlation coefficient	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Truth knowing	<i>r</i>	—	.13	.12	.04	.01	.02	.18
	<i>p</i>	—	(<.001)	(.003)	(.344)	(.893)	(.628)	(<.001)
2. Apology readiness	<i>r</i>	—	—	.66	.61	.33	-.47	-.09
	<i>p</i>	—	—	(<.001)	(<.001)	(<.001)	(<.001)	(.023)
3. Apology completeness	<i>r</i>	—	—	—	.79	.37	-.44	-.01
	<i>p</i>	—	—	—	(<.001)	(.009)	(<.001)	(.736)
4. Apology acceptance	<i>r</i>	—	—	—	—	.37	-.46	-.02
	<i>p</i>	—	—	—	—	(<.001)	(<.001)	(.599)
5. Restitution preference	<i>r</i>	—	—	—	—	—	-.55	-.21
	<i>p</i>	—	—	—	—	—	(<.001)	(<.001)
6. Avoidance	<i>r</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	.41
	<i>p</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	(<.001)
7. Readiness to draw a line	<i>r</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
	<i>p</i>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

*Note.* Restitution preference was coded 1 = referring case to legal system, 2 = working with the offender.

via truth knowing on apology readiness and apology completeness but not apology acceptance.

Yet, we did not replicate some of the previous findings. Participants in the complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience condition were no more likely to select working with the offender toward a restitution agreement than refer the case back to the legal system. Also, participants in the complete (vs. incomplete) knowledge salience condition did not report significantly greater apology readiness or apology acceptance. It is possible that the present study was underpowered to detect these effects as the observed effect sizes were smaller than anticipated and potentially below the minimum effect size detectable with our sample size (as indicated by a sensitivity analysis). These small and nonsignificant effects could be a result of the knowledge salience manipulation not being as effective with self-reported victims of crime (whose level of knowledge would actually vary).

We included victims' motivation for avoidance and readiness to draw a line as exploratory variables to elucidate unexpected findings from the previous studies. Specifically, we previously found that truth knowing was not significantly positively associated with an openness to dialogue with the offender, and truth knowing was significantly negatively associated with a motivation to establish consensus with the offender. The results of this study may provide an explanation for these unexpected findings as there was a positive indirect effect of complete knowledge salience on readiness to draw a line under the experience, via truth knowing. This finding may suggest that victims of crime who feel they know the whole truth may feel a decreased motivation to reach a consensus with offenders because they feel a readiness to move on from the crime.

Altogether, the results of this study are encouraging for the role of truth in victim–offender mediation. We emphasize that we presented a relatively minimal manipulation that varied knowledge salience, so we did not actually provide more or less information to victims. Despite this minimal intervention, we were able to replicate some of the previous findings with a sample of actual crime victims.

### General Discussion

It is considered one of the most important positive outcomes of victim–offender mediation that crime victims may receive an apology from the offender (Dhami, 2012). The expectation is that an

offender's offer of apology will be favorably received by the victim, but victims are not always satisfied with the apology they receive (Choi & Gilbert, 2010; Choi & Severson, 2009). We sought to understand why this is the case by looking to what victims strongly want from mediation—the truth (Borton, 2009; Paul, 2015; Van Camp & Wemmers, 2013). These studies suggest that having participants focus on the completeness (vs. incompleteness) of knowledge about a crime caused them to have a greater sense of truth knowing and, consequently, feel greater readiness for an apology, perceive the apology as more complete, and be more accepting of the apology (we did not replicate this finding in Study 3 with self-reported crime victims).

Our findings are consistent with the justification underlying truth and reconciliation commissions that the full truth being available to victims can help achieve restoration (de la Rey & Owens, 1998). Previous criticisms of the effect of truth have been leveled at the mere extrapolation that the benefits of truth would also help resolve interpersonal conflict in the absence of actually examining the effect of truth for more local conflict resolution mechanisms such as victim–offender mediation (see Mendeloff, 2009). Our findings demonstrate that victims perceiving to have the full truth about wrongdoing may have value for resolving interpersonal conflict. In doing so, these findings help shed further light on the mechanisms that contribute to effective apologies in mediation.

These findings may offer practical ways to achieve higher victim satisfaction with apologies and improve the success rate for mediation. Our findings may be used as a demonstration or evidence base to inform victim–offender facilitators or mediators about the importance of the perception of the full truth. In practice, these findings may translate into an explicit emphasis on providing victims with as complete a picture of the crime as possible. For example, checking that victims have no further questions about the crime before moving to the offender's apology may promote their readiness for the apology. Although we did not investigate whether getting the truth after an apology has been issued could cause victims to positively reappraise the apology, there is evidence to suggest that an apology is more effective if timed to come after other needs have been met (Frantz & Bennigson, 2005). Prompting the offender to elaborate in mediation may also be necessary if the victim (or mediator) perceives an incompleteness to the account/

truth offered by the offender. The measure of truth knowing (Quinney et al., 2022) may be a useful tool in this regard to assess and monitor victims' satisfaction with the availability of truth (e.g., pre-post mediation and during a break in mediation).

The present findings may also have important implications for offenders in victim-offender mediation. Some offenders can come into mediation with the intention to genuinely apologize for their actions (Braithwaite, 1989) and during the lead up to mediation can spend time writing out what they would like to say during the apology and thinking about the delivery of the apology itself (Choi & Severson, 2009). Even so, some victims may be dissatisfied and not accept the apology despite offenders' efforts to provide a genuine apology (Choi & Gilbert, 2010). The victim rejecting the apology in such cases can leave offenders bewildered and angry and make them see the victim in a less positive light (Dhami, 2016b; Thai et al., 2023). Our findings suggest that it is not only the verbal aspects of the apology, per se, that are important for the offer and acceptance of an apology. The provision of the full truth may also need to be considered as an essential component, so offenders may need to spend time also thinking and writing out the full story of what happened in preparation for truth telling in mediation. This is especially so when the offender is the sole proprietor of the truth. Here, the responsibility and onus may be—or morally ought to be—on the offender to deliver the full truth to the victim and help the victim come to a sense of truth knowing. This is especially true if offenders wish for victims to favorably receive their apology that they sincerely meant and spent time crafting.

However, not all findings were consistent with predictions. First, truth knowing was not significantly associated with an openness to further repair dialogue with the offender (Study 1), and truth knowing was significantly negatively associated with a motivation to establish consensus with the offender (Study 2). An exploratory analysis also revealed a positive indirect effect of complete knowledge salience on a readiness to draw a line, via truth knowing (Study 3). Taken together, although correlational, these findings may suggest that truth knowing might have different motivating effects on victims' engagement in victim-offender mediation. On the one hand, truth knowing may increase crime victims' receptiveness to an apology issued in victim-offender mediation. On the other hand, truth knowing might decrease victims' motivation to see eye to eye with the offender perhaps because when victims feel they know the whole truth, this satiates the driving need for truth, which may provide victims with a sense of psychological closure (Quinney et al., 2022), so victims feel ready to move on from the incident. This finding could be promising in that truth knowing might help victims of crime to feel satisfied with victim-offender mediation and move past the experience of crime. Conversely, this finding could be discouraging for co-engagement and consensus building between victim and offender in victim-offender mediation. It could therefore lead to a premature disengagement from the process; although the cognitive need to know may be satisfied, the emotional and social impacts of the crime may be left unaddressed. It is yet unclear whether victims having their need for truth met indeed translates into behaviors such as disengaging from the offender or wishing to terminate proceedings.

### Limitations and Future Directions

The studies reported here have several limitations. First, asking people to imagine mediation can constrain confidence in the

generalizability of the findings. However, given the experimental control that this approach affords, it was the method of choice for the present research. Nevertheless, we need to be cautious in generalizing the insights to real instances of victim-offender mediation.

Building on the previous limitation, we note that we examined the effects of our manipulation and a sense of truth knowing on a relatively basic and static victim-offender mediation. The use of a dyadic methodology to capture the more dynamic and complex interactions between victim and offender is a suitable next step to build on the studies here. A next logical step would be to examine how knowledge salience and truth knowing affect dynamics within victim-offender mediation. It is possible to take an experimental approach to answer this question by assigning participants to a victim or offender role and using the knowledge salience manipulation presented in this article to alter the perceived amount of truth available to participants assigned to the victim role. A simulated mediation approach (e.g., Kiefer et al., 2020) could provide a way to analyze how a sense of truth knowing affects victim-offender interactions in mediation.

Researchers interested in a more complex, but more complete, understanding of the dynamics in victim-offender mediation may consider *triadic* research. Victim-offender mediation has a third party present (i.e., the mediator), who can have their own views or goals for justice repair (Okimoto & Wenzel, 2014). The role of the mediator in the present research was minimal, but mediators are actively involved in shaping the dynamics of victim-offender mediation and come with varied skills and experiences (Choi & Gilbert, 2010). For example, victims have reported that they felt that mediation was rushed by the mediator, and their capacity to express themselves was limited (Choi et al., 2013; Jacobsson et al., 2012). Some mediators have even made unilateral decisions to accept an offender's apology without input from the victim or, conversely, expressed disappointment and anger toward the offender's apology (see Choi & Severson, 2009). There are guidelines for mediators to conduct sensitive victim-offender mediation (Umbreit & Armour, 2011) but a general lack of empirical investigation about how the mediator can affect the victim-offender dynamics in mediation. The present research suggests that the mediator's role in satisfying victims' need for truth should be part of such investigations.

Another limitation is that the present research investigated self-reported experiences of crime. Future research could consider staging a wrongdoing to induce the experience of victimization. Ethically, this must be a relatively minor wrongdoing, but it would still need to be suitable for victim-offender mediation. For example, researchers could consider modifying the Dictator Game to include acts of stealing from participants (Forsythe et al., 1994).

A field study is also a logical follow-up to the presented studies. Of course, there are practical and ethical constraints for an experimental design to use a knowledge salience/truth intervention for real instances of victim-offender mediation. In particular, asking victims of crime to focus on the incompleteness of their knowledge could detrimentally affect their level of satisfaction with the process. Instead, a measurement approach may be more suitable, such as capturing truth knowing before the offender apologizes.

It is also important to consider how the type of apology issued by the offender in these studies may have influenced the present findings. Indeed, victims value different types of apologies more so than others. For example, research in the legal settlement context has shown that apologies with responsibility taking are more effective than apologies

that convey sympathy without responsibility taking (Robbennolt, 2003). Relatedly, Robbennolt (2013) found that victims are more receptive to apologies offered by the offender than apologies offered on their behalf by an attorney. It is possible that responsibility taking and offenders apologizing themselves are necessary conditions for the positive effects of the perception of truth to arise. We did not manipulate the type, or source, of the apology within these studies. Consequently, our findings for the effects of truth on apologies are somewhat limited to apologies that contain responsibility taking and are delivered by offenders themselves. Of course, there are some key differences between the apologies delivered in victim–offender mediation and other justice settings such as civil legal disputes. Namely, the legal system (and often, the offender) has agreed on responsibility for the crime before victim–offender mediation occurs. Also, apologies are expected to be delivered by offenders themselves usually as a means of increasing responsibility taking for their wrongdoing. Hence, the findings of this research may promote understanding the factors that influence the reception of the more prototypical apologies that are delivered in victim–offender mediation, but caution should be used in generalizing these findings to different types of apologies used in other legal contexts.

Relatedly, in all studies, we did not vary the nature of the truth, meaning that we cannot generalize the findings observed here to all kinds of truth. This research appealed to victims' expectations or hopes of receiving the truth and built our theoretical case based on this need for truth to make our predictions. However, victims also have expectations for the type of truth they will receive. Clearly, some truths will be more or less satisfying than others because of the meaning or understanding of the crime it affords. For example, some victims may be more accepting of an apology offered by the offender because they learn a full, comforting truth (e.g., the offender did the crime only because they needed money to help other people). Conversely, some victims may be satisfied that they know the full truth, but no apology would be acceptable in light of the truth (i.e., the offender did the crime for the “wrong” reason). There may still be other benefits for victims who receive the complete, even if undesirable, truth, such as psychological closure (Quinney et al., 2022). However, it is possible that the benefits of complete knowledge and truth knowing in producing more effective apologies observed here may not be reproduced when the truth is unsatisfactory or hurtful. Future research could vary the nature or severity of the truth to explore whether “negative” truths might limit victims' acceptance of apologies made by an offender in mediation.

There are also some potential constraints on the present findings by race and gender that we could not account for. For example, previous research demonstrates that race and gender can affect responses to crime and apologies (ForsterLee et al., 2006; Polin et al., 2024). It could be that the present findings are constrained depending on characteristics of victims and offenders (e.g., race and/or gender) and/or characteristics of the crime (e.g., if racially motivated). These contextual factors warrant further investigation.

We note that we did not include a neutral control condition because neutrality was virtually impossible to realize. One option could be to include a no knowledge salience condition, but it may be difficult to make this condition a clear neutral reference point. That is, participants in a no knowledge salience condition would likely reflect on their level of knowledge even despite not responding to knowledge salience questions and then decide whether their knowledge is complete or incomplete. If the control condition

did resemble one of the experimental conditions (e.g., complete knowledge), this would provide information only about the default perception of knowledge in the recruited sample. The present studies are a theoretical test for the effect of victims' perceiving to know the truth about crime, so contrasting completeness to incompleteness of knowledge is sufficient to achieve this aim.

## Conclusion

The offer and acceptance of an apology are among the most important outcomes of victim–offender mediation (Dhami, 2012). The present research found that focusing on the completeness (vs. incompleteness) of knowledge caused participants who imagined crime to report greater apology readiness, apology completeness, and apology satisfaction. When participants were actual crime victims, focusing on the completeness (vs. incompleteness) of knowledge caused them to report significantly greater apology completeness (but not apology readiness or apology satisfaction). These findings point to the importance of bringing the full truth to light in victim–offender mediation for achieving effective justice restoration after wrongdoing.

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