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## RESEARCH ARTICLE OPEN ACCESS

# Assessing the Role of Honour Culture and Image Concerns in Impeding Apologies

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## ABSTRACT

Despite the known benefits of apologies, people often fail to apologize for wrongdoings. We examined the role of a cultural logic of honour—where apologizing may clash with concerns about maintaining an image of strength and toughness—in reluctance to apologize. Using general population samples from 14 societies in Mediterranean, East Asian and Anglo-Western regions ( $N = 5471$ ), we explored links between honour values and norms, image concerns, and apology outcomes using multilevel mediation analyses. Members of groups with stronger honour endorsement reported stronger image concerns about apologizing relative to their concerns about not apologizing, which, in turn, predicted greater reluctance to apologize and fewer past apologies. However, groups with stronger honour endorsement did not show greater reluctance to apologize overall, and some individual-level facets of honour predicted better apology outcomes. Our results highlight the importance of considering honour as a multifaceted construct and including contextual factors and processes when studying reconciliation processes and obstacles to apologies.

## 1 | Introduction

Transgressions are a commonplace occurrence in interpersonal interactions. Within relationships, divergence in goals and values or friction arising from deliberate or inadvertent breaches of

personal boundaries and norms is inevitable. In social scientific literature, apologies are typically framed as a beneficial and potent means of alleviating conflict in relationships: They are communicative acts through which individuals acknowledge their responsibility for a perceived wrongdoing or offence, express

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regret or remorse and seek reconciliation with the offended party (e.g., Fehr et al. 2010; Schlenker and Darby 1981; Tavuchis 1991). The net effect of an apology is often the continuation (if not strengthening) of the interpersonal relationship (see Barkat 2002; Eaton et al. 2006; Ohbuchi et al. 1989; Wohl and Tabri 2016), and an extant literature has provided support for the benefits of apologies for repairing trust, facilitating emotional healing and resolving conflict (Lazare 2005; Schlenker and Darby 1981).

Yet, despite the well-known potential benefits of apologies, people do not always choose to apologize and often even refuse to do so (e.g., see Schumann 2018, for a review). Among other factors, ego preservation, fear of vulnerability and threats to self-image have all been identified as significant barriers to offering apologies (Leunissen et al. 2022; Schumann and Ross 2010; Tavuchis 1991). Moreover, social norms, political beliefs and power differentials appear to be pivotal in shaping apology behaviours (Hornsey et al. 2017; O'Connor 2011; Ohbuchi et al. 1989). However, this literature on (reluctance towards) apologies has primarily focused on Western cultural contexts. Limited attention has been directed towards how reconciliatory behaviours such as apologies operate cross-culturally and what cultural factors may shape people's willingness or reluctance to apologize (for notable exceptions, see, e.g., Lee 2014; Lin et al. 2022; Maddux et al. 2011; Ohbuchi et al. 1989; Shafa et al. 2017).

The current study examined the role of cultural factors in the reluctance to apologize within-cultural settings where 'honour' takes on a pivotal role in guiding social life (e.g., the Middle Eastern and North African [MENA] region; Vignoles et al. 2024). In such contexts, individuals strive to build a reputation of autonomy, strength and toughness to build and protect their honour (for reviews see Uskul et al. 2019, 2023). Members of honour cultures are reportedly more reluctant than those in Western cultures to offer apologies following transgressions (Campbell 1964), potentially because apologizing is at odds with concerns about maintaining a strong and tough image (Lin et al. 2022). However, the existing evidence has been limited to studies of individual societies thought to embody 'a culture of honour', or studies relying on measuring individual differences in honour values within a single society as an analog of putative cultural differences; moreover, studies so far have focused on showing that individuals from honour-focused societies report an attitude of reluctance to apologize, leaving it unclear whether they would also genuinely refrain from offering apologies in interpersonal situations where an apology would be warranted. To go beyond past findings in this field of research, we studied the link among apologies, image concerns and different apology outcomes across a diverse sample of 14 societies, with a particular focus on Mediterranean and MENA societies—most of which have been severely underrepresented in psychological research (see, e.g., Kitayama et al. 2022; Kryś et al. 2022; Vignoles 2018).

## 1.1 | What Is Honour Culture?

Honour is commonly defined as 'the value of a person in [one's] own eyes, but also in the eyes of society' (Pitt-Rivers 1965, 21), and it has been viewed as a core cultural value and driver of social behaviour in wide regions of the world, especially the Mediterranean, the MENA region, Latin America, South Asia

or the Southern United States (for reviews see Cross and Uskul 2022; Uskul et al. 2023; Uskul and Cross 2019). This definition underscores that evaluation of individuals in honour cultures hinges on achieving and maintaining both positive self- and social worth (Cross et al. 2014; Cross and Uskul 2022). In this way, honour is a competitive social resource that individuals actively assert, yet it is also bestowed on individuals through the respect of others. Consequently, honour can be challenging to attain and easy to lose, which motivates individuals in honour cultures to engage in efforts to cultivate a positive and respectable social image and to be highly vigilant to any potential reputational threats (for reviews see Bowman 2007; Brown 2016; Cohen et al. 1996; Uskul and Cross 2019).

A fundamental way to cultivate a positive social image in cultures of honour generally involves developing, maintaining and communicating an image of personal strength and toughness: Individuals strive to build a reputation of autonomy, self-reliance and the strength and willingness to take action to protect one's family, reputation and belongings (Uskul et al. 2023). Especially among men living in cultures of honour, this concern to uphold an image of strength and toughness tends to manifest itself in retaliatory and violent reactions to interpersonal transgressions or behaviours that endanger one's honour and reputation, which has received much of the attention in the literature (e.g., Cross et al. 2013; O'Dea et al. 2022; Rodriguez Mosquera et al. 2008; Uskul et al. 2015). In contrast, participation in reconciliation has received far less research attention in honour-related research, and scarce work on this topic has been directed to understanding the *transgressor's* viewpoint (e.g., Doğan 2016) or how individuals in honour cultures perceive means to de-escalate conflict. Thus, little is known about how members of honour cultures feel about apologies or about their reasons to apologize or not following an interpersonal transgression.

## 1.2 | Saying Sorry in Honour Cultures: Understanding the Reluctance to Apologize

Given that an apology involves admitting culpability for a wrongdoing and thus places power in the hands of the victim (Kazarovytska and Imhoff 2023; Shnabel and Nadler 2008), offering apologies may be perceived as particularly undesirable within honour cultures. In such cultural groups, displaying strength, toughness and self-reliance are fundamental values in interpersonal relations—these values may be at odds with apologizing, which may be perceived to undermine one's self- and social image by making the apologizer appear weak, powerless or dependent on the other (Lin et al. 2022). Early anthropological studies, such as those conducted in Greece by Campbell (1964), provide initial support for this notion, indicating that apologies are infrequent in honour cultures due to the perception that they weaken the apologizer's strength and resilience. Seeking empirical support for a link between honour and reluctance to apologize, Lin et al. (2022) found that Turkish participants (recruited to represent an honour culture) were generally more reluctant to offer apologies following hypothetical transgression vignettes compared to participants from the eastern United States. Furthermore, highlighting the importance of variation in honour-associated values between individuals within cultures; in another study, they found that individuals in the United States

who showed stronger personal endorsement of honour values were also less willing to apologize, a link that was mediated by participants' concerns about their reputation as strong and tough (e.g., 'I will look weak to other people in this society if I apologize'). Notably, such cultural standards and norms can transcend external expectations and be internalized to varying degrees by individuals, influencing their identity, behaviour and psychological outcomes (see, e.g., Maltseva 2018).

Despite these initial insights, several open questions remain. First, although work by Lin et al. (2022) sheds light on how honour may play a role in apology-related attitudes and behaviours, this work was largely conducted with hypothetical scenarios. Whether these findings can be translated to naturally occurring behaviours in individuals from honour cultures remains unexplored. Second, the extent to which the link between apologies and honour is characteristic at the level of societies (rather than individuals) has yet to be clarified. Although individual concerns about reputation appear pivotal in navigating honour contexts, the wider applicability of the connection between honour and apologies across a broader range of societies varying in the importance of honour remains unknown, highlighting the need for further evidence across a larger number of societies than previously examined. Third, closely related, the origins of people's inclination to apologize in honour cultures are an open question. Cultural values, while endorsed to varying degrees by individuals, are also ingrained in their environment and may shape behaviours through various societal processes and institutions (e.g., social norms and practices, traditions and incentive structures) (Markus and Kitayama 2010). Considering such socio-cultural factors beyond the individuals' personal cultural values may be particularly crucial for the study of (reluctance towards) apologies in honour cultures, given the fundamental emphasis in these societies on maintaining the respect of others and presenting a positive and strong image. Fourth, although the majority of research on honour has focused on the influence of concerns about honour norms and one's social reputation, prior work has also suggested that cultural norms can become internalized and incorporated into the motivational and identity system of individuals (Maltseva 2018). Relatively little is known, however, about whether and how self-image concerns may guide attitudes and behaviour in-line with the honour code. This avenue may be particularly relevant in the context of apology behaviour, as threats to self-evaluation and self-image have been identified as significant barriers to willingness to apologize (e.g., Leunissen et al. 2022; Schumann 2018). Finally, if apologies should indeed be perceived as incompatible with central goals of honour cultures, it is still unclear by what means individuals in these cultures may reconcile and mend potentially damaged relationships following transgressions, and whether they potentially engage in other, alternative reconciliatory behaviours instead of apologies.

### 1.3 | The Current Study

The current study represents a large scale, comparative examination to address these open questions regarding the relationship between honour and apology-related outcomes, using general population samples from the Mediterranean (including Latin Europe, Southeastern Europe and MENA), East Asian and Anglo-Western regions. We recruited samples from Mediterranean

societies because recent research has largely supported the relative importance of honour in these contexts (especially MENA compared to Anglo-Western and East Asian societies; Vignoles et al. 2024). To account for honour being deeply embedded in one's socio-cultural environment and promoting behaviour processes that are not simply reducible to individuals, we assessed honour both in terms of personal endorsement as well as individuals' perception of the extent to which most people in their society endorse honour. We conducted our analyses using a multilevel approach, treating individuals as nested within their respective cultural contexts which allowed us to separate the role of individuals' differing personal endorsement of honour values from the role of living in a context where honour norms are more or less prevalent in our statistical models.<sup>1</sup> Following the previous work that has shown that the content and endorsement of honour can be highly gendered (Rodriguez Mosquera 2016), we defined cultural groups based on the intersection of gender and country (e.g., 'Spanish Women' and 'Japanese Men'). All hypotheses and analytical steps were preregistered on the Open Science Framework (<https://osf.io/cew5x>); we describe in detail the state of the data and analyses at the time of preregistration, as well as any deviations from the preregistration, in the Supporting Information section.

First, we tested the following *confirmatory hypotheses* that we formulated on the basis of the previous research on honour, image concerns and apology-related outcomes. In-line with the proposed idea of apologies clashing with social-image concerns in honour cultures, we hypothesized that, compared to those with weaker honour values, members of cultural groups with stronger prevalence of honour values would show higher levels of personal reluctance to apologize (H1a), lower likelihood of having offered an apology following a wrongdoing in the past (H1b), higher levels of concern about negative effects of apologizing on their self-image (H1c), and higher levels of concern about negative effects of apologizing on their social image (H1d).

Second, in-line with the idea that image concerns may be a factor in explaining the reluctance to apologize in honour cultures, we predicted indirect effects such that members of cultural groups with higher prevalence of honour values would show higher levels of concern about negative effects of apologizing on both their social image and/or their self-image, which, in turn, would be linked at the individual level to higher levels of personal reluctance to apologize (H2a) and lower likelihood of actual reported apologies (H2b).

We also conducted a series of *exploratory analyses* to complement the preregistered hypotheses. First, although our confirmatory hypotheses focused on the role of living in cultural contexts where honour norms are prevalent, we also included parallel effects of individuals' *personal* endorsement of honour values in our multilevel mediation analyses testing H2. Analyses of multiple datasets employing the current measure of honour endorsement had revealed a more differentiated factor structure of honour values at the level of individuals than at the level of cultural groups, with one factor emphasizing the maintenance and defence of family reputation and another factor emphasizing the need to project oneself as strong and powerful and respond decisively to threats to one's honour (Vignoles et al. 2024). The latter factor is conceptually more closely relevant to our rationale

about honour, image concerns and apologies than the former, suggesting that similar mediation processes may be expected at the individual level for self-promotion and retaliation honour, but not necessarily for defence of family reputation. Second, we explored the idea that members of honour cultures may show higher rates of other reconciliatory behaviours (e.g., gift-giving and third-party mediation) instead of offering a verbal apology by comparing the frequency of other self-reported behaviours following a past transgression.

## 2 | Materials and Methods

### 2.1 | Participants

We recruited 6577 participants from 14 data collection sites located in Anglo-Western (the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada), East Asian (South Korea and Japan) and Mediterranean regions (Cyprus [Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities], Egypt, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Spain, Tunisia and Türkiye) via local or international survey companies using online participant pools and following nationally representative quotas with respect to gender and age. Participants in all countries received comparable amounts of compensation for their participation according to the usual practice of each survey company.

Participants were eligible to participate if they were (a) at least 18 years old, (b) born in the country of data collection and (c) were living in the respective country at the time of data collection. Following feedback from local collaborators, we used nationality as a proxy for participants' birthplace in Lebanon and the Greek Cypriot community samples. To allow for sufficiently sized gender groups in each society to make up cultural units of analysis, we only included participants who self-identified as female or male in the final sample. These inclusion criteria left us with 5471 participants (see Table 1 for a detailed overview of sample sizes and characteristics per site), meeting our target sample size of 200 men and 200 women in all data collection sites except for the Greek-Cypriot Community sample (147 men and 132 women, due to restrictions in the pool of the recruitment company). The overall sample showed almost equal gender proportions (50.3% women), a wide age range ( $M_{\text{age}} = 42.61$ ,  $SD = 15.12$ ,  $\text{Min} = 18$  and  $\text{Max} = 89$ ), and an average self-reported socio-economic status (SES) slightly above the scale midpoint,  $M = 5.59$ ,  $SD = 1.94$  (on an 11-point scale from 0 = *Bottom* to 10 = *Top*).

### 2.2 | Procedure

The data were collected as part of a larger study designed to examine the link between honour and perceptions of apologies. After providing informed consent, participants first completed a series of measures (in the order presented below), which contained measures assessing individual's reluctance to apologize, self- and social-image concerns and personal and perceived normative endorsement of honour values. Next, participants were asked to recall a recent time when they did something wrong that hurt another person in some way and to report what they did in that situation (e.g., whether they offered an apology or not, whether they engaged in other reconciliatory behaviours). Finally, participants provided demographic information and were debriefed.

### 2.3 | Measures

The study was completed in the official language of each respective country. The materials were first generated or compiled in English and then translated into Arabic, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Spanish and Turkish using a team translation approach (Survey Research Center 2022); they were first translated by native speakers of the respective languages (either by a member of the research team or by a professional translator), and then reviewed and checked for accuracy and local conventions of language use by other team members (fluent in both the local language and English). Where disagreements emerged, additional individuals were consulted before a final version was reached.

Prior to our main analyses, we conducted an extensive series of multigroup and multilevel measurement models for all multi-item measures reported below to identify the best fitting factor structures across world regions (Anglo-Western, East Asian, Latin European, Southeast European and MENA) and at both individual and cultural levels of analysis. We used these models to create factor scores at the cultural group level ( $N = 28$  groups, as defined by the intersection of country and gender, i.e., 'Spanish Women', 'Japanese Men') and at the level of individuals ( $N = 5471$ ) for use in our main analyses.<sup>2</sup> All scales showed metric invariance of individual-level dimensions across world regions (i.e., equivalence of factor loadings), and all scales except for honour endorsement showed full isomorphism between the individual and group levels (i.e., factor loadings were constrained to be equal across levels, which results in individual and group scores having the same comparable scaling). For brevity, we will only report the final model structures below. With the exception of the models for honour (which can be found in Vignoles et al. 2024), all models can be found in the Supporting Information section. We saved factor scores from these measurement models for use in our main analyses.

**Honour Values.** Participants completed eight items assessing their personal and perceived normative endorsement of honour values, with four items from Yao et al. (2017) (e.g., 'People should not allow others to insult their family'.) and four items from Smith et al. (2017) (e.g. 'People always need to show off their power in front of their competitors'.); we rephrased the latter so they read as 'People should...' (instead of 'People are...' or 'People do...') to better capture endorsement of cultural values and beliefs (rather than states or behaviours). We selected these items based on extensive multigroup and multilevel measurement models conducted on a larger item pool of a previous study with samples from a similar set of societies to the current study; these analyses are reported elsewhere (see Vignoles et al. 2024). Participants rated these items once in terms of their personal agreement (i.e., personal values: 'How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?', rated 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) and once in terms of their perception of how much most people in their society would agree or disagree (i.e., perceived normative values: 'How much would most people in your society agree or disagree with the following statements?', rated 1 = *Most people would strongly disagree* to 7 = *Most people would strongly agree*).<sup>3</sup> A series of multilevel measurement models (reported in the Supporting Information section and in Vignoles et al. 2024, for honour values) suggested a two-factor structure at the within-cultures level (i.e., factors for individual differences in

**TABLE 1** | Overview of data collection sites and recruitment information.

| Country                  | Men  | Women | Age           | SES         | Language |
|--------------------------|------|-------|---------------|-------------|----------|
| Canada                   | 197  | 210   | 48.54 (14.40) | 6.10 (1.71) | English  |
| Cyprus (North)           | 213  | 188   | 43.76 (13.39) | 5.79 (2.05) | Turkish  |
| Cyprus (South)           | 147  | 132   | 45.87 (15.47) | 5.63 (1.61) | Greek    |
| Egypt                    | 200  | 196   | 32.56 (9.67)  | 5.34 (1.98) | Arabic   |
| Greece                   | 200  | 200   | 43.89 (13.46) | 5.46 (1.69) | Greek    |
| Italy                    | 200  | 200   | 43.02 (16.92) | 5.83 (1.61) | Italian  |
| Japan                    | 200  | 199   | 49.51 (13.70) | 4.86 (1.94) | Japanese |
| Korea                    | 198  | 200   | 44.31 (13.34) | 4.82 (1.97) | Korean   |
| Lebanon                  | 200  | 198   | 31.55 (10.00) | 5.20 (2.07) | English  |
| Spain                    | 198  | 200   | 44.30 (14.40) | 5.93 (1.63) | Spanish  |
| Tunisia                  | 200  | 197   | 34.37 (10.34) | 5.35 (1.84) | Arabic   |
| Türkiye                  | 200  | 200   | 38.30 (12.99) | 3.21 (1.84) | Turkish  |
| United Kingdom           | 200  | 200   | 50.11 (16.68) | 5.30 (1.91) | English  |
| United States of America | 199  | 199   | 47.13 (16.27) | 6.46 (2.31) | English  |
| Total                    | 2752 | 2719  | 42.61 (15.12) | 5.59 (1.94) | —        |

Note: Values for age and SES represent means with standard deviations in brackets.

Abbreviation: SES, socio-economic status.

defence of family reputation and self-promotion and retaliation) and a one-factor structure at the between-cultures level (i.e., variation across cultural groups in the prevalence of *honour*), in keeping with the factor structure observed in a previous sample (see Vignoles et al. 2024). Reliabilities of all factors (as assessed by using Coefficient  $H$ , please see Hancock and Mueller 2001) were adequate or better at both the within-sample (personal honour values: Coefficient  $H_{\text{SelfPromotion}} = 0.623$ ,  $H_{\text{FamilyReputation}} = 0.798$ ; perceived normative honour values:  $H_{\text{SelfPromotion}} = 0.652$ ,  $H_{\text{FamilyReputation}} = 0.798$ ) and between-sample level (personal honour values:  $H = 0.975$ ; perceived normative honour values:  $H = 0.976$ ).

**Social and Self-Image Concerns.** We included two sets of measures to assess participants' concerns about the consequences of apology-related behaviour on their self-image (i.e., their own view of themselves) and social image (i.e., their reputation in the eyes of others). Both sets contained parallel sets of items ( $N = 9$ ) that differed slightly depending on the self-image or social image focus: First, they contained six items (adjusted and expanded from Lin et al. 2022) assessing concerns about the possible negative impact of offered apologies following wrongdoings (self-image focus: 'Apologizing for a wrongdoing would harm my view of myself'; social image focus: 'Apologizing for wrongdoings would harm my reputation in the eyes of other people'). Additionally, we included three items assessing similar concerns after *not* offering an apology following a wrongdoing (self-image focus: 'If I failed to apologize for something I have done wrong, I would lose respect for myself'; social image focus: 'If I failed to apologize for something I have done wrong, I would lose others' respect'); these items were intended to provide a reverse-coded counterpoint to the original scale. All items were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

For both self and social-image concerns,<sup>4</sup> our measurement models unexpectedly showed that a two-factor solution separating a factor for *image concerns about apologizing* and a factor for *image concerns about not apologizing* fit the data better than a one-factor solution at both individual and cultural levels of analysis. Reliabilities of both factors were good at both the individual (self-image concerns:  $H_{\text{Apologizing}} = 0.895$ ,  $H_{\text{NotApologizing}} = 0.732$ ; social-image concerns:  $H_{\text{Apologizing}} = 0.893$ ,  $H_{\text{NotApologizing}} = 0.717$ ) and cultural level (self-image concerns:  $H_{\text{Apologizing}} = 0.969$ ,  $H_{\text{NotApologizing}} = 0.960$ ; social-image concerns:  $H_{\text{Apologizing}} = 0.970$ ,  $H_{\text{NotApologizing}} = 0.975$ ).

Image concerns about apologizing and about not apologizing were largely uncorrelated at the individual level ( $r_{\text{Self-Image}} = -0.07$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $r_{\text{Social-Image}} = 0.04$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and positively correlated at the cultural level ( $r_{\text{Self-Image}} = 0.73$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $r_{\text{Social-Image}} = 0.72$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, for both self-image and social-image concerns, the three additional items did not function as reversed items on a unidimensional scale, as we had expected. A possible explanation is that participants may have been considering the potential impact on their self-image and social image of the wrongdoing mentioned in the items—which would have fostered positive covariation between the two factors—in addition to the potential impact of apologizing or not—which would have fostered negative covariation between the two factors. Nevertheless, the theoretical construct of interest underlying our preregistered hypotheses was the extent to which participants were concerned that apologizing, *compared to not apologizing*, would negatively affect their self-image and/or their social image. We therefore decided that relative measures (i.e., the score for image concerns about apologizing minus the score for image concerns about not apologizing, calculated separately for self- and social-image concerns) would provide

the most theoretically meaningful tests of our hypotheses. Thus, we computed difference scores using the respective factor scores, with higher scores reflecting a stronger concern for possible negative impacts on one's self-image or social image of apologizing compared with not apologizing.

**Reluctance to Apologize.** We assessed participants' reluctance to apologize using four items taken from Hornsey et al. (2017) to measure the likelihood and frequency of apologies in the context of a transgression ('*I am unlikely to apologize if I have done something wrong.*', '*I rarely apologize to other people.*', '*In general, I apologize after having done something wrong.*', and '*After I have done something wrong, I usually apologize.*'; last two items reverse coded, rated 1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*). The items showed a one factor structure at both individual and cultural levels of analysis. Reliability was adequate at the individual level ( $H = 0.679$ ) and good at the cultural level ( $H = 0.799$ ).

**Recalled Transgression Situation.** Participants were asked to recall a past transgression incident and report the main **theme of the transgression** (i.e., emotional harm, physical harm, material/financial harm or other) as well as whether they eventually **offered an apology (or not)** to the person who was the subject of the recalled transgression ('*Following that situation, did you apologize to this person?*'; rated 0 = *No*, 1 = *Yes*). Finally, people were also asked whether they engaged in any **alternative reconciliatory behaviours** if did not offer an apology (by choosing one or more of the following options: '*I made a nice gesture [e.g. purchased a gift, invited them for coffee/tea]*', '*I asked someone else to help resolve the situation*', '*I apologized to somebody else who was related to this person*', '*Not listed [please briefly specify]*', '*I didn't do anything*').

Prior to analysing the recalled situations, we translated and screened all entries for potentially invalid responses by separately checking the open-ended answers related to the reported topic of the situation as well as the open-ended answers for the alternative reconciliatory behaviours: We considered a response potentially problematic if a participant was unable to recall a fitting situation (e.g., 'I haven't caused any harm', 'I don't remember doing anything'), may have recalled a situation in which he was not the transgressor (e.g., 'I was deceived', 'The harm was to me'), gave inconsistent information (e.g., reporting an apology in the alternative behaviours, but not in the respective question) or showed careless and unintelligible responding (e.g., 'Nnn'). Accordingly, we excluded 165 participants (who showed potential problems in their open-ended description of the apology situation) from analyses that included the recalled apology behaviour as a dependent variable, leaving  $N = 5306$  for analyses. Furthermore, we excluded those participants as well as 20 additional participants (who showed potential problems in their open-ended description of the alternative apology behaviour) from analyses that examined the alternative reconciliatory behaviours ( $N = 1350$ ; only participants who reported not offering an apology).<sup>5</sup>

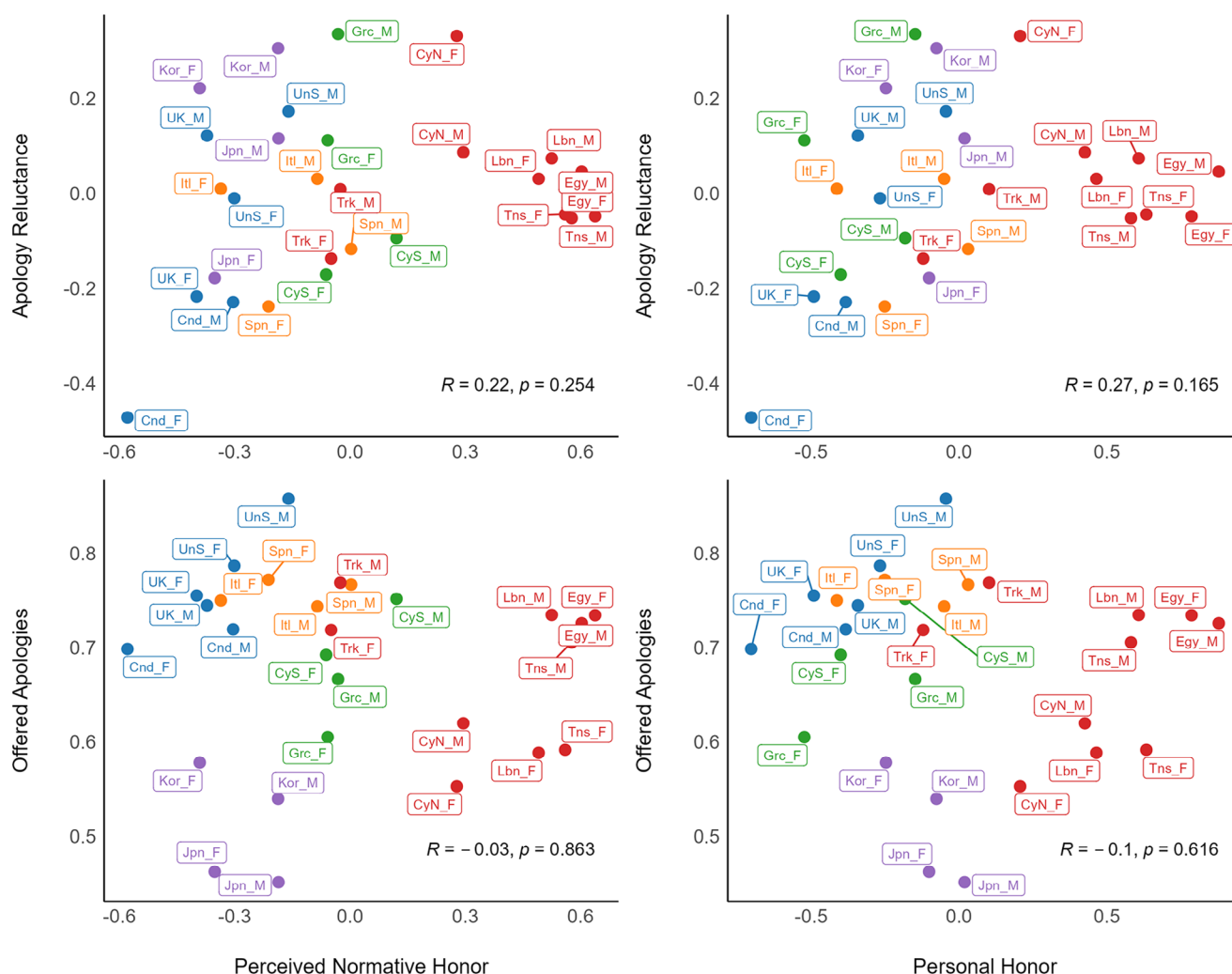
**Demographic Information.** Among others, we asked participants to report their gender, age, country of birth, parents' country of birth, parents' highest education, residence country and perceived (self) social status in the country of residence (MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status; Adler et al. 2000).

## 2.4 | Analytical Strategy

Following the preregistered analytical steps, we first conducted a bivariate *correlational analysis* at the cultural level of analysis with measures of personal and perceived normative honour values, self-image and social-image concerns, reluctance to apologize and self-reported apologies in the recalled situation to test confirmatory hypotheses (H1a to H1d).

Second, to test our research questions regarding mediation at the cultural (hypotheses H2a and H2b) and individual levels (exploratory research question), we conducted a series of multilevel mediation analyses using multilevel structural equation modelling in Mplus (v8.7; Muthén and Muthén 2017), nesting participants within their respective cultural groups. Because our main predictors (perceived normative and personally endorsed honour values) were highly correlated at the cultural level ( $r = 0.92$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), we conducted analyses separately for these two measures.<sup>6</sup> In all models, we included the two honour factors (i.e., *defence of family reputation* and *self-promotion and retaliation*) as external/exogenous variables at the individual level and the general honour factor as the external variable at the sample level; self-image and social-image concerns were included as simultaneous mediators at both levels. Finally, in separate models, we included either *reluctance to apologize* (linear regression) or self-reported *apology*<sup>7</sup> (logistic regression) as the dependent variables, which resulted in a total of four mediation models. In interpreting our results and hypotheses, we follow recent perspectives in mediation analyses (e.g., Zhao et al. 2010; Rucker et al. 2011) that consider mediation to be present if the indirect effect of interest is found to be significant (contrasting the approach by Baron and Kenny [1986] which considers the present of a significant total effect to be necessary for mediation). Because we theorized that image concerns would be linked to apology outcomes through individual-level psychological processes, we constrained the paths leading from our image concern mediators to our dependent variables to be equal at the individual and cultural level—thus maximizing both parsimony and statistical power to test the theorized indirect effects.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, to test our exploratory research question regarding alternative reconciliatory behaviours, we conducted a series of chi-square tests to examine differences in frequencies of each behaviour among different sub-regions. We categorized five world regions based on countries' ethnic/racial, religious and linguistic background; their geographic proximity and colonial heritage (*Anglo-Western*: the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada; *Latin Europe*: Spain, Italy; *Southeast Europe*: Greece, Cyprus [Greek Cypriot Community]; *MENA*: Türkiye, Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia; *East Asia*: South Korea, Japan; see Mensah and Chen 2012; Vignoles et al. 2024).<sup>9</sup> To zoom in on which behaviours were especially likely to be found in certain regions, we followed up significant results by examining the *adjusted residuals* (Bakeman and Quera 2011, 109–110): adjusted residuals reflect the degree of deviation of particular cell counts from the expected frequency counts based on chance (i.e., if there was no relationship between columns and rows, or regions and behaviours), and thus can give insights into which behaviours were especially likely or unlikely to be found in a particular region, compared to their average occurrence across all regions. For the adjusted residuals,



**FIGURE 1** | Scatterplot for correlation analyses on apology outcomes at the culture level. Shown are scatterplots using the culture-level scores on variables relevant to preregistered hypotheses (H1a and H1b). Data are coloured by region (Anglo-Western: blue; Latin Europe: orange; Southeastern Europe: green; Middle East: red and East Asia: purple).

we implemented a stricter significance criterion of  $z > 2.56$  to adjust for multiple comparisons (Bakeman and Quera 2011). For all analyses on alternative reconciliatory behaviours, we only included participants that reported *not* to have offered a direct apology following the transgression ( $N = 1350$ ).

### 3 | Results

#### 3.1 | Culture-Level Correlations (H1)

Figure 1 (for hypotheses H1a and H1b related to apology outcomes) and Figure 2 (for hypotheses H1c and H1d related to image concerns) depict the scatterplots and correlations among all variables at the cultural level of analysis (Tables S1 and S2 report all correlations at the cultural and individual levels, respectively).

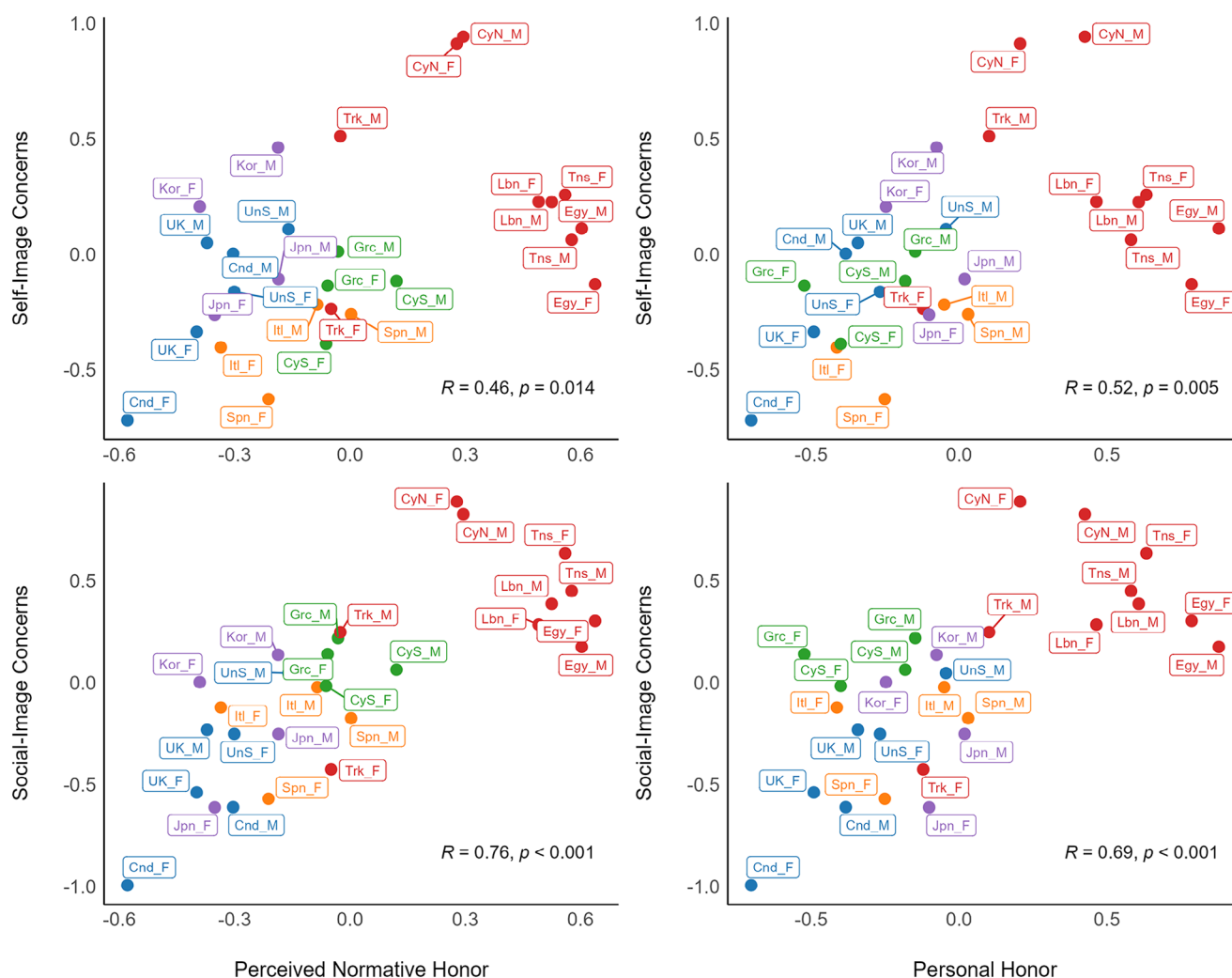
We found that our hypotheses were only partially supported: neither perceived normative ( $r = 0.22$ ,  $p = 0.254$ ) nor personal honour values ( $r = 0.27$ ,  $p = 0.165$ ) were significantly associated with culture-level variation in reluctance to apologize, thus not supporting H1a. The same pattern emerged for self-reported

apologies (perceived normative honour values:  $r = -0.03$ ,  $p = 0.863$ ; personal honour values:  $r = -0.10$ ,  $p = 0.616$ ), not supporting H1b.

However, as expected, culture-level variation in both perceived normative and personal honour values showed significant and positive relations with both self-image concerns (perceived normative honour values:  $r = 0.46$ ,  $p = 0.014$ ; personal honour values:  $r = 0.52$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ) and social-image concerns about apologizing versus not apologizing (perceived normative honour values:  $r = 0.76$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; personal honour values:  $r = 0.69$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting H1c and H1d.<sup>10</sup>

#### 3.2 | Indirect Effects of Culture-Level Variation in Honour (H2)

As described in our analysis plan, we tested H2a and H2b using a set of four multilevel mediation analyses, with separate analyses for each type of honour values endorsement (personal endorsement vs. perceived normative endorsement) and for each predicted dependent variable (reluctance to apologize vs. offered



**FIGURE 2** | Scatterplot for correlation analyses on image concerns at the culture level. Shown are scatterplots using the culture-level scores on variables relevant to preregistered hypotheses (H1c and H1d). Data are coloured by region (Anglo-Western: blue; Latin Europe: orange; Southeastern Europe: green; Middle East: red and East Asia: purple).

apologies).<sup>11</sup> All estimates presented are unstandardized; standardized estimates can be found in the Supporting Information section (see Tables S3 and S4 for a complete summary of model parameters).

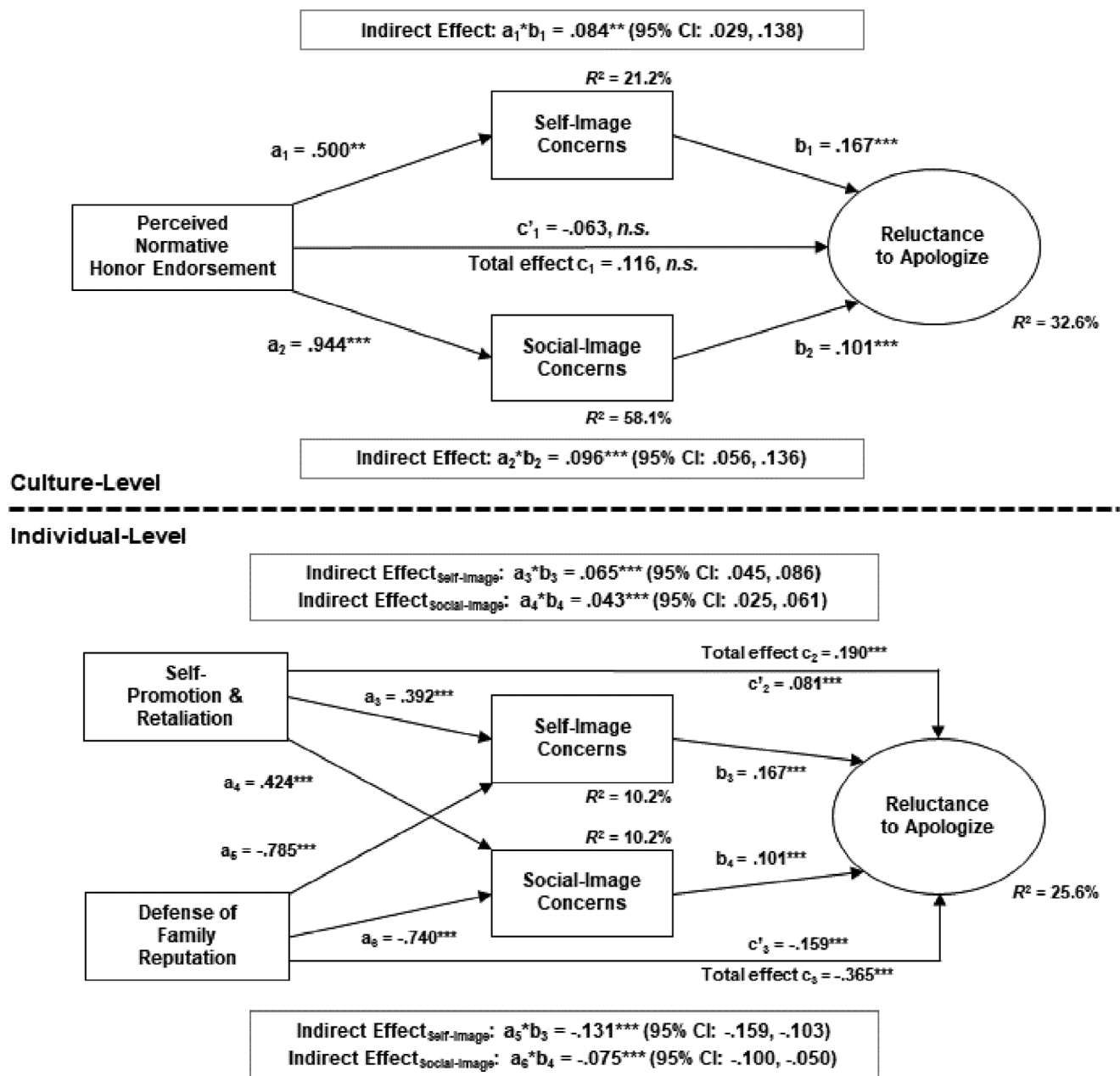
### Indirect Paths Predicting Reluctance to Apologize (H2a).

For perceived normative honour endorsement (Figure 3; top part), we found that members of cultural groups with stronger perceived honour endorsement reported greater self-image concerns ( $a_1 = 0.500$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) and greater social-image concerns ( $a_2 = 0.944$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In turn, both types of image concerns predicted greater reluctance to apologize (self-image concerns:  $b_1 = 0.167$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ; social-image concerns:  $b_2 = 0.101$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). The indirect effects through self-image concerns ( $a_1 \times b_1 = 0.084$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) and social-image concerns ( $a_2 \times b_2 = 0.096$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) were both significant. Furthermore, neither the direct effect ( $c'_1 = -0.063$ ,  $p = 0.363$ ) nor the total effect ( $c_1 = 0.116$ ,  $p = 0.224$ ) from perceptions of normative honour to reluctance to apologize was significant. As Figure 4 (top part) shows, the pattern of results for our mediation analyses using personal honour values was substantively identical to the results using perceived normative honour endorsement.

Taken together, our analyses supported the expected mediation effects at the culture-level for both types of image concerns as proposed in H2a: Members of cultural groups with stronger perceived honour endorsement, as well as with stronger personally reported honour endorsement, reported stronger concerns about apologizing (vs. not apologizing) for one's self-image as well as social image, which, in turn, both predicted higher levels of reluctance to apologize.

### Indirect Paths Predicting Offered Apologies (H2b).

For perceived normative honour endorsement (Figure 5; top part), we found the same links between honour endorsement and image concerns: Members of cultural groups with stronger perceived honour endorsement reported stronger self-image concerns ( $a_1 = 0.500$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ) and stronger social-image concerns ( $a_2 = 0.944$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In turn, social-image concerns predicted offered apologies negatively ( $b_2 = -0.115$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), but self-image concerns did not ( $b_1 = -0.049$ ,  $p = 0.076$ ). Thus, the models showed a significant indirect effect through social-image concerns ( $a_2 \times b_2 = -0.109$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), but not through self-image concerns ( $a_1 \times b_1 = -0.024$ ,  $p = 0.086$ ). Furthermore, neither the direct effect ( $c'_1 = 0.121$ ,  $p = 0.543$ ) nor the total effect



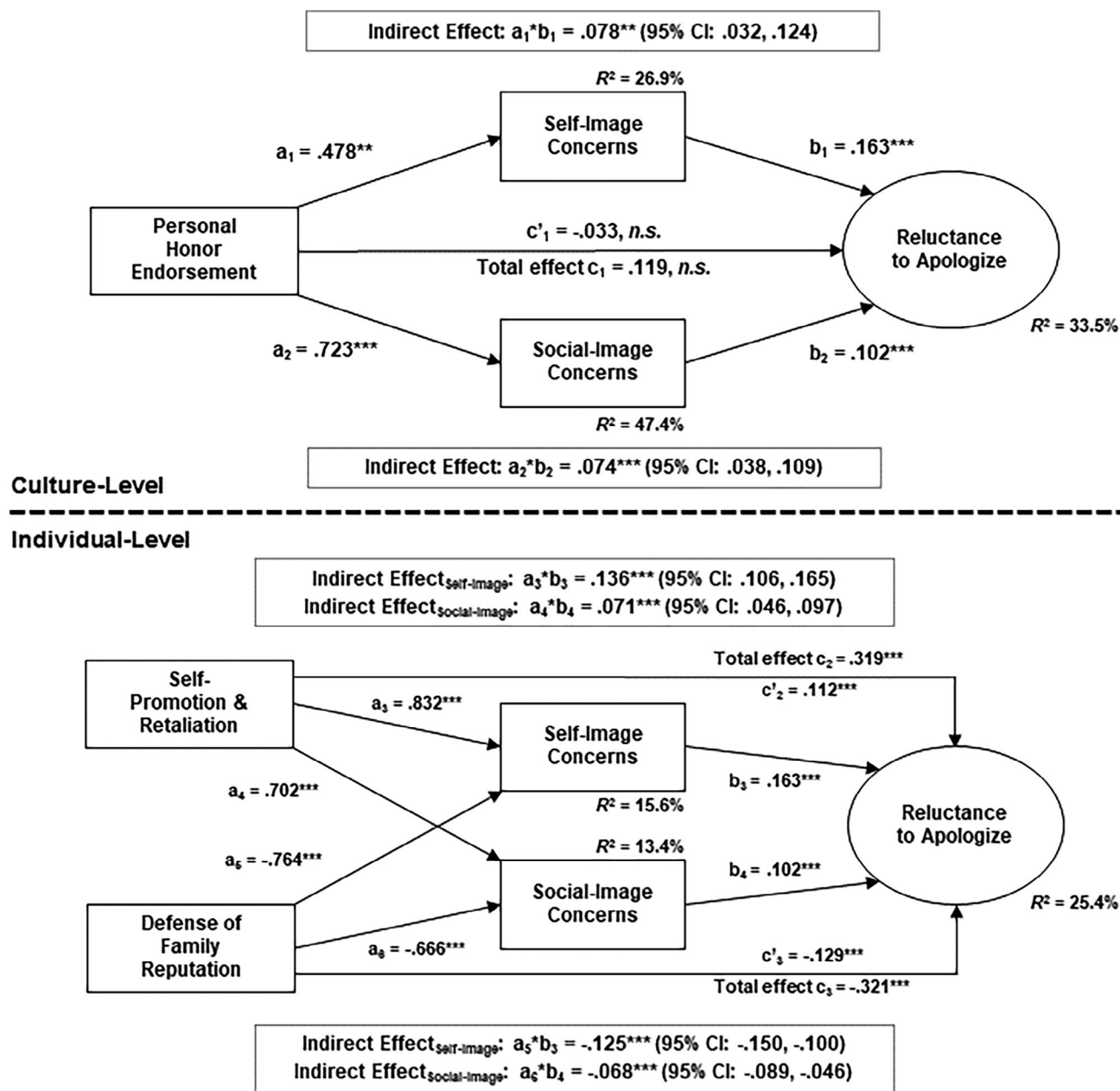
**FIGURE 3** | Multilevel mediation model predicting reluctance to apologize by perceived normative honour values, via concerns for self-image and social image related to apologizing (over not apologizing). Between-culture parameters are above the dotted line; within-culture parameters are below the dotted line. Unstandardized paths from self-image concerns and social-image concerns to reluctance to apologize were constrained to be equal across levels. \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

( $c_1 = -0.012$ ,  $p = 0.955$ ) from perceptions of normative honour to offered apologies were significant. As shown in Figure 6 (top part), the pattern of results for our mediation analyses using personal honour values was again substantively identical to the results using perceived normative honour endorsement.

Taken together, our analyses partly supported H2b: Members of cultural groups with stronger perceived honour endorsement, as well as with stronger personally reported honour endorsement, reported stronger concerns about apologizing (vs. not apologizing) for one's self-image as well as social image; however, only stronger social-image concerns (but not self-image concerns) also predicted less offered apologies in turn.<sup>12,13</sup>

### 3.3 | Exploring Effects of Individual-Level Variation in Honour Values

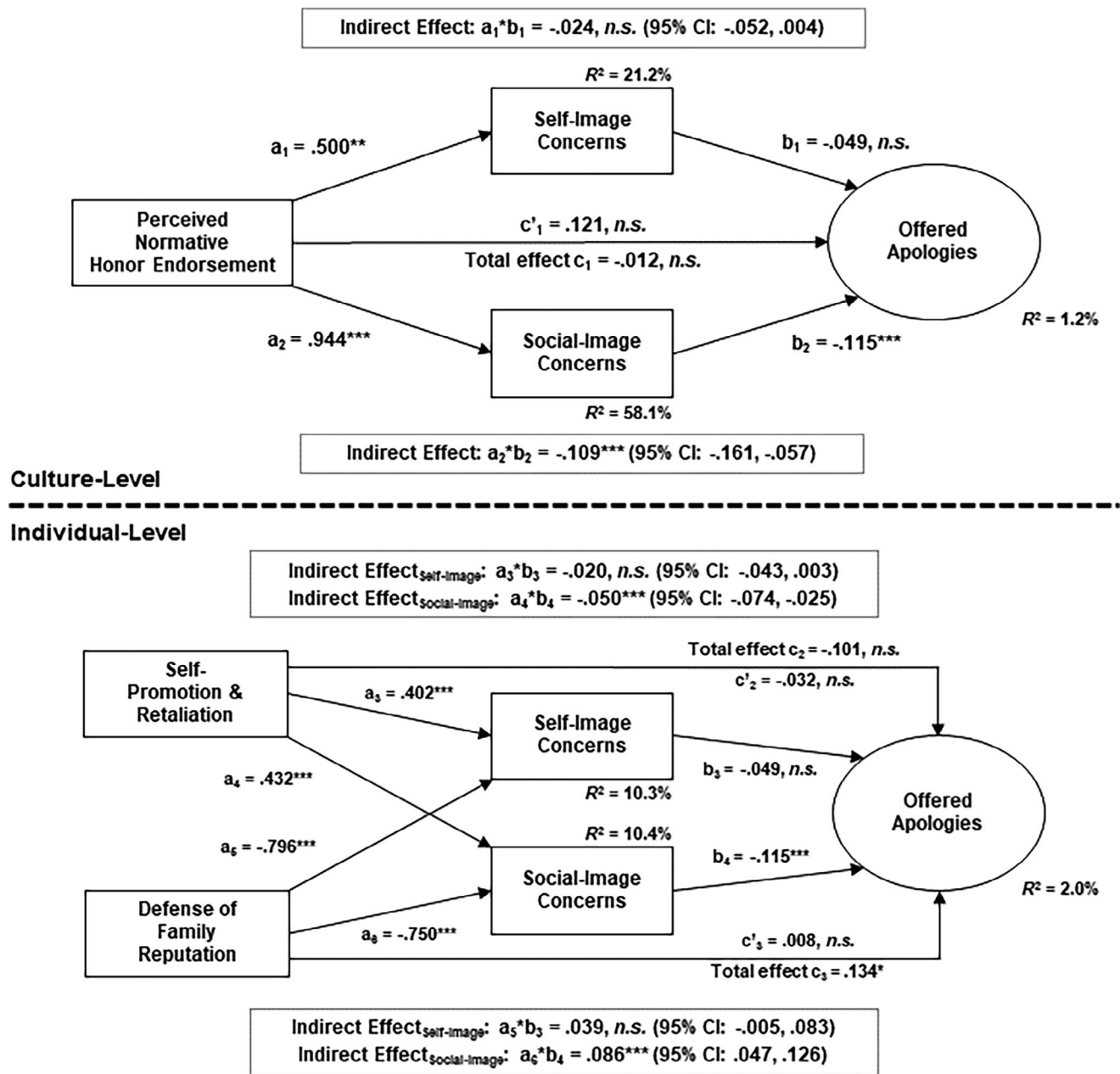
In all analyses discussed above, we also included individual differences in perceived normative or personally endorsed honour values, each of which formed two factors at the individual level of analysis (*defence of family reputation* and *self-promotion and retaliation*). This allowed us to explore indirect paths from individual-level variation in honour values to apology outcomes via image concerns (paralleling those of our main hypotheses H2a and H2b).



**FIGURE 4** | Multilevel mediation model predicting reluctance to apologize by personal honour values, via concerns for self-image and social image related to apologizing (over not apologizing). Between-culture parameters are above the dotted line; within-culture parameters are below the dotted line. Unstandardized paths from self-image concerns and social-image concerns to reluctance to apologize were constrained to be equal across levels. \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

**Indirect Paths Predicting Reluctance to Apologize.** For perceived normative honour endorsement (Figure 3; bottom part), we found that individuals within each cultural group who perceived a greater value of self-promotion and retaliation in their respective societies reported stronger self-image ( $a_3 = 0.392$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and social-image concerns ( $a_4 = 0.424$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), whereas those who perceived a greater normative value of defence of family reputation reported weaker self-image ( $a_5 = -0.785$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and social-image concerns ( $a_6 = -0.740$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) about apologizing, compared to not apologizing. In turn, both types of image concerns positively predicted reluctance to apologize (self-image concerns:  $b_3 = 0.167$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; social-image concerns:  $b_4 = 0.101$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Hence, all four indirect effects

from honour values through image concerns were significant, but in opposing directions: Whereas both indirect effects for self-promotion and retaliation values were positive (via self-image concerns:  $a_3 \times b_3 = 0.065$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; via social-image concerns:  $a_4 \times b_4 = 0.043$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), both indirect effects for defence of family reputation values were negative (via self-image concerns:  $a_5 \times b_3 = -0.131$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; via social-image concerns:  $a_6 \times b_4 = -0.075$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, both types of honour values showed significant direct effects (self-promotion and retaliation:  $c'_2 = 0.081$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; defence of family reputation:  $c'_3 = -0.159$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and significant total effects (self-promotion and retaliation:  $c_2 = 0.190$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; defence of family reputation:  $c_3 = -0.365$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). As the

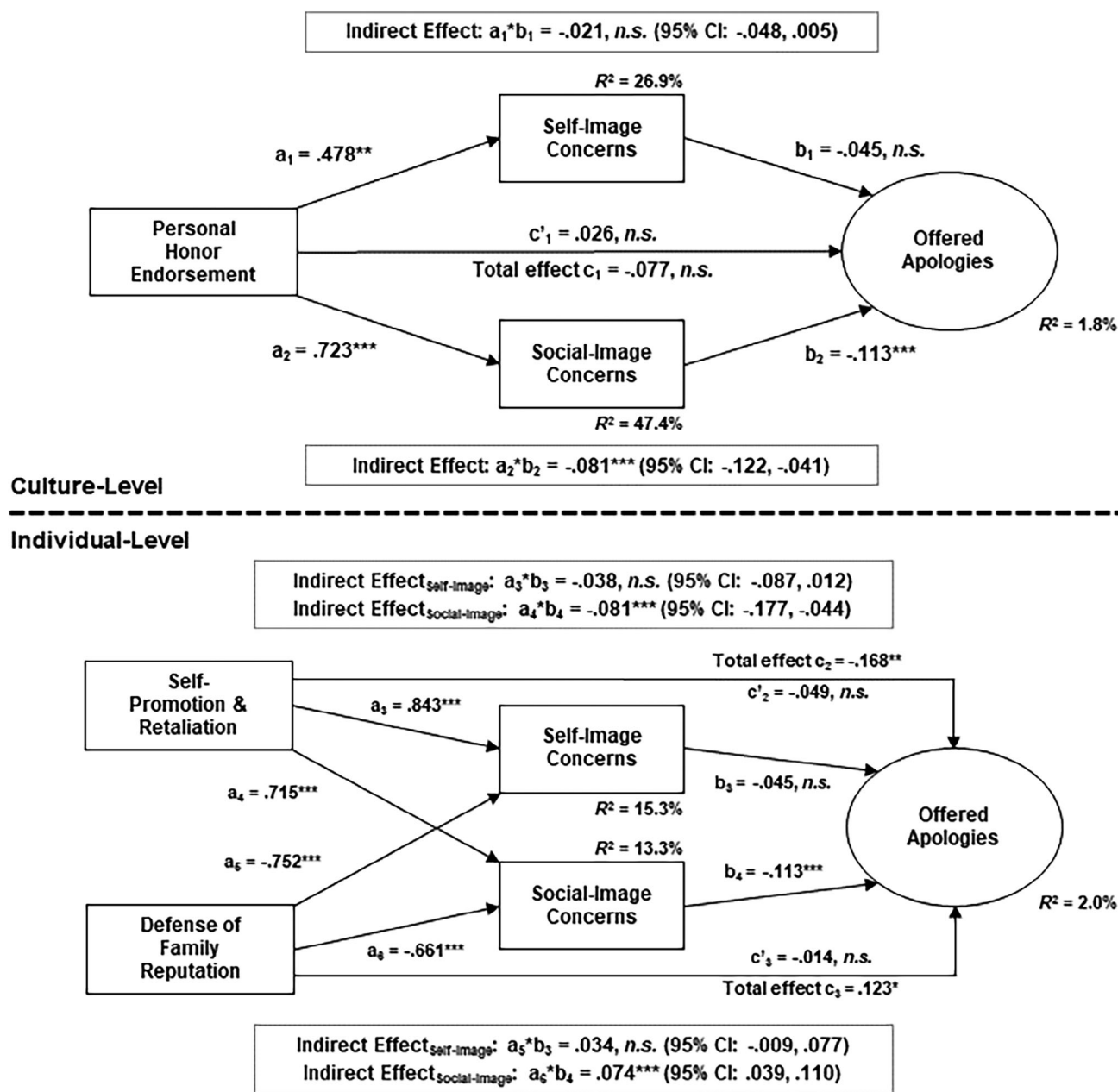


**FIGURE 5** | Multilevel mediation model predicting offered apologies as a function of perceived normative honour values, via concerns for self-image and social image related to apologizing (over not apologizing). Between-culture parameters are above the dotted line; within-culture parameters are below the dotted line. Unstandardized paths from self-image concerns and social-image concerns to offered apologies were constrained to be equal across levels. \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

bottom part of Figure 4 shows, the pattern of results for our mediation analyses using personal honour values was once more substantively identical to the results using perceived normative honour endorsement.

**Indirect Paths Predicting Offered Apologies.** For perceived normative honour endorsement (Figure 5; bottom part), as in the preceding analyses, we found that individuals within each cultural group who perceived a greater value of self-promotion and retaliation in their respective societies also reported stronger self-image ( $a_3 = 0.402, p < 0.001$ ) and social-image concerns ( $a_4 = 0.432, p < 0.001$ ), whereas those who perceived a greater normative value of defence of family reputation reported weaker

self-image ( $a_5 = -0.796, p < 0.001$ ) and social-image concerns ( $a_6 = -0.750, p < 0.001$ ) about apologizing, compared to not apologizing.<sup>14</sup> In turn, social-image concerns predicted offered apologies negatively ( $b_4 = -0.115, p < 0.001$ ), but self-image concerns showed no significant link ( $b_3 = -0.049, p = 0.076$ ). Therefore, we found that only the indirect effects from our honour variables through social-image concerns were significant: Although the indirect effect for self-promotion and retaliation values via social-image concerns was negative ( $a_4 \times b_4 = -0.050, p < 0.001$ ), the indirect effect for defence of family reputation values via social-image concerns was positive ( $a_6 \times b_4 = 0.086, p < 0.001$ ). No indirect effects via self-image concerns were significant (self-promotion and retaliation values:  $a_3 \times b_3 = -0.020$ ,



**FIGURE 6** | Multilevel mediation model predicting offered apologies as a function of personal honour values, via concerns for self-image and social image related to apologizing (over not apologizing). Between-culture parameters are above the dotted line; within-culture parameters are below the dotted line. Unstandardized paths from self-image concerns and social-image concerns to offered apologies were constrained to be equal across levels. \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ . \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ .

$p = 0.095$ ; defence of family reputation values:  $a_5 \times b_3 = 0.039$ ,  $p = 0.083$ ). Furthermore, neither dimension of honour values showed significant direct effects (self-promotion and retaliation:  $c'_2 = -0.032$ ,  $p = 0.583$ ; defence of family reputation:  $c'_3 = 0.008$ ,  $p = 0.894$ ), and only defence of family reputation values ( $c_3 = 0.134$ ,  $p = 0.024$ ), but not self-promotion and retaliation values ( $c_2 = -0.101$ ,  $p = 0.068$ ), showed a significant total effect on our dependent variable. As the bottom part of Figure 6 shows, the pattern of results for our mediation analyses using personal honour values was once again substantively identical to the results using perceived normative honour endorsement.

Taken together, although stronger image concerns consistently predicted higher levels of reluctance to apologize, our analyses thus suggest associations in the opposing directions between perceived normative endorsement and personal endorsement facets of honour on one hand and image concerns on the other hand: Although stronger endorsement of self-promotion and retaliation values was linked to stronger image concerns, stronger endorsement of defence of family reputation values was linked to *weaker* image concerns. Furthermore, although both types of image concerns explained the link between honour and reluctance to apologize, only social-image concerns (but not self-image concerns) played a role for self-reported offered apologies.

**TABLE 2** | Frequencies of alternative reconciliatory behaviours.

| Region              | % Apology offered | Nice gesture (%) | m                          |                                  |                           |
|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
|                     |                   |                  | Asked for outside help (%) | Apologized to another person (%) | I did not do anything (%) |
| Anglo-West          | 80.2              | 20.2             | 13.3                       | 6.0                              | 53.7                      |
| Mediterranean       | 74.1              | 27.6             | 15.7                       | 9.0                              | 45.2                      |
| Latin Europe        | 79.1              | 27.9             | 12.3                       | 7.8                              | 48.7                      |
| Southeastern Europe | 72.0              | 28.7             | 11.4                       | 13.8                             | 41.9                      |
| Middle East         | 72.7              | 27.1             | 18.3                       | 7.6                              | 45.2                      |
| East Asia           | 55.3              | 21.2             | 8.1                        | 3.3                              | 66.1                      |

Note: Percentages of alternative reconciliatory behaviours refer to the % of participants in each region that reported each option after not offering an apology. Participants had the possibility to report multiple alternative behaviours if they reported they had not apologized.

### 3.4 | Regional Differences in Alternative Reconciliatory Behaviours

Table 2 shows the percentages of participants across world regions who reported having apologized in the face of a past transgression, as well as the percentages of those that did not apologize who engaged in various alternative behaviours. Examining these figures across the five regions showed significant differences in self-reported apologies across cultures,  $\chi^2(4, 4970) = 154.94$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; with apologies offered the least in the East Asian sample (55.3%) and the most in the Anglo-Western (80.2%) participants. The three Mediterranean regions fell in between these two groups, with Latin European participants (79.1%) being closer to Anglo-Western participants than Southeastern European (72.0%) or Middle Eastern participants (72.7%). Examining the adjusted residuals revealed that participants from East Asian societies were less likely than average to apologize ( $z = 11.26$ ), whereas both Anglo-Western and Latin European societies were both more likely than average to apologize ( $z = 6.29$  and  $z = 4.21$ , respectively).

We found that, across the five regions, participants who did not offer an apology to the other party most frequently reported doing nothing following the transgression (range = 41.9%–66.1%). Among the remainder of reconciliatory behaviours, offering a nice gesture instead of an apology was the most frequent behaviour in all regions (range = 20.2%–28.7%). In most regions, this was followed by asking for outside help in the matter (range = 8.1%–18.3%) and then by apologizing to another related person (range = 3.3%–7.8%), except for Southeastern Europe where the reverse pattern was found (asking for outside help in the matter: 11.4%, apologizing to another related person: 13.8%).

We found significant differences in the frequencies of all these behavioural responses (asked for outside help:  $\chi^2(4, 1304) = 17.57$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ; apologized to other, related person:  $\chi^2(4, 1304) = 18.81$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; did nothing:  $\chi^2(4, 1304) = 40.61$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), except for offering a nice gesture (nice gesture:  $\chi^2(4, 1304) = 8.11$ ,  $p = 0.088$ ). Examining the adjusted residuals for each behaviour separately revealed that participants from East Asian societies were more likely than average to do nothing ( $z = 5.85$ ) and less likely than average to ask for outside help ( $z = -3.14$ ) or to apologize to another person related to the victim ( $z = -3.02$ ). Participants from

Southeastern European societies were more likely than average to apologize to another related person than the victim ( $z = 3.57$ ), whereas participants from Middle Eastern societies were more likely than average to ask for outside help in the matter ( $z = 3.77$ ); participants from both regions were also less likely than average to do nothing ( $z = -2.66$  and  $z = -3.37$ , respectively).

## 4 | Discussion

Extending previous research into the role of honour values in reluctance to apologize in individual societies (Campbell 1964; Lin et al. 2022), our study provides the first test of the role of culture-level differences in honour values in people's reluctance to apologize as well as self-reported apology behaviours. We found that members of societies where honour values were more prevalent also reported greater concerns about the risks of apologizing (vs. not apologizing) for their social image. In turn, these image concerns predicted not only a greater reluctance to apologize but also a lower incidence of recalled apology behaviours following past transgressions. Despite these links, however, cultural variation in honour values did not predict poorer apology outcomes overall, suggesting that the relationship between honour culture and reluctance to apologize may not be as straightforward as previously thought.

### 4.1 | Do Image Concerns About Apologies Keep Individuals in Honour Cultures From Apologizing?

As shown in our correlation and mediation analyses, members of cultural groups with stronger personal or perceived normative honour values were more likely to show stronger image concerns regarding offering an apology versus not apologizing (even if most participants overall had greater image concerns about not apologizing than about apologizing—see Endnote 8). Our mediation analyses further showed that these image concerns indeed predicted both reluctance to apologize (by both self- and social-image concerns) and self-reported apologies in past situations (by social-image concerns only) and consistently supported indirect effects of honour on these apology outcomes through image concerns. These results point to the role honour environments can play in individual processes concerning apologies, aligning with the idea

that environments that focus on honour could foster a relatively greater inclination to worry about the impact of apologizing (vs. not apologizing) on one's self-image, leading to worse apology outcomes. These findings are also in line with the previous work showing that our socio-cultural environment can profoundly shape our psychological and behavioural tendencies (Uskul and Oishi 2020) and call for a consideration of contextual factors when studying reconciliation processes and potential obstacles to apologies. One important consideration is that, although we did find consistent indirect effects, the total effects at the cultural level were consistently not significant, highlighting the possibility that further mediating mechanisms may be at play in the link between honour and apology-related outcomes (see Zhao et al. 2010). Future research on the topic should ensure to include a wider range of variables that may account for these relationships in both negative (e.g., fewer apologies through higher image concerns) and positive directions (e.g., more apologies through concerns about one's morality; Lin et al. 2022).

At the within-culture level of analysis, we found a more nuanced picture regarding the interplay between individual differences in honour, image concerns and apology-related behaviours, particularly in relation to the role and patterns of our two individual-level sub-facets of honour (values related to the defence of family reputation and values related to self-promotion and retaliation). First, we consistently found that stronger honour values related to *self-promotion and retaliation* were linked to stronger image concerns about apologizing (vs. not apologizing), which, in turn, predicted stronger reluctance to apologize and fewer self-reported apologies. This pattern of results is in-line with the previous theoretical and empirical (Lin et al. 2022) work on honour and apologies, proposing that individuals with stronger honour values may be more reluctant to offer apologies due to heightened concerns that apologies may make them look weak. Our factor of self-promotion and retaliation may have been particularly reflective of this idea, as the factor primarily touched upon showing strength in response to honour threats and displays of power. Second, however, honour values related to the *defence of family reputation* (a different, but crucial dimension of honour dynamics, see e.g., Rodriguez Mosquera 2016) showed the opposite pattern of relationships and were consistently linked to relatively *weaker* image concerns about apologizing (vs. not apologizing), thus indirectly predicting *lower* levels of reluctance to apologize and *more* self-reported apologies.

This pattern of findings underlines several important points. First, honour is not a unitary but a multifaceted construct that is linked to complex social dynamics, particularly at the level of individuals. The differential patterns of the two components of honour at the individual level not only highlight different relationships between honour components and apology processes but may also help to explain why our culture-level effects of honour were often not strong enough to show significant total effects. Although we found significant indirect effects consistent with our expectations—such that members of cultural groups with stronger honour norms and values tended to report higher concerns about apologizing (vs. not apologizing) and poorer apology outcomes—the opposing patterns for two dimensions of honour values at the individual level suggest the possibility that culture-level honour norms and values potentially could similarly affect image concerns in multiple and contradictory ways,

which may have somewhat weakened the pattern of culture-level findings. Assessing honour in a nuanced way at the level of its underlying dimensions can thus have profound consequences for the applicability of any research on honour (Rodriguez Mosquera 2016), and equating honour solely with a concern for toughness and strength may be a conceptual oversimplification.

Second, but relatedly, it is possible that the opposite pathways for the two sub-facets of honour and apology outcomes to some extent reflect the widespread duality of honour: on the one hand, individuals must compete with others, promote themselves, and stand out from the crowd as strong and tough (e.g., through self-promotion and retaliation). On the other hand, they must be aware that their acts also reflect on the honour of close others (e.g., their family) and maintain good and cordial relationships with close others around them (which may require morality and agreeableness rather than strength). In the latter specific context, apologizing (vs. not apologizing) may be perceived to be more in line with maintaining an honourable self- and social image, potentially reducing the reluctance to apologize. In fact, in their studies with Turkish and American participants, Lin et al. (2022) found that when honour was reframed to be about morality ('virtue') instead of strength ('virility'), differences in the reluctance to apologize were greatly reduced between the two countries. In our study, the endorsement of the two different honour facets may represent these opposing forces that may be differentially salient in different relationships and situations.

Finally, within all analyses, the overall patterns of results were the same for our two measures of personal and perceived normative honour endorsement. This further supports the utility and value of an intersubjective approach to the study of cultures (Smith et al. 2017), using individuals as 'informants' reporting on their cultural environment. Such an approach may allow researchers to complement the study of culture exclusively from a perspective of individual variation and to tap into cultural elements beyond the individual (e.g., perceptions of social norms) that may also guide cultural ways of being and relating.

## 4.2 | Do Individuals From Honour Cultures 'Walk the Walk' or Just 'Talk the Talk'?

Previous studies on reluctance to apologize (and particularly central studies from the realm of apologies in honour cultures, see, e.g., Lin et al. 2022) have largely relied on studying apologies in the context of de-contextualized scales or hypothetical scenarios. Using an additional measure of self-reported apology behaviour in the context of a past transgression, our results further complement previous insights and suggest a certain level of caution in fully generalizing these results to participants' recalled behaviour.

First, the explained variance for our outcome variables in our mediation models was generally much higher for our attitudinal measure of reluctance to apologize (individual level: 25.4%–25.6%; sample level: 32.6%–33.5%) than for our measure of recalled apology behaviour (individual level: 2.0%; sample level: 1.2%–1.8%). Second, both self- and social-image concerns showed significant direct paths, as well as significant indirect effects, when predicting reluctance to apologize, suggesting that both

types of concerns may play a role in people's attitudes towards offering apologies following transgressions. However, in the analyses predicting self-reported past apology behaviour, it was only social-image concerns, not self-image concerns, that showed significant direct and indirect effects across our mediation models. Admittedly, in our set of complementary single mediator models (see Supporting Information section), self-image concerns did indeed show significant effects; yet our main analyses indicate that concerns about one's reputation may be relatively more potent predictors of actual apology behaviour compared to self-image concerns. This pattern connects to an extensive literature on the central importance of reputation in cultures of honour, structuring social behaviours and relationships (for an overview, see, e.g., Uskul and Cross 2019), and concerns about one's social image and reputation have traditionally been the central focus of research on honour cultures (see Uskul et al. 2023).

Contextualizing these findings further, it is important to note that, among the regions that we included in this study, it were East Asian, not Mediterranean, societies that offered the lowest levels of offered apologies in the recalled situation, with Anglo-Western societies showing the highest levels. Given the predominant emphasis on relationship harmony and interpersonal attunement in East Asian societies (see, e.g., Leung and Cohen 2011; Markus and Kitayama 2010), this finding may appear counterintuitive. Yet, the previous work has also found that people in collectivistic cultures may be less actively engaged in close relationships (e.g., in levels of social support, self-disclosure; Kito et al. 2017) due to low relational mobility and social structures centred around assurance (rather than trust; Yamagishi and Yamagishi 1994), and that individuals higher in interdependent self-construal (as often found in East Asian societies) show particularly high levels of *indirect* conflict management styles (such as avoidance or third-party mediation; Ting-Toomey et al. 2001; but see Oetzel et al. 2001 for regional differences between Chinese and Japanese). Overall, although we do find a consistent role of honour endorsement and image concerns in reluctance to apologize, cultural groups where honour values are prevalent (such as MENA societies) may not represent an outlier in the absence of apologies globally, depending on which other regions one uses as a frame of reference.

#### 4.3 | Do Individuals in Honour-Focused Cultures Reconcile in Other Ways Than Apologies?

Finally, we explored whether (if apologies are indeed more undesirable acts in these cultures) reconciliation in Mediterranean societies may be driven by other behaviours than direct apologies by exploring reported behaviours among those participants that did not report having offered an apology in a past wrongdoing. We found that particularly Southeastern European and Middle Eastern regions showed an interesting pattern of differences: Individuals from both of these regions were less likely than those from other regions (especially East Asian participants) to report to have done nothing, and they were more likely to engage in reconciliatory behaviours that included people *other* than only the transgressed person (i.e., apologizing to a related person in Southeastern Europe and asking someone else to help resolve the situation in the Middle East).

The observed pattern of results suggests that reconciliatory processes for transgressions in (some) honour-focused cultures may be unfolding within the wider social context rather than just between the involved actors. Honour as a social resource has frequently been found to hold a strong element of interdependence with close others (particularly one's family, see, e.g., Rodriguez Mosquera 2016; Uskul et al. 2012; van Osch et al. 2013), in which potential transgressions towards one's honour may 'spill over' and affect close others in one's community. To successfully resolve such transgressions, in contexts where multiple people's honour may be at stake, people may find it necessary to seek advice and support from impartial others and to extend their reconciliatory efforts to the victim's larger social circle. At the same time, these alternative reconciliatory behaviours may also reflect a person's caution and awareness of the potential danger for escalation in honour cultures, which may be somewhat reduced by relying on outside mediation or avoiding direct confrontation with the victim.

#### 4.4 | Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations that should be considered when interpreting our results. First, even though our measure of recalled transgression situations and self-reported apologies was novel in going beyond attitudinal scales and approximating actual behaviour in the past, it is still subject to the same limitations of cross-sectional self-report measures (e.g., self-presentation bias, self-selection etc.). Future research should expand our insights into honour and apologies beyond one-off self-report measures and incorporate either a wider sampling of situations (e.g., via experience sampling methodologies, see Myin-Germeyns and Kuppens 2022) or assessment of actual interpersonal behaviours and situations (e.g., via observational interaction studies). Particularly the inclusion of longitudinal or experimental data (e.g., by priming honour; Lin et al. 2022) may provide deeper insights into the direction of causal links underlying our theoretical framework—an important goal considering the dynamic and mutual constitution of 'culture' and 'mind' (Markus and Kitayama 2010) in which a cultural logic of honour would be assumed to not only shape image-concerns and apology behaviours, but also these concerns and behaviours to form the overall socio-cultural honour logic as well. As such, the associations found in our own data may capture only part of the complete picture and may be better understood as indicators of explanatory value, not unidirectional causal influences. As a similar methodological point, although our current work represents a step beyond previous work by examining the link between honour and apologies across a wider range of 14 countries, this number still represents a limited number of units for analyses at the cultural level. Unlike our mediation models (which drew power from the larger individual level), our correlation analyses in particular should thus be seen as first tests of the proposed associations as they relied on a relatively limited sample size and power ( $N = 28$  groups) and would only have been adequately powered to detect large sized effects (i.e.,  $r \geq 0.50$  with power = 80%). Furthermore, although our decision to cluster participants into groups at the intersection of gender and countries aimed to respect potential differences between gender groups and maximize the number

of higher level groups for more robust estimation (Maas and Hox 2005), this decision also meant that our multilevel models carried a certain degree of non-independence at the culture-level which may still have impacted our findings and introduced bias in our estimates. Ultimately, future research should aim to further increase the number of societies under study to obtain greater statistical power and even more comprehensive insights.

Second, although apologies can be a crucial part of reconciling and mending relationships after a transgression (Barkat 2002; Eaton et al. 2006; Lazare 2005; Ohbuchi et al. 1989; Schlenker and Darby 1981; Wohl and Tabri 2016), they only represent a part of the larger process of reconciliation: Apologies signal regret for a harmful action and a willingness to make amends (Fehr et al. 2010; Lewis et al. 2015; Schlenker and Darby 1981), but this may be ineffective if the other person is not willing to accept the apology, forgive the transgressor and continue the relationship. The current work thus represents an important step forward for honour research (which has been dominated by a focus on retaliation, see review by Uskul and Cross 2019) but does not yet fully examine the interplay of apologies and forgiveness as part of the whole cycle of reconciliation. Cross-cultural work encompassing these elements in interplay appears especially important, as Shafa et al. (2017) provided some first evidence from a smaller cultural comparison that Turkish participants appeared to show a higher threshold for forgiveness and were less likely to forgive even after an apology was made, compared to Dutch participants. Future research should expand this line of research to a larger sample of cultures and include assessment of both apologies and forgiveness.

Third, in-line with much of the research conducted on apologies, the current work focused exclusively on the two involved parties of the transgressor and the transgressed. Yet, considering our results on alternative reconciliatory behaviours, this may not fully capture the social and interdependent dynamics of apologies in honour cultures. Future research may therefore benefit from contextualizing apology-related (and alternative) behaviours within the larger social network of the involved persons, including the role and influence of relevant close others in the reconciliation process.

Finally, the focus of the current work was to examine and extend a general perspective on the link between honour and reconciliatory behaviours, but future research should aim to zoom in and provide more nuance to this relationship by examining possible moderating and boundary conditions. For example, recent research on gratitude has proposed that gratitude may be offered more readily depending on the cultural expectations for partners in relationships (Yu and Chaudhry 2024), and the authors propose a similar perspective could be applied to apologies: Apologies may be offered and expected more when culturally central concerns rather than peripheral concerns are violated, as expectations for the respect of these concerns may be higher. In the current context, this may mean that higher honour endorsement may particularly foster apologies in contexts where, and through an awareness of, central honour-related concerns have been violated (e.g., undermining morality, authority and sexual purity).

## 5 | Conclusion

The current research set out to shed further light on the relation among honour, image concerns and the reluctance to offer an apology following committing a transgression by providing the first systematic large-scale investigation into the link between honour and apologies, utilizing cross-cultural data from a diverse set of societies circum-Mediterranean and beyond. Drawing upon culture-level correlations and multilevel mediation analyses, we explored the interplay among honour, image concerns and apologies at both individual and cultural levels of analysis, for both personal and perceived normative honour endorsement and for both attitudinal (reluctance to apologize) and behavioural (offered apologies) apology outcomes. Taken together, our results support the idea that members of honour cultures may be more reluctant to offer apologies due to image concerns, particularly concerns about one's social image, but they also suggest that equating honour solely with a concern for strength may be oversimplified. Limiting work on reconciliation to the study of direct apologies may omit contextual factors and processes when studying reconciliation processes and potential obstacles to apologies.

### Ethics Statement

The authors confirm that the manuscript adheres to ethical guidelines specified in the APA Code of Conduct and received full ethical approval from the University of Kent (#7785) and Carleton University (#118816).

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

The current research and analyses were preregistered at an independent repository, and the preregistration, data and analysis scripts that support this manuscript are available on OSF: [https://osf.io/cew5x/?view\\_only=bf85cbb0cab3469ca246367cdd1998a6](https://osf.io/cew5x/?view_only=bf85cbb0cab3469ca246367cdd1998a6).

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>More specifically, we talk about the 'prevalence of honour' when referring to variation in honour values between cultural groups (i.e., 'culture-level' variation), as opposed to variation in honour values among individuals within-cultural groups (i.e., 'individual-level' variation).

<sup>2</sup>We treated women and men in each society as separate cultural groups for analytical purposes based on arguments that different gender groups within the same society (perhaps especially in honour cultures) often inhabit separate cultural realities, with different expectations and external pressures (Bussemakers et al. 2017; Lopez-Zafra et al. 2020; Vignoles et al. 2024). Although gender is not a main focus of our current paper, we believe that defining cultural groups by the intersection of society and gender membership represents the best theoretical and statistical approach for our analyses, while also allowing us to maximize statistical power at the cultural level. Nevertheless, we recognize that this approach raises a potential issue of non-independence at the country level, given the nesting of gender groups within countries. To test the robustness of our main findings, we therefore conducted a series of additional analyses using countries as our cultural units of analysis and controlling for gender differences at the individual level of analysis. These alternative analyses showed highly similar results to our main analyses, supporting the robustness of our conclusions (see Section S8).

- <sup>3</sup>We clustered our data by gender groups within each country in both our measurement and analysis models to account for potential differences in social realities (see Endnote 2). However, our measure of perceived normative honour endorsement referenced the participant's society, rather than their gender group specifically. Consequently, our analyses reflect the idea that women and men may experience their societies differently, and their responses to apology situations may be influenced by broader societal norms, not solely by those of their own gender group. We acknowledge that this introduces some inconsistency in the level of analysis and encourage future research to directly assess gender-specific normative climates within societies, particularly in relations to honour values.
- <sup>4</sup>A complementary set of measurement analyses on the combined set of self-image and social-image items further supported our decision to treat these constructs as distinct. A four-factor model—differentiating self- and social-image items and concerns about apologizing versus not apologizing—emerged as the best fitting solution at both the individual and cultural levels of analysis. For further details, see Section S4.4.
- <sup>5</sup>A series of robustness analyses using the strictest exclusion criteria for all analyses (i.e., excluding the same number of participants across all sets of analyses) showed no differences in the pattern of results (see Section S9).
- <sup>6</sup>We made the decision to run separate analytical models for personal and perceived normative honour values as combining both variables together would have led to potential problems of multicollinearity and may have obscured potential relationships between one of the predictors and the outcome. Conceptually, we view personal and perceived-normative constructs as related but slightly different in how they tap into the prevalent cultural dynamics (see, e.g., Smith et al. 2017), and whereas we expected the two to provide similar patterns of results, our approach also remained open to potential differences, hinting to interesting differences in what may drive differences in apology reluctance (e.g., personal convictions or norms and social expectations).
- <sup>7</sup>Due to limitations of the Mplus software, we tested the indirect effect for our logistic regression analyses using non-standardized estimates, and included an additional latent factor that identically reflected the dependent variable (loading set to 1) to constrain the paths from our mediators to our dependent variable across levels.
- <sup>8</sup>These constraints entail that culture-level associations between image concerns and apology outcomes are such as would be expected to arise through aggregation of the corresponding individual-level relationships, rather than positing the existence of untheorized further culture-level processes that would have resulted in the paths differing across the two levels of analysis. We compared these constrained models with a series of parallel models in which we did not constrain these paths across levels. Comparing the model fit between the two types of models using log-likelihood comparisons, we found that only one out of the four unconstrained models (perceived normative honour endorsement predicting reluctance to apologize) showed significantly better fit than the corresponding constrained model ( $p = 0.026$ ), whereas the remaining models did not ( $p > 0.137$ ). However, the improvement in fit was small; the fit for the parallel constrained model was still high ( $CFI = 0.998$ ,  $TLI = 0.987$  and  $RMSEA = 0.022$ ), and measures of AIC and BIC (that favour model parsimony) showed an inconsistent pattern (with the constrained model showing the better fit in the BIC [Constrained Model: 52618.86; Unconstrained Model: 52627.31] but not AIC [Constrained Model: 52453.70; Unconstrained Model: 52448.94]). Hence, we decided to continue with the constrained version of all four models to maximize conceptual fit, parsimony, and statistical power of our models.
- <sup>9</sup>We decided to employ a regional comparison approach for these analyses of alternative reconciliatory behaviours because the size of the sample of people who reported to not have apologized was relatively small (27.5%) and because chi-square tests have been found to be quite sensitive to large deviations in cell counts (especially empty cells, see, e.g., Bakeman and Quera 2011).
- <sup>10</sup>We explored further the patterns of self- and social-image concerns underlying these significant findings in descriptive analyses using scale means rather than factor scores and treating concerns about apologizing and concerns about not apologizing as separate dimensions. Participants in all cultural groups on average reported higher concerns about both self- and social-image impacts of not apologizing than they did about impacts of apologizing. On a 1–7 scale, average image concerns about the impact of not apologizing ranged from 3.11 (Turkish Cypriot men: social image concerns) to 5.48 (Japanese women: social image concerns), whereas average concerns about the impact of apologizing ranged from 1.64 (Canadian women: self-image concerns) to 3.26 (Greek men: social image concerns). However, especially for social-image concerns, the gap was narrower in cultures with higher prevalence of perceived normative and personal honour values. Thus, for example, 27.1% of Turkish Cypriot women, but only 4.3% of Canadian women, reported greater social-image concerns about apologizing than about not apologizing. For further details of these descriptive analyses, please see Section S10.
- <sup>11</sup>In describing and interpreting our results, we will frequently use the term 'predict' to describe associations between variables. Given the cross-sectional nature of our work, we do not intend to imply causal associations, and we use 'predict' in a statistical sense only (in-line with 'predictor' and 'outcomes' of regression analyses).
- <sup>12</sup>The difference scores measuring self-image and social image concerns were strongly correlated at both individual and cultural levels of analysis (culture level:  $r = 0.80$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ; individual level:  $r = 0.67$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), raising possible questions about multicollinearity in our multilevel mediation analyses. However, a parallel series of analyses using self- and social-image concerns as single mediators (reported in the Section S3) showed largely the same pattern as our main analyses, except that self-image concerns showed additional significant indirect effects in models predicting offered apologies. We also report below and in the Supporting Information section selected further analyses treating concerns about apologizing and concerns about not apologizing as separate dimensions.
- <sup>13</sup>We also tested an alternative set of mediation models using image concerns about apologizing and image concerns about not apologizing as separate, simultaneous mediators (instead of combining them into difference scores). At the cultural level of analysis, the links between honour (personal and perceived normative) and reluctance to apologize were mediated by a negative indirect path through self- and social-image concerns about apologizing and a positive indirect path through self- and social-image concerns about not apologizing. The links between honour and lower incidence of offered apologies were mediated negatively only by lower social image concerns about not apologizing. However, in-line with our expectations, a closer look revealed that as honour culture increases, self-reported concerns about the impact of failing to apologize reduced more steeply than concerns about the impact of apologizing (see also Endnote 8). Thus, taken together, members of cultures with stronger honour norms and values were less likely to see greater risks to their self- and social-image of not apologizing compared to the risks of apologizing, which, in turn, predicted a greater reluctance to apologize and lower incidence of offered apologies. For more information on these alternative models, please refer to the Section S10.
- <sup>14</sup>These parameters differ slightly from the corresponding parameters in the preceding analyses owing to the exclusion of participants who did not provide valid responses to the recalled transgression task.

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## Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.