

SUMMARY

Do reminders to thank help or harm thankers? Reminders promote norm compliance and encourage prosocial behaviors. However, a dark side of reminders is that **reminders interfere with impressions of genuine prosociality**.

Across seven experiments, we show that **reminders to thank undermine the perceived genuineness** and likability of expressed gratitude **in the eyes of both uninvolved observers** (Studies 1-3) **and the receivers of gratitude** (Study 3). The negative effect of reminders to thank on perceived genuineness of expressed gratitude was **mediated by perceptions of increased social pressure** on the expresser to thank (Studies 1-3). In Study 4, this hit to genuineness had material consequences for the expresser of gratitude in resource allocation. Finally, the negative impact of reminders on perceived genuineness can be **overcome by engaging in more effortful expressions of gratitude** (Study 5). Expressers of gratitude know and spontaneously use this strategy of increasing effort when confronted with a reminder to thank (Study 6).

METHODS

Study 1b

Participants read an email conversation between three colleagues. Alex did a favor and two colleagues thanked him/her in sequence in group or private emails. Participants rated two thankers on **genuineness (DV)**, **social pressure (Mediator)**, and likability (Exploratory Variable).

[Group Condition]

From: Alex Miller [GROUP]
Sent: Monday, August 30, 2021 3:12
To: Robin Hill; Taylor Carter; Dylan Campbell

Completed the report today and sent it to the board of directors just now.

From: Robin Hill [FIRST] [GROUP]
Sent: Monday, August 30, 2021 5:37
To: Alex Miller, Cc: Taylor Carter; Dylan Campbell

Thank you so much, Alex!

Robin Hill

From: Taylor Carter [SECOND] [GROUP]
Sent: Monday, August 30, 2021 5:41
To: Alex Miller, Cc: Robin Hill; Dylan Campbell

Thanks a lot, Alex!

Taylor Carter

[Private Condition]

From: Alex Miller [GROUP]
Sent: Monday, August 30, 2021 3:12
To: Robin Hill; Taylor Carter; Dylan Campbell

Completed the report today and sent it to the board of directors just now.

From: Robin Hill [FIRST] [PRIVATE]
Sent: Monday, August 30, 2021 5:37
To: Alex Miller

Thank you so much, Alex!

Robin Hill

From: Taylor Carter [SECOND] [PRIVATE]
Sent: Monday, August 30, 2021 5:41
To: Alex Miller

Thanks a lot, Alex!

Taylor Carter

METHODS (Contd.)

Study 6

Participants play the role of the second thanker to express gratitude. The first thanker wrote either a short or long thank you message.

[Short Condition]

Completed the report today and sent it to the board of directors just now.

Alex Miller

Thank you so much, Alex! / Thanks a lot, Alex!

Robin Hill [FIRST]

[Long Condition]

Completed the report today and sent it to the board of directors just now.

Alex Miller

Thank you so much, Alex! I really appreciate your work. / Thanks a lot, Alex! Couldn't have done it without you.

Robin Hill [FIRST]

Task:

You want to follow Robin's example of thanking Alex in a reply-all email to both Alex and Robin.

You want Alex to see you as **just as grateful to him/her as Robin**.

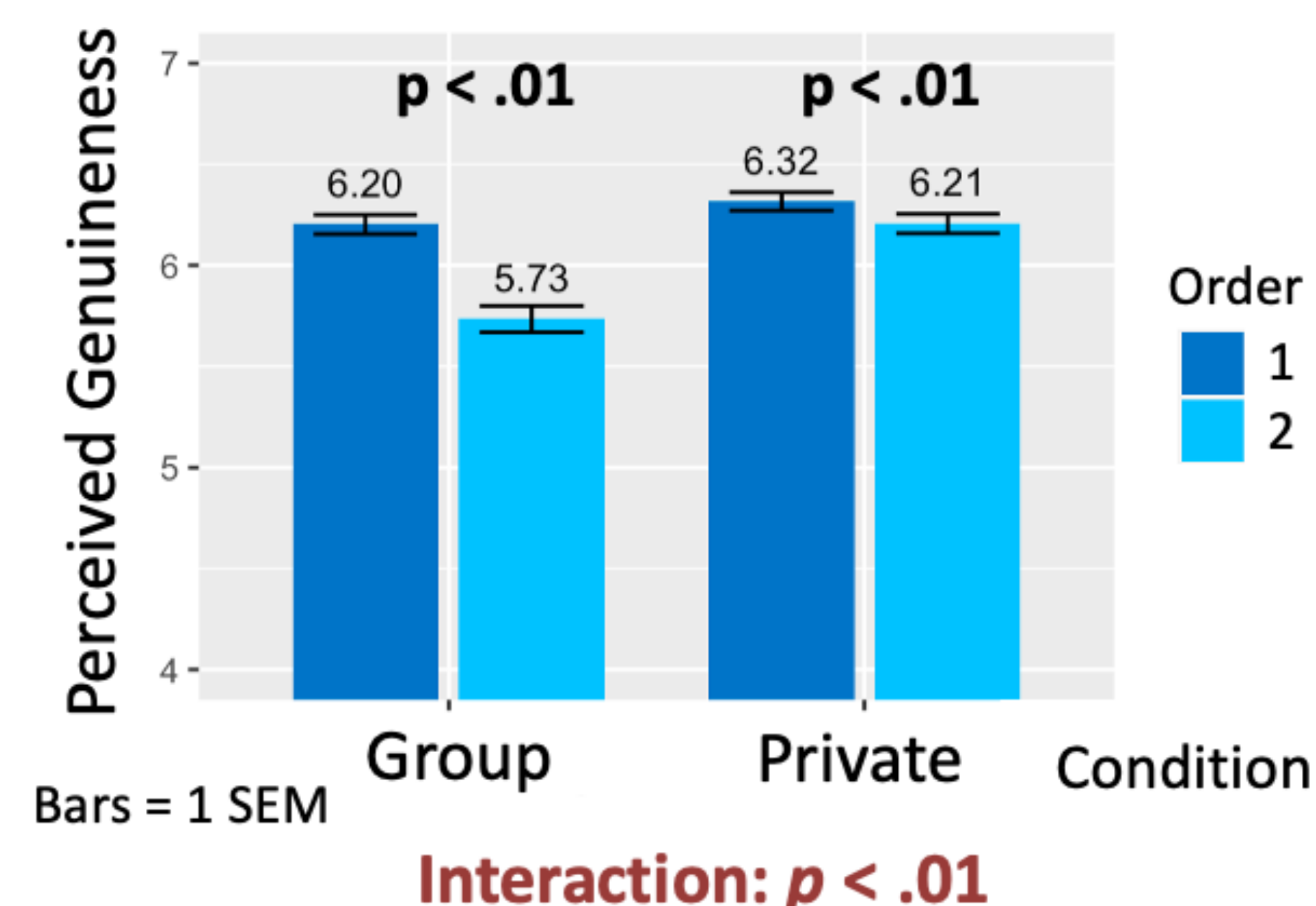
Write your email below, and keep in mind that **Robin thanked Alex before you**.

FINDINGS

1 REMINDERS HURT (STUDY 1b)

In both group and private email conditions, the second thanker was perceived as significantly less genuine, but the negative effect of expression order is significantly reduced in the private condition (in the absence of a previous group thank-you note as a reminder), meaning that **reminders undermine perceived genuineness**.

Perceived Genuineness by Condition

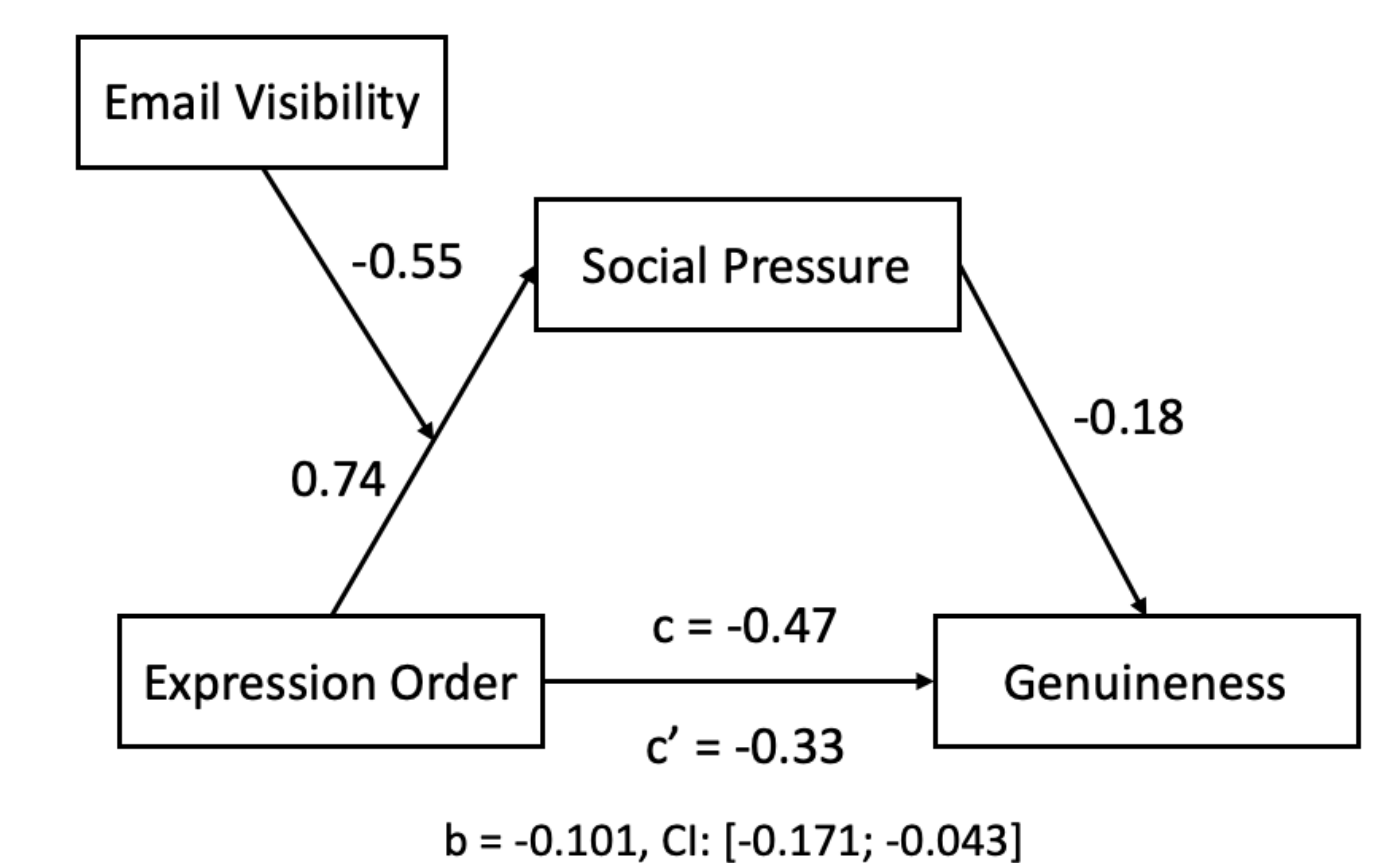
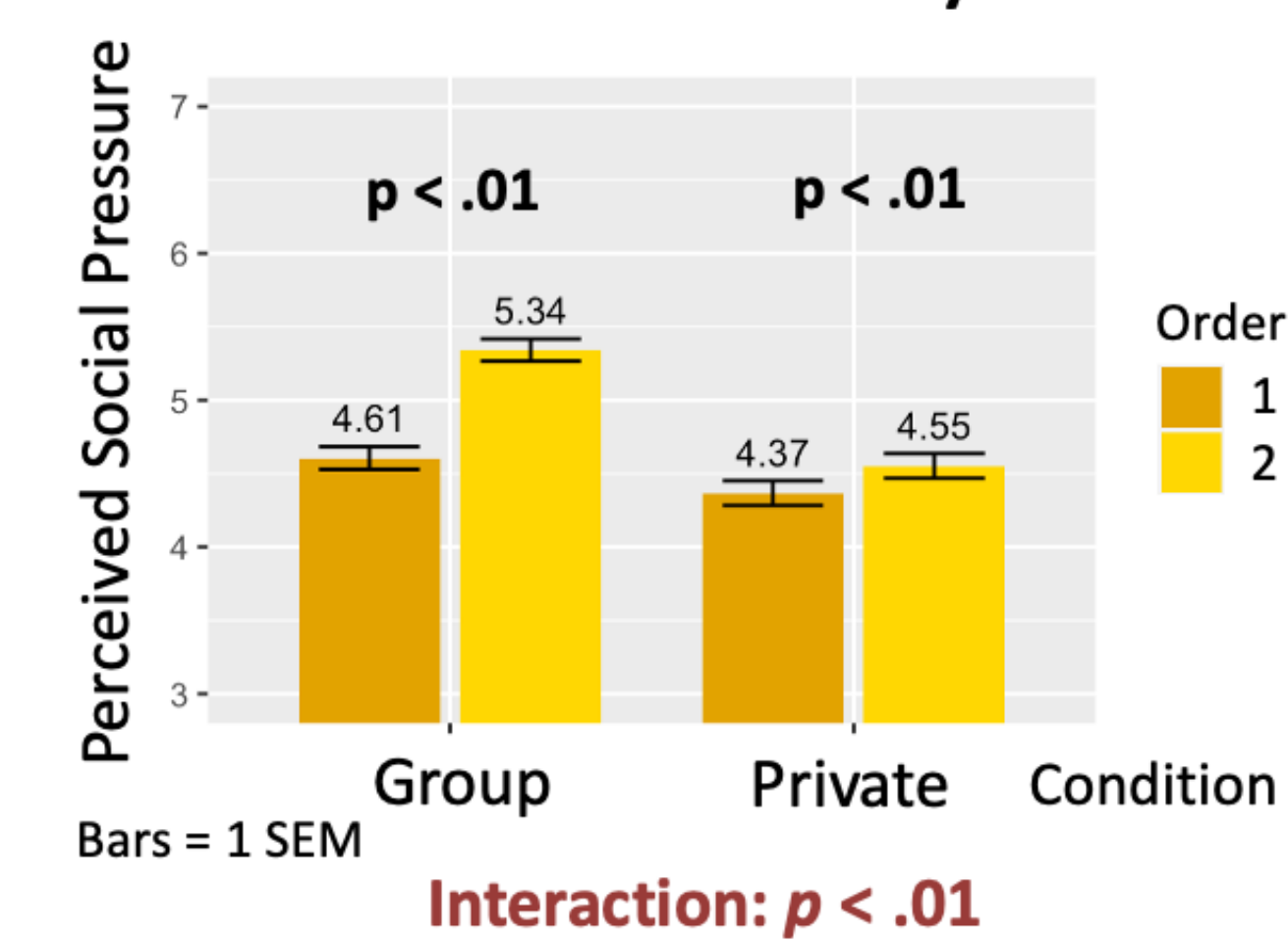


FINDINGS (Contd.)

2 MECHANISM (STUDY 1b)

The negative effect of order on genuineness is mediated by **perceived social pressure**, and this mediation effect is moderated by email visibility.

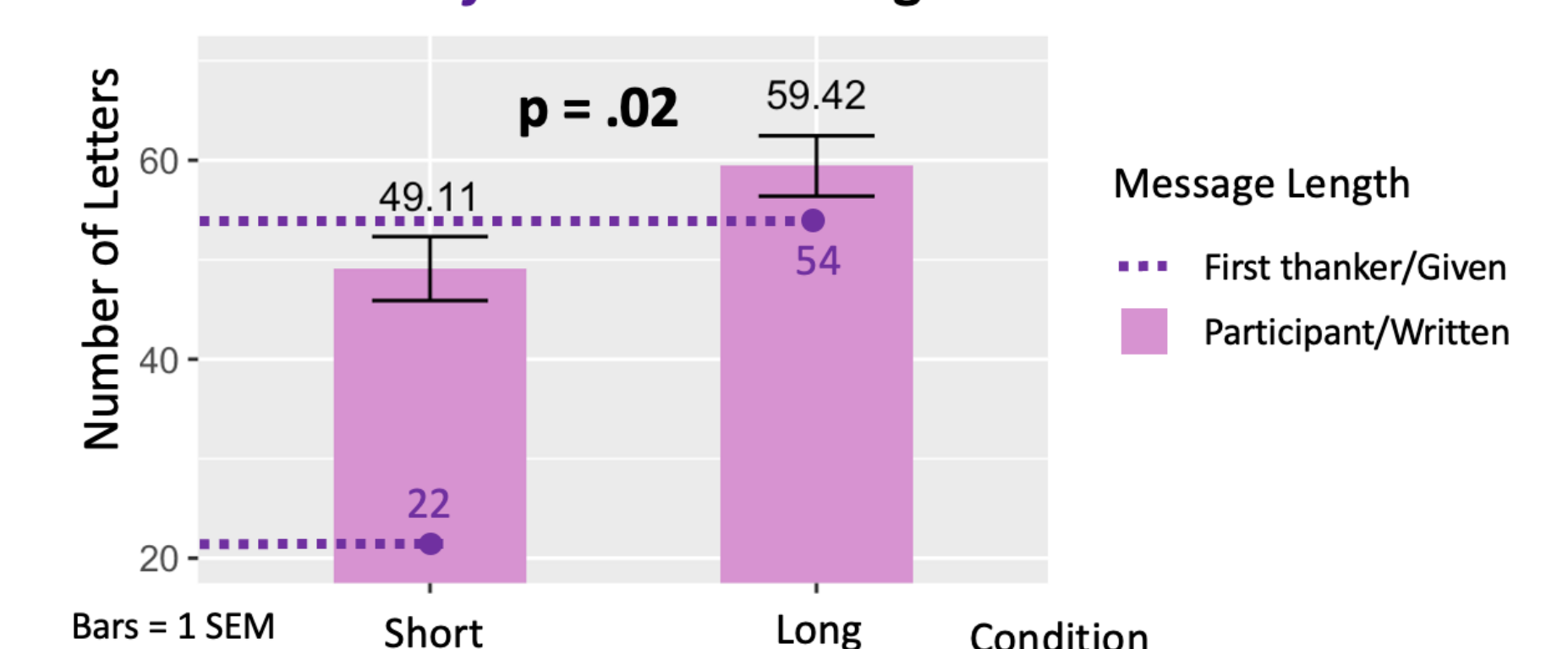
Perceived Social Pressure by Condition



3 SOLUTION (STUDY 6)

As the second thanker, participants wrote significantly longer messages than the given message in both short and long conditions, meaning that **reminded thankers spontaneously use the strategy of elaborating to overcome the negative effect of reminders**.

Number of Letters in Messages



DIRECTIONS

- **Generalizability** of reminder effect
 - The effect could be generalized to other prosocial emotional expressions such as expressing "happy birthday", "congratulations" and "sorry".
- **Moderators** of reminder effect
 - Blatant (vs. subtle reminders) might have a larger hit on genuineness
 - Self-reminders (vs. reminders from others) may have the opposite effect on perceived genuineness
- **Other consequences** of reminders
 - Reminders might cause reminded thankers to doubt their own genuineness
 - Discounting the genuineness of reminded thankers might not be justified
 - The second thanker might perceive the first thanker as less likable