

# Decision Processes Colloquia

---

Monday,

Where: JMHH 355

When: 12:00 – 1:20 pm

**Shereen Chaudhry**  
Assistant Professor of Behavioral Science  
University of Chicago, Booth School of Business

## I'm sorry if you are: The risk of apologizing first

### ABSTRACT:

Apologies are powerful tools for reconciliation, so understanding (and addressing) barriers to apologizing can enhance long-term cooperation. Existing research on apologies leaves critical blind-spots by focusing on one-sided blame conflicts: We find that most unresolved conflicts involve *mutual* blame. Using a game theoretic framework, we highlight strategic considerations unique to mutual blame conflicts, identifying an unexplored apologizing barrier: the risk of not receiving a return apology. We propose that people expect the pain of apologizing *first* to be lessened when followed by a return apology, even more so than when followed by forgiveness. We confirm these predictions across seven pre-registered studies that include a game with monetary incentives, event recall paradigms, and scenarios ranging from workplace conflicts to international diplomatic ones. This work illustrates the existence of strategic concerns in apologizing that are exclusive to the ubiquitous mutual blame conflicts, and highlights an unexplored avenue for research in conflict management.