

Moving on or Deciding to Let Go: The Effects of Emotional and Decisional Forgiveness on Intentional Forgetting

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Abstract : Different types of forgiveness (emotional and decisional) have been shown to have differential effects on incidental forgetting of information related to a prior transgression. The present study explored the extent to which emotional and decisional forgiveness also influenced intentional forgetting; that is, the extent to which forgetting occurs following an explicit instruction to forget. Using the List-Method Directed Forgetting (LMDF) paradigm, 236 participants were presented with a hypothetical transgression and then assigned to an emotional forgiveness, a decisional forgiveness, or a no-forgiveness manipulation. Participants were then presented with two-word lists each comprising transgression-relevant and transgression-irrelevant words. Following the presentation of the first list, participants were told to either remember or forget the previously learned list of words. Participants in the emotional forgiveness condition were found to remember fewer relevant and more irrelevant transgression-related words, while the opposite was true for both decisional forgiveness and no-forgiveness conditions. Furthermore, when directed to forget words in List 1, participants in the decisional and no-forgiveness conditions were less able to forget relevant transgression-related words in comparison to participants in the emotional forgiveness condition. This study suggests that emotional forgiveness plays a pivotal role in the intentional forgetting of transgression-related information. The potential implications of these findings for coping with unpleasant incidents will be considered.

Keywords : decisional forgiveness, directed forgetting, emotional forgiveness, executive control, forgiveness

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