BRIEF SUMMARY

Koutstaal, W. (1996). Beyond content: The fate – or function? – of contextual information in directed forgetting. *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section B, The Sciences and Engineering, 57(2-B),* 1478.

Research investigating the consequences of an instruction to forget on subsequent memory performance has focused on the degree to which either memory for the to-be-forgotten (TBF) information itself is impaired, or memory for the to-be-remembered information (TBR) is enhanced. This research examined how the instruction to forget affected subjects' ability to consciously recollect additional episodic details concerning the prior occurrence of the stimuli and their ability to identify which of two or more speakers had presented the stimuli. Subjects (primarily undergraduate students) were tested with one of four directed forgetting procedures: Item cuing (individual items were cued as TBR or TBF), Forget-Remember block cuing (subjects first studied an entire set of items, then were told that those items could be forgotten), Remember-Forget block cuing (subjects studied two sets of items, then were told that the second set could be forgotten), and Remember-Remember block cuing (two blocks with no forget instruction). Under the Item cuing method, subjects' ability to recollect episodic details concerning the TBF items was depressed beyond what would have been predicted on the basis of their ability to simply recognize the items (Experiments 1, 2, 4, and 5). Under Forget-Remember block cuing, recollection was also disproportionately impaired (Experiments 3, 4, and 5), but this impairment was significant only in meta-analyses combining across experiments. There was no evidence for a disproportionate impairment in speaker identification under any method. However, when speaker identity was correlated with the instruction cue, such that some speakers read only remember-cued items and others read only forget-cued items (Experiment 5), directed forgetting under Forget-Remember cuing was observed across a broader range of conditions and access to contextual information concerning the forget-cued block as a whole was significantly impaired. There was no evidence of directed forgetting under the Remember-Forget procedure. It is suggested that impaired access to forget-cued items under the Forget-Remember procedure results from the deactivation of the contextual representations and goals originally adopted during encoding and that separate contextual representations are necessary to allow selective forgetting to occur.