Abstract

Mechanisms between an apology and forgiveness of a transgression between strangers are examined. There are two primary theories to explain forgiveness: empathy, and/or attributions of behavioral stability. In a questionnaire-based study, Davis and Gold (2011) examined both approaches finding support for an integrated approach. Here these theories are tested in a random assignment laboratory experiment where a participant interacts with a computer program they believe is another live participant. A path analysis revealed that while perceptions of stability directly predict forgiveness, perceptions of decreased stability also increases forgiveness through empathy. The social context and evolutionary influences on forgiveness are discussed.