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*Oles Honchar Dnipropetrovsk National University***FORGIVENESS AS A MULTIFUNCTIONAL COPING RESOURCE  
OF A MATURE PERSONALITY**

**Анотація.** Розглянуто теоретичні концепції ролі готовності пробачати як особистісного фактора, що впливає на ефективність психологічного подолання стресу. Наведено емпіричні дані, що свідчать про наявність розбіжностей між групами досліджуваних із різними рівнями схильності пробачати (себе, інших і загального рівня пробачення) за показниками ефективності копінг-поведінки. З'ясовано, що за високого рівня схильності до самопробачення індивіди характеризуються низьким рівнем звернення до емоційно-фокусованої копінг-стратегії та самоінвалідації як негативної проактивної копінг-стратегії. Доведено, що за високого рівня готовності пробачати інших спостерігається низький рівень відволікання та наявність тенденції до високого рівня пошуку соціальної підтримки в подоланні стресу. За високого загального рівня готовності до пробачення виявлено високий рівень орієнтації на вирішення проблеми, низький рівень застосування стратегії фокусування на емоціях і низький рівень прояву тенденції до самоінвалідації.

Ключові слова: пробачення, копінг-стратегії, непробачення, стрес.

**Аннотация.** Рассмотрены теоретические концепции роли готовности к прощению в обеспечении эффективности психологического преодоления стресса. Описаны результаты эмпирического исследования, свидетельствующие о наличии различий между группами испытуемых с разными уровнями склонности к прощению в эффективности психологического преодоления стресса. Установлено, что при высоком уровне готовности к самопрощению отмечается низкий уровень обращения к эмоционально-фокусированной стратегии копинг-поведения и самоинвалидации. Доказано, что при высоком уровне склонности к прощению других наблюдается низкий уровень применения стратегии отвлечения. При высоком общем уровне склонности к прощению зафиксированы высокая вероятность выбора проблемно-ориентированной стратегии психологического преодоления стресса и низкий уровень ориентации на эмоциональное реагирование и самоинвалидацию.

Ключевые слова: прощение, копинг-стратегии, непрощение, стресс.

**Introduction**

The researchers who studied the phenomenon of forgiveness used different theoretical approaches to its conceptualization. The majority of them stress the point that forgiveness is a multifunctional phenomenon (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000), which comprises different components: cognitive (Flanigan, 1992), affective (Malcolm & Greenberg, 2000), behavioral (Gordon et al., 2000), motivational (McCullough et al., 1997) and decisional (DiBlasio, 1998) components.

Forgiveness can be both an intrapersonal process and, as a rule, though not necessarily, an interpersonal one.

Recently some scientists have theoretically substantiated the conceptual links between forgiveness and coping behavior (Worthington & Scherer, 2004; Strelan & Covic, 2006). The latter claim that they have made the first attempt to provide a broad theoretical framework by explicating the relationship between the coping and forgiveness processes.

*The objective* of this paper is to demonstrate a multifunctional impact of the individual's willingness to forgive on the choice of different types of coping strategies under stressful situations, which enhance self-regulation efficacy.

There appeared a variety of interpretations of the essence of forgiveness as a personality resource. Most of the researchers agree that forgiveness has to be differentiated from other related phenomena, resembling it, like pardoning, excusing, condoning, and

forgetting (Rye et al., 2001). Though the majority of the researchers stress the point that forgiveness should not also be confused with another similar construct, reconciliation, some authors propose that reconciliation is a desired endpoint of the forgiveness process (e.g., Fitzgibbons, 1986; Pollard et al., 1998).

In the monograph edited by D. O. Leontiyev (2011), forgiveness is interpreted as a “positive personality resource” and is characterized in this capacity as a “personality virtue” or as a “valuable personality trait”, that enhances the individual’s adaptability to the changing social environment, prevents the development of the psychic pathology, safeguards from the development for the personality deviations (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). To sum up, willingness to forgive can be referred to the individual’s character strength, which are related to the virtue of temperance, one of the six key positive personality values, assessed with the keep of the VIA Inventory developed by positive psychologists.

As Casarjian (1992) reasonably argued, forgiveness is the decision of the individual to assume responsibility for one’s perception and assessment of the situation, it is not just a single act, but rather a conscious choice reflecting the way of life, which gradually transforms the personality from a passive, helpless victim of the circumstances into an influential and loving co-author of the reality.

Similar conceptualization of forgiveness has been suggested by Luskin (2002), who claims that forgiveness entails the experience of serenity, which appears when the individual perceives one’s discomfort as less personally significant and assumes the responsibility for the depth of one’s feelings thus becoming the hero rather than a victim of the situation entailing offence. Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does change the present. Forgiving means that the person decides not to suffer and deliberately makes this sort of a decision.

Willingness to forgive in the interpersonal relations can be generalized as the decision resulting in: 1) getting rid of the negative thoughts and emotions as well as of the corresponding behavioral acts in relation to the person, earlier perceived as a wrongdoer; and 2) stimulating positive thoughts, emotions and behavioral acts (Gassin, 1999).

Thanks to forgiving the person, who felt offended, recognizes that the offence had been unjust and will always remain unjust. At the same time the act of forgiving does not deny one’s moral right for being angry, but it demonstrates the individual’s willingness to relieve other person from tolerating someone’s anger and offence (Enright, 2001). Nonetheless, the majority of researchers, as a rule, agree that forgiveness – is a complex of the cognitive, affective and, possibly, though not necessarily, behavioral responses to the transgression (e.g., Enright et al., 1996; Gordon & Baucom, 1998).

#### **Forgiveness as a character strength**

In the framework of the present study we have been predominantly interested in explicating how forgiveness can facilitate coping with the outcomes of the complicated life situations.

In foreign psychology the description and the analysis of the individual’s behavior under extreme situations are done in terms of the coping theory formulated by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). As it is known, those authors defined coping as thoughts and behavior to which an individual resorts in order to cope with inner and outer demands of stressful situations, appraised as personally significant. After the situation has been assessed as stressful the individual is likely to use quite a number of various coping-strategies to prevent and reduce stress or to endure it. In this light unwillingness to forgive can be conceptualized as a stressful response to appraisals of interpersonal stressors that include transgressions, betrayals, offenses, and wrongs (Berry et al., 2001). A perception of the interpersonal stressor as a hurt or offense is interpreted as a result of primary or secondary appraisals of situation. Those types of appraisals result in physiological, cognitive, motivational, behavioral, and emotional stress reactions. Thus, unforgiveness can be interpreted as predominantly an emotional component of response to stress (Worthington & Scherer, 2004).

Worthington and Scherer provided convincing data that prove the stressful nature of the lack of willingness to forgive. First of all, it is proved by analysis of the activity in the brain during unforgiveness which is consistent with activity in brain structures involved in stress and other negative emotions (Pietrini et al., 2000).

Secondly, hormonal patterns – notably glucocorticoid secretion – in unforgiveness are consistent with hormonal patterns from negative emotions associated with stress (Berry & Worthington, 2001).

In addition to that the activity of the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and EMG tension in facial muscles in the unforgiveness are similar to patterns registered when a person experiences stress and negative emotion (Witvliet et al., 2001). Besides, the data of the blood chemical analysis test also show similarity between the states of unforgiveness and both stress and negative emotions (Seybold et al., 2001).

To crown the above mentioned findings, the data of numerous studies of the acts of forgiveness and unforgiveness prove that forgiveness produce a noticeable therapeutic effect, which results in enhancing physical and mental health (Owen et al., 2011).

High level of willingness to forgive is associated with the better functioning of the cardiovascular (Toussaint & Cheadle, 2009), endocrine (Toussaint & Williams, 2003) and immune systems (Owen et al., 2011; Seybold et al., 2001). Forgiveness correlates negatively with anger and depression (Reed & Enright, 2006; Subkoviak et al., 1995), and has a positive correlation with optimism and self-confidence (Worthington, 2005).

Thus, the individual's attempts to reduce the injustice gap (Exline et al., 2003) and unforgiveness (Worthington, 2001) are considered by the researchers cited above as coping strategies.

Worthington and Scherer (2004) argued that forgiveness in some instances can influence the appraisals of the meaning of the stressful situation and act as a corresponding coping strategy (that of the situation reinterpretation). Despite the above mentioned those authors suggest that forgiveness has to be conceptualized as an emotion-focused coping strategy. Strelan and Covic (2006) adhere to this conceptualization and consider forgiveness to be a process of coping with a stressful situation.

Forgiveness is interpreted by them as a process of neutralizing the stressor, which evolved from the perception of hurt in the interpersonal relations. Forgiveness can be conceptualized as an emotion-focused coping behavior when it is related, first of all, to the internalized response to the transgression. It acts then as a means of ameliorating one's negative responses, such as anger and hostility.

Forgiveness can be also conceptualized as a problem-focused coping strategy, when it concerns with the problem that causes stress. In that case the discussion of the situation can bring about some solutions of how to deal with the situation that resulted in discord. The researchers stress the point that the emotion-focused coping can be effective in dealing with the recent events, perceived as negative, but concentration on emotions in the course of time can result in rumination, which, as is known, hinders forgiveness (e.g., McCullough et al., 2001).

Strelan and Covic (2006) also state that forgiveness can be future-oriented. Traditionally coping behavior was conceptualized as a survival strategy. But the recent theories of coping behavior suggest that coping can also be future-oriented. Research data show that coping behavior can be interpreted as a possibility of personal growth, acquisition of the new knacks of overcoming obstacles and spiritual perfection (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000). In the recent theories of coping future-oriented coping strategies have been identified. Schwarzer and Knoll (2003) have substantiated three types of future-oriented coping strategies, such as anticipatory coping, preventive coping and proactive one, all of which are related to forgiveness.

Anticipatory and preventive coping can be related to the process of forgiveness to the extent, in which the forgiveness motivation can be instrumental (for instance, as a need of retaining valuable relationship). For example, a hurt person can predict that till

he or she has not forgiven, the relations with person perceived as an offender may remain tense. Thus, the individual willing to forgive can resort to the anticipatory and the preventive coping strategy as a means of preserving valuable relations. Schwarzer and Knoll (2003) reasonably argue that the individual can improve, enhance one's personal resources to deal with the anticipated problems.

The above presented review of the state of investigation of the links between forgiveness and coping adequacy / inadequacy allows to conclude that willingness to forgive can perform the functions of various coping strategies depending on: 1) its *purposes*, such as to restore interpersonal understanding or to ease one's own emotional state and reduce tension; 2) the nature of the situation (the situation is liable to improvement or the conflict has come to a dead end and nothing can be done to tackle it); 3) the temporal orientation (dealing with the past or future problems); 4) type of forgiveness (forgiveness of others or forgiveness of oneself).

Willingness to forgive, in our opinion, can perform the function of a proactive coping strategy, when the person is prepared to forgive oneself or others for the failures or offences.

In the present article we have presented the results of the study aimed at identifying the relationships between various forms of forgiveness and the types of the coping strategies habitually chosen by the individuals to deal with stressful situations.

## METHOD

### *Sample*

Participants (36 females and 26 males) of the first mature age group (21 – 35 years) were recruited from the population of the university undergraduate and graduate students as well as the university alumni who volunteered to participate as acquaintances of the authors.

### *Data tools*

*The Heartland Forgiveness Scale* (L. Y. Thompson, C. R. Snyder, L. Hoffman, 2005) was back-translated from English into Ukrainian by professional University psychologists with mature knowledge of English not lower than B2.

The Heartland Forgiveness Scale (HFS) is an 18-item, self-report questionnaire that measures a person's dispositional forgiveness (i.e., the general tendency to be forgiving), rather than forgiveness of a particular event or person. The HFS consists of the Total HFS and three six-item subscales (Forgiveness of Self, Forgiveness of Others, and Forgiveness of Situations).

For assessing the participants' coping behavior *Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations* (CISS; Endler & Parker, 1990) was used. It was adapted to the Ukrainian culture by T. L. Kryukova (2001). The CISS is a 48-item, self-report measure of three major types of coping styles: Task-Orientated, Emotion-Orientated and Avoidance Coping. It also identifies two types of avoidance patterns: Distraction and Social Diversion.

Besides, we used *The Self-handicapping Scale* (designed by Jones & Rhodewalt, 1982, and adapted to the Ukrainian culture by D. Nosenko, 2014). Self-handicapping has been conceptualized by D. Nosenko (2014) as a disengagement proactive coping strategy indicative of the limitations of coping resources and the individual's fear of the anticipated failure to cope with the problems in the future. The SHS is 25-item self-report questionnaire that requires respondents to rate their agreement (on 6-point scales) with statements reflecting the use of self-handicapping behaviors.

### *Procedure*

The testing procedure was reviewed and approved by the Department of Educational and Developmental Psychology of Dnipropetrovsk National University, where the authors are currently employed. Students were scheduled for testing after their regular classes. They were provided with brief explanation of the research objectives and then asked to complete the above mentioned questionnaires individually.

*Data analysis*

The descriptive statistic program was applied to determined distribution characteristics. Since the sample was not numerous enough and distribution characteristics did not meet the criterion of normality, the empirical data were processed using non-parametric  $\phi^*$  Fisher criterion for assessing intergroup differences on the percentage of participants who preferred particular coping strategies. The method of the median split was used to divide the sample into 2 groups by the criteria of the willingness to forgive and then the differences between the groups were assessed by  $\phi^*$  Fisher criterion.

*Research findings*

Table 1 below shows intergroup differences in the preferences given by the participants to the choice of particular coping strategies.

*Table 1*

**Intergroup differences in preferences to the choice of particular coping strategies by the participants of the group split into 2 subgroups on the degree of willingness to forgive**

Coping strategies	Percentage of participants with preferences to different coping strategies in the subgroups	
	with low willingness to forgive oneself	with high willingness to forgive oneself
Problem-focused coping	45,2 %	61,3 %
Emotion-focused coping	61,3 %	32,3 %
Avoidance	54,8 %	38,7 %
Distraction	48,4 %	48,4 %
Social diversion	58,1 %	51,6 %
Self-handicapping	64,5 %	38,7 %

\* $p \leq 0.01$ . \*\* $p \leq 0.05$

As shown in tab. 1, the subgroups of participants with different levels of the willingness to forgive (higher vs. lower) appear to differ on the preferences given to the choice of different coping strategies.

The highest level of differences has been registered for the emotion-focused coping strategy; in the subgroup with a lower level of willingness to forgive 61,3 % of participants resort to this coping strategy, while in the subgroup with a higher level of willingness to forgive almost twice less percentage (32,3 %) of participants resort to this strategy. The differences are significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ .

Statistically significant differences (at  $p \leq 0.05$ ) have been registered for self-handicapping, conceptualized as a disengagement proactive coping strategy.

There are differences on the level of a tendency between the frequencies of choice of the problem-focused strategy and the avoidance strategy.

The results of this stage of the empirical research prove our hypotheses and the hypotheses of some foreign scholars, reviewed in this paper, that forgiveness is a positive personality trait: the willingness to forgive oneself protects the individual from a high level of emotion-focused coping and its equivalent in the matrix of the proactive disengagement coping strategies – the tendency to resort to self-handicapping.

In the Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations by Endler and Parker the tendency to resort to emotion-focused coping is interpreted as a feeling of guilt for one's indecisiveness and inability to cope with situation, as a manifestation of one's emotional appraisal of situation, of one's proneness to experience pain and sufferings, fixation on one's failures and shortcomings, feeling of helplessness, tension and frustration.

So, our empirical findings are in line with the above presented interpretation of the inner meaning of the emotion-focused coping strategy, as a sign of the individual's inability to effectively cope with difficulties in life.

These findings prove the positive role of willingness to forgive in coping with problems in life.

As we expected, the individuals with a low level of forgiveness would more frequently resort to self-handicapping, which finds reflection in causing obstacles to oneself to get an excuse for one's anticipated failures.

Table 2 shows our empirical findings which throw light on the relationships between the willingness of the individual to forgive others and the frequencies of choosing particular coping strategies in stressful situations.

Table 2

**Intergroup differences between the tendencies of the individuals with different levels of willingness to forgive in the choice of coping strategies of different types**

Coping strategies	Percentage of participants with preferences to different coping strategies in the subgroups	
	with low willingness to forgive others	with high willingness to forgive others
Problem-focused coping	45,2 %	61,3 %
Emotion-focused coping	48,4 %	45,2 %
Avoidance	48,4 %	45,2 %
Distraction	61,3 %	35,5 %
Social diversion	45,2 %	64,5 %
Self-handicapping	54,8 %	48,4 %

\*\* $p \leq 0.05$ . \*\*\* $p \leq 0.1$ .

As evident from the data presented in tab. 2, the individuals with higher level of willingness to forgive others do not avoid the solution of the problems that arise, as frequently as the individuals with a lower level of forgiveness do. Besides, the individuals with the higher level of forgiveness more willingly seek social involvement than the individuals with a lower level of forgiveness, which seems reasonable and explainable.

The comparison of the two subgroups of participants which differ on the levels of their willingness to forgive as an overall value (incorporating forgiveness of oneself, forgiveness of others and forgiveness, that is taken for granted the situation as a whole), allowed to make the following observations shown in tab. 3.

Table 3

**Intergroup differences in preferences to the choice of particular coping strategies by the participants of the group split into 2 subgroups on the degree of total willingness to forgive**

Coping strategies	Percentage of participants with preferences to different coping strategies in the subgroups	
	with low total willingness to forgive	with high total willingness to forgive
Problem-focused coping	38,7 %	67,7 %
Emotion-focused coping	61,3 %	32,3 %
Avoidance	54,8 %	38,7 %
Distraction	48,4 %	48,4 %
Social diversion	58,1 %	51,6 %
Self-handicapping	64,5 %	38,7 %

\* $p \leq 0.01$ . \*\* $p \leq 0.05$

As shown in tab. 3 the individuals with higher total level of willingness to forgive are characterized by the higher levels of preferences they give to the choice of the prob-

lem-focused strategy in dealing with stressful situations. They also distinctly differ on the lower proneness to resort to the emotion-focused strategy as well as demonstrate statistically significant lower tendency to resort to self-handicapping as a disengagement proactive coping strategy. These data correspond to the observations of other authors (Worthington & Scherer, 2004; Strelan & Covic, 2006), mentioned in the introduction to this article.

### Conclusion

The conducted research confirmed the hypothesis that the individuals with different levels of willingness to forgive (both: to forgive oneself, others, the situation at large) significantly differ in their coping efficacy. They give preferences in coping with stressful situation to the problem-focused strategy, less frequently resort to the emotion-focused coping strategy, seek social support, if necessary, and avoid self-handicapping as a disengagement proactive coping strategy.

The above-described characteristic features of the coping behavior of the individuals with higher willingness to forgive allows to argue that willingness to forgive is a valuable positive resource of a mature personality.

The future prospects of this research are associated with checking hypotheses that willingness to forgive is an important emotional character strengths likely to be one of the key personality precursors of an individual psychological, social and subjective well-being.

The results of this research allow broaden the appraisal of the positive role of forgiveness as a valuable personality resource by stating its multi-functionality in enhancing the individuals coping efficacy.

On a moderate but statistically adequate sample of the grown-up participants it has been demonstrated, that forgiveness can be claimed to be a sufficiently informative precursor of coping adequacy in the multitude of its manifestations. It enhances the probability of choosing the problem-focused coping, reduces the likelihood of resorting to the emotion-focused and avoidance strategies is their different temporal orientation (reactive or proactive); and is predictive of resorting to social support in the interactive contexts.

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## MATERNAL UPBRINGING AS A FACTOR OF PERFECTIONISM DEVELOPMENT

**Анотація.** Досліджено роль материнського виховання у розвитку перфекціонізму дитини. До вибірки досліджуваних увійшли 35 підлітків-учнів 9–11 класів. Як психодіагностичні засоби застосовано Багатовимірну шкалу перфекціонізму Х'юїтта–Флетта, Багатовимірну шкалу перфекціонізму Фроста та опитувальник «Підлітки про батьків». Одержані дані оброблено із застосуванням кореляційного аналізу та критерію U-Манна–Уїтні. Установлено, що високі показники, які стосуються перфекціонізму в дитини, пов'язані із притаманними матері відсутністю позитивного інтереса та вираженими директивністю, ворожістю і непослідовністю у вихованні. Водночас зв'язку між високими стандартами діяльності, характерними для дитини, та особливостями виховного впливу матері виявлено не було.

**Ключові слова:** перфекціонізм, виховання, позитивний інтерес, директивність, ворожість, непослідовність.

**Аннотация.** Исследование направлено на выявление возможной связи между перфекционизмом и особенностями материнского воспитания. Выборку составили 35 учеников 9–11 классов. Психодиагностический инструментарий представлен двумя методиками для диагностики перфекционизма (Хьюитта–Флетта и Фроста) и методикой «Подростки о родителях». Полученные данные подверглись корреляционному анализу и поиску различий между неэквивалентными группами, которые показали наличие значимой связи между выраженным перфекционизмом детей и присутствием их матерям отсутствием позитивного интереса, высокими показателями по директивности, враждебности и непоследовательности как особенностям воспитания.

**Ключевые слова:** перфекционизм, воспитание, позитивный интерес, директивность, враждебность, непоследовательность.

### **Problem identification**

The research of perfectionism have lately become very popular. Clinical psychologist M. Hollander (Hollander, 1965) was one of the first to work out the problem of perfectionism. According to him, perfectionists are used to making higher demands to themselves and their activities than everyday circumstances imply. Following classic