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Forgiveness as a coping strategy

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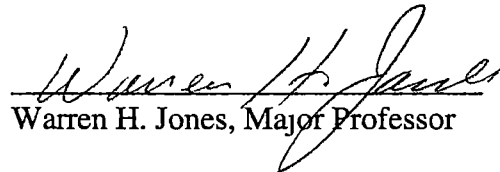<div align="right">Accepted for the Council:

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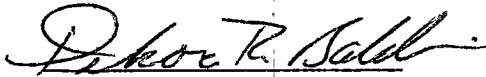
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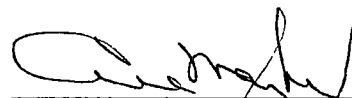
I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Karen E Friedman entitled "Forgiveness as a Coping Strategy." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

Warren H. Jones, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

FORGIVENESS AS A COPING STRATEGY

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Karen E. Friedman
December 2000

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents,

Mr. Charles Friedman

and

Dr. Deborah White Friedman

in recognition of their undying support and love without which none of my

accomplishments would have been possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

The process of forgiveness is receiving increased research attention as both a state and a trait. Some observers have noted the conceptual similarity between forgiveness and some strategies of coping. The purpose of this research was to determine the degree of convergence between measures of forgiveness and measures of coping and, in particular, to determine if state or trait forgiveness are more closely linked with either problem-focused or emotion-focused coping or their components. College students (n = 241) completed surveys containing measures of both state and trait coping and state and trait forgiveness in counterbalanced order. Results indicated that although forgiveness was extensively related to the indexes of coping, for the most part, the correlations were modest. Although on balance the pattern of results appeared to suggest that forgiveness is more consistent with conceptualizations of problem-focused coping than emotion-focused coping, the pattern of results was far from clear. It is suggested that these results may be due to the overlap between problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies which has been recognized recently in the coping literature.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Recently, forgiveness has become the focus of increased research attention in psychology and related disciplines. The interest in forgiveness derives from two considerations. First, in principle forgiveness affords a means for diverting the common behavioral pathway that begins with insult, betrayal, and injury and typically leads to resentment, revenge and retaliation (e.g., McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997). Thus, understanding forgiveness may provide insights into the processes by which interpersonal and social conflict may be resolved effectively and peacefully. Second, forgiveness is seen as not only as an important phenomenon in maintaining individual psychological adjustment, but also as both a model and as an objective of certain forms of psychotherapy (Al-Mabuk, Dedrick, & Vanderah, 1998; Coyle & Enright, 1997; Fitzgibbons, 1986). Thus, forgiveness is believed to have practical, clinical significance.

Several writers have suggested that forgiveness may be analogous to coping or that it is a type of coping or a coping strategy (Couch, Jones, & Moore, 1999; Rackley, 1993; Smedes, 1984). There is little empirical evidence available with which to evaluate this speculation, however. The literature on coping is extensive having begun primarily in the 1970s and growing rapidly since that time and resulting in numerous articles and books, a diversity of data collection and analytic methods, as well as useful conceptual distinctions and theories (Somerfield & McCrae, 2000). For these reasons the convergence of the constructs of forgiveness and coping is of theoretical interest and consequently is the primary focus of this research. In other words, this study sought to explore available operationalizations of forgiveness by comparing them to the domain of coping and, in particular, to the distinction between what is called emotional-focused coping versus problem-focused coping.

Psychology of Coping

Coping and stress are closely related as stress is a prerequisite for coping processes. Stress results when primary appraisals outweigh secondary appraisals. Primary appraisals refer to situational demands, which can be beneficial, challenging, threatening, or harmful (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). By contrast, secondary appraisals refer to one's judgment of his or her resources and abilities available to cope with the stressful situation. Stress is, therefore, subjective across people, situations, and time (Lazarus, 1993).

Research has demonstrated that stress affects mental, physical and social well-being. Specifically, it is implicated in the development of coronary heart disease, migraines, nausea, muscular discomfort, mental illness, psychosomatic illness, low self-esteem, anxiety, tension, and impaired relationships (Cohen & Lazarus, 1979). Therefore, gaining an understanding of how to cope with stress which presumably prevents or alleviates these symptoms is the focus of considerable research.

Coping encompasses all of the apparent and concealed behaviors performed for the purpose of reducing psychological stress (Fleishman, 1984). Several typologies of coping have been identified, but the most widely cited is that of Folkman and Lazarus (1985). These researchers based their model of coping on transactional theory in which a continuous reciprocal relationship between an individual and his or her environment is postulated as the dynamic arena in which stress and coping processes unfold. Furthermore, they distinguish two distinct categories of coping. The first, emotional focused or palliative coping, refers to accommodating strategies used to alter one's own relationship to the stressful environment by taking psychological actions. These include positive reappraisal, support seeking, distancing, and escape. The second category, problem-focused or instrumental coping, includes methods used for the purpose of altering the environment itself through overt actions. Included in this category are self-control, accepting responsibility, problem solving and confrontive coping.

In general, research indicates that problem-focused coping yields improved adjustment, and emotion-focused coping yields negative outcomes (Folkman, 1984). However, this literature has been criticized on methodological grounds and more than one review has asserted that this and similar models have failed to answer the fundamental questions about the process of coping and its effectiveness (cf. Coyne & Racioppo, 2000). Furthermore, the simple distinction between emotion-focused and problem-focused coping belies the complexity of the issue. Some studies have identified certain emotion-focused coping dimensions, such as positive reappraisal and seeking social support, as effective, whereas the dimensions of self-control and accepting responsibility were ineffective (Watson, Wilson, & Sinha, 1998).

However, a growing body of evidence indicates that in most stressful encounters, both problem-focused and emotional-focused coping strategies are utilized to varying degrees, and the ratio of these two defines an individual's coping pattern (Lazarus, 2000). Furthermore, according to Lazarus and Folkman's (1992) matching hypothesis, a more important determinant of effective or ineffective coping strategies is defined as a competent match between the situation and the coping method employed. This supports the idea that specific coping strategies should not be labeled a priori as advantageous or injurious, but rather viewed as effective or ineffective based on a particular individual and his or her unique situation.

Situational Correlates of Coping

Although situational correlates of coping have been extensively investigated, debate and mixed results sometime characterized the study of this issue. In general, researchers have found that problem-focused coping is applied to work settings and similar situations which are appraised as correctable and where effective coping may change the situation. By contrast, emotion-focused coping patterns are typically applied to health related sources of stress such as terminal illnesses which offer little possibility of cure, recovery

or change. As would be expected from the perspective of attribution theory, circumstances perceived as internal, unstable, and controllable generally stimulate problem-focused coping whereas those perceived as external, stable, and uncontrollable give rise to emotion-focused coping. The application of emotion-focused coping to internal, unstable, and controllable situations or problem focused coping to external, stable, uncontrollable situations results in an increase of psychological distress and a deterioration of health symptoms (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Major, Richards, Cooper, Terry & Hynes, 1998).

Anticipated loss in a given situation also predicts which coping strategy will be employed. Most studies report that emotion-focused coping alleviates depression among individuals coping with high-loss episodes but causes opposite results for low loss episodes (Mattline, Wethington, & Kessler, 1990). High loss episodes are those involving the loss of someone or something regarded as having great value. For example, most individuals would consider the loss of a loved one as a high loss. On the other hand, low loss episodes refer to the dispossession of someone or something held with less regard such as material items or acquaintances.

These approaches might be called state coping because the primary issue in these studies is the question of the manner and effectiveness with which a person copes with a particular stressful situation or loss. Consequently, this approach corresponds to the concept of state forgiveness--the extent to which a person has forgiven a specific person for a specific offense--one of the main variables to be examined in this study.

Personality Correlates of Coping

Another approach to coping is the identification of personality characteristics associated with the use of a particular coping strategy. Recent innovations in models of personality structure mean that coping processes can be compared to robust dimensions of personality applicable across individuals and settings. For example, with respect to the

so-called Five-Factor Model of Personality, the dimension of neuroticism is positively associated with the use of emotion-focused coping strategies, whereas extroversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness all correlate with problem-focused coping strategies.

Dimensions defined in Bowlby's Attachment Theory have been explored as predictors of the differential use of coping strategies as well. According to Attachment Theory (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1969) a child's personality and definition of the world derives from internal working models which emerge from the relationship between the child and the parent. Adults with secure attachment styles typically report greater use of the emotion-focused techniques of seeking social support (Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992) whereas anxious/ambivalent and avoidant adults employ the emotion-focused technique of escape more frequently (Mikulincer, Florian, & Weller, 1993).

A trait approach refers both to the investigation of personality correlates of coping strategies, but also to the concept of a coping style (e.g., Cohen & Edwards, 1989; Costa, Somerfield, & McCrae, 1996). In this model, some people may develop preferences with respect to coping strategies to the point that they because relatively stable and consistently displayed in the same kinds of situations and perhaps even stable across situations. This concept corresponds to the forgiving personality which may be defined as a dispositional tendency to avoid taking offense and to forgive others, at least somewhat independent of the offender and the offense (Jones, 2000a).

Psychology of Forgiveness

The second major theme of this research is that of forgiveness which, until recently, has been studied only infrequently (Gorsuch & Hao, 1993). The first accounts of forgiveness date back hundreds of years to the teachings of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. According to Jewish scripture, an individual who repents and rectifies his or her behavior will receive the forgiveness of God. Similarly, Christianity teaches that God

forgives those who repent and accept Christ. In both views, individuals have a moral obligation to forgive others in a fashion modeled after their relationship with God (Enright, Gassin & Wu, 1992).

> Enright (1996) defines forgiveness as:
> the willingness to give up one's right to resentment, condemnation, and subtle revenge toward an undeserving offender while at the same time fostering qualities of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her (Enright, 1996, p. 108).

As such, it is a voluntary and active process which follows an unjust act and leads to a personal emotional release. It is not the same as forgetting the offense, reconciling with the offender, nor pardoning the offender's actions.

Forgiveness involves affective, cognitive and behavioral processes. It is affective because the negative emotions of anger, resentment, and hatred are replaced by neutral or positive emotions of compassion and kindness. The cognitive aspect involves the development of pleasant thoughts such as that of respect for the offender. Finally, the behavioral component refers to the active inclusion of the offender back into the offended person's life (Ausburger, 1981; Drinnon, 2000; Enright, et al., 1992; North, 1987; Smedes, 1984). Following forgiveness, there is often a decrease in blood pressure and negative emotions such as anger, depression, anxiety, resentment and hostility, and an increase in marital adjustment, hope, well-being, personal power, and health (Enright, et al., 1992; Enright & Zell, 1989; Freedman & Enright, 1996; Huang, 1990; Jones, 2000a).

State Forgiveness

Steps to forgiveness. One approach to studying forgiveness has involved focusing on the origins, sequence and consequences of state forgiveness, that is, forgiving a specific person for a particular incident. The forgiveness process has been described as involving a series of four steps, the first of which is perceiving the offense (McCullough & Worthington, 1994). The offense can vary from a friend forgetting to say hello to the

murder of one's child, although research suggests that the common features are a violation of trust, commitment, and expectation in an ongoing relationship (Jones, Couch, & Scott, 1997). Furthermore, because of perceptual subjectivity, it is plausible than an offender may not realize that he or she has offended the injured party. Second, the offended person must identify the negative emotions caused by the event. The third task is for the offended person to recognize possible motivations for the offender's hurtful behavior. The next step is for the offended individual to undergo a reconciliation of the relationship (McCullough & Worthington, 1994).

Clinical interventions. Clinical psychologists and other mental health practitioners came to realize the usefulness of including the forgiveness process in their treatment of patients suffering from hurtful relationships (Al-Mabuk, et al., 1998; Coyle & Enright, 1997; Fitzgibbons, 1986; Hargrave & Sells, 1997). Brandsma (1982) claimed that patients who undergo forgiveness report lessened psychological complications. Pettitt (1987) successfully decreased clients' chronic pain, cardiovascular problems and violent tendencies by teaching them to forgive their offenders. Wilson's (1974) patients who had previously undergone unsuccessful mental health treatments were able to improve their psychological state by engaging in psychotherapy sessions which included forgiveness. Thus, not only has the forgiveness process been utilized frequently in therapy, but it also appears to have worked successfully in many instances.

Situational factors. Research indicates that individuals are more likely to forgive the offender when their relationship is of high satisfaction, intimacy, and commitment (Nelson, Rackley, 1993; Roloff & Janiszewski, 1989; Woodman, 1991). Pre-offense closeness between the parties and an apology from the offender correlate with increases instances of forgiveness (Jones, 2000a; McCullough et al., 1998). Pre-offense closeness indicates a desire to alleviate the offenders distress but also to restore the relationship. The apology facilitates both empathy and the forgiveness process by indicating that the

offender regrets his or her actions that have caused distress to the offended party (Baumeister, Stillwell & Heatherton, 1994; Jones, 2000b; McCullough, Worthington, & Rachal, 1997).

The measures used in this research operationalize forgiveness as a transitory state and focus on the respondent's feelings and attitudes about a specific person who has offended or betrayed him or her (Drinnon, 2000; Drinnon, et al., 2000; Jones, 2000a; Trainer, 1981; Wade, 1989). As indicated above, this illustrates state forgiveness or the degree to which the participant has forgiven a specific person for a specific incident or betrayal. Studies involving interviews and narrative analyses suggest that participants respond with greater forgiveness when the betrayal was less severe, when they experience lower level of anxiety, and when commitment and relationship quality were higher before the betrayal.

Trait Forgiveness

Personality components and determinants of forgiveness have also been explored. With regards to the Five Factor Dimensions, high scores on the agreeableness scale correlate with a high propensity to forgive (Iyer, 2000; McCullough. Sandage, Brown, Rachal, Worthington, & Hight, 1998). Those with traditional values and a community orientation place a greater value on forgiveness (Rokeach, 1967; Young, 1984). Positive correlations have been observed between having a positive regard for forgiveness and one's age, religiosity, and justice reasoning (Enright, Santos, & Al-Mabuk; Rokeach, 1973). Additionally there is an inverse relationship between high scores on Machiavellianism and the tendency to forgive (Okanes, 1974). Feelings of affective empathy for the offender also increase the likelihood of forgiveness (McCullough, et al., 1998). Affective empathy refers to cognitive identification with the feelings and thoughts of another. According to Batson (1990) affective empathy motivates participants in a relationship to commit altruistic acts perhaps including the act of forgiveness.

Studies measuring the forgiving personality trait directly, suggest a wide array of positive predictors of the dispositional tendency to forgive including, for example, apology, empathy, attachment, and inverse predictors such as cynicism, loneliness, and vengeance. One study demonstrated that ratings by friends and family members of target person's level of forgiveness were highly correlated with target's self-ratings (Iyer, 2000).

Problem

In order to explore state forgiveness and trait forgiveness, measures of these constructs were administered to a sample of college students along with a state and a trait measure of coping. It was expected that trait forgiveness would be more strongly related to trait coping than state coping, and that the reversed pattern would emerge for state forgiveness. Finally, these measures of trait and state forgiveness were compared to the emotion-focused and problem-focused subscales. Although specific hypotheses were not formulated for these analyses, one of the goals of this research was to ascertain whether there was differential convergence between these measures of forgiveness and either type of coping.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

Participants

Surveys were completed by 241 students enrolled in undergraduate psychology classes at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. One-hundred-thirteen of the participants were men and 167 were women. Their ages ranged from 18 to 43 with a mean of 19.98 and standard deviation of 2.93.

Procedure

Students were recruited from undergraduate psychology classes and offered nominal course credit in exchange for their participation. Students completed the surveys outside of class. The questionnaires were counterbalanced. Specifically, half of the respondents answered the trait related surveys first followed by the state measures and the other half of the respondents answered the state related surveys followed by the trait. Also, the order of presentation was counterbalanced within state and trait categories, that is, the Brief Cope Scale and Forgiving Personality Scale were counterbalanced as were the Cope Scale and Act of Forgiveness Scale.

Measures

Brief Cope Scale

The Brief Cope Scale (Carver, 1997) assesses coping as a trait. Participants express their agreement or disagreement with the items using a four-point Likert-type response format. It is composed of subscales identifying fourteen distinct coping mechanisms as follows: self-distraction, active coping, denial, substance use, emotional support, instrumental support, behavioral disengagement, venting, planning, humor, acceptance, religion, self-blame, and positive re-framing. As indicated in the literature, the subscales of active coping, instrumental support, and planning are all problem-

focused techniques. A sample item belonging to the active subscale is "I concentrate my efforts on doing something about the situation that I am in." A sample item from the planning subscale is "I try to come up with a strategy about what to do." Emotion-focused coping are assessed by the remaining subscales of emotional support, humor, acceptance, religion, positive re-framing, self-distraction, denial, substance use, venting, and self-blame. Sample items belonging to the subscales of emotional support and self-distraction, respectively, are "I get comfort and understanding from someone," and "I turn to work or other activities to take my mind off of things." No items require reverse scoring. Results are calculated by adding all responses which yield a potential range of 28 to 112. Cronbach's alpha for the Brief Cope Scale is .60 or above for each of the subscales. The test-retest reliabilities were observed to be .89 and .42 across six and eight week intervals, respectively. Validity was examined by comparing the relationship between the subscales and similar measures such as the Life Orientation Test and the Hardiness subscale of the Personal Views Survey. Results indicated that correlations ranged from .41 to -.34 with Life Orientation and between .23 to -.29 for hardiness.

Coping Scale

The 26-item Coping Scale (Terry & Hynes, 1998) measures coping strategies for a specific instance of stress and therefore indexes state coping. Responses are assessed in a Likert-type format indicating the extent to which respondents agree or disagree with each statement. One item requires reverse scoring. Final scores are calculated by adding all responses which leads to a range of 26 to 130. Subscales include escapism, which accounted for 16.3% of the common variance in a factor analysis, and emotional approach coping, accounting for 5.6% of the common variance. These two subscales comprise the measure of emotion focused coping. Sample items for each of these subscales are as follows: Escapism (e.g., "Daydreamed or imagined a better time or place than the one I was in"); and Emotion Approach Coping ("Talked with friends about how I

was feeling"). Alpha coefficients for the escapism subscale were .78, and .75, based two consecutive assessments The other subscales, problem appraisal coping and problem-management, both refer to problem-focused coping. Problem-appraisal coping accounted for 13.1% of the common variance in the factor analysis, and problem-management coping accounted for 8.3% of the common variance. Items belonging to each of these subscales are "Tried to step back from the situation and be more objective," for the subscale of problem-appraisal; and "Thought about what steps to take to deal with the problem" for the subscale of problem-management coping. Alpha coefficients for these subscales were .74, and .78, for the first and second retest of the problem management subscale; and .71, and .76, for the first and second administration of the problem-appraisal coping subscale. Mean correlations among the coping subscales were .16, and .19, for the two assessments, and therefore each subscale contributes more-or-less independently to the overall coping score.

Act of Forgiveness Scale

The Act of Forgiveness Scale (AF; Drinnon, Jones, & Lawler, 2000; Schratter, 2000) requires participants to describe a specific event in their own life when someone important to them betrayed them or deeply hurt their feelings. Respondents are then instructed to specify their relationship with the offender, when the event took place, what the event was, why the offender committed the act, how the respondent felt as a result, and how their relationship changed after the event. Following their descriptions participants are instructed to respond to 45 follow-up items referring to the event and person previously described. Using a five point Likert-type format, respondents indicate their agreement or disagreement with the statements. Sample items include "My relationship with the person in question has changed for the worse;" "I understand why the person in question did what he/she did;" and "I showed compassion to others about the person in question." Scores are calculated by adding the numeric responses taking

into account the 26 reverse scored items. Results range from 45 to 225. Based on a sample of 398 college students, internal reliability was .90; and the mean inter-item correlation was .37. Fifty-five participants were retested after eight week yielding a test-retest reliability of .90. Forgiveness scores correlated inversely with measures of the seriousness of the described betrayal and directly with the time passed since the betrayal occurred. The mean correlation between this measure and available state measures (e.g., Enright's Forgiveness Scale, Wade's Forgiveness Scale, Trainer's General Forgiveness Scale, and the IRRS Forgiveness Scale) was .74, whereas the mean correlation between this scale and the relevant trait measures (e.g., Forgiveness of Others Scale, Forgiveness/Non-Retaliation Scale, Vengeance Scale, and the IRRS--Pain Scale) was only .16 thereby demonstrating both the convergent and discriminant validity of AF.

Forgiving Personality Scale

The final scale included was the Forgiving Personality Scale (FP; Iyer, 2000; Schratter, Iyer, Jones, Lawler, & Jones, 2000), which is a trait measure. Its 33 items are answered using a five point Likert-type format. Twenty-one items are reverse scored. Each item response is then added resulting in scores ranging from 33 to 165. Higher scores indicate a greater tendency on the part of the respondent to forgive an offender. Sample items include "Forgiveness is a sign of weakness (reverse scored);" "If someone wrongs me, sooner or later I will try to make them pay for it (reverse scored);" and "People must face consequences of their mistakes, but they should also be forgiven." The scale correlates positively with measures of empathy, parent attachment, peer attachment, family satisfaction, need to belong, partner trust, self-esteem, moral standards, and forgiveness of self; and the scale correlates negatively with measures of loneliness, cynicism, shyness, dogmatism, jealously, rejection sensitivity, betrayal by others, and vengefulness. Further comparisons were made between it and the five factor model of personality indicating a non-significant relationship between forgiveness and openness

and extroversion; a significant inverse relationship between FP and neuroticism; and significant direct relationships between FP and conscientiousness and agreeableness. Based on an initial sample of 398, the scale's alpha coefficient was 93; mean inter-item correlation was .30; and test-retest reliability was .79 among 69 respondents who took the test twice over a two month period of time. The mean correlation between the Forgiving Personality Scale and the mean state forgiveness measures described previously was .25, whereas the mean correlation between the Forgiving Personality Scale and the trait measures was .66 again demonstrating both convergent and discriminant validity.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for the four scales based on the data from this study can be found in Table 1. As may be seen these estimates of scale operating characteristics are quite similar to the values reported for these instruments based on other samples.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Scales

Scale	Mean	SD	Range	# of Items	Mean Inter-item r	Alpha
BC	73.04	8.77	54-107	28	.10	.75
Cope	12.34	4.41	1-25	26	.10	.75
AF	153 65	33.41	68-225	45	.36	.96
FP	123.44	16.41	84-162	33	.27	.92

Notes: BC = Brief Cope Scale (Carver, 1997); Cope = the Cope Scale (terry & Hynes, 1998); (AF = Act of Forgiveness Scale (Drinnon, 2000); FP = Forgiving Personality Scale (Drinnon, et al., 2000)

Correlations between the two forgiveness scales and the two coping scales were calculated. As indicated in Table 2, the only significant relationship was found between the FP and the Brief Cope Scales. This correlation, although significant, was very low. Also calculated were the correlations between the two forgiveness scores, which was .40. This is significant at the .01 level. The two coping scales were also significantly correlated to one another. Their correlation was .38, which was significant at the .01

level.

As previously indicated, both of the coping scales consist of several subscales each of which correspond with a type of coping function or mechanism. These subscales can be categorized as emotion-focused or problem-focused coping. For the purpose of this analysis, correlations were calculated for each of the subscales and the Acts of Forgiveness Scale as well as the Forgiving Personality Scale.

Table 2

Correlations between the Coping and Forgiveness Scales

	FP Scale	AF Scale
Brief Cope	.16*	-.03
Cope	.11	-.09

Notes: * = p < .01.

BC = Brief Cope Scale (Carver, 1997); Cope = the Cope Scale (terry & Hynes, 1998); AF = Act of Forgiveness Scale (Drinnon, 2000); FP = Forgiving Personality Scale (Drinnon, et al., 2000)

The problem-focused variables from the Brief Cope Scale are the subscales of Active, Instrumental Support, and Planning. As indicated in Table 3, all were significantly correlated in the positive direction with both forgiveness inventories with the exception of Instrumental Support which yielded an insignificant correlation with the AF. Therefore, participants who endorse problem-focused coping techniques appear to be more forgiving as assessed by these measures.

The remaining eleven subscales of the Brief Cope are emotion-focused coping strategies. Several significant relationships were observed between these indexes and the

forgiveness measures as is presented in table 3. The strongest correlation was found between the religion subscale and the Forgiving Personality Scale. The remaining correlations between acceptance, humor, and self-distraction and the forgiveness measures were unreliable.

Similar analyses were performed with the Coping Scale and are presented in the Table 4. Problem Appraisal and Problem Management are the two subscales referring to problem-focused coping strategies. Both were significantly correlated with the FP Scale, but not the Acts of Forgiveness Scale. In contrast, Escapism and Emotional Support, the two subscales referring to emotion-focused coping techniques, were significantly correlated with AF, but not the Forgiving Personality Scale. Thus, those respondents showing a forgiving personality are more likely to endorse problem-focused coping techniques. However, for the single event based on which the acts of Forgiveness scale items were answered, respondents were significantly more likely to indicate they had forgiven the person who offended them the less they reported relying on emotion-focused coping techniques with respect to the same person and the same incident.

In addition, step-wise regression analyses were performed. This analysis takes into account the statistical relationships among predictor variables in order to determine the unique variance contributed by each predictor for the dependent variable. From the Brief Cope Scale, the subscales of religion, positive reframing, self-blame, behavioral disengagement, emotional support, and venting all related independently to variation in the magnitude of trait forgiveness scores. From the Coping Scale, the subscales of escapism, problem appraisal, and emotional approach significantly predicted the likelihood of state forgiveness. Table 5 contains analyses pertaining to Brief Cope and FP, whereas table 6 presents the analysis of the Coping Scale and AF.

Table 3

Correlations between Forgiveness and the Brief Cope Scale

Problem-focused Coping			Emotion-focused Coping		
Subscales	AF	FP	Subscales	AF	FP
Active	.16*	.21*	Emotional Support	-.02	.24*
Instrumental Support	-.01	.17*	Positive Re-framing	.20*	.31*
Planning	.19*	.20*	Acceptance	.03	.10
			Religion	12*	.36*
			Humor	.01	.04
			Self-Distraction	-.09	-.01
			Denial	-.18*	-.07
			Substance Use	-.10	-.20*
			Venting	-.10	-.14*
			Self-blame	-.18*	-.15*
			Behavioral Disengagement	-.11	-.17*

Notes: * = p < .01.

AF = Act of Forgiveness Scale (Drinnon, 2000); FP = Forgiving Personality Scale
(Drinnon, et al., 2000)

Table 4

Correlations between Forgiveness and the Coping Scale

Problem-focused Coping			Emotion-focused Coping		
Subscales	AF	FP	Subscales	AF	FP
Problem Appraisal	.09	.18*	Escapism	-.26*	-.09
Problem Management	.05	.14*	Emotional Approach	-.16*	-.02

Notes: * = p < .01.

AF = Act of Forgiveness Scale (Drinnon, 2000); FP = Forgiving Personality Scale (Drinnon, et al., 2000)

Table 5

Regression of Brief Cope Subscales on FP Scores

Subscale	R	R Square	R Square Change	F	Significance
Religion	.36	.13	.13	41.71	.01
Positive Reframing	.43	.19	.06	20.20	.01
Self-Blame	.47	.22	.03	10.88	.01
Behavioral Disengagement	.49	.24	.02	6.32	.01
Emotional Support Seeking	.50	.25	.02	5.48	.02
Venting	.32	.27	.01	4.33	.04

Notes: FP = Forgiving Personality Scale (Drinnon, et al., 2000); Brief Cope (Carver, 1997).

Table 6

Regression of the Coping Scale Subscales on AF

Subscale	R	R Square	R Square Change	F	Significance
Escapism	.26	.07	.07	20.81	.01
Problem Appraisal	.30	.09	.02	5.83	.02
Emotional Approach	.33	.11	.02	5.90	.02

Notes: AF = Act of Forgiveness Scale (Drinnon, 2000); Coping Scale (Terry & Hynes, 1998).

Additional analyses were performed to investigate gender and age differences. T-test analysis failed to detect significant differences between the responses of men and women for both state and trait coping. Correlation analyses were used to analyze the relationship between age and the use of a particular coping strategy. However, the only significance was found for instrumental support indicating that as the respondent's age increases, he or she is less likely to report relying on this coping strategy.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

A primary goal of this research was to compare state and trait measures of forgiveness and coping. The hypothesis predicted that state measures of forgiveness would correlate with state measures of coping, and trait measures of forgiveness would correlate with trait measures of coping. However, these results provided only limited support for this expectation. Specifically, Brief Cope Scale and the FP were significantly, but only modestly correlated.

Another aim of this research was to determine whether or not forgiveness was a problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategy. With regard to the state coping, indexed by the Coping Scale, significant correlations were observed between the Forgiving Personality Scale and both problem-focused coping subscales suggesting that the forgiving personality might be best conceptualized as involving a problem-focused strategy. Also from the Coping Scale, both emotion-focused coping subscales correlated inversely and significantly with the AF Scale. Thus, if forgiveness occurs in a specific instance, emotion-focused coping strategies apparently were less likely to have been used. This further supports the interpretation that forgiveness is a problem-focused coping strategy. Statistical tests from similar analyses of the Brief Cope Scale were less easily interpreted but suggest the same or a similar pattern of results. For this trait measure of coping, all problem-focused coping subscales correlated significantly with the Forgiving Personality Scale, and all but the subscale of instrumental support correlated significantly with the AF Scale. However, with respect to the emotion-focused coping subscale, some correlations with the Acts of Forgiveness Scale were significant and some correlations with the Forgiving Personality Scale were significant. A further complication emerged because some of the relationships were direct and others were negative. A possible reason for this discrepancy is the multiple subscales contributing to problem-focused and

emotion-focused coping categories and the relatively few items composing each of the subscales.

On the other hand, the regression analysis indicated that the unique variance in FP scores was subsumed by religion, positive reframing, self-blame, behavioral disengagement, emotional support seeking and venting, all of which are emotion-focused coping strategies. Comparable results were observed for state forgiveness. In that case the variables of escapism, problem appraisal, and emotional approach independently contributed to the prediction of the occurrence of forgiveness for a specific act. Both emotion-focused coping subscales were represented, but only one of the two problem-focused coping subscales achieved significance.

Taken together, these results appear to suggest that coping and forgiveness are linked in some fundamental way, but that it is not yet clear whether either state or trait forgiveness is primarily emotion-focused or problem-focused. Such a pattern of results is not unique in the coping literature and is perhaps due to the idea that a given individual may use both problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies in response to the same incidents. It is also possible that some limitation of this study constrained the clarity of results such as the exclusive reliance on self-reported indexes among a relatively homogenous sample of college students. On the other hand, this is one of the first efforts to link these two constructs and, in that regard, these data begin to answer the questions, is forgiveness a coping strategy and, if so, what is the underlying mechanism.

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VITA

Karen Elizabeth Friedman was born in Sylvania, Ohio on October 17, 1976, but soon moved to Clinton, North Carolina. She graduated valedictorian from Clinton High School in 1994, and cum laude from Wake Forest University in 1998. Karen majored in psychology and subsequently pursued a Masters of Arts degree in experimental psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville While attending the university, she participated in the Personality and Relationships Laboratory and the Forgiveness Laboratory, served on the Graduate Teaching Assistant Mentoring Program, held an assistantship with the Office of Evaluation Services, tutored for the Athletic Student Life Office, worked as an intern in the Education and Development Department of a world-wide manufacturing company, and joined Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society Upon completion of this degree, Karen will enter law school at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill