

Chapter #10

THE INFLUENCE OF PERSONALITY AND COPING STYLES ON FORGIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

Three types of forgiveness have been identified: forgiveness of self; forgiveness of others; and forgiveness of situations (such as illness or natural disaster). Forgiveness is related to personality factors; however, there is scant research to date examining the relation between coping styles and forgiveness. We recruited 160 undergraduate students to complete questionnaires. There were significant correlations among personality, coping styles, and forgiveness. When personality factor scores were used hierarchical multiple regression analyses, forgiveness of self was predicted by lower scores on Neuroticism and emotion focused coping, and higher scores on problem focused coping. Forgiveness of situations was predicted by lower scores on Neuroticism and emotion focused coping, and higher scores on Openness, Agreeableness, and problem focused coping. Finally, forgiveness of others was predicted by higher Agreeableness scores; coping styles did not contribute additional variance in this model. Regressions were also conducted using the facet (subscale) scores. Forgiveness of self was predicted by lower scores on hostility, depression, and self-consciousness. Forgiveness of situations was predicted by lower vulnerability. Higher altruism drove the relation between Agreeableness and forgiveness of others. Finally, lower emotion focused coping scores and higher problem focused coping scores contributed unique variance in each of the facet models.

Keywords: forgiveness, personality, coping.

1. INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness has recently become a topic of interest to psychologists due to its therapeutic applications (Baskin & Enright, 2004; Wade, Worthington, & Meyer, 2005), and associations with positive physical health (Lawler et al., 2005; Svalina & Webb, 2012; Webb, Toussaint, Kalpakjian, & Tate, 2010; Wilson, Milosevic, Carroll, Hart, & Hibbard, 2008) and mental health outcomes (Riek & Mania, 2012; Webb, Colburn, Heisler, Call, & Chickering, 2008). In particular, measures of dispositional forgiveness (i.e., the inherent tendency of an individual to forgive regardless of circumstances), tend to correlate more strongly with these outcomes than measures of situational forgiveness (i.e., forgiveness of a specific transgression); thus, dispositional measures are especially effective for studying the factors that influence the act of forgiveness (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002).

From a holistic perspective, forgiveness is an important topic to investigate because of its implications for helping individuals in distress. The act of forgiving has been tied to greater life satisfaction, positive affect, optimism (Hill & Allemand, 2011) and feelings of hope (Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, & Worthington, 2014). Furthermore, forgiveness reduces depression and anxiety (Wade et al., 2014). Individuals who forgive have fewer physical symptoms (e.g., back pain), sleep problems, and somatic complaints (Lawler et al., 2005).

Thus, from a wellness perspective it is important to identify the antecedents and consequences of forgiveness (see Riek & Mania, 2012 for a review).

A number of antecedents have been investigated in relation to forgiveness, such as religiosity, empathy, and rumination (Riek & Mania, 2012). Individuals are more likely to come to terms with forgiveness if they have a heightened sense of spirituality, have the ability to take the perspective of another, and do not dwell on the negative aspects of the transgression. Furthermore, demographic factors may also influence forgiveness. Specifically, older adults tend to be more forgiving than their younger counterparts (e.g., Allemand, 2008; Mullet & Girard, 2000; Toussaint, Williams, Musick, & Everson, 2001). In terms of gender differences, there is mixed evidence in the literature; however, meta-analytic findings suggest that females score slightly higher than males on forgiveness (Miller, Worthington, & McDaniel, 2008). As such, the present study investigated age and gender in relation to forgiveness.

Thompson and colleagues (2005) emphasized the importance of examining three types of forgiveness: forgiveness of self; forgiveness of others; and forgiveness of situations. During the development of a scale assessing these types (i.e., the Heartland Forgiveness Scale), these authors found that the propensity to forgive the self, others, and situations was negatively correlated with depression, anger, anxiety, and positively correlated with life satisfaction. As such, it is important to understand the factors which contribute to an individual's ability to forgive. One factor, that has been studied in this context is personality.

1.1. Personality

A number of studies have examined personality in relation to forgiveness. Personality is often conceptualized in terms of the "Big Five" model. The NEO-PI-R (McCrae & Costa, 2010) measures the personality factors of: Neuroticism; Extraversion; Openness; Agreeableness; and Conscientiousness. In addition, each of these personality factors contains six subscales known as facets.

Several studies have demonstrated that personality factors account for a small to moderate proportion of the variance in forgiveness, depending on how the latter is defined (Brose, Rye, Lutz-Zois, & Ross, 2005; Exline, Baumeister, Bushman, Campbell, & Finkel, 2004; Leach & Lark, 2004; Ross, Kendell, Wrobel, & Rye, 2004; Walker & Gorsuch, 2002). Agreeableness consistently displays a moderate correlation with forgiveness (Berry, Worthington, O'Connor, Parrott, & Wade, 2005; Brose et al., 2005; Brown & Phillips, 2005; Exline et al., 2004). Specifically, Agreeableness is reliably associated with forgiveness of others (e.g., Leach & Lark, 2004; Ross et al., 2004; Walker & Gorsuch, 2002), but inconsistently associated with forgiveness of self. In contrast, Neuroticism is negatively related to forgiveness (Berry et al., 2005; Brown & Phillips, 2005; Brose et al., 2005; Exline et al., 2004), especially forgiveness of self (Ross et al., 2004; Leach & Lark, 2004); however, its relation with forgiveness of others is ambiguous.

Meta-analytic findings suggest that there is a small, but significant, relation between Conscientiousness and forgiveness (Balliet, 2010); however, research relating Conscientiousness to the three types of forgiveness is conflicting. Furthermore, the vast majority of studies found no relation between Openness and forgiveness (Berry et al., 2005; Brose et al., 2005; Ross et al., 2004; Walker & Gorsuch, 2002; but see Exline et al., 2004 and Leach & Lark, 2004 for exceptions).

The evidence linking Extraversion with forgiveness is also mixed. The lack of consistent results may be due to discrepancies at the personality facet level. For instance, Brose and coworkers (2005) found no significant relation between the Extraversion factor

and the likelihood of forgiveness, yet two of its facets (warmth and positive emotions) were positively related. These inconsistencies could emerge due to differential relations with the forgiveness types, as Extraversion has displayed mixed relations with each of the three forgiveness types. Thus, it is important to examine both personality factor and facet scores in relation to forgiveness. These personality factors and their facets may exert their influence on forgiveness by affecting how the transgression is interpreted (McCullough et al., 1998), and may influence the type of strategies an individual adopts to cope with a stressor.

1.2. Coping styles

Individuals may cope with a stressor in a variety of ways, including: problem focused strategies (i.e., dealing the source of the stress); and emotion focused strategies (i.e., attempting to minimize emotional distress; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Vitaliano, Russo, Carr, Maiuro, & Becker, 1985). Certain personality traits may predispose individuals to use certain strategies. For instance, individuals scoring high on neuroticism tend to use less adaptive coping behaviors than their emotionally stable counterparts (Gunthert, Cohen, & Armeli, 1999). Specifically, evidence suggests that Neuroticism is negatively correlated with problem focused coping strategies (Bouchard, Guillemette, & Landry-Leger, 2004; Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; Vickers, Kolar, & Hervig, 1989; Zhou, Li, Li, Wang, & Zhao, 2017) and positively correlated with emotion focused coping strategies (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; Shewchuck, Elliot, MacNair-Semands, & Harkins, 1999; Zhou et al., 2017). In contrast, Extraversion and Conscientiousness are positively related to problem focused coping (Bouchard et al., 2004; Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; Vickers et al., 1989; Zhou et al., 2017). Other research focusing on the traits of Agreeableness and Openness has yielded mixed results; the effects these traits have on coping appears to be minimal, especially when controlling for the effects of the other personality factors (Vickers et al., 1989).

Given the relation between personality and coping styles, and between personality and forgiveness, it stands to reason that there should also be an association between coping styles and forgiveness. Indeed, several commonalities between the coping process and the forgiveness process have been identified (Strelan & Covic, 2006), leading some researchers to speculate that the act of forgiving is a means of coping with a stressor that reduces psychological distress (e.g., Strelan & Covic, 2006; Worthington & Scherer, 2004). Despite the theoretical association between these processes, there is limited empirical data examining the relation between forgiveness and coping (see Konstam, Holmes, & Levine, 2003; and Strelan & Wojtysiak, 2009 for exceptions).

1.3. Purpose of the present study

The purpose of the present was to extend the research on personality, coping, and forgiveness by determining if coping styles added unique variance, beyond that of personality, in predicting each of the three types of forgiveness. Given the positive outcomes associated with forgiveness, it is desirable to promote forgiveness in clinical settings. Thus, the present study aimed to determine if targetting coping styles is an effective intervention to promote forgiveness, irrespective of an individuals personality traits.

2. METHOD

One hundred and sixty students at a small university in Eastern Canada were recruited from introductory psychology courses to participate in a questionnaire study in exchange for course credit. The mean age of the sample was 20.62 years ($SD = 3.7$). The majority of participants were female (66.6%). Participants completed randomized questionnaire packages in supervised group sessions. All measures and procedures were approved by the university's Research Ethics Board prior to the commencement of the study.

2.1. Measures

2.1.1. Demographics

Participants completed a demographics measure that asked for age, gender, and marital status.

2.1.2. Heartland forgiveness scale

(HFS; Thompson et al., 2005). This scale consists of 18 items and measures forgiveness on a scale of 1 = *almost always false of me* to 7 = *almost always true of me*. In addition to a total score, three subscale scores are computed: forgiveness of self (e.g., "*I hold grudges against myself for negative things I have done*"); forgiveness of others (e.g., "*I continue to be hard on others who have hurt me*"); and forgiveness of situations (e.g., "*With time I can be understanding of bad circumstances in my life*"). The reliability of the three scales in the current study was .78, .64, and .76, respectively.

2.1.3. Ways of coping checklist

(WCL-42; Vitaliano et al., 1985). The WCL-42 is a 42-item scale designed to measure a number of coping styles. For the purpose of this study, we used the problem focused coping and emotion focused coping subscales. Participants recorded the degree to which they used each coping strategy on a 4-point Likert scale where 0 = *not used*, and 3 = *used a great deal*. Emotion focused coping and problem focused coping were found to have good internal reliability in this study ($\alpha = .91$ and $.79$, respectively).

2.1.4. The NEO-PI-R

(McCrae & Costa, 2010). The NEO-PI-R is a 240-item measure that was used to assess personality. The NEO-PI-R measures five factors and each of their facets (Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness). The NEO-PI-R is considered the "Gold Standard" for measuring personality and has good convergent and discriminant validity (see McCrae & Costa, 2010, for more details). The internal reliabilities were adequate in the present study: Neuroticism ($\alpha = .86$); Extraversion ($\alpha = .80$); Openness ($\alpha = .68$); Agreeableness ($\alpha = .71$); and Conscientiousness ($\alpha = .81$).

3. RESULTS

3.1. Gender differences

A series of independent samples *t*-tests revealed several gender differences in the current study. Females scored statistically significantly higher than males on the personality factors of Neuroticism ($M_{\text{females}} = 105.21$, $M_{\text{males}} = 96.95$) and Agreeableness

($M_{\text{females}} = 117.79$, $M_{\text{males}} = 109.13$). These results were also seen at the facet level, with females scoring higher than males on several facets, including anxiety ($M_{\text{females}} = 20.55$, $M_{\text{males}} = 17.40$), vulnerability ($M_{\text{females}} = 15.25$, $M_{\text{males}} = 12.78$), straightforwardness ($M_{\text{females}} = 19.16$, $M_{\text{males}} = 16.07$), altruism ($M_{\text{females}} = 23.27$, $M_{\text{males}} = 21.56$), modesty ($M_{\text{females}} = 20.25$, $M_{\text{males}} = 17.85$), and tendermindedness ($M_{\text{females}} = 20.99$, $M_{\text{males}} = 19.76$). In contrast, males scored higher than females on the Extraversion facet of excitement seeking ($M_{\text{females}} = 18.92$, $M_{\text{males}} = 21.18$). There were no gender differences in coping styles or forgiveness types (all p 's > .05).

3.2. Age differences

Correlational analyses between age and the study variables revealed that older individuals scored statistically significantly higher on Conscientiousness ($r = .20$, $p = .010$), problem focused coping ($r = .25$, $p = .002$), and forgiveness of self ($r = .16$, $p = .039$), than their younger counterparts.

3.3. Bivariate correlations

The correlations among forgiveness, personality, and coping are displayed in Table 1. As expected, personality was related to forgiveness. Specifically, lower levels of Neuroticism and higher Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness were associated with a greater propensity to forgive the self, others, and situations. No statistically significant correlations emerged between Openness and the forgiveness types. These results were generally replicated at the personality facet level (see Table 1).

Personality was also related to coping styles. Emotion focused coping styles were positively correlated with Neuroticism and negatively correlated with Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. On the other hand, problem focused coping was positively correlated with Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness, and negatively correlated with Neuroticism. Consistent with the factor results, all Neuroticism facets were positively correlated with emotion focused coping strategies (see Table 1), whereas the majority of Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness facets were negatively correlated with emotion focused coping. In contrast, problem focus coping tended to be negatively related with Neuroticism facets and positively related to Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness facets.

In terms of the relations between forgiveness and coping styles, problem focused coping was positively correlated with forgiveness of self, others, and situations. The inverse was found to be true for emotion focused coping.

3.4. Hierarchical multiple regressions – factors

Three hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to determine if coping added unique variance beyond that of personality scores in the prediction of forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of situations. In each model, age and gender were entered on the first step to control for their effects, the personality factors of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness were entered on the second step, and the third step included problem and emotion focused coping.

When predicting forgiveness of self, the overall model was statistically significant, accounting for 49% of the variance ($F_{(9, 147)} = 15.40$, $p < .001$, $R = .70$, adjusted $R^2 = .45$). A significant personality predictor was low Neuroticism ($\beta = -.57$). Problem focused coping ($\beta = .29$), and emotion focused coping ($\beta = -.30$) added unique variance to the model.

Table 1.
Correlations among Forgiveness, Coping, and Personality Factors and Facets.

	Forgiveness			Coping Styles	
	Self	Others	Situations	Emotion Focused	Problem Focused
Neuroticism	-.61***	-.27***	-.60***	.72***	-.18*
anxiety	-.39***	-.05	-.36***	.49***	.03
angry-hostility	-.48***	-.39***	-.49***	.52***	-.16*
depression	-.60***	-.16*	-.51***	.68***	-.17*
self-conscientiousness	-.58***	-.20**	-.49***	.60***	-.16*
impulsiveness	-.23**	-.13	-.31***	.43***	-.05
vulnerability	-.49***	-.34***	-.55***	.53***	-.27***
Extraversion	.37***	.34***	.28***	-.33***	.30***
warmth	.38***	.35***	.34***	-.27***	.30***
gregariousness	.20**	.27***	.15	-.19*	.19*
assertiveness	.29***	.10	.19*	-.28***	.24**
activity	.17*	.17*	.07	-.28***	.14
excitement seeking	.11	.17*	.03	-.09	.00
positive emotions	.39***	.36***	.38***	-.32***	.37***
Openness	.00	.14	.15	.11	.18*
fantasy	.07	.05	.09	.20*	.06
aesthetics	-.18*	-.07	.03	.15	.10
feelings	.10	.23**	.12	.08	.17*
actions	.00	.10	.06	-.09	.18*
ideas	.02	.07	.15	.02	.19*
values	.07	.25***	.15	-.01	.01
Agreeableness	.30***	.50***	.37***	-.29***	.17*
trust	.46***	.32***	.36***	-.37***	.18*
straightforwardness	.19*	.23**	.19*	-.24**	.08
altruism	.31***	.49***	.38***	-.29***	.23**
compliance	.30***	.37***	.31***	-.30***	.08
modesty	-.18*	.21**	.03	.13	-.10
tendermindedness	.02	.34***	.15	-.01	.22**
Conscientiousness	.24**	.22**	.20*	-.36***	.25***
competence	.23**	.24**	.24**	-.29***	.22**
order	.07	.09	.11	-.13	.13
dutifulness	.17*	.23**	.12	-.26***	.23**
achievement striving	.18*	.10	.05	-.24**	.23**
self-discipline	.29***	.21**	.22**	-.41***	.19*
deliberation	.13	.13	.13	-.23**	.13
Coping Styles					
emotion focused	-.52***	-.31***	-.53***	-	.13
problem focused	.32***	.16*	.26***	.13	-

Note: $N = 158-160$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The model predicting forgiveness of situations was also statistically significant, accounting for 53% of the variance ($F_{(9, 145)} = 17.78, p < .001, R = .72, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .50$). Significant predictors were low Neuroticism ($\beta = -.66$), high Openness ($\beta = .20$), and high Agreeableness ($\beta = .21$). Furthermore, high problem focused coping ($\beta = .26$) and low emotion focused coping ($\beta = -.33$) were significant predictors.

The third hierarchical regression analysis, predicting forgiveness of others, was statistically significant accounting for 33% of the variance ($F_{(9, 146)} = 8.04, p < .001, R = .58, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .29$). Agreeableness ($\beta = .43$) was the lone significant predictor in the model; however, this result should be interpreted with caution given the lower reliability of the forgiveness of other subscale in the present study ($\alpha = .64$).

3.5. Hierarchical multiple regressions – facets

Three additional hierarchical regression analyses were conducted using the personality facet scores predicting each type of forgiveness. In these analyses, we substituted the subscale scores for the significant factor scores. At step one, age and gender were entered to control for their effects. In step two, the personality facets from the significant factors were added. Finally, coping styles were added in the third step, to determine if they increased the predictive capacity of the model.

The overall model predicting forgiveness of self was statistically significant, accounting for 52% of the variance ($F_{[10, 146]} = 15.50, p < .001, R = .72, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .48$). Significant personality predictors were low hostility ($\beta = -.20$), depression ($\beta = -.30$), and self-consciousness ($\beta = -.25$). In addition, high problem focused coping ($\beta = .27$) and low emotion focused coping ($\beta = -.25$) added unique variance beyond personality.

The overall model predicting forgiveness of situations significantly predicted 54% of its variance ($F_{[22, 132]} = 6.94, p < .001, R = .73, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .46$). The personality facet of low vulnerability ($\beta = -.31$) contributed significantly. In addition, low emotion focused coping ($\beta = -.33$), and high problem focused coping ($\beta = .25$) added unique variance to the model.

Finally, the overall model predicting forgiveness of others was also significant, predicting 36% of its variance ($F_{[10, 145]} = 8.03, p < .001, R = .60, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .31$). The personality facet of altruism ($\beta = .35$) was a significant predictor. Consistent with previous patterns, problem focused coping ($\beta = .16$), and emotion focused coping ($\beta = -.22$) contributed significantly to the model; however, this result should be interpreted with caution given the lower reliability of the forgiveness of others subscale.

4. DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relations among personality, coping, and forgiveness. Consistent with previous literature, at the bivariate level, older adults were more conscientious (Roberts, Walton, & Viechtbauer, 2006) and more likely to engage in problem focused coping strategies than their younger counterparts (De Minzi & Sacchi, 2005; Trouillet, Doan-Van-Hay, Launay, & Martin, 2011). Moreover, older individuals were more inclined to forgive themselves. It is important to note, however, that in the regression analyses age was not a statistically significant predictor of forgiveness.

The present study also replicated previous literature with respect to gender differences in personality. Specifically, at the bivariate level, females scored higher than males on neuroticism (including anxiety and vulnerability) and agreeableness (including straightforwardness, altruism, modesty, and tendermindedness), whereas males scored

higher on the extraversion facet of excitement seeking (Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001). However, in the regression analyses, the current study did not find gender differences in the forgiveness of self, others, or situations, validating previous studies with similar results (e.g., Brose et al., 2005; Brown & Phillips, 2005; Toussaint & Webb, 2005; Walker & Gorsuch, 2002). Taken together, age and gender did not significantly predict the forgiveness of self, others, and situations in our model. Thus, in the present study, the influence of demographic factors on forgiveness was minimal.

The correlational analyses found that individuals scoring higher on all three forgiveness types had lower neuroticism scores. Lower Neuroticism scores reflect emotional stability; these individuals are not anxious or depressed and are capable of dealing with their current situation. We also found positive correlations between Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and the three forgiveness types. People who are more outgoing, easy to get along with, and rational are more likely to be able to forgive than those who are introverted, cynical, and undisciplined. Finally, in accordance with previous studies, no correlation was found between openness and forgiveness (Berry et al., 2005; Brose et al., 2005; Ross et al., 2004; Walker & Gorsuch, 2002).

Concerning personality and coping, the present research corroborated that of Connor-Smith and Flachsbart (2007) and Zhou and coworkers (2017) in that individuals who scored higher on Neuroticism were less likely to endorse problem focused coping strategies and more likely to use emotion focused coping strategies. Also, consistent with previous research (Bouchard et al., 2004; Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007; Vickers et al., 1989; Zhou et al., 2017), our study found that the opposite pattern was true for extraverts and individuals high on conscientiousness – they were more likely to endorse problem focused coping strategies and less likely to use emotion focused strategies. Problem focused coping has implications for subjective well-being because these strategies deal directly with the stressor at hand, whereas emotion focused coping tries to minimize the emotions that are felt; in this case, the stressor can continue because it is not addressed.

This study also served to fill a gap in the literature as few empirical studies exist examining the relation between coping and forgiveness. The findings of this study indicate the emotion focused coping is negatively correlated with forgiveness of self, others, and situations. Alternatively, problem focused coping was found to be positively correlated with the three forgiveness types. Although Worthington and Scherer (2004) proposed a theoretical argument equating emotion focused coping with forgiveness, our empirical evidence suggests otherwise. The strength of these correlations were weak to moderate suggesting that although the two constructs are correlated, forgiveness is distinct from coping. Nevertheless, how an individual deals with a stressor (e.g., problem solving versus avoidance) contributes to the ability to move beyond the transgression and forgive.

The results of several hierarchical regression analyses found that personality and coping account for a significant amount of the variance in the prediction of forgiveness of self, others, and situations. Specifically, forgiveness of self was predicted by low Neuroticism and emotion focused coping, and high problem focused coping. Forgiveness of situations was also predicted by these factors, as well as high Agreeableness and Openness. Finally, forgiveness of others was predicted by high Agreeableness.

Subsequent analyses revealed that specific personality facets contributed to the predictive capacity to the forgiveness model. Specifically, low levels of hostility, depression, and self-consciousness contributed to the ability to forgive the self. According to McCrae and Costa (2010), individuals scoring high on angry-hostility are prone to experience anger. Furthermore, high scores on depression and self-consciousness reflect an individual who is disposed to feelings of guilt and shame (McCrae & Costa, 2010).

As such, these individuals may experience anger towards themselves for events that they perceive as guilt-inducing or shameful, resulting in an inability to forgive the self.

Interestingly, the only personality facet that independently predicted forgiveness of situations was low vulnerability. Individuals who score low on this facet tend to be calm in the face of stressful events, because they believe they are able to effectively manage the situation (McCrae & Costa, 2010). As a result, these individuals may be more likely to forgive situations, because they may not interpret the situation as stressful in the first place.

Finally, high altruism was predictive of forgiveness of others. Altruistic individuals are deeply considerate of those around them; that is, they have a high regard for others' feelings and circumstances (McCrae & Costa, 2010). This sensitivity may enable them to see a transgression from another's perspective, resulting in the ability of being more capable of forgiving others.

A unique contribution of this study was the influence of coping styles on forgiveness. At the facet level, higher scores on problem focused coping and lower scores on emotion focused coping significantly predicted each forgiveness type, beyond that of personality. Coping styles are amenable to invention, so these techniques should be taught in therapeutic sessions.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

These results are applicable to clinicians and researchers alike. Given the associations between forgiveness and positive mental health outcomes (e.g., Riek & Mania, 2012; Webb et al., 2008) it may be desirable to promote forgiveness in therapeutic settings. Indeed, previous research has shown therapeutic interventions to be successful in promoting forgiveness, reducing depression and anxiety, and facilitating hope (Wade et al., 2014).

An individual's life circumstances might require him or her to forgive the self, others, or situations at any given time. This study demonstrated that these forgiveness types are predicted by different personality profiles. For instance, individuals who are hostile, depressed, and self-conscious may have a more difficult time coming to terms with forgiving the self, but not necessarily forgiving others or situations.

Besides personality profiles, our study demonstrated a unique contribution of coping styles in the forgiveness process. In order to forgive, an individual should acknowledge that a stressor or transgression occurred and face it directly. As such, promoting problem-focused coping strategies and reducing reliance on emotion focused coping strategies (e.g., avoidance and wishful thinking) may prove beneficial for all individuals, regardless of their personality profile.

Finally, personality and coping styles accounted for approximately half of the variance in forgiveness of self and situations, and a third in forgiveness of others. Although this amount is a significant proportion of the variance, there is still a substantial amount of variance unexplained. Therefore, attempts to explain forgiveness entirely in terms of a personality disposition or a coping strategy (e.g., Worthington & Scherer, 2004) are oversimplifications of this complex phenomenon, and future research should continue to search for additional predictors of forgiveness.

6. LIMITATIONS

This sample was drawn from a population of undergraduate students, and more females participated than did males. As such, caution should be exercised when generalizing these results to males and older adults. In addition, the suboptimal reliability of the forgiveness of others subscale could have led to a failure to detect meaningful relationships in the data analysis.

7. CONCLUSION

This study found that the three forgiveness types were differentially predicted by personality and coping styles. As such, it is important to tease apart forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of situations as each of these forgiveness types have different predictor models. In other words, for each type of forgiveness, different personality factors/facets and coping styles made unique contributions. Although personality factors and facets contributed the most variance in these models, coping styles are more amenable to change and can be taught in therapeutic interventions. To conclude, this study provided empirical support for relations among personality, coping styles, and forgiveness.

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