



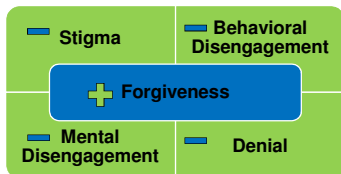
# Maladaptive Coping, Stigma, and Forgiveness in HIV+ Adults

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## Introduction

- Stigma associated with HIV can manifest itself in many ways. For example, when seropositive individuals disclose their HIV status, others may have negative reactions about that person and distance themselves. This rejection may encourage the use of maladaptive coping strategies such as denial, behavioral and mental disengagement. Such maladaptive coping strategies associated with stigma may discourage people living with HIV (PLH) from seeking medical treatment and disclosing their seropositive status to sexual partners (Kinsler, Wong, Sayles, Davis, & Cunningham, 2007).
- Forgiveness, a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral response to interpersonal conflict, is essential in maintaining social harmony (Lawler et al., 2005). More importantly, forgiveness has been associated with improvements in health issues such as quality of life, depression and stress in PLH (Volpone & Vosvick, 2007; Doi, Vosvick, & Chng, 2007) while maladaptive coping strategies have been associated with decreases the quality of life (QOL) of seropositive individuals (Vosvick et al., 2002). However, if PLH can reduce maladaptive coping strategies that deal with stigma and learn healthier alternatives, then they may be more likely to practice more forgiving behaviors, which will improve their QOL and overall health.

## Model



Note. This model depicts a negative association between stigma and maladaptive coping strategies, which equate to increased forgiveness.

## Hypotheses

- Stigma is negatively associated with forgiveness.
- Forgiveness is negatively associated with maladaptive coping.
- Increased stigma and maladaptive coping will account for a significant portion of the variance in forgiveness.

## Sample Demographics (n=288)

	Mean	SD	Range
Age	41.66	8.39	19 – 68
Gender		Frequency(%)	
Male		140 48.8%	
Female		143 49.5%	
Transgendered		5 1.7%	
Ethnicity		Frequency(%)	
African-American		156 54.4%	
European-American		85 29.6%	
Other		47 16%	

## Measures

### HIV Stigma Scale

(Berger, Ferrans, & Lashley, 2001)

- Measures stigma experienced from HIV + diagnosis
- 40 likert-type items
- Reliability: Published  $\alpha = .96$
- Convergent Validity: Correlation between CES-D and HIV Stigma Scale: .63
- Responses: (1-4)  
1 = Strongly Disagree  
4 = Strongly Agree
- "I feel guilty because I have HIV"

### Brief COPE Survey

(Carver, 1997)

- Determines usage of adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies
- 28 likert-type items, 14 subscales
- Reliability: Published  $\alpha = .90$
- Concurrent validity was established (Carver, 1997)
- Responses (1-4)  
1 = I haven't been doing this at all  
4 = I've been doing this a lot
- "I've given up the attempt to cope."

### Heartland Forgiveness Scale

(Thompson et al., 2005)

- Measures forgiveness experienced by participants
- 18 likert-type items
- Reliability: Published  $\alpha = .92$
- Validity: Concurrent validity was established (Thompson & Snyder, 2007)
- Responses: (1 – 7)  
1 = Almost Always False of Me  
7 = Almost Always True of Me
- "I continue to punish a person who has done something that I think is wrong."

## Results

### Univariate Statistics

Variable	Mean (SD)	Range	Possible Range	Calc. $\alpha$
Forgiveness	81.47 (14.68)	89 – 125	87 – 149	.88
Neg. Self-Image*	29.67 (8.73)	13 – 52	13 – 52	.89
Denial	1.95 (0.88)	1 – 4	1 – 4	.76
B. Disengagement	1.86 (0.93)	1 – 4	1 – 4	.62
M. Disengagement	2.44 (0.87)	1 – 4	1 – 4	.50

\* = Negative Self-Image is one of four subscales on the HIV Stigma Scale.

Note. Denial, Behavioral Disengagement, and Mental Disengagement only had two items for each subscale, which may explain the low  $\alpha$  levels.

### Bivariate Statistics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Age	----						
2. Sex	-.11	----					
3. Ethnicity	-.06	.08	----				
4. Negative Self-Image	-.05	.01	-.03	----			
5. Denial	.01	.01	-.04	.29***	----		
6. Behavioral Disengagement	-.11	.05	.01	.30***	.61***	----	
7. Mental Disengagement	-.02	.06	-.01	.26***	-.37***	.37***	----
8. Forgiveness	.16**	-.04	.08	-.29***	-.36***	-.43***	-.06

\*\*\*  $p < .001$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*  $p < .05$

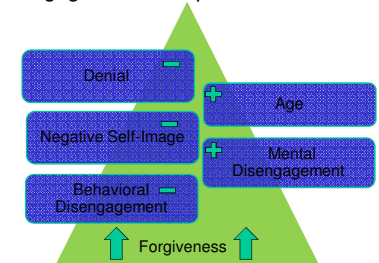
### Regression Analyses

Predictors	Forgiveness		Tolerance	VIF
	$\beta$	$t$		
Age	.16	2.78**	.97	1.03
Negative Self-Image	-.19	-3.43**	.87	1.15
Denial	-.17	-2.57*	.60	1.69
B. Disengagement	-.32	-4.83***	.59	1.71
M. Disengagement	.17	3.00**	.81	1.23

Adj.  $R^2 = .25$   $F(5, 287) = 20.29$

## Discussion

Although negative self-image, denial, and behavioral disengagement were negatively associated with forgiveness, age and mental disengagement were positive correlates.



These findings suggest that the relationship between maladaptive coping behaviors and forgiveness is not as straightforward as was assumed. As one gets older it becomes more likely that forgiveness will be practiced (Orathinkal, Vansteenwegen, & Burggraave, 2008), which could be due to worldly experience and an overall more accepting attitude of others that is sometimes absent in younger individuals. Mental disengagement may increase the likelihood of forgiving behaviors because self-distraction that may divert attention from stigmatizers. Additionally, using self-distraction, such as developing hobbies, may assign meaning to one's life and improve one's QOL.

Clinical implications should focus on developing more adaptive ways of coping and reducing the effect of stigma on HIV+ individuals by teaching more forgiveness.

## Limitations

This study used a cross-sectional correlational design, so causality cannot be inferred. Data was obtained through self-report techniques.

## References

See handout for references.