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COPINGS, ACTUALIZED IN ORDINARY CONSCIOUSNESS
(internet-forums material devoted to the relationship
between men and women)*

SUMMARY. Copings, actualized in ordinary consciousness on the Internet forums material devoted to the love relations between a man and a woman are identified. The possibilities of the content analysis of Internet messages as an instrument for studying copings and ordinary consciousness are illustrated. The users' opinions of those sites where they speak about the ideas of the solution of difficult situations connected with the relations between a man and a woman were studied. 565 opinions of 75 users of Internet forums were analyzed with the help of the content analysis method and experts. Categories of the content analysis are identified on the basis of the copingstrategies' classification offered by I.P. Streltsova (2003) and based on the classifications of R. Lazarus, S. Folkman (1988), E. Heim (1988), C. Carver (1989), J. Amirkhan (1990). Some often used coping- strategies were revealed: Problem solution, 32.39% (the most common ways — the "practical activity", "the problem analysis"), Changing attitudes to the problem — 19,65% (the most widespread way "decrease in the importance"), Maintaining self-esteem and self-confidence — 11.33% ("acceptance of responsibility", keeping "self-esteem").

KEY WORDS. Coping, ordinary consciousness, love relation, relationship between a man and a woman, content analysis.

The need to overcome life difficulties and stress is a relevant issue and a subject of both foreign and domestic researches. According to the public opinion polls 37% of Russians often experience stress [1], 23% of respondents are often irritated and depressed [2]. According to the American psychological association, 72% of Americans specify that over the last 5 years the stress level in their life has increased, according to 80% of respondents the stress level increased or remained the same over the last year.

The need to cope with difficulties makes it urgent to study the ways of coping. In the scientific literature there are numerous classifications of coping-strategies; however, a set of ways people use in their everyday life is limited. So, the All-Russian

Public Opinion Research Centre asked a question: "What do you usually do if you experience stress, strong tension?" 43% of Russians answered that they communicate with friends, 26% watch TV, 20% lie on the sofa [4]. Afore-mentioned results make it necessary to study the ways of coping with the difficult situations actualized in ordinary consciousness.

The ways of coping are a subject of researches within the study of coping-strategies and psychological defences. There are different approaches to the definition of coping. The psychoanalytic approach by A. Freud (1936) and N. Haan (1974) differentiates copings and psychological defences. The dispositional approach by J.H. Amirkhan (1990) describes it as a predisposition to react in a certain way to difficult situations [5, 6, 7]. R. Lazarus and S. Folkman propose the transaction approach to **copings** that are defined as continuous cognitive and behavioural efforts meant to cope with specific external and/or internal needs estimated as those requiring particular effort or exceeding inner resources of a person [8; 237]. Treating stress as a transactional process accentuates the study of a stressful situation, but mostly the study of a stressed person behaviour [9; 98].

There are many classifications of copings. According to the traditional one they are differentiated in problem-oriented (meant to change a situation) and emotion-oriented (meant to regulate the emotional state caused by assessment of a problematic situation) [9; 97]. According to the copings classification offered by Ch. Carver (Carver et al. 1989), E. Frydenberg, E. Lewis (Frydenberg, Lewis, 2000), the most adaptive copings are strategies meant to deal with a problematic situation. The next group represents the strategies which are not connected with active coping, but facilitates one's adaptation to a stressful situation. They are: search of an emotional support, an attempt to cope with a situation using humour, etc. A separate group includes the coping-strategies which are not adaptive, but help to cope with stress in some situations. These are the strategy of refusal to cope with the situation and the strategy of emotional response [6, 10].

The **objective** of the research is to identify copings actualized in ordinary consciousness, using messages from Internet forums devoted to the love relations between a man and a woman. The methodical purpose is to show possibilities of the content analysis of Internet messages as a tool to study copings.

Methodology.

Data collection. We searched for the forums on the sites where users offer their solutions to the difficult situations connected with the relations between a man and a woman. The sites romanticcollection.ru, nelubit.ru, woman.ru were studied. Open sites, with the messages posted in January 2013 at latest, were chosen for the analysis. The professional psychological community sites were not considered. The messages posted by the same user were analysed as a single text. Separate text files were formed from the statements of every user. Then these files underwent content-analysis.

Data processing. The statements of 75 Internet forums users were subjected to the analysis. The categories of the content analysis have been defined according to the coping-strategies classification offered by I.P. Streltsova [10; 122-124] and the

classifications by R. Lazarus, S. Folkman (1988), E.Heim (1988), C. Carver (1989), J. Amirkhan (1990). The strategies are seen as behavioural orientation in a difficult situation: on a problem – "problem solution", "accepting the situation as inevitable", etc.; on other people – "search for social support", "removal", etc., on self-assessment – "maintaining self-respect and self-confidence". These strategies are specified in the ways of behaviour [10; 114].

Statements (phrases, sentences) relevant to the categories of the analysis (the ways of coping with a difficult situation) were used as the units of the content analysis. In total, 565 statements were analysed. Expert assessment (three psychologists acted as experts) guaranteed the reliability of the statements being referred to a definite category. The experts were offered to classify statements into given categories; if a statement didn't correspond to any category, the experts formulated a new category for this statement. The data was further processed in the QDA Miner [11] program. The frequency of units in each category was counted.

Results

The results of the content analysis are presented in table 1. The additional categories, offered by experts, are italicized.

Table1

The Results of the Content Analysis of the Messages
of Internet Forums Users — Frequency of the Categories

The strategy of coping	Number of units (% from total number of units)	The way of coping	Number of units
1	2	3	4
Problem solution	183 (32,39%)	Practical activity	66
		Analysis of a problem	62
		Considering alternatives	26
		Planning	17
		Concentration of efforts	12
Changing one's attitude to the problem	111 (19,65%)	Depreciation of importance	44
		Philosophical removal	23
		Humour	6
Maintaining self-respect and self-confidence	64 (11,33%)	Accepting responsibility	24
		Retaining self-respect	24
		Positive revaluation of a situation	16
Withdrawal from a situation	45 (7,96)	*Behavioural withdrawal*	32
		Mental avoiding	11
		Fantasizing	1
		Alcohol	1
Passive expectation of a solution	31 (5,49%)	Waiting	31

1	2	3	4
Accepting a situation as inevitable	45 (7,96%)	Accepting inevitability	38
		Fatalism	7
Pseudo-advice	30 (5,31%)	*Appeal to one's experience*	19
		Dodging the question, abstract speculating	11
Search for social support	27 (4,78%)	Cooperation	10
		Search for emotional support	5
		Aaltruism	4
		Recognition of the partner's value	3
		Search for common values	3
		Search for instrumental support	2
Referring to the propriety	19 (3,36%)	*Propriety/norm*	19
Counteraction	14 (2,48%)	*Accusing\insulting the author of the topic*	11
		Aggression	3
Distraction	11 (1,95%)	Distraction	6
		Compensation	4
		Entertainment	1
Conscious regulation of the emotional state	8 (1,42%)	Conscious self-control of emotions	8
Impulsive behaviour	6 (1,06%)	Emotional release	3
		Impulsive actions	3
Removal	3 (0,53%)	Keeping "mask of wellbeing"	2
		Withdrawal	1

The strategy *"problem solution"* is the most frequent. It coincides with the results of E.R. Isayeva's research that proved that active problem-focused strategies, the strategy of "planned solution" in particular, prevail among healthy people (N = 1627) [12; 53]. According to the results of a number of researches, the problem-focused ways of coping with a difficult situation provide high living standards, health and personal development [9, 13]. This strategy is often chosen by transformational (encouraging and innovations implementing) leaders [14]. "Problem analysis" and "practical activity" are the most frequent among other ways of the strategy realization. Within the former, the users interpret the received information about a problem, while the latter contains recommendations on a problem solution. According to the experts, the strategy of "problem analysis" contains a large number of users' interpretations and suppositions about the situation. The next most frequent way is "considering alternatives". It offers some options of the possible conduct, like the category of "practical activities", and also predicts the consequences of this conduct. Internet users simply enumerate the necessary steps three times as often as they take possible consequences into consideration. Users are not responsible for their recommendations; therefore, they don't think it is necessary to consider consequences of their advice.

On the other hand, it can be interpreted as a manifestation of impulsiveness of the ordinary consciousness, a desire to find the easiest solution as quickly as possible [15, 16]. A relatively low frequency of the strategy of "planning" supports such an approach. The least frequent strategy is "efforts concentration". It recommends to pull oneself together, to take the first step, to be more courageous.

The strategy *"Changing one's attitude to the problem"* describes recommendations on changing one's attitude to a difficult situation. "Depreciation of importance" is the most frequent way of this strategy realization. It includes the statements convincing an addressee that a problematic situation is not that serious; and it is not worth wasting time. According to B.F. Berezin's research, the depreciation of the initial need lowers an anxiety level; however, can consequently result in depression and somatisation [17]. The strategy of "philosophical removal" is less frequent. Its efficiency is quite ambiguous: removal and attempt to analyse the situation in the context of the more significant life events can either contribute to a more realistic re- assessment of the whole situation, or reduce the importance of the problem and efforts to solve it [10; 129]. The least frequent strategy here is "humour". It includes playful interpretations and recommendations about a problem solution.

"Accepting responsibility" and "retaining self-respect" are the most frequent ways within the strategy *"Maintaining self-respect and self-confidence"*. Their efficiency is high when they are used as one of the stages of coping with a situation that help to gain one's resources and to solve a problem. However, if a person is fully focused on the maintaining self-esteem, this strategy loses efficiency, since it distracts one from a problem solution [10; 138]. "Positive revaluation of a situation" is the least frequent here. It includes options of positive interpretation of difficulties and allows to boost one's optimism and challenge-resistance, and also induces a person to use the strategy of an active solution of a difficult situation [18; 270]. According to the research results, this coping is considered to be stable, independent from the specifics of a difficult situation [8; 238-239].

The category *"Withdrawal from a situation"* is considered as not adaptive because the tension is being relaxed by simply avoiding the difficult situation; no active steps are being taken to deal with it [10]. The efficiency of this strategy increases if a stressful situation is short-term and uncontrollable [19; 265]. "Behavioural withdrawal" is the most frequent within this strategy. It includes such advice as to drop a partner, "to escape" from the situation, etc. The next most frequent way here is "mental withdrawal". It recommends to avoid thinking about the situation and is quite infantile for a problem solution: "I see nothing, I hear nothing" approach.

The strategy *"Passive expectation of a solution"* includes the only way of a problem solution – "waiting". Since passive waiting excludes all the activities aimed at a problem solution, this strategy is often seen as inefficient [10; 128]. The efficiency of this strategy grows if it allows to restrain an impulsive reaction and to analyse the situation calmly. It is reflected in the users' advice: *Wait and see what will happen next, let her blow off steam.*

The strategy *"Accepting a situation as inevitable"* includes "accepting inevitability" and "fatalism". These copings recommend to accept a situation and not to try to change anything. They are considered to be inefficient; however, if a situation requires more than a person can give, this strategy can become efficient and save one's time and energy [20].

The strategy *"Pseudo- advice"* is singled out during the content analysis. It includes such ways as "appeal to one's experience", for example, *my husband used to say the same, just like your boyfriend; I was twice married to the ladies like you;* and "dodging the question" –such statements seem to answer a question, but without any specific recommendations, for example, *I can give a lot of advice, but I am afraid that even if it can help you, but only for a short while.* In general the ways are similar to those used by people in their everyday conversations, no real recommendations are given, only description of one's experience of dealing with the similar problem.

The strategy *"Search for social support"* is often estimated as inefficient since it presupposes coping with the problem using the external resources that proves one's social dependence and immaturity [21; 122]. However, information, practical help and emotional support that a person gets from others encourage the formation of the individual coping-strategy [22; 11]. "Cooperation" is the most frequently used way. This strategy is not dominant. Though, the very using of forums in order to deal with a difficult situation can be seen as the search for social support [12; 29].

The strategy *"Referring to the propriety"* is singled out during the content analysis. It refers to the norms adopted in the society and compares them with a difficult situation discussed in the forum. This strategy reflects such components of everyday ordinary consciousness as everyday norms, naive ideas of how the world has to be organized.

The *"Counteraction"* strategy is estimated as inefficient [10, 12]. "Accusing\insulting the author of the topic" is the most frequent coping here. It was singled out during the content analysis and is defined as verbal aggression against the author of the topic that can reveal the high degree of aggression of Internet messages in general [24, 25].

The strategy of *"Distraction"* doesn't contribute to the concentration on a problem solution, but it allows to relax emotional tension in a difficult situation [26]. "Distraction", "compensation", "entertainment" copings recommend about to shift attention to different kinds of activity: *to study, to communicate with other people.*

The strategy *"Conscious regulation of an emotional state"* includes "conscious self-control of emotions" coping. It recommends to control one's emotions and to resist provocations. According to I.P. Streltsova, the efficiency of the strategy grows when excessive tension prevents one from searching for a problem solution [10; 134].

"Impulsive behaviour" strategy includes "emotional release" and "impulsive actions" copings. They are seen as inefficient [10; 136]. They presuppose impulsive behaviour and ignoring the consequences: *run to her, no matter what other people say.*

Research restrictions. The research results depend a lot on the kind of the texts selected for the content-analysis. This can be partially avoided in the future by analysing a bigger corpus of texts, and bigger number of sites. It is also possible to use sites dealing with various topics and to consider not only Russian, but also foreign

forums. This will allow studying cross-cultural differences in the ways of coping with difficult situations.

Conclusions.

The strategy of *"problem solution"* is dominant in the Internet users' messages. It includes "problem analysis" and "practical activities" copings. Within the former, the users interpret the received information about a problem, while the latter contains recommendations on a problem solution. "Considering alternatives" is much less frequent. It predicts the consequences of the recommendations. The next most frequent strategy is *"Changing one's attitude to the problem"*. It describes recommendations on changing one's attitude to a difficult situation. "Depreciation of importance" is the most frequent way of this strategy realization. It includes the devaluation of a situation and efforts for its solution. "Philosophical removal" coping is less frequent; it is an attempt to re-assess a situation in the context of more significant events. This can contribute to a more realistic reassessment of the whole situation, but also reduce the importance of a problem and efforts to resolve it. During the content analysis the specific strategies were singled out. They are *"Pseudo- adv*ice" involving the use of personal experience of dealing with the similar problem, and the strategy of *"Referring to the propriety"*, referring to the norms adopted in a society.

The conducted research shows that the content analysis can be used as a convenient tool to study copings. Thus, there are prospects of monitoring the ways of copings with difficult situations and possibility to analyze messages from a large number of users.

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