

Character and Resilience as Personality Factors

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Background. Researchers propose that resilience is both a process and a personality trait (i.e., Pan & Chan, 2007). They define resilience as the ability to positively recover from negative life events or circumstances through individual and community efforts. This conceptualization introduces the idea that the tendency to recover from circumstances can be a personality factor. Here we focus on personality factors, like the Big Five and character strengths, to inform reports of resilience. We expected differences in strengths of hope, gratitude, and forgiveness to provide unique information for resilience beyond Big Five reports.

Method. As part of a larger project, 130 college adults were recruited from a central US public university (Mage = 18.47, SD = .92; 69.2% women). Participants completed computerized questionnaires about individual differences in endorsed character strengths of hope (Snyder et al., 1991), gratitude (McCullough et al., 2003), and forgiveness (McCullough et al., 2006). Participants also completed a measure about Big Five personality traits (Gosling et al., 2003) and reported on tendencies to respond to life's challenges in a resilient fashion (Smith et al., 2008).

Results. Correlations showed that reported hopefulness and motivations to forgive others were significantly and positively associated with reports of resilience and the capacity for recovering from setbacks. A regression analyses tested the influence of these three strengths simultaneously and after accounting for reports of Big Five personality traits (i.e., Extraversion, Neuroticism). Hopefulness and forgiveness continued to have unique and positive associations with reported resilience after accounting for the Big Five.

Discussion. Our results are in line with studies suggesting character is positively associated with resilience (Park et al., 2003) and views of resilience as a personality factor (Pan & Chan, 2007). Future studies will benefit from cross-cultural considerations of character and resilience, addressing the consistency of these associations across cultural settings.