

# Character and Resilience as Personality Factors

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## BACKGROUND

Researchers propose that **resilience** can be 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.

We are focused on *personality factors*. These include the **Big Five** personality traits—like extraversion and neuroticism—that emerge early in life and are fairly stable over time (Costa & McCrae 1988, 1992). Further, these include **character strengths**—differences in approaches like being hopeful or grateful for experiences that are influenced by Big Five traits, but emerge later into childhood and the teen years (Park, 2004). Existing work suggests both early-emerging personality (i.e., the Big Five) and later-emerging individual differences (i.e., character strengths) are important for tendencies to show resilience. Questions remain on the unique information character may provide for resilience.

Our **research questions** were:

1. Are reports of Big Five personality traits correlated with reports of character strengths?
2. Are character strengths correlated with reports of resilience?
3. When considered along with the Big Five in a regression model, do character strengths provide unique information about reports of resilience?

## METHOD

**Sample.** As part of a larger project, 130 college adults were recruited from a central US public university (*M* age = 18.47, *SD* = .92; 69.2% women).

**Procedure.** Participants received class credit through SONA for engagement in the study. The study is compromised of computerized questionnaires regarding 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 with resilience (Smith et al., 2008).

## RESULTS

Correlations found significant associations between multiple Big Five traits and strengths of hope and gratitude in the expected directions (**Q1**). Hope and forgiveness—but not gratitude—were positively associated with endorsements of tendencies to be resilience (**Q2**).

### CORRELATIONS

|                     | 2   | 3   | 4      | 5     | 6      | 7     | 8     | 9      |
|---------------------|-----|-----|--------|-------|--------|-------|-------|--------|
| 1 Extraversion      | .03 | .07 | -.17*  | .13   | .34**  | .27** | .09   | .14    |
| 2 Agreeableness     | --  | .09 | -.21*  | .23** | .05    | .29** | .07   | -.17   |
| 3 Conscientiousness |     | --  | -.37** | .04   | .34**  | .31** | -.03  | .21*   |
| 4 Neuroticism       |     |     | --     | -.21* | -.40** | -.21* | -.10  | -.39** |
| 5 Openness          |     |     |        | --    | .09    | .13   | .12   | .21*   |
| 6 Hope              |     |     |        |       | --     | .45** | .12   | .40**  |
| 7 Gratitude         |     |     |        |       |        | --    | .31** | .14    |
| 8 Forgiveness       |     |     |        |       |        |       | --    | .34**  |
| 9 Resilience        |     |     |        |       |        |       |       | --     |

Note. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### REGRESSION ANALYSIS

A multiple regression analysis tested the effects of trait hope, gratitude, and forgiveness on reports of resilience after accounting for age, sex, and Big Five personality traits. The model was significant,  $F(10, 119) = 7.93, p < .001$ . Adding character strengths significantly improved the model ( $\Delta R^2 = .14, p < .001$ ).

When considered simultaneously, trait hope ( $\beta = .28, p = .002$ ) and forgiveness ( $\beta = .31, p < .001$ ) had unique and positive effects on reports of resilience (**Q3**).

## DISCUSSION

- Hope and gratitude were associated with Big Five traits
- Hope and forgiveness were associated with individual differences in resilience
- Findings fit with past research (e.g., Park et al., 2003) and theory (Pan & Chan, 2007)
- More work is needed to consider how stable these effects are over time and with different age groups