Birds of a Feather?: The Relationship Between Resilience, Meaning, and Hardiness

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Abstract

The current study will be created to better understand the psychological constructs of meaning, resilience, and hardiness. In the current literature, there is considerable overlap in defining these constructs. However, is this overlap due to the fact that both hardiness and meaning are key aspects of resilience and cannot be parsed together or are these three constructs different enough to stand alone as separate concepts within the field of positive psychology? The current study will strive to determine if these concepts overlap enough to be identified as the same construct and thus can be combined to create a cohesive measure rather than having these constructs be measured and defined separately.

*Keywords*: meaning, resilience, hardiness

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The current study will examine the relationship between resilience, meaning, and hardiness measures in order to better understand the similarities and differences between the constructs. Before exploring the potential overlap of these constructs it is first and foremost important to define resilience, meaning, and hardiness.

**Resilience**

Overall, the construct of resilience has gone through several revisions. These revisions and variations have greatly depended on the context it has been studied in. Resilience has been defined as a characteristic of at-risk children who were “invulnerable” (Garmezy, 1974; Pines, 1975; Werner, 1984) to a concept that is an adaptive process and relates to how a person interacts with his or her environment (Luthar, 2003; Luthar & Zelazo, 2003; Masten, 2001; Rutter, 1993). The work of George Bonanno (2004) then shaped the meaning of resiliency to be the “ability to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning” (p. 20). Thus, overall, resilience is the ability one has to withstand a stressful event and go back to how he or she was functioning prior to experiencing the stressful event (Bonanno, 2004; Wagnild & Young, 1993). That is not to say that these individuals do not experience intrusive thoughts or memories about the event, they in fact do, but they are still able to function at “normal” or routine levels (Bonanno & Mancini, 2012). Resilient people are able to handle stressors in this way due to the fact that they possess certain characteristics.

Wagnild (2009) identified five aspects of resilience: persevering, experiencing equanimity, self-reliance, and existential aloneness. Perseverance is one’s motivation to carry on in the face of difficulty. Equanimity is when a person is able to be stable during life’s stressors. A self-reliant individual is an individual who are able to learn problem-solving skills from stressful situations. Existential aloneness is when an individual are able to handle events on their own without needing others. According to Wagnild, these five characteristics facilitate one being able to return to normal functioning after experiencing a stressor. Along with these characteristics, an additional component of resiliency according to Wagnild is purpose or meaning in life. Purpose or meaning in life is a key characteristic of resilience due to the fact that it is a foundation to persevering, experiencing equanimity, self-reliance, and existential aloneness.

Wong and Wong (2012) took this relationship between meaning in life and resilience to another level by positing that resiliency-building should involve meaning centered components. According to Wong and Wong, by adding the meaning components to resiliency building, one will develop character strengths, moral strength, compassion for others, and supportive social ecologies which in turn leads one to become more resilient. Due to the fact that resilience is a holistic term that encompasses many constructs and personality characteristics, these tactics cohesively lead one to build resilience.

**Meaning**

Due to the fact that meaning in life is closely related to resiliency, it is important to delineate how the literature defines meaning in life. Overall, like resiliency, there are many interpretations of what defines meaning. According to Frankl (1959/2006), humans have innate “will to meaning,” put into other words, people want to find importance in their lives. Frankl even emphasized that this “will to meaning” was needed in order for humans to survive. Thus, the construct of meaning can be seen as a key feature to human development. Steger (2009, p. 682) defines meaning in life as ‘the extent to which people comprehend, make sense of, or see significance in their lives, accompanied by the degree to which they perceives themselves to have a purpose, mission, or overarching aim in life.’

Weinstein, Ryan, and Deci’s work have explained meaning in life as part of the self-determination theory. Self-determination theory is essentially a theory about motivation and personality development (Deci & Ryan, 1985, Ryan & Deci, 2000). According to Ryan and Deci (2001), “As individuals internalize and integrate new experiences, values, and behaviors they experience greater internal harmony, purpose, and wholeness.” The main determinants for meaning are intrinsic motivation and self-knowledge (Weinstein, Ryan, and Deci, 2012). This is directly aligns with creating meaning because in both instances, people are motivated to understand and integrate experiences. As a result, being motivated and searching for self-knowledge, can help people maximize their potentials and find meaning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Along these lines, perceived meaning has been defined by how a person’s reconciles the values they aspire to live by and the actual lives they are living (Frankl, 1959/2006; Schulenberg & Melton, 2010).

Overall, people believe in themselves and believe that they live in a kind world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992); however, this is because these beliefs are illusory (Taylor & Brown, 1988). Due to this positive bias about one’s worth and his or her environment, it has been supported that meaning in life is positively correlated with subjective well-being (Compton, Smith, Cornish, & Qualls, 1996; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; McGregor & Little, 1998).

Besides meaning being associated with well-being, meaning is also associated with character strengths. Overall, religiousness, gratitude, hope, and zest for life are the four character strengths that correlate with meaning (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2006). By and large, the religiousness character strength was the most related to meaning. The religiousness character strength makes sense to correlate highly with meaning in life because religion provides a sort of framework to use in order to assess if and how one is living with meaning. Although religion is not the only framework to facilitate meaning in life, it is one that many people use (Emmons, 1999).

**Hardiness**

At its core, hardiness is a measure of meaning in life (Kobasa, 1979) and according to Maddi (1970) is the reason why humans have motivation. Hardiness is an existential construct that states that people strive to find meaning in their lives and this meaning is subjective to that person. One with a hardy characteristic is motivated by being committed to finding purpose in life, this purpose driven outlook allows one to grow from life stressors. This is because these individuals minimize the stress and appraise the situation in a way that makes it appear less harmful in order for them to find a way to make the event meaningful and a self-growth process. (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982)

Three attitudes that are core to hardiness and help an individual be more resilient are commitment, control and challenge (Kaboasa, 1979; Maddi & Kobasa, 1984). In order for one to be hardy, they must have all three (Maddi, 2002). The three cognitions are known as the three C’s of hardiness and allow a person to grow from a stressful or traumatic situation. By using commitment, control, and challenge people are able to overcome stressful events by viewing them as less threatening, being committed to personal life roles, a feeling of control over some aspect of life, and assumption of challenge orientation.

As a result, hardiness is a way to be resilient during a stressful experience (Bonanno, 2004) by making the stressful experience a meaningful experience (Maddi, 1986). According to Maddi, people are able to transform stressful experiences into opportunities by using the three C’s of hardiness. One reason individuals who are hardy are so resilient is the fact that these people use social support and coping strategies to help them deal with the stressful experience in a healthy manner (Florian, Mikulincer, & Taubman, 1995). In Florian, Mikulincer, and Taubman’s study, Israeli recruits completed hardiness, mental health, cognitive appraisal, and ways of coping questionnaires before and after completing an intensive four-month combat training. The two major findings of this study were that those who were hardy were more apt to appraise the training in a less threatening way and were more likely to view themselves as capable of coping with the training stressors. Overall, the Israeli recruits who were more hardy, had better mental outcomes and were better able to handle the combat experience. Primarily, it was commitment and control that were the best predictors of positive mental health and ability to appraise and cope wit the training.

**Present Study**

From the literature, there is clear overlap between resilience, meaning, and hardiness. Overall, there are multiple theorized pathways to resilience including hardiness (Kobasa et al., 1982) and meaning and purpose (Wong & Fry, 1998). To elaborate, Bonanno (2004) stated that hardiness is a means to be resilient and at its core, hardiness is a measure of meaning in life (Kobasa, 1979). In fact, a predictor of being resilient is whether or not one is achieving his or her perceived purpose in life (Smith, Epstein, Ortiz, Christopher, and Tooley, 2013). However, is this overlap between constructs so great that they are actually the same concept? Are resilience measures, meaning, and hardiness measures actually measuring the same construct or do they just share certain characteristics?

It is hypothesized that the constructs of resiliency, meaning, and hardiness are measuring the same construct or at least some of the same facets. Participants will be administered measures of two measures of resilience, the Brief Resilience Scale, the 14-Item Resilience Scale, two measures of meaning in life Meaning in Life Questionnaire and Purpose in Life Test-Short Form, and one hardiness questionnaire, the Personality Construct of Hardiness III-R. Factor analyses will attempt to determine whether items from some of the questionnaire load on the same factors. It is predicted that the entire Brief Resilience Scale will load onto the same factor as quests 1, 3, 7, 11, and 14 from the 14-Item Resilience Scale, and questions 1, 4 7, and 12 from the Personality Construct of Hardiness III-R. It is also predicted that question 3 from the Purpose in Life Test-Short From will load onto the same factor as question 11 from the Personality Construct of Hardiness III-R.

If the constructs are in fact measuring the same construct or facets, these three constructs could be synthesized in a better overall measure of resiliency that is multi-faceted and cohesive. The implications of this finding will mean that the field of positive psychology can start synthesizing the literature on resiliency, meaning, and hardiness in order to make the field more efficient and productive.

**Method**

**Participants**

Six hundred participants between the ages of 18 and 25 will be recruited from a large comprehensive state university in the South and a large public university in the Midwest.

**Materials**

*Resilience Measures*

**The 14-Item Resilience Scale**. The 14-Item Resilience Scale (RS-14; Wagnild, 2009) will be one of the measures used to assess resilience. The RS-14 is a shortened version of the Resiliency Scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993) with facets that measure meaning/purposeful life (items 2, 9, 13), perseverance (items 6 and 8), equanimity (items 3 and 10), self-reliance (items 1, 5, 7, 12, 14), and existential aloneness (items 4 and 11). The RS-14 (Wagnild, 2009) uses a seven point Likert-type response format where *1* represents *Strongly Disagree* and *7* represents *Strongly Agree*. The lowest score one can achieve on the RS-14 is a 14 and the highest score is a 98. Lower scores suggest low perceived resiliency and high scores represent greater perceived resilience. Specifically, “Very Low” (14-56), “Low” (57-64), “On the Low End” (65-73), “Moderate” (74-81), “Moderately High” (82-90), and “High” (91-98). The internal consistency for the RS-14 has excellent internal consistency of .93 and great convergent validity with the original Resilience Scale (*r* = .97). The RS-14 is positively correlated with self-actualization and stress management. Furthermore, in terms of validity, the scale has been supported to have divergent validity; Abiola and Udofia (2010), found the RS-14 to be negatively related to depression (*r* = -0.28) and anxiety (*r* = -.26).

**The Brief Resilience Scale.**  The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; Smith et al., 2008) is a six-item resilience scale that measures resilience. Specifically, this scale measures how one is able to bounce back from stress or not. The scale uses a five point Likert scale where *1* represents *Strongly Disagree* and *5* represents *Strongly Agree*. The lowest score is 6 and the highest score one can possibly obtain is 30. The lower scores represent lower ability to bounce back from stress and the higher scores represent higher ability to bounce back from stress. Internal consistency of the BRS is good with a Cronbach’s alpha range of .80-.91. In terms of validity, the BRS exhibits good convergent validity with significant positive correlations to active coping (four sample range: *r* = .31-41) and the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (*r* = .59). With regards to divergent validity, the measure had good negative relations to anxiety (four sample range: *r* = -.46- -.60) depression (four sample range: *r* = -.41- -.66), and perceived stress (four sample range: *r* = -.60- -.71).

*Meaning in Life Measures*

**The Purpose in Life Test-Short Form.** The Purpose in Life Test – Short Form (PIL-SF; Schulenberg, Schnetzer, & Buchanan, 2011)is a four-item version of the Purpose in Life Test, which is 20 items (PIL; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1964, 1969). The PIL-SF assesses perceived meaning and purpose in life. The PIL and thus the PIL-SF were created from Frankl’s logotherapy paradigm and has been supported to measure meaning regardless of theoretical perspective (Crumbaugh & Maholick; Schulenberg & Melton, 2010; Schulenberg et al., 2011; Schnetzer, Schulenberg, & Buchanan, 2013). The PIL-SF uses a seven point Likert scale where *1* represents *No mission or purpose in life* and *7* represents *Clear cut goals and a satisfying life purpose*. Scores range from 4 to 28 where lower scores are indicative of lower perceived meaning in life and higher scores are representative of higher perceived meaning in life (Schulenberg, Schnetzer, & Buchanan, 2011). The survey has good reliability with alphas ranging from .79 to .86 (Schnetzer, Schulenberg, & Buchanan 2013; Schulenberg et al., 2011). In terms of validity, the PIL-SF positively correlates with similar measures of life satisfaction while negatively correlating with measures such as depression, anxiety, and stress (Baczwaski et al., 2012; Schulenberg et al., 2011; Schulenberg, Baczwaski, & Buchanan, 2013).

**Meaning in Life Questionnaire.** The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006) is a 10-item questionnaire designed to measure the presence of meaning by measuring how much meaning one perceives his or her life has and how one search’s for meaning. Search for meaning is how people strive to find meaning in their lives. The questionnaire uses a seven point Likert scale ranging from *1,* which represents *Absolutely True* to *7*, which represents *Absolutely Untrue*. The lowest score is 10 and the highest score one can possibly obtain is 70. The lower scores represent lower levels of perceived meaning and search for meaning and the higher scores represent higher levels of perceived meaning and search for meaning. The MLQ has good consistency with the facet of presence of meaning having alphas in the .80s and for the search of meaning facet alphas between mid .80s to low .90s (Strack, 2007).

*Hardiness Measure*

**Personal Views Survey III-R.** The Personal Views Survey III-R (PVS III-R; Maddi et al., 2006) is an 18-item measure that measures hardiness. The PVS III-R is the revised third edition of the original Personal Views Survey (Maddi, 1997). The survey uses a four-item Likert scale ranging from 0 to 3 to represent personal relevance where *0* represents *Not True* and *3* represents *True* (Maddi et al., 2006). The lowest score possible is 0 and the highest score one can possibly obtain is 54. The lower scores represent lower levels of personal relevance to hardiness and the higher scores represent higher levels of personal relevance to hardiness. The reliability for the overall PVS-III-R was .80 while the Commitment facet had an alpha of .69, the Control facet an alpha of .57, and the Challenge an alpha of .73. Validity of the measure is good, with the PVS III-R being negatively related to regressive coping (*r* = -.48) and positively related to active coping (*r*  = .48).

**Procedure**

Qualtrics will be used to administer the survey and will accessible for both samples for two semesters. Students will be given the survey link from their university’s respective study board organizations and once they are given the link they may complete the survey. Overall, both samples will be completing the survey for course credit and will be recruited from the courses that require some kind of research participation. Overall, there will be four different forms of the surveys. Each form will include all of the questions; however, the questions will be counterbalanced so practice effect error will be kept to a minimum. As a result, one format will include the PVS III-R, PCL, MLQ, RS-14, and BRS in this order. The second format of the project will include PCL, MLQ, RS-14, BRS, and PVS III-R in this order. The third format of the project will include RS-14, BRS, PVS III-R, PCL, and MLQ. Finally, the fourth format of the study will include PVS III-R, RS-14, BRS, PCL, and MLQ in this order.

**Proposed Analyses**

Statistical Package for Social Sciences will be used to perform all statistical analyses. Before running the primarily analyses, missing data and outlier tests must be conducted. In order to deal with missing data, list-wise deletion will be conducted. It is important that participants answer the surveys in their entirety in order to effectively run the analyses needed to create a model that could potentially synthesize the resilience and hardiness measures. In order to examine if there are outliers in the data, Mahalnobis D2 will be run to analyze if outliers are in the data.

The current study will be examining the variability among questions from the surveys listed above. Specifically, the researchers will examine how all of the questions are or are not grouped into categories. By examining the factor loadings of these questions, the researchers may determine if the resiliency, meaning, and hardiness measures are or are not different.

In order to examine overall construct overlap between resilience, hardiness, and meaning, a canonical correlation analysis will be utilized. If there is a lot of overlap within these constructs, more analyses will be conducted in order to look at question overlap in all of the questionnaires used. In order to analyze factor-loading patterns, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) statistics will be used. The first 150 participants from each university will be analyzed using EFA. Thus, in all, half of the sample’s responses to the resilience, meaning, and hardiness will be assessed using the EFA. This will be able to show the researchers what questions if any load onto the same factor. If the resilience, meaning, and hardiness measures load onto certain factors and thus share a variance, the questions on the hardiness scale and meaning scale that load onto the same factors of the resiliency questionnaire may be synthesized together to create a resiliency scale that shares the relevant hardiness and meaning questions. From the EFA, goodness of fit and residual statistics will be analyzed to create a model that empirically combines the hardiness and meaning questions that loaded onto the resiliency questions. In order to determine if this theorized factor model could be replicated, the other half of the sample (*n* = 300) will be used to conduct a CFA. Goodness of fit, residual statistics, and internal consistency reliability will thus be assessed for the model. If the CFA supports the model created by the EFA analysis, a new measure of resilience will be proposed.

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