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RESULTS SUMMARY FOR RESEARCH PROJECT   
“Weathering Well: Predictors of Relational Resilience

During Pandemic Lockdown”

Part 2 of 2

(Data collected April & May 2020)

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Greetings again!

In late June, I sent you results from my large survey. At that time, I had analyzed half the data. Here are results from the second half.

# What WERE the research questions?

My interest for this second study was how other variables (besides valuing contract or covenant ways of relating) would help or hinder your ability to weather the pandemic well. I cast “weathering well” in terms of “relational resilience” since we were forced to live with the same people in the same space for a long time.

My questions were sweeping and many. Would being older or younger help or hinder resilience? Would gender count? Or where you lived? Or the number of times you exercised per week, or play Xbox? Or whether you lived with one person or seven? You get the idea. Here are the results.

To answer this question, I asked you to provide information about 1) demographics, 2) your experience with the pandemic, 3) ways you coped, and 4) your personality. Here is what I found.

# Results

1. Demographics.
2. Age. Among the six decade groups (18-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, 70+), the group best adapting were 60-69, and worst were 18-29. I explain this by arguing that a lot of young adults were university students who experienced more upheaval than mature folks: Young adults had to go home, finish school online, manage new(er) relationships, and worry about ‘what next’ for summer employment. Mature folks, by contrast, likely did not relocate, were financially stable, and had the same ongoing relationships in largely empty nest environments.
3. Education. A similar finding was found for education level. People with graduate degrees (i.e., profs and staff) adapted better than people with high school or ‘some university’. The same reasons why hold here as for age.
4. Sex. While men and women did not differ on the general ‘weathering well” index, they did differ on three of the relational scales. In particular, women reported less interpersonal trust, more social fear, and more loneliness than men. Or, men reported more trust, less fear, and less loneliness. In explaining this outcome, I found resilience research that indicated how women are more likely to reach out to friends and family for social support whereas men focus on task-related ways to cope. The pandemic cut women off from a primary source of coping – friends and family – which likely explains why isolation hurt more.
5. Geographic location. It did not matter if you were taking the survey in North America or Asia. Resilience scores were about equal.
6. Experiences with the Pandemic

Studies in trauma recovery point out that some traumatic events are short or long, and intense or subtle. (Compare a one-time hurricane versus subtle verbal abuse over time). The pandemic has been a blend. To capture intensity and duration of experience, I asked several questions in the survey. Here are the results.

*You and the virus.* Scores on ‘weathering well’ did not differ based on whether or not you had a family member contract the virus, get really sick from it, or die from it (though number of people in these categories was very low, so the stats might be suspect). However, for the six of you who got really sick, resilience scores plummeted.

*You and change.* Scores on ‘weathering well” did not differ based on whether or not you had to work from home, received government assistance or not, worked for an essential service or not, were in week 1 or week 8 of lockdown (or any other week), or lived with 1-8 others. The one qualifier was that people who lived alone reported higher loneliness and lower satisfaction with life than people who lived with others, and those who perceived their level of risk in contracting the virus as “moderate” were a bit less resilient than those noting ‘low’ and ‘high’ .

1. Coping Strategies. Coping is our response to traumatic events. They can be considered “adaptive” (helpful) or “maladaptive” (not helpful). For example, one might eat healthy food or binge on junk food all in the name of coping with stress.

The results showed that people who exercised more hours per week, attended more church online, ate better food (compared to before the pandemic), and engaged fewer hours of media per day, were more relationally resilient. *Quantity* of food and alcohol did not matter.

The media consumption finding led me to probe more, and what I found was disturbing. Media consumption correlated moderately strong with all the relational indicators: the more hours per day one engaged media (on a 0-8 hours scale), the less likely one indicated interpersonal trust, feeling supported, and being satisfied with life. Moreover, increased media use correlated with more interpersonal aggression, social anxiety, social fear, and loneliness. (Note: because these results are correlational, not causal, we can’t say ‘using media causes poor relationships’, nor can we say ‘poor relationships drive one to use media more’. There’s likely a blend of the two.)

1. Personality. You took a brief credible personality index based on the Big 5 Personality Factors with the well-known acronym OCEAN. These letters stand for

Open to experience *or* closed to new things

Conscientious *or* lacking direction

Extraverted *or* introverted

Agreeable *or* antagonistic

Neurotic *or* emotionally stable

Results indicated that being *open to experiences* and *emotionally stable* played more heavily than the other traits. I believe this is a unique insight to the pandemic setting because most trauma research does not show “openness” helping with adapting. Normally conscientiousness and extraversion help most. It seems reasonable though that people who were open, flexible and creative to the demands of huge adjustments were likely better off than those who cling to regular routines and shy from change.

Agreeableness was also found to help with relational resilience. Agreeable people are more accommodating and warm in their close relationships, and this helped people get along in the pressure cooker of isolated living.

1. The relational variables. You may recall filling out several relationship scales. I took those answers to see if they ‘predicted’ (correlated with) weathering well, and they did, just as expected. Results indicated that scores on “weathering well” were positively linked to all thriving variables—interpersonal trust, social support, and satisfaction with life, and were negatively linked to all struggling variables—aggression, social anxiety, social fear (fear of people), and loneliness.
2. Covenant or contract relating. While this variable was not the focus of this second study, it is interesting to note that it was more at play with relational resilience than was personality. This means that no matter our general wiring (personality), we can gain resources and models for resilient living when we buy in to covenantal values: putting others first, living by community norms, aiming to grow morally, and drawing on spiritual resources such as prayer, scripture, and church interaction. This contrasts with contract values: being independent and self-sufficient, aiming for equal rewards in relationships, looking for a better deal when things get rough, and drawing on human resources alone for support.

## Synopsis

This second study found that people who were relationally resilient were likely more open, extraverted, agreeable, conscientious, and less neurotic; more covenantal in relational orientation; well educated; sixty years old or older; and male. Moreover, individuals who were doing better were more likely to trust their housemates, receive social support, feel satisfied with life, and less likely to aggress against housemates, feel lonely, or be anxious and fearful. The coping strategies that appeared to contribute to pandemic pluck included exercising often, limiting media, eating well, and attending church online.

In terms of experiences with the virus and home/workplace changes, only getting very sick led to people feeling like they were not adapting well.

Thank you again for helping shed light on how we are getting through this pandemic.

If you have any questions about these results, please contact me.

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