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RESULTS SUMMARY FOR RESEARCH PROJECT   
“Relational Thriving During COVID Isolation

(data collected April & May 2020)

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In late April or early May 2020 you took part in my study; over 700 people did. Thank you again! You checked the box to indicate your interest in receiving a summary of what I discovered. This brief document explains.

# THE VARIABLES

My interest was in how your beliefs, values, and assumptions about close personal relationships would help or hinder your ability to cope under required isolation during this pandemic. To answer this question, I asked you to complete numerous questionnaires. (Thanks again! I realize it was a long survey.) The individual scales you completed were:

1. The Contract-Covenant Continuum. This was a scale I developed three years ago to capture your beliefs, values, and assumptions about close relationships. At one ‘end’, the contractual one, it sees life as you trying to find satisfaction by managing the rewards and costs between you and your friends/partner/family members with the option to retaliate or leave a relationship if you feel you’re getting a raw deal. At the other ‘end’, the covenantal one, it sees life as you nested in a community of people who value a religious view of relationships and aiming to make and keep promises that will benefit you and your friends/partner/family. If you want to read more, see here: 2013, 2017, 2018. My hunch was that people high on covenantal relating and low on contractual relating, would be managing pandemic isolation better based on being wired for life together.

The following scales measured signs of resilience and signs of struggle in order to test if the contract-covenant scale correlated with them.

The scales of *resilience* were:

1. General Resilience. An overall measure of how well you were coping during pandemic isolation, consisting of four questions:
   1. I think I am weathering the COVID-19 pandemic well.
   2. I think the people I live with are weathering the COVID-19 pandemic well.
   3. My closest relationships are becoming better during the crisis.
   4. The people I live with in isolation are providing support for my well-being.
2. Dyadic Trust Scale. Measured how much you trusted people you were living with.
3. Perceived Social Support Questionnaire. Assessed the degree you felt supported by people who shared the same living space.
4. Satisfaction with Life. Asked you how you thought your life was going generally compared to your ideal life.

The scales of *struggle* were:

1. Interpersonal Aggression. Tapped the degree to which you expressed physical aggression, verbal aggression, hostility, and anger among your housemates during the pandemic.
2. Social Anxiety and Phobia. This two-part scale considered if you were especially anxious around people, and if you were fearful of being watched by people.
3. UCLA Loneliness Scale. Since isolation can lead to feeling lonely, I had you complete this scale so I could see if you felt alone.

General additional scales: In addition, you took two other scales. One was to see if some people were sugar-coated their answers, and the other is for another study:

1. The Social Desirability Scale: this scale assesses the degree to which you are prone to give answers on a questionnaire that sugar-coated or more favourable than your true feelings or beliefs.
2. The Big Five Personality Indicator: (this is for another study still to come) It assesses the degree to which you see yourself as:
   * Agreeable *or* antagonistic
   * Conscientious *or* lacking direction
   * Emotionally stable *or* neurotic
   * Open to experience *or* closed to new things
   * Extraverted *or* introverted
3. You also provided demographic information on gender, age, demographic residence.
4. Finally, you provided information on your experience with the pandemic-related issues, such as perceived risk, work from home, illness of self or friends, and ‘coping strategies’ related to exercise, diet, church attendance, and media use.

# Results

## What did the study show?

The big picture. The study found that holding a more ‘covenantal’ view of close relationships related positively with signs of resilience, and negatively with the signs of struggle, across the board. That is, covenantal values appear to have helped people generally cope better, trust more, feel supported more, and rate life as satisfactory. At the same time, these same people reported being less aggressive, less anxious, less fearful, and less lonely, than people who rated high on contract and low on covenant. If you would like the statistics on these findings, let me know, and I can send them to you.

Some interesting additional findings.

With regard to coping strategies, ‘covenanters’ were more likely to exercise outdoors, eat better, worship more, and consume less media. However, they were not likely to eat more or less food, or drink more or less alcohol, than their patterns before the pandemic hit.

Related, people who exercised more tended to worship more and drink more, but use less media; people who worshipped more appeared to eat better and use less media; people who ate better quality food tended to eat less quantity of food, consume less alcohol, and use less media; and subjects who reported eating more food (than before the pandemic) also reported higher rates of alcohol and media consumption. You can likely see yourself in these trends.

Church attendance. People who are religious tend to see life in covenantal perspective, so I was interested to examine if church attendance (online during the pandemic) predicted similar outcomes. And it did. They were especially contrasting for people who said they do not attend church, and those who said they attended three times or more per week. This level of engagement might appear burdensome, but it seemed life-giving for high attenders during the pandemic. I found a great quotation that captures why this may be true in a *Resilience: The Science of Mastering Life’s Greatest Challenges* (Cambridge University Press) by Southwick & Charney (2012). They write:

Although it seems clear that religion is associated with positive physical and mental health as well as resilience, it is not known exactly why. It appears likely, however, that regular attendance at religious services may foster a number of resilience factors including optimism, altruism, and a search for meaning and purpose. In addition, as a member of a religious congregation, parishioners routinely interact with positive and resilient role models who encourage them to adopt meaningful social roles where they can give to others through acts of generosity. … By parsing spirituality/religion and focusing on discrete components, like prayer and meditation, or attendance at religious services, science is beginning to uncover which elements of faith and spirituality are most closely related to psychological well-being and resilience. For example, the relationship between resilience and religion may partly be explained by the social quality of religious attendance. (p. 79)

A happy face. Finally, the results of the social desirability analysis indicated that if you are prone to put your best foot forward in public settings or on questionnaires by making statements you think others want to hear (in order to increase your self image), then you also likely did so on the survey by indicating you were doing better than you really are (on the ‘signs of resilience’) and not as poorly as you really are (on the ‘signs of struggle). I guess one could call this optimism….or denial. I hope you know the difference and are able to talk about how you are really feeling with people close to you.

## Synopsis

This study found that a covenantal approach to close relationships helped people cope during social isolation at the height of government lockdown (weeks 7 and 8). It also indicated that being a part of a church in an active way bring resources to bear in managing the challenges of life.

I hope to see this study published in an academic journal, and I hope it has practical relevance you. Thanks again for participating.

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

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