Resiliency is “the process of, the capacity for, or the outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (D’Imperio, Dubow, & Ippolito, 2000, p. 129). Adults who have successfully overcome a traumatic childhood have identified several external and internal factors they considered key in overcoming their adversity. These adults mentioned: supportive relationships outside of the family, belief in self and self-worth, belief in religion/spirituality, and a recognition of their own power (Garvin, Kalter, & Hansell, 1993). Barnard (1994) identified the external factors adults most commonly referred to as important in their childhood. The factors identified were: positive relationship between child and parents, maintenance of family rituals, and the absence of parent-child role reversals. Additionally, research has confirmed that when encountering high levels of stress, internal personality qualities are strongly associated with good adjustment outcomes (Garvin et al., 1993). It was these internal personality characteristics that were the focus of the current study.

The internal personality characteristics of the individual experiencing trauma that have been associated with positive outcomes include optimism, extraversion, and neuroticism. Indeed, definitions of optimism resemble descriptions of psychological and social adjustment (Costa & McCrae, 1980). Optimism is characterized by an internal locus of control, the hope that things will get better, and the ability to realize that responsibility for an event may not be one’s own (Klohnen, 1996). Those who are characteristically more optimistic are happier, better adjusted, higher in ego-strength, higher in self-esteem, and much more socially involved (Klohnen, 1996). In a study conducted by Costa and McCrae (1980), optimism was not identified as one of the Big Five personality characteristics through factor analysis; rather it was subsumed under the trait of extraversion. Extraversion, together with its component parts of sociability, tempo, and vigor, predisposes individuals toward positive

**Relationships Between the Big Five Personality Factors, Resiliency Attitudes, and Life Satisfaction in Divorced Parents**

This study investigated connections between the Big Five Personality Factors, resiliency attitudes, and life satisfaction in divorced parents. It was predicted that resiliency attitudes and life satisfaction would correlate positively with extraversion and negatively with neuroticism. Thirty-seven participants were administered the Resiliency Attitude Scale (RAS), the NEO-FFI, and the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). Pearson correlations indicated that the NEO-FFI did not correlate well with either the RAS or the SWLS. However, there were correlations between the NEO-FFI subscales and two RAS items. Specifically, more neurotic individuals tended to find new ways of looking at things and less extraverted individuals tended to avoid repeating unhealthy relationships. Discussions follow regarding reasons for the lack of relationships and directions for future research.
affect, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of an optimistic outlook on life. Conversely, those who are high in neuroticism have been identified as persons high in emotionality, impulsivity, fear, and anger. These individuals are predisposed to negative affect and suffer more acutely from their misfortunes (Costa & McCrae, 1980).

While extraversion and neuroticism have not been specifically related to resiliency attitudes, they have been related to life satisfaction. Satisfaction with life refers to a cognitive, judgmental process that is dependent upon a comparison of one’s circumstances to what is thought to be standard (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Life satisfaction appears to be a stable personality characteristic, despite transitory effects of life events (Seidlitz, Wyer, & Diener, 1997). Those individuals who are high in extraversion are more likely to experience positive affect and thus increased life satisfaction. In addition to this, those who are high in neuroticism are more likely to experience negative affect and thus decreased life satisfaction (Costa & McCrae, 1980).

Research on resiliency in coping with trauma has tended to focus on traumatic events of the distant past, often in childhood rather than on current experiences of trauma (King, 2000). Due to the fact that there has been little research on adults in the process of encountering trauma or those who have encountered trauma only in adulthood, this study sought to examine factors relating to resiliency attitudes in a group of adults experiencing trauma: divorced parents. Marital dissolution is a stressful event for divorcing individuals (Ahrons, 1994), ranking lower in life trauma only to death of a loved one (King, 2000). Additionally, there are many social and psychological stressors connected to the process of divorce (Ahrons, 1994). Research has indicated that separated and divorced individuals are more likely than widowed, never married, and married individuals to be admitted into inpatient and outpatient psychiatric and alcoholism facilities, to be involved in motor vehicle accidents, to commit suicide, and to die from diseases (Frank, 1985). Thus, it was hypothesized that if there are relationships between resiliency attitudes, life satisfaction, and personality, it would seem that they might be evident in a divorced population.

The purpose of this study was to discover if personality, as measured by the Neuroticism-Extroversion-Openness Five Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), correlates with resiliency attitudes and the related construct of life satisfaction in divorced parents. The hypotheses for this study were as follows: there would be (a) a positive correlation between extraversion and resiliency, (b) a negative correlation between neuroticism and resiliency, (c) a positive correlation between extraversion and life satisfaction, and (d) a negative correlation between neuroticism and life satisfaction. In addition to extraversion and neuroticism, the NEO-FFI measures openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Thus, connections between these latter three and resiliency attitudes and life satisfaction were also examined.

Method

Participants

The 37 participants for this study were from two major cities in a midwestern state. All participants were going through or had been through the process of divorce or separation and were parents of children for whom they were the primary caretakers. The parents were solicited from two parent support groups, employees from a local college, and a group of individuals who were interested in the research. There were no partners from the same couples represented. All participants were above the age of 25.

Measures

Demographics Questionnaire. The demographics questionnaire was researcher designed for the purposes of this study. The questionnaire consisted of 11 questions and the items had varying response options. Respondents were asked to give their gender, occupation, the number of years since their most recent divorce, and age. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of educational attainment from choices that included: less than a high school diploma, high school diploma, some college, associate degree, technical school, bachelor’s degree, graduate degree, and professional school. They also were asked to give the number of years since their most recent divorce, the number of times they have been divorced, the number of children they have, and if they were currently dating. Participants were asked whether they had received additional support from an outside agency other than the support group from which they had been selected. If respondents had received support, they were asked to rate this support on a scale ranging from 1 (very little support) to 5 (very much support). Similarly, respondents were asked to rate the overall level of support (i.e., financial, childcare, and emotional support) they had received from their family in issues relating to the divorce.

Resiliency Attitude Scale. The Resiliency Attitude Scale (RAS, Biscoe & Harris, 1994) measures seven...
types of resiliency in separate subscales: Insight, Independence, Relationships, Initiative, Creativity and Humor, Morality, and General Resiliency. Due to participant time constraints a shortened, researcher designed, form of the RAS was used for this study versus the original 72-item scale. In its shortened form, the Morality, Initiative, and Independence scales contained one item; the others included two items for a total of 11 items. A Cronbach’s Alpha was conducted to determine the reliability of the shortened scale and yielded an alpha of .81, suggesting good internal consistency. Validity information for this shortened measure was not collected. Like the original, each item on the shortened form corresponded to a specific skill or facet of resiliency (e.g., a General Resiliency item was, “No matter what happens, if I keep trying I’ll get through it.”) and these items were answered using the following choices: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), undecided (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). For the subscales containing two items, subscale scores were obtained by summing the items corresponding to that specific subscale, after reverse coding appropriate items. For subscales containing one item, the response to that item constituted the subscale score. A total RAS score was computed by summing all items. On each subscale and the total scale, higher scores indicated higher resiliency attitudes.

**NEO-FFI.** Created by Costa and McCrae (1994), the NEO-FFI is a 60-item version of the NEO-PI-R that provides a brief, comprehensive measure of five domains of personality: Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness (O), Agreeableness (A), and Conscientiousness (C). The response scale for each item is as follows: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). Subscale scores are attained by summing the items corresponding to the specific domain of personality after reverse coding appropriate items. Higher scores indicate a greater presence of the personality characteristic in the individual taking the measure.

Costa and McCrae (1992) designed the NEO-FFI to measure the same factors as the NEO-PI-R with the same validity. Item selection for the NEO-FFI used the items that most strongly loaded on the five validimax factors from the NEO-PI. When the NEO-FFI was correlated with the domain scales of the NEO-PI-R in the Augmented Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging sample, correlations were .92, .90, .91, .77, and .87 for the N, E, O, A and C domains, respectively (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

**Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS).** Diener et al. (1985) created the SWLS in an effort to measure general life satisfaction. This scale consists of five statements expressing general life satisfaction (e.g., “The conditions of my life are excellent”), and participants rate their agreement with each item on a 7-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). These five statements are then summed to obtain an overall life satisfaction score.

Diener et al. (1985) indicates that the scale has “favorable psychometric properties” (p. 74). For example, correlations between interviewer estimates of well-being and the SWLS were at adequate levels. Diener et al. (1985) also conducted correlations between the SWLS and the other measures of subjective well-being, such as the Fordyce (1978) single item measure of happiness and Cantril’s (1965) Self-Anchoring Ladder and the correlations were moderate to strong. Similarly, a correlation of .46 between the SWLS and the Life Satisfaction Index (Adams, 1969) was obtained in a study with older adults.

**Procedures**

Data were collected from four different groups: Parents without Partners, a church divorce support group, college employees and students, and a group of individuals interested in the research.

**Group #1.** Parents without Partners (PWP) is a not-for-profit agency headed by a group of single parents. The president of PWP granted permission for data collection to take place at one of the group’s social activities. At the group activity at which the data were collected, the purpose of the study was explained and an opportunity for questions to be asked and answered was given. Potential participants were made aware that they would be completing three measures and a demographics questionnaire that would take approximately 30 minutes, their name would not be used, and any participation was strictly voluntary.

A consent form was distributed to those who elected to participate following the verbal description. Participants were asked to read and sign the consent form if they agreed to participate, ten people chose not to participate in the study. The consent forms were collected and those 21 who signed were given packets. Participants were then given instructions on how to complete each of the four measures. This yielded 15 completed sets of measures out of a possible 21 potential participants.

**Group #2.** The same procedure was used for the divorce support group at a local church. Consent was obtained from the pastor of the church. Participants were solicited at their weekly meeting. Nine completed sets of measures were collected from this group.

**Group #3 and Group #4.** Employees at a local college and a group of interested individuals also were asked to participate in this study via e-mail. Individuals who were interested in participating responded to an
e-mail that was sent to ask for volunteers. Those who volunteered to take part in the study met with the researcher individually to get the consent forms and questionnaires. Participants were asked to return completed questionnaires to the researcher’s mailbox in the sealed envelope provided to them. Thirteen additional surveys were collected from the college employees, students, and the interested individuals.

Results

Demographics

A total of 37 respondents returned as completed the RAS, NEO-FFI, SWLS, and the demographics questionnaire. However, one person was excluded because she did not complete all the measures, yielding a total of 36 completed measures. Most of the respondents were female (N = 26 or 72%). Occupations were varied; some positions mentioned by respondents were registered nurse, machinist, and health information technologist. This varying range of occupations can be best understood in the context of the educational backgrounds that were reported: seven (19.4%) reported a high school diploma, seven (19.4%) some college, six (16.7%) associate degree, six (16.7%) technical school degree, five (13.9%) bachelor’s degree, four (11.1%) graduate or professional school, and one (2.8%) did not report his/her educational status.

Nearly all individuals in this study were experiencing their first divorce; only one reported experiencing his/her second. Fifty percent of the respondents reported dating. Refer to Table 1 for means and standard deviations of the following: age, number of years since divorce, and number of children.

RAS, Extraversion, and Neuroticism

The first hypothesis of this study was that there would be a positive correlation between extraversion and resiliency, wherein higher extraversion scores would correspond to higher resiliency attitude scores. The second hypothesis was that there would be a negative correlation between neuroticism and resiliency attitudes; lower neuroticism scores would correspond to higher resiliency attitude scores in individuals who are experiencing or have experienced the trauma of divorce. A Pearson correlation between the total score on the RAS and the extraversion subscale score revealed no resiliency attitudes-extraversion connection, r(34) = -.19, p > .05. Similarly, the Pearson correlation calculated on the total score on the RAS and neuroticism subscale revealed no resiliency attitudes-neuroticism connection, r(34) = .22, p > .05. Refer to Table 2 to see the correlations between the Satisfaction with Life Scale, RAS total scores, and NEO-FFI subscale scores.

SWLS, Extraversion, and Neuroticism

In addition to the first two hypotheses, it was predicted that a higher degree of life satisfaction, as indicated by the SWLS, would relate to higher extraversion scores. It was also predicted that a higher degree of life satisfaction would correlate to lower neuroticism scores. A Pearson correlation calculated between the SWLS score and the extraversion score indicated no relationship, r(34) =-.11, p > .05. Also, a Pearson correlation calculated between the SWLS score and the neuroticism score indicated no relationship, r(34) = - .11, p > .05.

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<td><strong>Means and Standard Deviations of Demographics Questionnaire</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Pearson Correlations of RAS Scores, Satisfaction with Life Scale Scores, and NEO-FFI Subscale Scores</strong></td>
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<td>NEO-FFI Subscale</td>
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Note. None of these correlations were statistically significant at p < .05.
relation was calculated examining the relationship between SWLS scores and neuroticism, but no correlation was found, \( r(34) = .17, p > .05 \).

**Secondary Analyses**

Although the four hypotheses were not supported, further analysis of the data set revealed other correlations relevant to the hypotheses. Because external support has been shown to relate to resiliency (Barnard, 1994; Garvin et al., 1993), it was thought that the reason for the lack of NEO-FFI-RAS and NEO-FFI-SWLS relationships might be due in part to variability in social support. So, correlations between RAS and NEO-FFI extraversion and neuroticism scores, as well as SWLS and NEO-FFI extraversion and neuroticism scores, were computed with support level partialed out. Controlling for social support did not affect the significance in the relationships, with RAS and neuroticism and RAS and extraversion remaining uncorrelated, \( r(34) = .15, p > .05 \) and \( r(34) = -.09, p > .05 \), respectively. The same was true for satisfaction with life, with SWLS and neuroticism and SWLS and extraversion remaining uncorrelated when support was partialed out \( r(34) = .15, p > .05 \) and \( r(34) = -.05, p > .05 \), respectively.

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine relationships between extraversion and neuroticism and facets of the subscales of the RAS. The facets of the subscales represent individual items under a subscale. These facets target specific skills related to each type of resiliency identified by the RAS. A positive correlation was found between the personality characteristic of neuroticism and the RAS facet of finding new ways to look at things from the sub-scale of Creativity, \( r(34) = .33, p < .05 \). This indicates that those higher in neuroticism tend to find new ways of looking at things in their lives. In addition to this, a negative relationship between extraversion and a facet of the Relationship Resiliency subscale, the tendency to avoid repeating unhealthy relationships, was found, \( r(34) = -.33, p < .05 \). This indicates that those lower in extraversion also tend to avoid repeating unhealthy relationships.

Recall that divorced individuals were chosen as the population which to study resiliency because divorce is traumatic enough that factors relevant to resiliency should show up in that population. However, because it seemed likely that those divorced for a shorter length of time would be experiencing trauma to a greater degree than those divorced for a longer length of time, it seemed important to compare the resiliency scores of the two groups. Thus, an independent samples \( t \)-test was conducted to compare the RAS scores of individuals who were divorced for a length of time at/below the mean number of years (7.5 years) to those who were divorced for a length of time above the mean. No significant difference was found, \( t(34) = -.815, p > .05 \). The mean RAS score of those divorced for 7.5 years or less \( (M = 42.00, SD = 6.13) \) was not significantly different from those who were divorced more than 7.5 years \( (M = 43.77, SD = 6.48) \).

**Discussion**

While past research has indicated that personality does have an impact on the behaviors and attitudes people exhibit (Barnard, 1994, D’Imperio et al., 2000, & Garvin et al., 1993), this is one of the few studies focusing on connections between the specific variables of personality and resiliency attitudes. Additionally, this study represented an attempt to extend the earlier qualitative literature on resiliency (Barnard, 1994, Goertzel & Goertzel, 1962), by searching for quantitative indication for factors important in coping with trauma using the NEO-FFI and RAS.

It was predicted that extraversion on the NEO-FFI would positively correlate with resiliency attitudes on the RAS, and that neuroticism would negatively correlate with resiliency attitudes. However, the total Resiliency Attitude Scale (RAS) scores and extraversion scores on the NEO-FFI were not significantly correlated, nor were the total RAS scores and neuroticism scores. Second, it was hypothesized that higher scores on extraversion and lower scores on neuroticism would predict greater life satisfaction. However, persons who were more extraverted and lower in neuroticism did not tend to be more satisfied with life.

Despite this, there were correlations found between specific items of the RAS and the NEO-FFI. Specifically, there was a positive correlation between new ways of looking at things from the Creativity subscale and neuroticism, \( r(34) = .33, p < .05 \). This indicates that those higher in neuroticism tend to find new ways of looking at things in their lives. In addition to this, a negative relationship between extraversion and a facet of the RAS, the tendency to avoid repeating unhealthy relationships, was found, \( r(34) = -.33, p < .05 \). This indicates that those lower in extraversion also tend to avoid repeating unhealthy relationships.

In addition to the above correlation, surprisingly, a negative correlation was found between extraversion and the tendency to avoid unhealthy relationships from the Relationships subscale. Extraversion has been found to be associated with psychological and social adjustment (Costa & McCrae, 1980), which is why it was hypothesized that those scoring higher in extraver-
sion would score higher on the RAS. However, the negative correlation may have been due to the possibility that because those high in extraversion seek out more relationships than do those lower in extraversion (Costa & McCrae, 1992), they tend to find a combination of both healthy relationships and unhealthy ones. That is, those high in extraversion do not seek unhealthy relationships nor do they avoid them.

Perhaps one of the more interesting findings was that the point in the divorce process did not relate to resiliency attitudes. The comparison between individuals who were divorced for 7.5 years or less (below the mean) and those divorced more than 7.5 years was made because it was possible that correlations between personality and resiliency attitudes may have been more easily detected a shorter time after the divorce. This is because those who have to recall back to the time of their divorce may not recall the exact attitudes they had then; rather their memories can be confounded by the attitudes that they have now, which may be more positive for the longer divorced group. Additionally, longer-divorced individuals may have achieved stability in their lives. However, an independent samples t test suggested that the varying points at which the individuals were in the divorce process may not have related to their resiliency attitudes.

While it is possible that personality does not relate to resiliency attitudes, the general lack of relationships between neuroticism, extraversion, and Resiliency Attitude Scale scores may have been due to small sample size. Similarly, small sample size probably was responsible for the finding of a lack of relationship between extraversion and life satisfaction, as past research has shown that extraversion relates to happiness (Costa & McCrae, 1980).

Another area of concern for this study was the validity of the shortened RAS scale. While validity has been determined for the original 72-item version of the RAS, the shortened version has not been tested for validity. With fewer items for participants to respond to, there was a smaller opportunity for variability among the participants’ answers. Without variability, a true relationship between the desired variables may have been hidden.

One limitation of the present study was that the population consisted of divorced single parents, a specific population at a specific point in their lives, going through a specific sort of trauma. This may highly reduce the generalizability of this study. A second limitation was the variability of the participants in terms of support. An attempt was made to partial out the degree of support out of personality and RAS, and satisfaction with life and RAS, with the variables remaining uncorrelated. Despite this, the importance of external support remains. Past research has indicated that external factors bear much weight in an individual’s ability to be resilient (Barnard, 1994; Garvin et al., 1993). It is possible that a more specific measure of support versus the global one used in the current study may be helpful in tapping into the role that external support plays in resiliency attitudes.

To correct these limitations, future research should be done with a much larger sample of divorced parents. Additionally, future research with personality and resiliency might measure resiliency differently. Perhaps the hypothesized correlations would have been found between personality and resiliency if resiliency behavior, rather than resiliency attitudes, had been measured or if the longer version of the RAS had been used.

Further research in this area remains important despite the lack of significant findings in this study as the study’s limitations may be at fault for the lack of correlations between personality and resiliency. Nonetheless, if there are significant findings in future research it may have implications for the way divorced individuals are taught to cope in marriage and family therapy, assuming that personality affects coping behaviors. For example, therapists might help divorced individuals bring out the personality characteristics that have that have been found to be key in resiliency, or at least learn the skills that those high in resiliency demonstrate. Thus, these individuals may be able to cope better and become more resilient in the face of trauma.

References


