



Understanding the Distinctions of Positive Constructs Resilience, Grit and Hardiness

Vasiliki Georgoulas-Sherry PhD*

Saybrook University, 55 W Eureka St, Pasadena, California.

Introduction

Positive psychology is the scientific branch of psychological study that centers on the character constructs, strengths, and behaviors that foster individual and community thriving [1,2]. According to Norrish and Vella-Brodrickn [3] “positive psychology aims to contribute to a comprehensive approach to mental health by adding an investigation of positive emotions and human strengths to existing knowledge on mental illness and dysfunction” (275). Through a positive psychology lens, individuals can move beyond surviving to thriving, and create and lead a life with meaning and fulfillment through promoting and fostering what is best within themselves [1-4]. With such a prominence in fostering well-being, a significant body of research continues to demonstrate the need to better understand positive psychology constructs including the theoretical and empirical frameworks, relationships, and structures across these constructs [2,4-6]. An emphasis must be placed on understanding the related but distinct positive psychological constructs of resilience, grit, and hardiness, as these three specific constructs are critical protective factors in individual mental health and well-being [4,5]. Particularly, resilience, grit, and hardiness continue to be linked to several positive health outcomes such as influencing and predicting human performance; overcoming challenges, failures, and hardships; predicting better quality of life and life satisfaction; and supporting better mental and physical health and decreases in depression and anxiety [4,6-11]. Furthermore, resilience, grit, and hardiness are essential in overcoming stressors that are inevitable in life (e.g., familial challenges, financial hardships, medical concerns, workplace issues) and therefore, research is integral to the theoretical and empirical comprehension of these constructs.

In the first section, each construct will be discussed briefly, and in the second section, current distinctions amongst the three constructs will be discussed in efforts to continue the important differentiation amongst these related but distinct constructs.

The Construct of Resilience

Resilience has been researched in various environments and contexts, which adds to the complication of its operationalization [4,8,12-16]. While the operationalization of resilience continues to be debated, there are numerous factors agreed upon; this includes (1) the tendency to “bounce back” from a negative experience with “competent functioning” in efforts to acclimate and adjust following trauma (2) the ability to possess positive coping skills and mechanisms as well as a positive outlook to

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 15 May 2022

Accepted 21 Jun 2022

Published 26 Jun 2022

KEYWORDS

Psychology, Resilience, Grit, Hardiness.

navigate through trauma more effectively, (3) the capacity for healthy homeostasis and adjustment that inherently come following a significant adversity or challenge, (4) the ability to protect their mental stability and psychological health, and (5) the tendency to fruitfully balance positive with negative affect [4]. Resilient individuals can survive several emotionally provoking experiences, and subsequently, safeguard their mental stability and psychological health [4,8,16].

Resilience has been associated with several psychological constructs; this includes cognitive appraisal, locus of control, perception of predictability and control, dispositional optimism, motivation, effort [1], agreeableness [17], and openness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability [18]. Resilience has been shown to predict increases in self-efficacy [19], in mental health in older adults [13], in relative absence of depressive symptoms [20], and in successful adaptation in college students [12].

The Construct of Grit

Grit promotes a perseverance of effort in prevailing over challenges that individuals must face on the path to success and is utilized “as a driving force in achievement realization” [21]. Particularly, grit promotes an individual’s ability to continuously preserve and work hard over a period on highly valued goals; grit is established through an individual’s passion for a long-term goal, fixed with a strong desire to attain that individualized aim [22]. Plainly, grit is a motivating mechanism in goal attainment. Gritty individuals can perform persistently toward any complications without losing effort and self-regulate and self-maintain feelings of commitment, over a long period of time, regardless of any challenges [22]. While most individuals might perceive failures as indications to walk away and start something new, gritty individuals persist; gritty individuals are more likely to self-maintain and self-regulate their feelings of commitment and willpower over a long time, regardless of any failures, they might face [22-24].

Contact Vasiliki Georgoulas-Sherry ✉ Saybrook University, 55 W Eureka St, Pasadena, California.

Gritty individuals are more likely to be successful and accomplished and characteristically possess traits that are above a normal person's ability [22]. Additionally, gritty individuals are distinguished by their inclination to maintain "effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress," while non-gritty individuals are dispirited, easily prone to distractions, and commonly preoccupied by new interests [21]. Grit has predicted wellbeing and mental health [23,25], life satisfaction and positive affect [26], and self-efficacy in grade school children [24].

The Construct of Hardiness

Hardiness has been defined as the ability to adapt and perform under stressful conditions while remaining emotionally healthy and stable [6,27-29]. According to Maddi et al. [6], hardiness encompasses a mindset that is necessary in gaining the courage and knowledge to persevere through hardships. According to Bartone et al. [27], the main features of hardiness are challenge (i.e., possessing an ability to be amenable to change to gain more knowledge), commitment (i.e., an ability to engage and participate in a community and feeling a sense of purpose), and control (i.e., an ability to believe that impact can happen). A hardy individual can take an adverse experience and turn it into a learning opportunity; hardy individuals are able to commit to a focused and meaningful life by feeling in control and adapting to challenges. This personality construct evolves from an early age, and maintains consistency throughout time, although it has shown to be amenable to change under specific circumstances [28].

Hardiness has shown to predict neuroimmunological reactions to stress [29], adaptability in military leaders [27], hopefulness and life satisfaction [30], indirect effect on posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms through avoidance coping [31], quality of life [32], and adaptive cognitive stress processes and lowered depression [32]. Hardiness is associated with the capacity to sustain emotional well-being [34], psychological well-being and health and positive autonomy [35], and social support and engagement in health behaviors [36].

Distinctions amongst Resilience, Grit, and Hardiness

While resilience, grit, and hardiness have been delineated and defined as unique constructs, these positive psychology constructs are still frequently linked with one another [5,21,37]. Several papers have attempted to utilize resilience, grit, and hardiness as interchangeable constructs. While the psychological constructs of resilience and grit have been associated with one another, an overwhelming amount of research continues to maintain the distinction amongst hardiness, grit, and resilience [5].

In terms of resilience, according to Luther et al. [14], we believe that there is considerable value in retaining resilience as a distinct construct... resilience encapsulates the view that adaptation can occur through trajectories that defy "normative" expectations... the conceptual distinctiveness of resilience lies in evidence that positive adjustment patterns occurring with, versus without, conditions of adversity often have different correlates and thus reflect distinct constructs (551).

While resilience possesses a complex array of definitions, resilience emerges from hardship, trauma, or adversity.

However, it is important to note that researchers have argued that resilience can materialize outside of trauma suggesting that events that are favorable and not adverse (such as a job promotion) can foster resilience [38]; specifically, positive circumstances can necessitate resilience as there is a requisite to positively adapt to changes. The existence of grit and hardiness do not demand an adverse environment or situation as it is not dependent upon sustaining effort through a critical incident [6]; however, this is not the case with resilience. More so, hardiness is characterized with a positive mindset that allows for homeostasis during adverse circumstances [28], while resilience is categorized as an active process of positive adaptation where an effort is made to continue and maintain homeostasis during traumatic or challenging circumstances [14]; while all constructs can be found in any individual as they are not rare, resilience is considered a process while grit and hardiness are considered traits. Furthermore, according to Duckworth et al. [21], grit is different from hardiness and resilience due to the degree of perseverance and passion placed on achieving a goal regardless of hardship – in both hardiness and resilience, there is no goal attainment.

When measuring resilience, grit, and hardiness, these constructs are further distinguishable. Particularly, a hardy individual's success is contributed to how he is able to better manage demanding situations in a manner in which allows him to bounce from a devastating to a progressive learning experience [6]. Unlike hardiness, the construct of grit does not require a traumatic environment, and instead highlights the need of long-term endurance and energy in sustaining interest and effort over an extended period of time notwithstanding absent of feedback or progress, problems, barriers, distractions, and failures [21]; in grit, consistency and perseverance continue to be critical as a gritty individual's success emerges from persevering through any obstacle regardless of failure that he must overcome, as well as the consistency to maintain the goal. In contrast, resilient individuals are successful when they can accept setback, recover quickly from adversity, and adapt well following this adversity [7]. Furthermore, unlike grit and hardiness, resilience emphasizes on character strengths and virtues that promote and improve an individual is optimal functioning and mental wellness as well as adaptation and homeostasis [39]. Resilience, thus, is centered on an array of protective factors such as societal (e.g., health, social support) and personal (e.g., behavior, temperament).

Additionally, grit, hardiness, and resilience differ from one another within the context of time and function. As Duckworth and Gross [22] explain, "the overarching difference between resilience and grit is the "timescale" and "nature of the enemy" (323). For example, gritty individuals are more likely to maintain a goal over a long period of time regardless of challenges or failure, whereas individuals who are resilient do not necessarily need to maintain a goal over an extended period; hardiness consists of three critical components: (1) commitment, (2) control, and (3) challenge; hardy individuals thrive under a new challenge because change is a typical experience to them, while involving themselves fully in life, and possessing the coping skills of independently functioning and managing [27,29]. Furthermore, according to Bartone et al., [27], grit, resilience, and hardiness differ at the "measurement level" in that grit's and hardiness' lack of complexity in operationalization

allows for more tangible and concrete theoretical models as compared to resilience, which is, absent of clear, cohesive, and standardized operationalization. Specifically, both grit and hardiness are assessed with certain validated measures while resilience is more complex to measure as this construct can be assessed from a variety of assessments. The lack of ease in the operationalization of resilience comes from the dynamic and multidimensional nature, not typically found within the constructs of grit and hardiness. While grit, hardiness, and resilience consist of the ability to overcome an obstacle, hardiness and resilience precludes the achievement of a goal or positive outcome as compared to grit [22]. Lastly, grit's operationalization is contingent on goal setting while resilience is dependent on positive appraisal, spirituality, active coping, self-efficacy, meaning making and learning, and acceptance of limitation, and hardiness is reliant upon the capacity to overcome, engage, and control [27,29].

Additionally, in terms of the sub facets that make up grit (i.e., perseverance of effort and consistency of interest), resilience, and hardiness (i.e., control, commitment, and challenge), while conceptually related, none fully capture the theoretical framework, which allows for the distinctions amongst these constructs [5]. For example, the ability of a positive mindset during adverse circumstances, necessary elements in conceptualizing hardiness, is not evident in grit, resilience, or their respective subfacets. Another example, the perseverance of effort and consistency of interest, crucial elements in defining grit, is not evident in hardiness, resilience, or their respective subfacets amongst them. Importantly, while grit and hardiness have concrete and validated subfacets, due to the complexity that is associated in the operationalization of resilience, subfacets related to resilience have been hotly debated [4]. For example, Friberg et al. [10]'s factor analyses of the Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA) revealed the subfacets of social competence (i.e., social adeptness), personal competence (i.e., self-esteem), personal structure (i.e., upholding routines), family cohesion (i.e., family support), and social support (i.e., external support); alternatively, Morote et al. [40]'s factor analyses of the RSA include not only a six-factor structure of subfacets – social competence (i.e., social adeptness), planned future (i.e., future planning), perception of self (i.e., self-esteem), structured style (i.e., upholding routines), social resources (i.e., external resources), and family cohesion (i.e., family support) – but also second order subfacets – the interpersonal (i.e., family cohesion and social resources) and the intrapersonal (i.e., social competence, perception of self, planned future, and structured style). In another example, Jackson and Watkin [41]'s factor analyses of the Resilience Factor Inventory (RFI) revealed seven different subfacets associated to resilience – reaching out (i.e. enhancing and taking challenges), empathy (i.e., reading cues), realistic optimism (i.e., staying positive), self-efficacy (i.e., successfulness), causal analysis (i.e., identifying causes), impulse control (i.e., managing gratification), and emotional regulation (i.e., controlling affect). In a supplementary example, Georgoulas-Sherry and Kelly [5]'s factor analyses of the Response to Stressful Experiences Scale (RSES) revealed six subfacets that promote resilient responses to high magnitude stressors: positive appraisal (i.e., rethinking), spirituality (i.e., believing), active coping (i.e., problem solving), self-efficacy

(i.e., embracing), meaning making and learning (i.e., advancing), and acceptance of limitation (i.e., understanding).

Importantly, while many have used these constructs interchangeably, some research has shown that regardless of the similar associations amongst them, each construct is operationally distinct [6,28]. In Parthasarathy and Chakraborty's [42] study investigating grit as a dominant leadership trait, findings showed a strong positive correlation between grit and resilience ($r = .59, p < .001$). This strong association was also found in a study investigating sportspersons' and non-sportspersons' goal attainment ($r = .53, p < .001$) [43]. A 2015 study that examined whether measures of resilience, grit, and hardiness predicted both general and sport-specific quality of life, revealed positive relationships amongst all constructs correlated ($r = .40, .41, \text{ and } .53$, respectively) [37]; the researchers further reported that, "the moderate correlation among grit, hardiness, and resilience suggests that although they share some variance (16-26%), they appear to be measuring unique constructs" [37]. More so, Stoffel and Cain's [2018] literature review investigating the potential relationship between resilience grit also noted that these constructs are "completely different constructs ... by definition, resilience is an inherent attribute of grit" (p. 125); as they report, caution must be taken in synonymously applying these terms as they can be misapplied in analysis. Maddi et al. [6] found a moderate correlation between these two constructs ($r = .46, p < .001$); similar findings by Kelly et al. [28] who also investigated hardiness and grit as performance predictors among USMA cadets were shown ($r = .34, p < .001$). Georgoulas-Sherry and Kelly [5] conducted a study utilizing numerous structural equation modeling techniques to report the factor structures and the associations amongst these constructs; findings from this study revealed that while previous research characterized resilience as an "umbrella term" as it integrates a broad variety of psychological elements, Georgoulas-Sherry and Kelly [5] demonstrated the distinctive capacity of these constructs, not potential subordinate relationships. Further findings revealed that confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) revealed a three-factor model structure among the three constructs. These results propose that resilience, grit, and hardiness are distinct from one another. The three-factor model structure promoted the necessary distinction of the three similar, but separate, constructs and results showed the need to eliminate the synonymous use of these constructs.

Summary

Resilience, grit, and hardiness produce an array of protective mechanisms that shield individuals from adverse environments and situations. These constructs are particularly critical in helping individuals maintain equilibrium during those challenging times, which allows for increased well-being in mental and physical health and decrease in risk-taking behaviors and maladaptive attitudes [4,6-11,15,22]. The value of understanding these constructs is immeasurable as adverse experiences, which are prevalent in everyday normal life, continue to produce irreversible psychological and physiological wounds [5,6,11,21,28]. Previous research has illustrated the mechanism of qualifying these psychological constructs, distinguishing them from one another, and advising

against using these constructs synonymously as they are empirically different from each other. Using these constructs interchangeably can lead to potential misinformation and misleading and faulty work. As the field of positive psychology continues to expand, so does the need in understanding the theoretical and empirical frameworks, relationships, and structures across positive psychology constructs.

References

1. Csikszentmihalyi M, Seligman M. Positive psychology. *American Psychologist*. 2000; 55(1): 5-14.
2. Lopez SJ, Pedrotti JT, Snyder CR. Positive psychology: The scientific and practical explorations of human strengths. Sage Publications. 2018; 672.
3. Norrish JM, Vella-Brodrick DA. Positive psychology and adolescents: Where are we now? Where to from here? *Australian Psychologist*. 2009; 44(4): 270-278.
4. Southwick SM, Bonanno GA, Masten AS, Panter-Brick C, Yehuda R. Resilience definitions, theory, and challenges: interdisciplinary perspectives. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*. 2014; 5(1); 1-14.
5. Georgoulas-Sherry V, Kelly D. Resilience, grit, and hardiness: Determining the relationships amongst these constructs through structural equation modeling techniques. *Journal of Positive Psychology and Wellbeing*. 2019; 3(2): 165-178.
6. Maddi SR, Matthews MD, Kelly DR, Villarreal B, White M. The role of hardiness and grit in predicting performance and retention of USMA cadets. *Military Psychology*. 2012; 24(1): 19-28.
7. Agaibi CE, Wilson JP. Trauma, PTSD, and resilience: A review of the literature. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. 2005; 6(3): 195-216.
8. Bonanno GA. Loss, trauma, and human resilience: Have we underestimated the human capacity to thrive after extremely aversive events? *American Psychologist*. 2004; 59(1): 20-28.
9. Bonanno GA, Galea S, Bucciarelli A, Vlahov D. What predicts psychological resilience after disaster? The role of demographics, resources, and life stress. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*. 2007; 75(5): 671-682.
10. Friborg O, Barlaug D, Martinussen M, Rosenvinge JH, Hjemdal O. Resilience in relation to personality and intelligence. *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*. 2005; 14(1): 29-42.
11. Matthews MD, Eid J, Kelly D, Bailey JK, Peterson C. Character strengths and virtues of developing military leaders: An international comparison. *Military Psychology*. 2006; 18(S1): S57-S68.
12. Cazan AM, Truta C. Stress, resilience, and life satisfaction in college students. *Revista de Cercetare si Interventie Sociala*. 2015; 48: 95-108.
13. Gooding PA, Hurst A, Johnson J, TARRIER N. Psychological resilience in young and older adults. *International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*. 2012; 27(3): 262-270.
14. Luthar SS, Cicchetti D, Becker B. Research on resilience: Response to commentaries. *Child Development*. 2000; 71(3): 573-575.
15. Masten AS. Ordinary magic: Resilience processes in development. *American Psychologist*. 2001; 56(3): 227-238.
16. Wilson JP, Drozdek B. Broken spirits: The treatment of traumatized asylum seekers, refugees and war and torture victims. Routledge. 2004; 736.
17. Davey M, Eaker DG, Walters LH. Resilience processes in adolescents: Personality profiles, self-worth, and coping. *Journal of Adolescent Research*. 2003; 18(4): 347-362.
18. Riolli L, Savicki V, Cepani A. Resilience in the face of catastrophe: Optimism, personality, and coping in the Kosovo crisis. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*. 2002; 32(8): 1604-1627.
19. Wright MOD, Masten AS, Narayan AJ. Resilience processes in development: Four waves of research on positive adaptation in the context of adversity. In S. Goldstein & R. B. Brooks (Eds.), *Handbook of resilience in children*. Springer. 2013; 15-37.
20. Dias R, Santos RL, Sousa MF, BD, Nogueira MML, et al. Resilience of caregivers of people with dementia: a systematic review of biological and psychosocial determinants. *Trends in Psychiatry and Psychotherapy*. 2015; 37: 12-19.
21. Duckworth AL, Peterson C, Matthews MD, Kelly DR. Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 2007; 92(6): 1087-1101.
22. Duckworth A, Gross JJ. Self-control and grit: Related but separable determinants of success. *Current directions in psychological science*. 2014; 23(5): 319-325.
23. Goodman FR, Disabato DJ, Kashdan TB, Kauffman SB. Measuring well-being: A comparison of subjective well-being and PERMA. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*. 2018; 13(4): 321-332.
24. Rojas JP, Reser JA, Usher EL, Toland MD. Psychometric properties of the academic grit scale. Lexington: University of Kentucky. Retrieved from <https://motivation.uky.edu/files/2013/08/PojasPeserTolandUsher.pdf>
25. Kannagara CS, Allen RE, Waugh G, Nahar N, Khan SZN, et al. All that glitters is not grit: Three studies of grit in university students. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 2018; 9: 1539-1545.
26. Singh K, Jha SD. Positive and negative affect, and grit as predictors of happiness and life satisfaction. *Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*. 2008; 34(2): 40-45.
27. Bartone PT, Kelly DR, Matthews MD. Psychological hardiness predicts adaptability in military leaders: A prospective study. *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*. 2013; 21(2): 200-210.
28. Kelly DR, Matthews MD, Bartone PT. Grit and hardiness as predictors of performance among West Point cadets. *Military Psychology*. 2014; 26(4): 327-342.

29. Sandvik AM, Bartone PT, Hystad SW, Phillips TM, Thayer JF, et al. Psychological hardiness predicts neuroimmunological responses to stress. *Psychol Health Med*. 2013; 18(6): 705-713.
30. Hamid N. Study the relationship between hardiness and hope with life satisfaction in managers. *International Journal of Psychology*. 2020; 14(1): 310-339.
31. Thomassen ÅG, Hystad SW, Johnsen BH, Johnsen GE, Bartone PT. The effect of hardiness on PTSD symptoms: A prospective mediational approach. *Military Psychology*. 2018; 30(2); 142-151.
32. Rajaei A, Nadi MA, Jafari A. Psychometric characteristics of positive psychological capital scale among staff employees of education in Isfahan. *Knowledge & Research in Applied Psychology*. 2017; 18(3); 94-108.
33. Bartone PT, Homish GG. Influence of hardiness, avoidance coping, and combat exposure on depression in returning war veterans: A moderated-mediation study. *Journal of Affective Disorders*. 2020; 265: 511-518.
34. Gorkovaya IA, Miklyaeva AV. Hardiness and coping-strategies of adolescents with motor impairments. *Clinical Psychology and Special Education*. 2019; 8(1): 90-102.
35. Viola MM, Musso P, Inguglia C, Lo Coco A. Psychological well-being and career indecision in emerging adulthood: The moderating role of hardiness. *The Career Development Quarterly*. 2016; 64(4); 387-396.
36. Pengilly JW, Dowd ET. Hardiness and social support as moderators of stress. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*. 2000; 56(6): 813-820.
37. Martin JJ, Byrd B, Watts ML, Dent M. Gritty, hardy, and resilient: Predictors of sport engagement and life satisfaction in wheelchair basketball players. *Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology*. 2014; 9(4): 345-359.
38. Fletcher D, Sarkar M. Psychological resilience. *European Psychologist*. 2013; 18(1): 12-23.
39. Oshio A, Taku K, Hirano M, Saeed G. Resilience and Big Five personality traits: A meta-analysis. *Personality and Individual Differences*. 2018; 127(1): 54-60.
40. Morote R, Hjemdal O, Martinez Uribe P, Corveleyn J. Psychometric properties of the Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA) and its relationship with life-stress, anxiety and depression in a Hispanic Latin-American community sample. *PloS one*. 2017; 12(11): e0187954.
41. Jackson R, Watkin C. The resilience inventory: Seven essential skills for overcoming life's obstacles and determining happiness. *Selection & Development Review*. 2004; 20(6): 13-17.
42. Parthasarathy N, Chakraborty P. Grit as a dominant leadership trait in the corporate world. In I. C. Patranabis (Eds.) *Globysn management conference Allied Publishers Pvt Ltd*. 2014; 189-199.
43. Shrivastava MU, Mishra V. Grit, resilience, and agency in sportspersons and non-sportspersons. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*. 2016; 5(10); 1-4.