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On Hardiness and Other Pathways to Resilience

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Bonanno's (January 2004) recent, excellent article is a compelling analysis of several different reactions to extremely aversive events. With regard to major stressors, such as the death of a loved one or the experience of a life-threatening circumstance, there is, notably, not only the psychopathological breakdown (e.g., posttraumatic stress disorder [PTSD] or depressive disorder) that has been emphasized but also the less recognized resilient response, in which there is little or no loss of functioning. Whereas the emphasis in the breakdown response is understandably on treatment that facilitates recovery, the resilient response may require little but the person's own ongoing efforts in life to continue effectively. Indeed, Bonanno suggested that the typical treatment efforts following traumatic events might actually undermine the resilient person's adjustment efforts. Bonanno's conceptualization and supportive research evidence advance our understanding of individuals' reactions to massive stressors.

Further, Bonanno (2004) argued that there are multiple pathways to resiliency under stress, and he identified personality hardiness as one of them. His presentation of hardiness accurately emphasizes its interrelated attitudes of commitment (rather than alienation), control (rather than powerlessness), and challenge (rather than threat) but does not cover how this concept has evolved over the last 25 years. Coordinating theory, research, and practice over this period of time, I have concluded (Maddi, 2002) that hardy attitudes amount to the courage and motivation to face stressors accurately (rather than to deny or catastrophize them). This courage and motivation lead to coping by problem solving rather than by avoiding and to interacting with others by giving and getting assistance and encouragement rather than by striking out or overprotecting. Thus, personality hardiness is emerging as a pattern of attitudes and actions that helps in transforming stressors from potential disasters into growth opportunities.

Findings have shown that hardiness enhances resiliency in a wide range of stressful circumstances, such as when nurses regularly confront death and dying in hospice settings, or when statistical consultants experience culture shock in their work overseas, or when immigrants arrive in the United States; indeed, hardiness enhances resiliency in response to the ongoing demands and pressures of everyday life (Maddi, 2002). Of particular relevance to Bonanno's (2004) article are the findings of several studies in which Bartone (1999) measured hardiness levels in military personnel just before they left this country for overseas service in combat or peacekeeping missions. The higher their hardiness level, the less likely these soldiers were to develop PTSD or depressive disorders following the experience of life-threatening stressors.

The HardiSurvey III-R (Maddi & Khoshaba, 2001) is a 65-item questionnaire with considerable reliability and validity that measures the attitudes, coping strategies, and interaction patterns of hardiness. This test can be administered in hard copy form or on the Internet, and it generates a comprehensive report. As Bonanno (2004) pointed out, subjecting resilient people to clinical interventions following major stressors may actually undermine their functioning. It may be useful, therefore, to evaluate such personality characteristics as hardiness (by administering the HardiSurvey III-R) to persons who have either just experienced trauma or are likely to because of their work and social patterns. Such an approach may facilitate informed decisions as to how to proceed according to a person's need after experiencing a major stressor.

There is also a training program (Khoshaba & Maddi, 2001), based on theory, research, and practice, that emphasizes several sessions and a workbook to enhance the attitudes, coping strategies, and interaction patterns of hardiness. Thus far, research has shown that among people completing the training, students subsequently improve in grade point average, college retention rates, and health, and working adults improve in performance, job satisfaction, and health (Maddi, 2002). Building on Bonanno's (2004) argument, I propose that the HardiTraining program may be especially useful for people who are at risk of encountering major stressors because of their occupations or life circumstances.

Finally, Bonanno (2004) identified several other pathways to resiliency under stress besides hardiness. These include self-enhancement (an overly positive bias about oneself), repressive coping (rendering unpleasant emotions unconscious), and positive emotion/laughter (expressing positivity). These three pathways are not only different from each other but are also notably different from the concept of hardiness and the courage and hard work emphasized in that pathway. If these three pathways can be measured adequately, it would be useful to engage in research comparing their power in evoking resiliency under stress with that of personality hardiness. Are these four pathways empirically different enough from each other to be considered separately? If so, is one or another of them the most effective, or are combinations of pathways better than single ones? Bonanno's exciting position has opened the way for such comparative analytic research (Maddi, 1996) through which researchers can further their current knowledge concerning how resiliency under stress comes about.

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