This special issue on spirituality in resilience processes across international contexts helps clarify a three-pronged research agenda for the future study of trauma and disasters by psychologists of religion and spirituality. First, the special issue demonstrates the value of expanding from U.S.-based theories, data, models, and practices to incorporate a wider repertoire of international research (e.g., Western Africa, Romania, Haiti, China, and diverse additional contexts). Second, the special issue suggests that the topic of resilience defies the constraints of traditional variance-based research methodologies and requires the adoption of newer process-based research methodologies in order to study longitudinal phenomena, such as cosmology episodes, post-traumatic growth, and forgiveness processes. Third, the special issue emphasizes the need for psychologists of religion and spirituality to collaborate more frequently with allied social scientists (e.g., sociologists of religion and scholars of management, spirituality and religion) in order to comprehend the systemic, multi-level complexities of large-scale trauma.

Over the past several years we have had the opportunity to study resilience processes across a variety of contexts and populations. From our years of research emerged The Center for Trauma Studies and Resilience Leadership, which is devoted to the study of large-scale trauma and the resilience processes that lead to resilient individuals, teams, organizations, communities, and nations. We have studied populations such as earthquake survivors in Haiti; Human Terrain Team members serving in the war in Afghanistan; survivors of the 2008 earthquake in China; survivors of rape as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and protestors, pastors, police, media, and community leaders involved in the racial unrest in Ferguson, Missouri. Additionally, we have reviewed hundreds of articles on resilience that have included survivors of countless disasters and tragedies (Orton & O'Grady, in press).

The diversity of the populations we have studied is nearly matched by the diversity of the doctoral students who have served in the Center's research laboratory. One type of diversity that we have benefitted from in the Center is faith diversity: Buddhists, Pagans, Christians, Jews, Muslims, and others. A complementary type of diversity is country of origin: Korea, China, South Africa, Jerusalem, Bahamas, Puerto Rico, the United States, and others. Our students are diversified in many other areas including age, race, gender, and sexual orientation. Diversity in the lab has elucidated constructs through multiple cosmological lenses, which has led to rich discussions and complex theoretical developments. Leveraging these diverse perspectives in the lab and in the field we have concluded that a rigorous definition of resilience is multi-level, process-focused, evidence-based, context-respectful, and spirituality-inclusive.

First, although most research on resilience has been conducted on personal resilience, our emerging definition of resilience focuses on collective, multi-level understandings of resilience at the individual, team,
Answering Important Questions in the Field

After years of conducting research, the natural next step for the Center was to invite engaged scholars interested in the social sciences of spirituality and religion to share their perspectives about spirituality in resilience processes across international contexts. We have learned a great deal about resilience processes from the authors who contributed to this special issue. These scholars, and other reputable scholars in the field, have helped answer three important questions on the special issue topic: Why should scholars study international populations? Why should scholars study resilience processes? Why should scholars conduct multi-level, cross-disciplinary research? After addressing each of these questions, we will share future implications.

Why Should Scholars Study International Populations?

Psychology and allied social sciences are tasked with studying human behavior and providing services that help alleviate ills and promote health and social sustainability. Given the complexity of the subject matter, this is no easy task! Gaining such insights will require rigorous research that stretches beyond what the field has historically employed. In a 2008 article in the American Psychologist, Arnett asserted that the “central challenge for American psychologists in the 21st century is to cross our borders as never before, not only geographically but intellectually, in pursuit of making psychology a fully human science” (p. 613).

Studying an anomalous population. Per the rules of science, social scientists attempt to sample from representative populations and make appropriate generalizations. When they find anomalies, they employ statistical procedures to reduce the impact of those anomalies on the findings. Most social scientists would not consider claiming generalizability across people if the sample population was vastly different from the represented population, unless there was a significant, justifiable reason for doing so; in this rare case, it would be expected that the presumption of generalizability or universality would be explicitly explained in the discussion. Despite this norm, most findings published by social scientists are subtly communicated as being universally applicable to human behavior through a lack of discussion of international differences. As social scientists, we seem to be studying an anomaly but acting as if it is the norm. The vast majority of behavioral science studies are conducted on only 5% of the population, and that sample differs widely on nearly every human feature than the broader sample of humans (Arnett, 2008).

An analysis of the top journals in the main sub-disciplines of psychology revealed that 96% of participants come from Western industrialized countries, with 68% coming from the United States. In other words, 96% of psychological samples come from countries that host 12% of the larger world populations. Additionally, most studies (67%) are conducted using undergraduate psychology students (Arnett, 2008). It also appears that other scientific fields hold themselves to a higher standard of research sophistication, as the field of psychology cities U.S. sources at a higher percentage than 19 other sciences. This is particularly alarming because the greatest theoretical basis for assuming variations in samples seems to exist in psychology research (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010).

Falling behind the times. Academia has been criticized for solving problems that only hold meaning for those in the “ivory tower.” Unfortunately, issues being addressed in the “ivory tower” are often behind the curve of social trends and current needs. Some argue that there are “good reasons to be concerned that progress in making psychology a truly international enterprise is failing to keep up with the pace of globalization” (Cole, 2006, p. 915). This is particularly concerning because the need for global awareness has never been greater:

At a time when globalization is intensifying and international conflicts in many fields are accelerating, the zeitgeist is heading in the opposite direction.... The main
thrust in American psychology continues to be a research focus on processes and principles that goes forward as if none of these issues existed. (Arnett, 2008, p. 612)

Considering the stakes involved, it seems unwise to assume that studies of psychology students in U.S. universities capture the processes of complex societies around the globe.

Psychology of spirituality and religion and international populations. Recent events have signaled that spiritual and religious issues are often at the center of human motivation and struggle, thus evidencing the need for social scientists focused on spirituality and religion to expand their research and theories to include international populations.

There are also good reasons to be concerned that progress in making psychology a truly international enterprise is failing to keep up with the pace of globalization... While progress has been made in bringing the entire range of nations into the forum of international psychology, the rapid escalation of religious fundamentalism and international conflict, combined with the increased power of many countries to visit massive destruction on others, are phenomena that urgently need to be discussed by all professionals who deal with the human sciences. Contrary to the beliefs of many, science has not replaced religion as a mode of understanding either the physical or the human world. It is little wonder, then, that the serious study of religion has undergone quantum changes in the past decade. (Cole, 2006, p. 915)

The study of spirituality and religion has surged, but the inclusion of international populations in such studies seems to be much slower.

In this special issue, Van Tongeren and colleagues demonstrated the international divisions that can occur when people feel threatened by the issues of people in foreign countries. The authors found that individuals who are identified as espousing an extrinsic religious orientation are significantly more likely to agree with four public policy items consistent with a security-oriented perspective after being primed with a few minutes of writing on the emergence of Ebola virus in the United States in September 2014. These and other findings demonstrate that the meaning and purpose of religion and spirituality for individuals and societies can largely influence the way people engage with the "foreigner."

Studying international populations underscores the necessity of interpreting results and tailoring interventions in accordance with the worldview, or cosmology, of our participants (O'Grady, Rollison, Hanna, Schreiber-Pan, & Ruiz, 2012). For instance, Van Tongeren and colleagues (this issue) suggested that national narratives may shape in-group, out-group responses, while O'Grady and Orton (this issue) illustrate how people's unique and shared cosmologies implicitly guide their interpretation of and engagement with the world. Thus, gleaning information about such cosmological narratives is crucial to helping social scientists understand patterns or trends.

Likewise, social scientists need to remember that the assumptions that guide psychological science reflect a worldview that is not shared by the majority of the world's population (Slife & Whoolery, 2006). As a case in point, Ting (this issue) highlights how some of the terms and conceptualizations of mental and social heath do not translate well into many populations. The Tibetan population studied by Ting expressed spiritual beliefs and rituals that diverge from traditional U.S.-based spiritual practices. For the most part, spirituality and religiosity outside of the United States have been unexplored, and most studies that do engage international populations do so from cosmologies, ontologies, epistemologies, methodologies, and instrumentation grounded in and developed from a Western cosmology. As social scientists, self-awareness about our personal, national, and institutional cosmologies is more likely to promote accurate assessment and ethical intervention because we will be less likely to impose our worldviews as universal givens.

Current debates (such as those regarding terrorists and refugees, building walls, or opening borders) should prompt social scientists of religion and spirituality to escalate the number of evidenced-based, theory-driven studies of resilience across international populations. In addition, studying spirituality and religion in international populations should enlarge the repertoire of spiritual constructs, languages, and practices for psychological exploration and intervention. Such studies should attempt to move beyond dichotomies and false generalizations toward sophisticated investigations of contextually nuanced processes.

Why Should Scholars Study Resilience Processes?

Most people, if not all, will encounter a trauma or crisis sometime in their lifetime, and research has shown that certain protective factors, including the resources, beliefs, and practices of individuals, teams, organizations, communities, and nations influence the degree to which people bounce back, slide backwards, or spring forward following such disruptions (Aten, O'Grady, Milstein, Boan, & Schruba, 2014; O'Grady
& Orton, this issue). Given the salience of reducing and managing the impact of disasters on people and communities and the consequences of failing to do so, the need for understanding resilience processes seems obvious. Over a decade ago, Bonanno (2004) published an article in the *American Psychologist* cautioning psychologists against overemphasizing pathology and underemphasizing resilience:

It is imperative that future investigations of loss and trauma include more detailed study of the full range of possible outcomes; simply put, dysfunction cannot be fully understood without a deeper understanding of health and resilience.... As we move into the next millennium, it will be imperative ... to take a fresh look at the various ways people adapt and even flourish in the face of what otherwise would seem to be potentially debilitating events. (pp. 26–27)

Since 2004, there have been some notable shifts toward a balance between the study of pathology and the study of resilience, but there are gaps yet to be filled.

**Resilience in psychology.** Historically, psychology has tended toward studies of pathology, in general, and post-traumatic symptomology, in particular, when it comes to investigations of trauma. However, recent attention to positive features of human functioning have ushered in a more balanced inquiry of post-trauma trajectories. For instance, a number of notable scholars have argued that studying resilience as the absence or inverse of PTSD misses the point (Linley & Joseph, 2005). Rather, they suggest that many people experience adversarial growth, stress-related growth, or post-traumatic growth, and that the processes involved in such growth engenders distinct consideration (Linley & Joseph, 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) proposed that growth following adversity seems to manifest in three areas: enhanced relationships, changes in views about themselves, and changes in life philosophy. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) described posttraumatic growth as occurring in the same broad categories, but also added that growth following disasters or trauma can include changes in spirituality. The study of resilience produces rich areas for investigation into human and social processes.

**Moving beyond simple variance-based investigations of resilience.** Variance theories explain a phenomenon in terms of input/output functions in which a variable or set of variables predict or "cause" a specific outcome and are easily plugged into a mathematical formula. In contrast, process theories of research attend to the intersectionality of likely conditions, potential processes, and external forces (Mohr, 1982). Although a process approach to research is less frequently employed, many scholars argue that most of the conditions being studied in the social sciences are too complex for simplistic statistical procedures, even when the sample size is large.

Large-scale disasters and extreme personal traumas are anomalies, and, therefore, are especially difficult to explain by a variance-based ontological paradigm because they would be dismissed as outliers and as non-generalizable. In contrast, these events are conducive to explanation within a process-based ontological paradigm because they are extreme events, they occur over a period of time, and they generate massive amounts of verbal data. This is not to suggest that social scientists should do away with variance-based research, but rather that the challenges of the day mandate careful selection and execution of our methods. This seems especially salient when addressing complex social dynamics. In an article on the virtues of qualitative research, Gergen, Josselson, and Freeman (2015) encouraged scholars to consider a grander potentiality for psychology:

It is critical, then, that the field comes to appreciate and honor the multiple ways in which psychological inquiry can contribute to both the field and society at large. Giving voice to the marginalized, undermining the taken for granted, helping a community rebuild, or generating new ways of seeing the world—for example—should take their place alongside hypothesis testing in the contribution of psychology to society. (p. 9)

Given that most would agree that resilience is neither a one-time event nor simply an output variable, it seems reasonable to consider processes and complex relationships in our studies.

**Psychology of spirituality and religion and resilience processes.** Trauma activates pathways and processes that are inherently spiritual for many people, which makes the study of religion and spirituality in resilience processes a natural fit and vital endeavor. Consistent with this sentiment, Peres, Moreira-Almeida, Nasello, and Koenig (2007) stated,

When people become traumatized they often look for a new sense of meaning and purpose in their life. Spiritual or religious beliefs and practices are important components of almost all cultures. Religiosity and spirituality
Psychologists of religion and spirituality have much to contribute to the understanding of resilience in people and communities and could do so by considering their specific areas of expertise within a framework of resilience processes.

In this issue, Worthington and colleagues explain that many people look to faith communities, faith leaders, and theological narratives to provide comfort and direction and to fulfill physical and emotional needs. They added that forgiveness might play an important role in promoting resilience by mitigating the effects of rumination and emotional responses. Transgressions are often a component of traumatic events; thus, forgiveness can help alleviate feelings and cognitions associated with the effects of the offense. Worthington et al.’s article exemplifies an effort to refocus an area of expertise within the psychology of religion and spirituality (forgiveness) within the framework of resilience processes (forgiveness processes). Similarly, other virtues (e.g., humility, hope, gratitude, and fortitude) could also benefit from re-investigation using a resilience process orientation.

Why Should Scholars Conduct Multi-Level, Cross-Disciplinary Research?

Psychology has notoriously been a science of the individual. In fact, the field is so grounded in assumptions of individualism that it will likely require scholars from fields more adept at seeing individuals within systems and at analyzing the system as the unit of analysis to expand this view. This may be particularly necessary when engaging in process-oriented studies of resilience. In 2011, Cacioppo, Reis, and Zautra published an article in American Psychologist proposing the value of studying social resilience.

Social resilience, however, is inherently a multilevel construct, revealed by capacities of individuals, but also groups, to foster, engage in, and sustain positive social relationships and to endure and recover from stressors and social isolation. Emergent levels of organization, ranging from dyads, families, and groups to cities, civilizations, and international alliances have long been apparent in human existence, but identifying the features of individuals, relationships, and group structures and norms that promote social resilience—and determining effective interventions to build social resilience—represent some of the most important challenges facing... contemporary behavioral science. (p. 43)

The constructs and measures in psychology rigidify its individualistic professional cosmology. The constraints of this cosmology may inhibit researchers’ ability to notice the nested nature of resilience.

Multi-level conceptualizations of resilience. Early studies of resilience in psychology focused on individual traits or attributes of resilience. Although sufficient research exists in areas such as personality and neuropsychology to substantiate intrinsic and biological variations of individual resilience, there is growing recognition that reducing resilience to an individual-level feature is poor science that could have devastating consequences.

A dark mark on psychology’s history is its early propensity to attribute shortcomings to the individual without holding systems responsible for the differences found between populations. The multicultural movement helped highlight the importance of understanding people within the context of the systems that give them life. It seems particularly important to consider systems when studying resilience so as to not overburden traumatized individuals with the responsibility of thriving. Scholars in privileged positions need to resist the urge to opt out of their social responsibilities when studying resilience.

Some resilience scholars have noted that an important attribute of resilience or growth “is its interpersonal dimension, and as psychologists we should endeavor also to find ways to facilitate growthful interactions in the wider communities we inhabit. However, this remains a very novel topic, and one that requires much more research attention” (Joseph & Linley, 2006, p. 1050). An accurate and responsible way to explore resilience in populations is to remember the systemic influences of social capital, infrastructures, policy, institutions, and national cosmologies on resilience. This reframing of resilience may be challenging for the field not only because of the tendency to view the individual in isolation, but because social influences highlight the need for social interventions—perhaps even by the researchers themselves.

Playing in the sandbox with others. Some fields of study make better bedfellows than others. Chan and Rhodes (2013) proposed a number of justifications
and realities of integrating psychology with other social science fields, particularly sociology. He noted that many questions within the purview of psychology are inherently interdisciplinary. Further, common themes are already being considered by the other fields, so it is counterproductive to reinvent the wheel; instead, collaboration may enhance the outcomes produced by the study of those themes. Chan and Rhodes argued that “information transfer can allow findings and insights from one discipline to be extrapolated and exploited by another discipline” (p. 127). The social nature of resilience, particularly, encourages multi-disciplinary investigations.

The psychology of religion and spirituality and allied social scientists. There is a small, but growing movement of scientists who are creating multi-disciplinary teams to find cures for some of the toughest diseases. We encourage psychologists of religion and spirituality to invite other social scientists interested in the study of religion and spirituality to join with them in solving some of the toughest social problems of our day. We caution such scholars to resist the temptation to overemphasize the role of individual-level spirituality in fostering resilience. We are hopeful that the psychology of religion and spirituality can lead out in multi-level analysis of resilience in diverse environments. This will most likely be realized through novel collaborations.

Several of the contributors to this special issue made an effort to frame their scholarship from a collective level of analysis. In their study of expeditionary care providers in Romania, Newmeyer and colleagues found some preliminary support for the notion that a team of care providers can help buoy the spiritual, psychological, and spiritual resources of another team of care providers in international contexts. Van Tongeren and colleagues shared implications of various types of individual-level spirituality on national-level responses. Ting couched her analysis and interventions from a collectivistic approach to resilience when working with the Tibetan people. Worthington and colleagues framed the lack of forgiveness as a public health issue, and proposed forgiveness as a community intervention for restoring health following disasters. O'Grady and Orton found that resilience among survivors of the Haiti earthquake was a community, rather than an individual, project.

Most psychology of religion and spirituality researchers are not trained to conceptualize resilience from multiple levels of analysis, so partnering with other social scientists may be necessary for rigorous research. There are professional organizations, each with several associated journal outlets, for the field of sociology of religion (see Sociology of Religion) and the field of management, spirituality, and religion (see Journal of Management, Spirituality, and Religion). The shared emphasis on a traditionally marginalized area of investigation may foster easy alliances between the fields, thus positioning scholars at the cutting edge of solving critical social problems.

Conclusion

Several prominent mainstream psychology researchers have presented compelling arguments for scholars to study and partner with international populations, to study resilience processes, and to consider multi-level conceptions of resilience. The special issue published in this journal by Aten and Walker (2012) demonstrated the value of studying spirituality and trauma. This special issue builds on that work and is the first to address the topic of spirituality in resilience process across international populations. We are impressed with the efforts of the contributors to stretch their professional cosmologies to meet the unusual criteria of the special issue. We view this as a beginning step in the development of a timely and valuable topic of inquiry. We hope psychologists will form partnerships with scholars from other fields interested in spirituality and religion in the study of resilient individuals, teams, organizations, communities, and nations.

We encourage journal editors and funding agencies to step down from their ivory towers and out of their academic stovepipes, so that they can support cutting-edge scholarship teams in the effort to solve the most pressing social issues around the world.

References


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