Character strengths and psychological well-being as predictors of life satisfaction among multicultural populations

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CHARACTER STRENGTHS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING
AS PREDICTORS OF LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG
MULTICULTURAL POPULATIONS

by
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ABSTRACT

Character Strengths and Psychological Well-Being as Predictors of Life Satisfaction Among Multicultural Populations

by

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Dr. Christopher Heavey, Examination Committee Chair
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The purpose of this study was to examine if facets of character strengths and psychological well being differentially predicted life satisfaction among four racial groups in a sample of 572 university students. Participants completed assessment instruments measuring character strengths, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction. Regarding character strengths, the following were predictive of life satisfaction: Caucasians, intellectual strengths and emotional strengths; African Americans and Hispanic Americans, theological strengths; and Asian Americans, theological strengths, emotional strengths, and intellectual strengths. Regarding psychological well-being, the following were predictive of life satisfaction: Caucasians, self-acceptance and environmental mastery; African Americans, none of the domains; Hispanic Americans, self-acceptance; and Asian Americans, environmental mastery and self-acceptance. Results were considered within the context of limitations and implications were discussed.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Psychology</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well-Being</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Minorities and Mental Health</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Present Study</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypotheses</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2  METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3  FINDINGS OF THE STUDY</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive Statistics</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square Test</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANOVAS and Post Hoc Tests</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correlations among the Dimensions</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Regressions</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4  SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Group Identification</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racial Group Differences</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associations among Dimensions</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associations with Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  Descriptive Statistics .......................................................................................... 56
Table 2  Racial Groups And Their Degree Of Identification With Their Group ........ 57
Table 3  Correlations Among Caucasians ...................................................................... 61
Table 4  Correlations Among African Americans ......................................................... 63
Table 5  Correlations Among Hispanic Americans ....................................................... 65
Table 6  Correlations Among Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders ................................ 67
Table 7  Summary Of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis For Psychological Well-Being Domains Predicting Life Satisfaction Among Caucasians .......... 73
Table 8  Summary Of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis For Character Strength Factors Predicting Life Satisfaction Among Caucasians ......................................................... 73
Table 9  Summary Of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis For Psychological Well-Being Domains Predicting Life Satisfaction Among African Americans ................................................................. 74
Table 10 Summary Of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis For Character Strength Factors Predicting Life Satisfaction Among African Americans ......................................................... 74
Table 11 Summary Of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis For Psychological Well-Being Domains Predicting Life Satisfaction Among Hispanic Americans ................................................................. 75
Table 12 Summary Of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis For Character Strength Factors Predicting Life Satisfaction Among Hispanic Americans ................................................................. 75
Table 13 Summary Of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis For Psychological Well-Being Domains Predicting Life Satisfaction Among Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders ................................................................. 76
Table 14 Summary Of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis For Character Strength Factors Predicting Life Satisfaction Among Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders ................................................................. 76
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The field of psychology is replete with studies examining the negative aspects of psychological functioning such as anxiety, depression, and other similar pathologies. There exists a propensity to focus on the etiology and amelioration of dysfunctional behavior (Robbins & Kliewer, 2000). The domain of psychology in general has predominantly focused on the topic of mental illness and has considerably advanced our knowledge of the etiology, assessment, and treatment of many major mental illnesses (Seligman, 2002). Furthermore, psychology has operated out of the medical, or disease, paradigm of individual functioning and it unfortunately became equivalent to victimology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

However, it has been argued that counseling psychology, an applied subfield of psychology, has long been interested in individuals' psychological strengths and resources but significant theoretical or empirical advancements regarding optimal human functioning have been lacking within the field (Gelso & Woodhouse, 2003). Although significant progress has been made regarding mental illness, it has unfortunately come at the expense of researching the more positive aspects of human functioning (Seligman, 2002). In its quest to ameliorate mental illness, psychology forgot its two other basic callings: nurturing genius and improving the lives of all individuals (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Furthermore, the field of psychology does not know much about human thriving and how to promote it as a result of not dedicating enough
resources to that endeavor and because it has failed to acknowledge the quality of the
question (Sheldon & King, 2001).

During one 10-year span there were seventeen articles published on psychological
dysfunction for every one article published on psychological well-being (Myers &
Diener, 1995). Similarly, it has been noted that there have been 46,000 papers about
depression and only 400 papers about joy in the psychological literature during the last
thirty years (Myers, 2000). In addition, various scientific journals in psychology (e.g.,
Journal of Abnormal Psychology) focus exclusively on topics associated with
pathological functioning (i.e., psychopathology) (Christopher, 1999).

While the field of psychology has extensively examined the negative effects of
psychological functioning (e.g., trauma and abuse), it has also ignored the very common
observation that extraordinary growth, strength, and creativity often result from these
undesirable events (Seligman, 2000). Unfortunately, psychological well-being has not
received the same theoretical and research focus of attention (as psychopathology), even
though it is one of the most pivotal concepts in psychology (Christopher, 1999). That is,
psychological well-being provides a baseline from which we determine psychopathology,
as well as it being a critical aspect in theories of personality and development
(Christopher, 1999). Clinically, knowledge of psychological well-being assists the
therapist in determining the possible direction that therapy should take in ameliorating
psychological distress and in informing the goals for psychological interventions
(Christopher, 1999).

In addition to psychological well-being being crucial in the theoretical and clinical
realms, it is significant because, generally, all individuals strive for well-being. In other
words, human beings desire to be more than just free of certain pathological symptoms or
clinical diagnosis. They yearn to get the most out of life by living optimally and by performing at peak levels. Seligman (2002) writes that individuals yearn more than to just fix their weaknesses and that they desire to have purposeful lives.

Furthermore, prevention research has revealed that human strengths act as buffers against mental illness and its mission should be to learn how to instill them in young people (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Hence, instead of treating mental illness after the fact, it would seem much more prudent to study and widely promote those human strengths that deter mental illness from developing in the first place.

While it is certainly crucial to understand and ameliorate psychopathology, it is equally critical to comprehend and promote the positive aspects of psychological functioning. Thus, the focus of this study and paper will be to examine character strengths and psychological well-being as predictors of life satisfaction among various multicultural populations. As will be discussed later in this paper, there has been a dearth of research conducted on these dimensions as they specifically relate to ethnic minorities. However, it is first imperative to now turn to a discussion of the emerging field of positive psychology and character strengths.

Positive Psychology

Positive psychology is said to have started in 1998 (Seligman & Peterson, 2003). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) write that positive psychology centers on the study of positive individual traits, positive subjective experiences, and the institutions that permit those positive traits and positive experiences. Positive psychology involves changing the focus from repairing what is worst in life to the creation of what is best in life (Seligman, 2000). Seligman (2003) contends that strengths and virtues, as well as negative traits, are basic to human nature. Positive psychologists view both strengths and
weaknesses as genuine and believe they can be researched and comprehended scientifically (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Thus, positive psychology entails scientifically examining everyday human virtues and strengths and attempts to broaden the scope of psychology to include an examination of the motives, capacities, and potentials of the individual (Sheldon & King, 2001).

Positive psychology differentiates itself from humanistic psychology because it claims to rely on the scientific method and empirical research to comprehend individuals and their lives as opposed to the humanists who were suspicious of the scientific method but nonetheless believed that people were inherently good (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Furthermore, humanistic psychology has been criticized for accentuating the self and encouraging self-centeredness at the expense of collective well-being (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). For example, Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, and Vohs (2005) reported increasing peoples’ self-esteem has become a national priority as there is the prevalent belief that low self-esteem is at the core of individual and societal ills. However, research reveals that programs aimed at increasing self-esteem do not substantially reduce problematic behavior or improve the academic performance of young individuals (Baumeister, Campbell, Krueger, & Vohs, 2005).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) write that in order to determine what is wrong with individuals we routinely turn to well-known and accepted classification manuals such as the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). However, they correctly note that no such equivalent exists for assessing those things that are right with individuals or for determining the good life. Furthermore, they state that mental health professionals typically equate wellness with the mere absence of distress as if failing to meet diagnostic criteria for any

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particular disorder is a worthwhile goal for which individuals should strive. Seligman and Peterson (2003) argue that positive psychology's progress will be impeded if it utilizes a vernacular that reflects deficiency and disease and thus they advocate that an authoritative classification that assesses various areas of human excellence, conceptualized as an antithesis to the DSM, is very much needed.

Therefore, it would seem that in order to gain a more accurate and comprehensive picture of individuals' complete psychological functioning we should be examining their psychological strengths as well as their deficits. To fail to do so would seem to provide the mental health professional with a biased and simply inaccurate view of the individual. Unfortunately, this is not typically done in our society.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) write that insurance companies remunerate for the assessment and treatment of psychological disorders and not for the advancement of fulfillment and happiness. They add that the National Institute of Mental Health only utilizes a small fraction of its budget to fund research on mental health and thus its name is really a misnomer as it focuses on mental illness disproportionately more than on mental health. Therefore, the medical model of disease is deeply entrenched in our society and it will probably take some time for another perspective to take an equal hold in our culture. Offering a radically different perspective, the new field of positive psychology wants to do exactly that. It wants to change the landscape of mental health and Western thought by emphasizing happiness and well-being as being worthy outcomes of scientific inquiry (Seligman, 2003).

Seligman (2000) proposes that effective prevention of mental illness should come from measuring and building human strengths such as optimism, hope, courage, responsibility, perseverance, and loving-kindness. In fact, psychologists have revealed
various strengths that deter mental illness such as future-mindedness, interpersonal skill, faith, work ethic, honesty, and insight (Seligman & Peterson, 2003). Snyder and McCullough (2000) report that the principles and findings from positive psychology should be disseminated widely to individuals, groups, and societies via education, therapies, various sources of media (e.g., journals, books, and television), political policies, and community planning. Perhaps, many disorders could be prevented in the first place if our priorities in mental health shifted by taking a more proactive, instead of reactive, stance on how we conceptualize and treat mental disorders. This approach would seem to be more cost-effective over the long run, in addition to saving people the tremendous psychological pain that is inherent in having a mental disorder.

It seems to be easier for the field of psychology to focus on the negative aspects of individual psychological functioning than the positive aspects of human functioning. But why is this? There are potentially many answers to this question. For example, in regards to why we so frequently experience negative emotions, Seligman (2002) contends that the answer might be found in evolutionary theory and that first we have to compare the purpose and meaning of negative emotions to positive ones. In regards to negative emotions (e.g., fear or anger), he writes that they warn us against external threat and prepare us to be vigilant. In evolution, an external threat might harm us or jeopardize our survival, especially considering that external threats are zero-sum games in which one individual’s win is another’s loss. Furthermore, the more serious an outcome (e.g., life or death), the more the emotions experienced will be intense and in their extreme forms.

Therefore, Seligman (2002) concludes that the proliferation of negative emotions has been likely favored by natural selection for the above-mentioned reasons and those individuals in the past who strongly experienced negative emotions, when they thought
their life was in jeopardy, were the best fighters or those who fled the swiftest, thus
passing those survival-enhancing genes down to further generations.

But what about positive emotions? Could there be an evolutionary reason for why
individuals also experience them? Fredrickson (1998) reports that positive emotions also
serve a purpose. She claims that positive emotions allow us to expand our social,
intellectual, and physical resources and strengthen our reserves in order to be able to
access them in case of a threat or an opportunity. Fredrickson (1998) suggests that
positive emotions might have protective health properties that counteract the aftereffects
(e.g., elevated blood pressure) of negative emotions. Furthermore, she has noted that
positive emotions might strengthen an individual’s psychological resiliency, which in
turn, should lead to enhanced emotional well-being. Fredrickson (1998) writes that
individuals are more attracted to us when we experience positive affect, and therefore,
friendships and love tend to crystallize and are more likely to endure. Furthermore,
positive emotions allow us to think openly, creatively, and flexibly, as we are more
amenable to new experiences and ideas (Fredrickson, 1998).

Seligman (2002) states that when one is experiencing positive affect, thinking is
likely to happen in a different brain region and probably has a distinct neurochemistry
altogether than when thinking in a negative mood. Furthermore, he succinctly reports
that being in a positive mood simply makes us think in a totally different way than when
we are experiencing negative affect.

A recent study was conducted that highlights the importance of positive emotions.
Keyes (2002) examined languishing and flourishing in a sample of adults taken from the
1995 Midlife in the United States study. Mental health was operationalized as symptoms

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of positive feelings and was characterized as flourishing. Conversely, the absence of mental health was conceptualized as languishing. Several results were reported.

Those individuals who were moderately mentally healthy and flourishing revealed the best emotional health, had the fewest days of work cutbacks, and the fewest days of work loss. Conversely, functioning was greatly impaired when languishing and a major depressive episode occurred at the same time during the past year. Languishing was related to poor emotional health, greater likelihood of a high number of lost workdays and work cutback due to mental health, and more limitations of daily living. Furthermore, more than fifty percent of the individuals in the sample revealed a moderate level of mental health and less than 25% of them were considered flourishing. Languishing was as common as experiencing a major depressive episode and approximately 5% of this sample had the debilitating combination of languishing with a major depressive episode.

The sample's findings were extrapolated to a similar segment in the general population and it was estimated that a total of 45 million adults would be considered languishing or depressed (or both) whereas 32 million adults would be characterized as mentally healthy based on the occurrence of flourishing in life. The majority of the population would not be considered mentally ill nor mentally healthy, which would total approximately 77 million individuals. The author recognized a significant limitation to the study, which was that the data were cross-sectional.

This study clearly reveals that the mere absence of mental illness does not translate into an individual being mentally healthy. Instead, it seems that the individual is in a psychological “no man’s land” where he (or she) is neither mentally ill nor mentally
healthy. Although positive emotions are a central construct within the field of positive psychology, it is now critical to turn to a discussion of virtue and character strengths.

**Virtue and Character Strengths**

Sandage and Hill (2001), drawing from the literature on moral philosophy and psychology, claim that there are six dimensions in defining virtue: ethics and health, embodied character, strength and resilience, community-related, meaningful purpose, and wisdom. Virtue has been characterized as a mental process that facilitates an individual’s ability to think and behave in self-advantageous ways as well as in a society-benefiting manner (McCullough & Snyder, 2000). In the first dimension, ethics and health, there is an integration between the two in the ideal advancement of wellness, even though the modern medical model differentiates ethics and wellness. Embodied character is the second dimension in which virtues are conceptualized as more than simply attitudes and qualities but are the expression of one’s internal character. The third dimension, strength and resilience, entails the conceptualization of virtues as being qualities of individual resilience and strength and are also likely to be nurtured within the family. Virtues are also embedded within particular cultures and communities, which is the fourth dimension, and an individual with virtues incorporates the community’s ideals. The fifth dimension is in regards to virtues being connected to a life purpose that provides meaning to individuals. The last dimension reveals that wisdom is a critical virtue that embodies many different dimensions.

Sandage and Hill (2001) acknowledge that the concept of virtue has not been adequately researched in modern social science due to its inherent language regarding morals and values. That is, the social sciences avoid discussing morals and values because it strives to be value-neutral, objective, and scientific, although this is not
completely possible. For example, the practice of psychotherapy is supposed to be
detached from the imposition of one’s values on to the client even though all of the
theoretical orientations that psychotherapists utilize as their framework inherently entail
hidden values and assumptions about human nature and the etiology and treatment of
psychological disorders. Although the social sciences have not traditionally investigated
constructs such as virtue and character due to its uneasiness with these morally-laden
constructs, this is slowly starting to change.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) have conceptualized the components of good character
as being present at three different levels: virtues, character strengths, and situational
themes. The first level, virtues, are those critical characteristics that seem to be universal
and that have been long revered by religious thinkers and moral philosophers. Those
virtues are temperance, wisdom, transcendence, humanity, courage, and justice and it is
believed that these virtues have to be sufficiently present in order for an individual to be
considered to have good character.

The next level consists of character strengths, which are the distinguishable
mechanisms or processes by which an individual defines and displays the virtues. The
virtue of justice, for example, might be actualized through such strengths as being
equitable, doing what is right, and taking a stand against injustice. Although these
strengths are similar in that they involve the notion of justice they are also different and it
is unlikely that an individual will exhibit all the strengths within a virtue group. It is
believed that if an individual evinces just one or two strengths within a particular virtue
group then he or she could be deemed to have good character.

The third, and last, level is situational themes which are those specific habits which
guide individuals to actualize particular character strengths in certain situations and
which are meant to describe how we might act in a certain setting such as the workplace. It is important to note that themes are different from character strengths in various ways. First, themes are situated in specific settings such as work themes being different from family themes and there can be variability in how themes manifest themselves in any given setting. For example, within a particular family or work setting, the themes that become manifested can vary depending on culture or gender. Lastly, themes are not necessarily good or bad and can be used to actualize strengths (thus contributing to virtues) or can be acquired for the wrong purposes. Furthermore, they add that different configurations of themes can be utilized by individuals to ascertain the same results. That is, there are different routes to becoming a good person and what is important is that one find the appropriate setting to apply one’s themes to his or her desired ends.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) have created a system for classifying and measuring twenty-four specific strengths that fall under six broad virtues: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. The authors report that these positive traits can be found across culture and history. Furthermore, they state that their research of authoritative philosophical and religious doctrines reflect their six broad virtues to be omnipresent. Seligman (2002) writes that three criteria in selecting strengths were used: they had to be malleable, revered in their own right, and they had to be venerated in almost every culture.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) write that the six broad virtues are rooted in the traditions of various cultures throughout the world. For example, within China, these positive traits are grounded in Confucian and Taoist virtues. Within the region of South Asia, the six broad virtues are rooted in Buddhist and Hindu virtues. From Western
civilization, these positive traits are reflected in Athenian, Judeo-Christian, and Islamic virtues.

Under the broad virtue of wisdom and knowledge, there exists the character strengths of creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, and perspective. Under the domain of courage are the character strengths of bravery, persistence, integrity, and vitality. The character strengths of love, kindness, and social intelligence fall under the category of humanity with the positive traits of citizenship, fairness, and leadership being subsumed under the domain of justice. The authors state that the character strengths of forgiveness and mercy, humility and modesty, prudence, and self-regulation make up the category of temperance. Finally, the domain of transcendence consists of appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality.

An inherent problem with enumerating such positive traits is that it inevitably leaves out other potentially positive character strengths. Of course, it is impossible to list every potential character strength but Peterson and Seligman's classification system seems like a good place to start this much-needed endeavor. Research on positive psychology and these character strengths has been initiated and will be reviewed next.

*Research in Positive Psychology*

Although research in this area is nascent, various studies have been conducted in the field of positive psychology. For example, Isaacowitz, Vaillant, and Seligman (2003) examined the strengths and life satisfaction of young, middle-aged, and older adults. There were three community samples of adults ranging in age from 18 to 93 and one sample consisting of older, surviving individuals of the Grant study of graduates from Harvard University. The authors reported several results.
Among the young adult sample, hope emerged as the sole strength that significantly predicted satisfaction with life. Among the middle-aged sample, loving relationships was the sole strength to significantly predict life satisfaction. In the community older adult sample, there were three predictors of satisfaction with life: hope, citizenship, and loving relationships. However, in the Grant sample of older men, loving relationships and appreciation of beauty predicted satisfaction with life. Furthermore, greater satisfaction with life correlated with greater levels of strengths in all four samples of individuals.

In an interesting study, Peterson and Seligman (2003) investigated if individuals’ character strengths changed before and after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City. Their sample consisted of individuals who had completed their on-line assessment instrument before and after September 11, 2001. The sample was overwhelmingly female (72%) and Caucasian (85%), which are obvious limitations to the generalizability of their study’s results. Another limitation to the study is that individuals had to be computer literate and have access to a computer in order to participate in the study. Furthermore, we do not know what other personal characteristics potentially differentiate those who are computer users and participate in on-line studies from those who do not.

Nonetheless, they reported that the following seven character strengths revealed increases two months post terrorist attacks: gratitude, hope, kindness, leadership, love, spirituality, and teamwork. The authors also revealed that these character strengths continued to be elevated ten months after the terrorist attacks, although to a lesser degree, and identified these character strengths as religiously-oriented virtues as opposed to the more secular character strengths which apparently did not change in the wake of the attacks.
Positive psychology studies are beginning to be conducted with adolescents. For example, Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi (2003) conducted a study that investigated two groups of adolescents: those individuals experiencing daily chronic interest in their life experiences and those individuals experiencing chronic boredom. Utilizing a socio-economically diverse sample, both groups of participants were compared on various measures of well-being including locus of control, global self-esteem, and emotions in regards to one’s future prospects. It was hypothesized that chronic interest was a sign of psychological health and chronic boredom was evidence of psychic dysfunction.

Several findings were reported. In general, the interested adolescents were more likely to perceive themselves as being effective (greater locus of control) and had a stable positive self-concept whereas the bored adolescents were negative and had less stable self-concepts. The interested individuals were more likely (than the bored individuals) to feel more positively and less negatively about aging and the future, and this had nothing to do with their family’s financial standing or economic class. In regards to racial differences, Caucasians and African Americans reported greater levels of optimism than Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans. Further research needs to be conducted investigating cultural differences such as this in order to explain these results.

In another study, Steen, Kachorek, and Peterson (2003) investigated character strengths among adolescents. The authors utilized twenty distinct high school classes ranging in subjects as focus groups. The participants were asked what they thought about various character strengths (4-6 for each class discussion), with each session lasting 45 to 90 minutes and all discussions being audiotaped and then transcribed.

The results indicated that the participants valued certain strengths such as love of learning, spirituality, wisdom, social and practical intelligence, leadership, and the
capacity to love/be loved, although they were willing to discuss all the strengths that were chosen for discussion. The participants believed that character strengths fall along a continuum and individuals exhibit these strengths to varying degrees, although they also felt that all of these strengths could be developed or learned from life experience and from parents. The students also realized that the various strengths were interdependent, that peer pressure in the promotion of character strengths can be positive, and they could not state contemporary role models that exemplified the various character strengths.

_Criticisms_

Although research in the field of positive psychology is burgeoning and is perceived as long overdue, there are individuals who do not completely agree with the domain and its basic tenets and feel that there are some limitations to this emerging area. For example, positive psychology has been criticized for overlooking the contributions of their prior ancestors who wrote about positive mental health (Cowen & Kilmer, 2002). This seems to be a legitimate criticism considering that the influential works of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, for example, significantly predate the field of positive psychology.

It has also been argued that positive psychology lacks a unified and comprehensive theory that guides research in the field (Cowen & Kilmer, 2002). Furthermore, Cowen and Kilmer (2002) write that positive psychology is primarily focused on looking at cross-sections of adults while insufficiently focusing on early childhood development and examining the factors and processes that undergird early positive development.

As mentioned previously, positive psychologists have attempted to differentiate themselves from humanistic psychologists by their emphasis on the scientific method and their utilization of research to study optimal human functioning (Peterson & Seligman,
2004). This assertion, however, has been contested. For example, Rathunde (2001) writes that Maslow’s work does not reflect inadequate science or a narrow, overemphasis on the self, but rather points out that Maslow articulated the importance of science in examining ideal human functioning. Furthermore, Rathunde (2001) urges the field of positive psychology to openly acknowledge the historical contributions of Maslow, Dewey, and James to optimal individual functioning and suggests that the nascent field integrate their critical ideas.

Resnick, Warmoth, and Serlin (2001) write that positive psychology has espoused the same themes that humanistic psychologists have echoed over the past four decades and they reveal that even the term “positive psychology” derives from a chapter title in one of Maslow’s most influential books. The authors suggest that both fields, positive psychology and humanistic psychology, can inform and complement one another.

Some researchers have even been more critical of the field of positive psychology. For example, Held (2004) condemns the positive psychology movement as having a negative side, or negative tendency. She writes that the positive psychology movement has a dominant, polarizing, and separatist message and that some positive psychologists (including major spokespersons) react negatively or dismissively to any ideas that are incongruent with their dominant movement message.

Held (2004) also reports that having a positive attitude (i.e., thinking positive thoughts and experiencing positive emotions) has now become tyrannical in contemporary society and that it has negative unintended consequences such as individuals feeling worse because they cannot transcend their pain due to not having positive (or right) attitudes. For example, the self-help sections of bookstores across this country are replete with books on how to think positively. Although these books have
good intentions, they might unfortunately make individuals feel worse about themselves due to their overly simplified and empirically untested suggestions on how they can improve their lives.

Although there are legitimate criticisms to positive psychology, it is important to remember that this field is still very new and flourishing. Hopefully, in time, positive psychology’s adherents will successfully confront the significant issues that have been rightfully raised by its critics. Moreover, there is a need to examine these constructs among various cultural groups. Empirically investigating virtue and character strengths is a worthy scientific endeavor, as is the study of well-being, which will be discussed next.

*Well-Being*

The field of well-being has been traditionally conceptualized and researched in two distinct, though related, ways: subjective well-being and psychological well-being (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). Subjective well-being researchers have examined how individuals assess their lives, both cognitively and affectively (Diener, 1984). In contrast, psychological well-being researchers have analyzed how well individuals have met the existential challenges of life, which refers to critical life endeavors such as finding purpose in life, establishing quality interpersonal relationships, and personally growing as a human being (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). A review of the research conducted in the areas of subjective well-being and psychological well-being is warranted and will be discussed next, respectively.

*Subjective Well-Being*

As mentioned previously, subjective well-being has been theorized and defined as the way an individual cognitively and affectively evaluates his or her own life (Diener,
Subjective well-being has three components: 1) an overall cognitive evaluation of life or domain satisfaction, 2) the presence of pleasant affect, and 3) the absence of negative affect (Diener, 2000). The first component refers to an overall judgment that one makes in regards to life satisfaction (Myers & Diener, 1995). The second component refers to the individual experiencing a preponderance of positive emotions such as happiness (Myers & Diener, 1995). The third component entails the individual not or infrequently experiencing negative emotions such as depression (Myers & Diener, 1995). Therefore, an individual with high subjective well-being would feel satisfied with his or her life conditions and frequently experience positive emotions while infrequently feeling negative emotions (Lucas & Diener, 2000). Subjective well-being has also been construed as happiness and as an approach to defining the good life (Diener, 2000).

Various theories of happiness have been proposed: need and goal satisfaction theories, process or activity theories, and genetic and personality predisposition theories (Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002). Regarding needs and goal satisfaction theories, the fundamental premise is that reducing tensions and satisfying one's psychological and biological needs and goals leads to happiness, with Freud's pleasure principle and Maslow's hierarchy of needs serving as examples of this approach. Therefore, happiness is a result after goals and needs have been met, or in other words, happiness is the final destination to which all activity is focused. Process, or activity, theories of happiness emphasize that engagement in an activity (or in life tasks) provides individuals with happiness. Both of the above-mentioned theories contend that subjective well-being will vary depending on the conditions of individuals' lives. However, proponents of the third theory of happiness (i.e., genetic and personality predisposition theories) argue that an individual's well-being level has an inherent element of stability (unexplained by life's
conditions), which is strongly affected by personality disposition. Furthermore, subjective well-being tends to be stable and consistent because of a significant genetic element, with some individuals having a predisposition to being happy or unhappy.

Diener (1984) has stated that the domain of subjective well-being has several key features. First, it is the individual who determines his or her own well-being (i.e., it is subjective). Second, subjective well-being includes positive (not just the mere absence of negative factors), as well as negative measures. Third, subjective well-being assessment instruments usually consist of a global evaluation of all aspects of an individual’s life. However, these instruments can also assess satisfaction within a particular life domain (e.g., marriage or work) and/or within a certain temporal period (e.g., assessing a brief period of a few weeks to over an entire life).

Correlates of Subjective Well-Being

A prominent subjective well-being study conducted in the 1960’s concluded that the happy person is “a young, healthy, well-educated, well-paid, extroverted, optimistic, worry-free, religious, married person with high self-esteem, high job morale, modest aspirations, of either sex and of a wide range of intelligence (Wilson, 1967, p. 294).” Since that time, research on subjective well-being has advanced considerably with some of the above-mentioned characteristics being no longer accurate (Diener, 1984). The various factors that have been analyzed in the subjective well-being field since Wilson’s characterization of the happy person will be discussed next.

Even though Wilson (1967) reported that youth predicted happiness, subsequent research has challenged this notion. It has been occasionally reported that there is a marginal decline in life satisfaction with age, but when other variables (e.g., income) are controlled, this relation is not found (Shmotkin, 1990). Other studies have often indicated
that satisfaction with life increases with age (or does not drop) (Herzog & Rodgers, 1981; Horley & Lavery, 1995; Stock, Okun, Haring, & Witter, 1983). It has been hypothesized that the discrepancy between Wilson’s findings and current ones may be due to older individuals staying healthier and more engaged in various life domains than previous generations (Bass, 1995).

In regard to health, an individual’s perception has more of an effect on his or her subjective well-being than does objective measures of health (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). However, if a person’s health consists of multiple or severe problems, this could negatively affect an individual’s subjective well-being, irrespective of one’s subjective evaluation (Diener et al., 1999). Nonetheless, if one’s health condition is less severe, then a substantial amount of adapting to the situation is possible (Diener et al., 1999). Although we do not fully understand what variables are involved in successfully adapting to disability and illness, it has been hypothesized that ill health might negatively affect well-being because it interferes with important goal attainment, and therefore, adaptation to illness might mean that one has to adjust his or her goals in life (Diener et al., 1999).

There are small, but significant, correlations between education and subjective well-being (Campbell, Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Cantril, 1965; Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz, & Diener, 1993), with education being more highly associated with well-being for low-income individuals (Campbell, 1981; Diener et al., 1993) and in impoverished nations (Veenhoven, 1994). It has been found that income and occupational status covaries with education (Campbell, 1981; Witter, Okun, Stock, & Haring, 1984). It seems that education might be indirectly associated with subjective well-being, with supporting research showing that this small relationship in the United States becomes nonsignificant.
or negative, when income (Campbell et al., 1976; Diener et al., 1993) and occupational status (Witter et al., 1984) are controlled. Thus, a significant part of the relation between education and subjective well-being is attributable to the correlation of education with income and occupational status (Diener et al., 1999).

When analyzing the relation between wealth/income and subjective well-being, there does not seem to be a significant relationship between these two variables (Diener et al., 1999). However, there is a trend for wealthy individuals to be somewhat happier than impoverished people in affluent nations, and wealthier nations seem to be much happier than poorer ones (Diener et al., 1999). In addition, income changes sometimes do not have the expected effects such as individuals who have acquired large sums of money having higher subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1999).

In a recent longitudinal study, setting financial success as a goal, the actual fulfillment of that goal, and satisfaction with different life domains was investigated (Nickerson, Schwarz, Diener, & Kahneman, 2003). Interestingly, it was reported that the negative effects of financial success as a goal were not as pervasive and adverse as previously suggested, although there were negative consequences, but these negative effects were reduced as household income increased. Furthermore, it was revealed that satisfaction with one’s job and family life were the strongest predictors of satisfaction with life.

Religion is a factor that is related to subjective well-being. Research has shown that religious individuals usually report elevated levels of life satisfaction and happiness (Poloma & Pendleton, 1990), while being slightly less susceptible to depression (Brown, 1993; Gartner, Larson, Allen, 1991). They are much less likely to break the law, abuse substances, commit suicide, and be unhappily married or divorced (Batson, Schoenrade,
& Ventis, 1993; Colasanto & Shriver, 1989). Religious individuals also have been found to live longer and be physically healthier (Koenig, Smiley, & Gonzales, 1988; Levin & Schiller, 1987; McIntosh & Spilka, 1990). One meta-analytic study found that health and religiosity were the two best predictors of subjective well-being among the elderly (Okun & Stock, 1987).

The association between subjective well-being and marriage that Wilson (1967) noted has been substantiated by other researchers. Large-scale studies have found that married individuals report higher levels of happiness than those never married, divorced, separated, or widowed (Diener et al., 1999). The causal direction of this association is still unresolved (Diener et al., 1999). There has been longitudinal research that has shown that well-adjusted and happy individuals are more likely to marry and remain married longer (Mastekaasa, 1992, 1994; Veenhoven, 1989). Research has suggested that the healthy effects of marriage (e.g., emotional and economic support) creates positive states of subjective well-being (Coombs, 1991; Gove, Style, & Hughes, 1990; Kessler & Essex, 1982).

Waite and Gallagher (2000) argue that it is marriage that causes better mental and emotional health for men and women, which cannot be explained by selection effects, and not that happier and healthier individuals attract and retain mates more easily. They reported various benefits of being married such as emotional support and intimacy, improved psychological health including reduced levels of depression, reduced problem drinking, and providing individuals with a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Subjective well-being research has found modest correlations between job satisfaction and life satisfaction (Tait, Padgett, & Baldwin, 1989), even though this relation has become stronger for women in recent decades, attributable to the availability
of new careers and their changing roles in society (Tait et al., 1989). Certain job characteristics that predict satisfaction have been researched and some conclusions have been ascertained (Diener et al., 1999). For example, it has been found that person-organization fit (Bretz & Judge, 1994), intrinsic rewards (Mottaz, 1985), and social benefits (Mottaz, 1985) are predictive of satisfaction. Due to the correlational association between job satisfaction and life satisfaction, the causal direction is not very well known and other variables influence both type of ratings (Diener et al., 1999).

In regards to gender and subjective well-being, research has indicated that women and men have approximately equal amounts of global happiness (Myers & Diener, 1995). In a meta-analysis examining 146 studies, it was reported that gender accounted for less than 1% of global well-being (Haring, Stock, & Okun, 1984) and these findings tend to generalize across nations (Inglehart, 1990; Michalos, 1991). This finding seems paradoxical because women experience depression more frequently than men in the general population (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-Text Revision, 2000). A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that women generally experience stronger, and with more frequency, positive and negative emotions as compared to men (Diener et al., 1999). In regards to intelligence, there are contradictory findings, but it probably does not directly influence subjective well-being (Diener et al., 1999).

Race was not a variable that Wilson (1967) mentioned in his influential subjective well-being study. Since then it has been analyzed and it does not seem to be related to subjective well-being (Myers & Diener, 1995). For example, African-Americans are marginally less susceptible to depression (Diener et al., 1993; Robins & Regier, 1991), indicate being nearly as happy as European-Americans (Diener et al., 1993; Robins &
Regier, 1991; Stock et al., 1985), and tend to score similarly on self-esteem tests (Crocker & Major, 1989). This is noteworthy considering the racial discrimination they experience. Possible explanations for their self-esteem maintenance include attributing difficulties to things outside of themselves (e.g., racism and prejudice) and valuing the things they are successful in (Myers & Diener, 1995). Cultural differences, however, do seem to affect subjective well-being. When research has analyzed levels of subjective well-being across various cultures, it has been found that nations vary greatly in their levels of happiness, even while controlling for income (Diener, Diener, & Diener, 1994). For example, collectivist cultures generally experience lower levels of subjective well-being compared to individualistic cultures (Diener, Suh, Smith, & Shao, 1995). This might be attributable to the tendency that collectivist societies emphasize collective well-being more than individual well-being.

In addition to demographic information, research has focused on the relation between personality traits and subjective well-being. It has been found that happy individuals can be characterized as having four internal traits: positive self-esteem, a sense of personal control, optimism, and extraversion (Myers & Diener, 1995). First, happy individuals feel good about themselves (Campbell, 1981). Second, people who are happy feel like they have a sense of control over their life and circumstances (Campbell, 1981; Larson, 1989). In other words, they feel empowered rather than helpless. Third, these individuals tend to be usually optimistic (Myers & Diener, 1995). Lastly, happy people are usually extraverted (Costa & McCrae, 1980; Diener, Sandvik, Pavot, & Fujita, 1992; Emmons & Diener, 1986a, 1986b; Headey & Wearing, 1992). Extraversion has been characterized as sociability, dominance, high activity, and warmth and has been clearly related to positive affect (Diener, 1998).
Furthermore, Diener and Seligman (2002) conducted a study that compared very happy individuals with average and very unhappy individuals. Several findings were reported. Very happy individuals have satisfying interpersonal relationships and do not spend much time alone (compared to average individuals), as opposed to unhappy individuals who seem to have worse than average social relationships. Thus, social relationships are necessary, but not sufficient, for being very happy, as are low levels of psychopathology, low neuroticism, and extraversion. There does not seem to be a single criterion for being very happy but the happiest individuals still experience unpleasant emotions at times but they tend to be happy most of the time (medium to moderately strong), although rarely euphoric or ecstatic.

Thus, research on the traits of positive self-esteem, optimism, and extraversion seem to confirm Wilson’s findings (1967) on these very same factors. That is, these variables do seem to characterize the happy person. Wilson also mentioned that being worry-free is another trait that describes the happy person. Subsequent research seems to confirm this trait as well, with neuroticism being strongly associated with negative affect while being inversely related with positive affect (Diener, 1998). Neuroticism is characterized by anxiety, pessimism, interpersonal sensitivity, and irritability (Diener, 1998).

Relatedly, the concept of flow, or autotelic experience, has been suggested as leading to subjective well-being (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Flow has been conceptualized as being such a pleasurable and all-consuming experience that it is engaged in for its own sake (hence, autotelic) regardless of any external factors such as money or fame (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Flow typically derives from various creative endeavors (e.g., music), religious experiences, and playing games or sports (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). However, experiencing flow is not just limited to creative activities as it has been
reported by individuals engaged in typical everyday activities such as studying or driving (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Csikszentmihalyi (1999) writes that the experience of flow has the following typical characteristics: clearly understanding what needs to be done moment to moment (e.g., knowing what musical note has to be played next), receiving immediate feedback from one’s actions (e.g., knowing where one’s shot in a sport went), and feeling that one’s skills match and are in balance with the challenge (if not, one might feel boredom or anxiety if there is a disequilibrium). Therefore, the experience of flow requires that an individual be skillful as well as have the ability to focus, concentrate, and persevere (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). It would be interesting for future research to examine whether it is possible to teach individuals to experience flow and how to get into that state.

As discussed up to this point, there have been great advances in our knowledge of subjective well-being. The following section will discuss the other research tradition in the field of well-being, namely psychological well-being.

Psychological Well-Being

Psychological well-being, or psychological health, has been theorized as consisting of six conceptually distinct domains of psychological functioning: Self-Acceptance, Environmental Mastery, Positive Relations with Others, Purpose in Life, Personal Growth, and Autonomy (Schmutte & Ryff, 1997). Before discussing each of these domains in further detail, it is essential to state some essential features of this approach to examining psychological well-being.

First, an assumption of the above-mentioned paradigm is that subjective well-being is not necessarily a condition for mental health (Robbins & Kliewer, 2000). For example, psychotic individuals might report being happy despite being psychologically distressed.
Therefore, additional features (besides subjective well-being) are essential in evaluating psychological health (Robbins & Kliewer, 2000). Subjective well-being researchers have criticized this model of well-being because it places too much authority on the outside evaluations of behavioral experts, rather than the individual (Diener, Sapyta, & Suh, 1998).

Ryff and Keyes (1995) have criticized previous research for not really answering the fundamental question: What does being psychologically healthy mean? Another criticism has been that prior formulations of well-being have largely been atheoretical (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Ryff (1989) developed a theory-derived, multidimensional model of psychological well-being that does not equate psychological health with the mere absence of psychopathology. The six dimensions of psychological well-being have been derived from clinical accounts of full and mature psychological functioning, synthesized from positive mental health criteria, and grounded in life-span developmental theories (Ryff, Magee, Kling, & Wing, 1999). A detailed description of the six domains of psychological well-being, along with high and low scorer characteristics, is warranted and will be discussed next.

The first dimension of psychological well-being to be discussed is self-acceptance. Ryff and Singer (1996) contend that this is a cardinal feature of positive psychological functioning and is characteristic of the mature, self-actualized, and optimal functioning human being. That is, having self-accepting and positive attitudes towards oneself is a central quality of good mental health. Individuals with high self-acceptance, by definition, would possess positive attitudes towards themselves, feel good about their past and present, and accept their good and bad qualities. Conversely, people with low self-
acceptance would be defined as either feeling dissatisfied with themselves, being unhappy with certain personal qualities, or feeling disappointed with their past.

Positive relations with others is another realm of psychological well-being. This is similar to self-acceptance, however, it involves interpersonal relationships (Keyes & Ryff, 1999). Having positive regard for other individuals, as well as oneself, is essential for the psychologically healthy person. Positive relations with others has been defined as the development and maintenance of warm and trusting interpersonal relationships, feeling empathy and affection for others, having the ability to love, and having a sense of responsibility to others. In addition to having these features, an individual with this characteristic is concerned about the welfare of others and comprehends that relationships are “give and take.” In contrast, a person who does not have positive relations with others is defined as being interpersonally isolated and frustrated, unempathic, is unwilling to make compromises to maintain friendship ties, and has few intimate and trusting relationships.

A third dimension of psychological well-being is autonomy, which is characterized by independence and self-determination (Ryff & Essex, 1992). Individuals who are self-actualizers and fully functioning have been described as having self-regulating behavior and as being immune to societal enculturation. They do not seek the approval of others because they evaluate themselves based on their own standards. Therefore, individuals with high autonomy are defined as resistant to thinking and behaving according to societal conventions, whereas people with low autonomy are defined as being more likely to conform to social pressures, are concerned about others’ judgments and evaluations of them, and rely on others’ opinions in order to make decisions.
A fourth domain of psychological well-being is environmental mastery, which refers to the individual being able to tailor his or her environment so it is reflective of his or her personality, along with his or her psychological and physical needs (Keyes & Ryff, 1999). Those with high environmental mastery are defined as making maximum use of their surrounding opportunities, are competent in managing the environment, and select contexts that are compatible with their subjective values and personal needs. Conversely, individuals with low environmental mastery lack a sense of control over their external environment, are not able to change their surrounding context, and have difficulty in managing their daily affairs.

The fifth dimension of psychological well-being is purpose in life, which includes the belief that life has meaning and purpose (Ryff, 1989). An individual who functions optimally has goals, acts intentionally, and has a sense of directedness, which, in turn, contributes to the feeling that life is meaningful. A person with high purpose in life would be characterized by beliefs that connote life purpose, objectives for living, feeling that one’s past and present have significance, and have a sense of directionality. This is in direct contrast to an individual with low purpose in life who would be described as having few goals in life, lacking a sense of direction, holding no beliefs that affirm life meaning, and lacking an overall sense of life purpose and meaning.

The last dimension of psychological well-being to be discussed is personal growth, which can be described as continuing to achieve one’s potential in expanding and developing as a human being (Ryff & Essex, 1992). Having an openness to new experiences and confronting new challenges are characteristics of this psychological dimension. Those who score high on this domain tend to see themselves as continuously growing and developing, changing in ways that are based on further self-knowledge, and
seeing improvements in themselves and their actions over time. In contrast, an individual who scores low on personal growth may feel personally stagnated, feels he or she has not improved over time, and lacks zest and interest for life.

Correlates of Psychological Well-Being

Research has been conducted in order to determine differences (if any) in psychological well-being across various factors such as age, gender, culture, and socioeconomic status. The studies that will be discussed next have been conducted within the six-dimension psychological well-being paradigm utilizing structured self-report scales (Ryff, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2002).

Ryff (1995) reviewed various studies she conducted on psychological well-being. Studies analyzing age differences in psychological well-being have reported consistent findings. In one empirical study conducted that established the validity and reliability of the above-mentioned self-report scales, individuals divided into young, middle-aged, and old-aged were asked to rate themselves on each of the six psychological well-being dimensions. Their responses revealed a varied pattern of significant age differences. For example, results indicated that environmental mastery and autonomy increased with age, especially from an individual’s young adulthood years to his or her midlife years. Conversely, personal growth and purpose in life decreased, particularly from the midlife years to the old age years. In regards to positive relations with others and self-acceptance, there were no significant age differences that were found across the three age groups.

In a second study, utilizing the same three age cohorts, very similar results were found although the findings lacked generalizability due to the sample of volunteers from the community. One possible explanation for these results lacking generalizability could
be because those who volunteered for this study might have been more motivated and psychologically sophisticated, and therefore, different from the rest of the community.

In a third study, a national sample and a reduced version of the original psychological well-being scales were utilized, revealing highly complementary findings with the two above studies. On the dimension of positive relations with others, the findings varied across the three studies in that there were no differences found to there being increases with age.

Further research (e.g., longitudinal studies) is needed in order to determine if these age patterns are reflective of cohort differences, or if they signify developmental changes (Ryff, 1995). The author contends that a possible explanation is that older adults might have limited opportunities for continued growth and development (Ryff, 1995). Furthermore, the recurring low ratings of older individuals on personal growth and purpose in life suggests that later life might have significant psychological challenges, which warrants further attention according to Ryff (1995).

Gender differences in psychological well-being have also been explored. Studies have shown that women of all ages rate themselves higher than men on positive relations with others and on personal growth (Ryff, 1995). Interpersonal well-being is the dimension that men rate themselves the lowest, although men (in open-ended interviews) have stated that relating to others is a critical feature of positive functioning (Ryff, 1989). For the remaining four dimensions of psychological well-being, research has not indicated any gender differences (Ryff, Magee, Kling, & Wing, 1999). The subjective well-being literature, although noting some mixed results, generally indicates that men and women are approximately equal in global happiness (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). These findings on gender are critical to emphasize due to the higher rates of depression among
women (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-Text Revision, 2000). However, in order to gain a more complete and accurate assessment of women’s psychological functioning, it is imperative to consider that it seems they have superior psychological resources compared to men in particular areas of well-being and score similarly to men on the other dimensions of well-being (Ryff, 1995).

Studies have examined cultural differences in psychological well-being. In one study (Ryff, 1995) that was comprised of midlife American and South Korean adults, it was reported that Americans tended to ascribe more positive qualities to themselves than Koreans. Within the Korean culture, it was revealed that they displayed high self-ratings on the dimension of positive relations with others, while having low self-ratings on personal growth and self-acceptance. Within the American culture, personal growth was endorsed highest, particularly for women. Surprisingly, in light of our individualistic culture, autonomy was rated the lowest. Gender differences across both cultures revealed that women obtained higher ratings than men on positive relations with others and personal growth. There is evidence, which suggests that Koreans, more than Americans, define their own wellness by emphasizing the well-being of other people (e.g., family).

Surprisingly, Ryff, Lee, and Na (as cited in Keyes & Ryff, 1999) reported similar findings in their study when they asked open-ended questions to American individuals in their midlife years. These midlife adults conceptualized well-being via their marital relationships and families. Moreover, they characterized a well-adjusted individual to be a caring person who has ties to others. However, unlike Korean respondents, American adults described the healthy individual as also being confident, constantly evolving, and deriving satisfaction from life. Furthermore, Americans tended to view personal fulfillment as personal achievements, as opposed to achievements of their children.
There have been noted socioeconomic differences in psychological well-being. For example, one longitudinal study (Ryff & Singer, 2002) focused on level of education and it was revealed that individuals (especially women) with more education had better well-being profiles. Education is strongly predictive of psychological well-being in general, even after controlling for other variables such as income, parental education, occupational status (Ryff et al., 1999). Results from another study, based on a representative sample, found that individuals are less likely to have greater purpose in life if they report having less education (Ryff & Singer, 2002).

Utilizing a sample of 251 university students, Yanez (2004) examined how well various existential variables predicted psychological and subjective well-being. The existential variables that were examined included purpose in life, self-actualization, spirituality, and death anxiety. It was reported that purpose in life was the strongest predictor of well-being, thus highlighting the significance of that construct in the well-being of a young adult population.

Thus, as discussed up to this juncture, the fields of subjective well-being and psychological well-being have considerably advanced our knowledge of overall well-being. Each of these domains have emphasized different aspects of well-being, both theoretically and in regards to generated research. Unfortunately, however, the overall field of well-being, as well as the domain of positive psychology, has predominantly examined their constructs with Caucasian individuals while providing insufficient attention to how these areas of study apply to ethnic minorities. Therefore, a discussion of ethnic minorities and mental health is now warranted and will be reviewed next.
Ethnic Minorities and Mental Health

American psychology, in general, has been criticized for being grounded primarily on a Eurocentric model of human functioning (Leong & Wong, 2003). The problem with this paradigm is twofold (Leong & Wong, 2003). First, it is usually not aware or explicitly acknowledged that it is in fact Eurocentric. Second, the field of Caucasian-European American psychology assumes that its theories and scientific data are universal instead of actually being what they really are, namely Eurocentric.

As a result of this field believing that its scientific theories and data are universal (when they may actually be specific to this culture), it has naively intervened in culturally-distinct societies with these cross-culturally untested or wrong theories and models (Leong & Wong, 2003). This “one size fits all” approach to the study of human functioning may reflect a biased and incomplete view of human functioning. Further cross-cultural research needs to be conducted with non-white individuals to see if the Eurocentric model (or a different model) accurately applies to them.

The same criticism that has been lodged in general against American psychology has been equally applied to the scientific study of optimal human functioning. There is a scant amount of research investigating how well-being, or optimal human functioning, may differ across various ethnic groups (Sue & Constantine, 2003). There is a critical problem in selecting whose definition of optimal human functioning is going to be utilized (Leong & Wong, 2003). Hopefully, it will be a broad and flexible definition so as not to exclude a particular group of people.

Furthermore, positive psychology has been criticized for not including people of color in their scientific study of optimal functioning (Bacigalupe, 2001). It has been argued that defining optimal human functioning is inherently culture-bound and has limited
applicability to ethnic minorities because positive psychology and defining the good life are intricately intertwined with larger society's values (Sue & Constantine, 2003).

Along those same lines, positive psychology has been denounced as ethnocentric for failing to acknowledge the various non-Western approaches (e.g., transpersonal psychology) to researching optimal human functioning (Walsh, 2001). Sue and Constantine (2003) write that positive human functioning will be insignificant to the majority of the world's population as long as the field of psychology dismisses other cultural groups' contributions as a result of our own cultural biases. Rich (2003) states that in order for positive psychology to be persuasive the world's cultures and values have to be mirrored in the research that is conducted on optimal human functioning.

Therefore, Sue and Constantine (2003) state that it is critical to openly acknowledge the cultural values and worldviews, racial discrimination experiences, and sociopolitical histories of individuals of color when attempting to comprehend well-being and positive human functioning. By doing so, these perspectives can provide enhanced opportunities for mental health professionals to comprehend individuals of color within the context of their culture (Sue & Constantine, 2003).

**Ethnic Minorities and Well-Being**

It is now critical to examine the limited amount of relevant research that has been conducted with various ethnic minorities. For example, a study was conducted that investigated the relationship between minority status and eudaimonic, or psychological, well-being (Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003). The authors examined the association between status inequality (defined as race/ethnicity, gender, and educational level) and eudaimonic well-being (defined as the realization of human potential and making life meaningful even if challenged by adversity). Eudaimonic well-being was operationalized
as consisting of six domains: purpose in life, personal growth, autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, and positive relations with others. Their sample consisted of the Midlife in the U.S. 1995 national survey (drawn from 48 states) and two racial subsamples: African Americans in New York City and Mexican Americans in Chicago with the latter (city-specific samples) allowing for the assessment of variation within and between minority groups.

A critical finding of the study was that, across various ethnic groups, one’s status as a minority positively predicts eudaimonic well-being compared to those individuals of majority (i.e., white) status, indicating that minorities experience greater well-being than Caucasians even though they are confronted with difficulties related to race. This result was found for all six dimensions of well-being except for two minor exceptions: for autonomy the pattern was found in two of the minority samples (for those in the national survey and African Americans in New York City) and for purpose in life the result was revealed only after taking into account education. Therefore, minority groups fared better on all outcomes, compared to Caucasians, and these effects continued to be seen in the majority of cases even when other factors such as interaction effects or perceived discrimination were taken into consideration. Perhaps, minorities have built up the psychological fortitude and resiliency to buffer against the deleterious effects of race-related difficulties they inevitably encounter in their lives.

Not surprisingly, Ryff, Keyes, and Hughes (2003) also reported that perceived daily discrimination correlated negatively with overall psychological well-being. Notably, the authors of the study reported that the deleterious effects of perceived discrimination on psychological well-being were particularly salient for women but not men, which is at odds with prior research that has revealed that women tend to have comparable or
enhanced well-being relative to men. That is, women across all racial groups in this study (including Caucasians) experienced lower well-being when they perceived high levels of discrimination.

In a related study, Woody and Green (2001) examined the relationships among race/ethnicity, gender, and well-being (psychological and social). Multiple domains of well-being were investigated in this study: individual (psychological), marital, and family. This study utilized a sample of non-disadvantaged and non-clinical men and women of African-American and Caucasian descent. However, the sample did consist of strictly civilian reservists and their spouses in one branch of the military in a single state, thus limiting the generalizability of the study's results.

The authors reported that race/ethnicity, gender, and well-being were all associated with one another. Although all groups had moderate to high levels of well-being, race/ethnicity was still found to be a significant predictor of well-being. Furthermore, there were relatively low levels of well-being among African-American men, which the authors attribute to their experienced stigma. Therefore, this study's findings are inconsistent with those just previously mentioned in Ryff, Keyes, and Hughes (2003).

Cha (2003) conducted a study that investigated the subjective well-being of Korean college students living in Korea. The author examined how subjective well-being related to various personality constructs that included optimism, self-esteem, and collective self-esteem. There were various interesting findings from the study. It was reported that Korean students displayed equal amounts of life satisfaction/dissatisfaction, revealed marginally more positive affect than negative affect, and men seemed to exhibit slightly more subjective well-being than women. The current study did not consist of participants...
from other nations and therefore it is difficult to draw comparisons with individuals of other nations.

However, Cha (2003) cited research that reports Korean students' life satisfaction and affective well-being are very low relative to their counterparts from western nations and that this might be partly attributable to cultural factors. That is, moderate states, instead of extreme states, tend to be preferred in Confucian cultures (e.g., Korea), and therefore extreme happiness and life satisfaction are not considered as the ideal as their conception of the good life is viewed as a balance between positive and negative life events. Therefore, it is very possible that the cultural standards for subjective well-being might play a more significant role in collectivistic nations than in individualistic ones.

Evidence for this assertion is revealed in another finding from this study, which found that collective self-esteem (assessed by one’s social group memberships such as race or religion) was significantly correlated with satisfaction with life, positive affect, and negative affect (with self-esteem controlled).

Furthermore, the results revealed that optimism, self-esteem, and collective self-esteem all predicted life satisfaction with optimism being the most significant predictor (Cha, 2003). The author writes that the fact that collective self-esteem was an equally strong predictor of life satisfaction in this study (along with optimism and self-esteem) reveals that subjective well-being is more closely intertwined with the self’s collectivistic aspects in collectivist nations than in individualistic ones. However, while this is true it is important to remember that it was optimism, and not collective self-esteem, that was the most significant predictor, which suggests that the author’s interpretation of the findings might be insufficient.
In a related study, Lee (2003) conducted two studies that empirically investigated the potential protective effects of ethnic identity and other-group orientation on both personal ethnic and minority group discrimination utilizing a sample of Asian American college students. In the first study, it was reported that there was a moderate correlation between minority group discrimination and lower community well-being. This association was not found with lower social and personal well-being, and minority group discrimination was assessed by subjective perceptions of a racially unfavorable climate at the university. In the second study it was revealed that there was a moderate correlation between personal ethnic discrimination and lower social and personal well-being but that the former (i.e., personal ethnic discrimination) correlated with higher psychological distress. Personal ethnic discrimination was assessed by one’s views of not being treated fairly.

The results from Lee’s (2003) study seem to suggest that personally being discriminated has a more powerful effect on well-being and distress than one’s minority group being discriminated, although both types of discrimination were not simultaneously assessed in the same study. Furthermore, the findings from both studies (Lee, 2003) reveal that ethnic identity does not mediate or moderate the adverse effects of both types of discrimination, which surprisingly is a departure from the prevailing perception that it does. The study’s author suggests that ethnic identity, although a possible contributor to psychological well-being, is not itself enough to defend against the deleterious effects of discrimination (Lee, 2003).

Perhaps, ethnic identity is a necessary, but not sufficient, factor involved in immunizing minorities from discrimination’s harmful consequences. However, other-group orientation (seeking support from other ethnic groups) does seem to moderate the adverse effects of minority group discrimination even though this was discovered only on
community well-being and there was a small to medium effect size (Lee, 2003). Thus, a sense of community is likely to be reduced by elevated minority group discrimination among those with a low other-group orientation as opposed to those with a high other-group orientation (Lee, 2003). The author also reported that those individuals who have a high other-group orientation and believe to have experienced elevated minority group discrimination have equal amounts of community well-being as those individuals who experienced low group discrimination (Lee, 2003).

In a similar study, Suh (2002) conducted two studies that examined the relationships among culture, identity consistency, and well-being. Study one utilized a sample of college students and the findings revealed that individuals who perceived themselves more consistently across various situations were more likely to report higher satisfaction with life and positive affect but less negative affect, which is congruent with prior research stating that Americans who tended to be more consistent experienced greater levels of subjective well-being.

In study two, the relationship between identity consistency and subjective well-being in the United States and South Korea was investigated. The results indicated that Americans tend to see themselves as more consistent than Koreans across various social situations. Furthermore, identity consistency was related with greater subjective well-being in both the American and Korean cultures but it was a more effective predictor in the American culture.

Cross-cultural research has revealed that many Western constructs (e.g., self-consistency) are not as predictive of well-being in cultures that are relation-oriented (e.g., South Korea) and future studies should investigate those constructs that are more likely to predict subjective well-being in non-Western societies (Suh, 2002). A prominent idea in
psychology is that it is healthy for an individual to have a consistent self-identity across various situations, however, it is critical to remember that what is psychologically healthy is constantly shaped by time and culture (Suh, 2002). If we fail to consider the powerful effects of time and culture in our conceptions of psychological health we are inevitably bound to unnecessarily pathologize individuals from minority cultural groups.

In another study, Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, and Broadnax (1994) examined the relationship between collective self-esteem and psychological well-being among Caucasian, African-American, and Asian-American college students. Collective self-esteem refers to how an individual perceives himself/herself based on a variety of his/her social group memberships such as gender, religion, and ethnicity. Psychological well-being was operationalized with measures of life satisfaction, personal self-esteem, depression, and hopelessness.

The findings revealed that collective self-esteem was predictive of many dimensions of psychological well-being across all subjects. Furthermore, collective self-esteem was found to be related to self-esteem although the latter was predicted by the judgments one makes of his or her own groups and his or her role in them, rather than how important those groups are to one’s own identity.

However, the association between collective self-esteem and well-being becomes tenuous when personal self-esteem is controlled and this relationship varies among the groups. For example, with personal self-esteem controlled, none of the subscales from the collective self-esteem measure were significantly associated with any of the well-being measures for the Caucasian students. With personal self-esteem controlled, two of three subscales for the collective self-esteem measure were predictive of some dimensions of well-being for the African-American students. For the Asian-American
students, with personal self-esteem controlled, there was convincing evidence that collective self-esteem was significantly related to enhanced psychological well-being. Therefore, when the effects of personal self-esteem are controlled, collective self-esteem seems to be predictive of psychological adjustment for various ethnic minority groups but not for Caucasians.

Relatedly, Cassidy, O’Connor, Howe, and Warden (2004) examined the relationship between psychological distress and perceived ethnic discrimination utilizing a sample of various ethnic minorities. The results indicated that personal and ethnic self-esteem did not moderate the relationship between discrimination and distress but there was partial evidence for a mediating role, but only among men and not women. Men who had greater levels of perceived discrimination were found to have reduced personal and ethnic self-esteem. As a result, this predicted greater levels of depression and anxiety. Discrimination had a direct effect (not mediated by personal/ethnic self-esteem) on anxiety but no effect was found on depression. Furthermore, women cited lower levels of perceived discrimination than their male counterparts in the study although prior research has revealed inconsistencies on this point and which the authors attribute to possible differences in the way ethnic discrimination is operationalized.

Utsey, Chae, Brown, and Kelly (2002) investigated how ethnic group membership effects ethnic identity, stress related to race, and quality of life utilizing a sample of African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanic Americans. The authors utilized assessment instruments to measure quality of life (consisting of physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and environment), race-related stress (comprised of individual, cultural, and institutional racism), and ethnic identity (consisting of ethnic behaviors, affirmation/belonging, and ethnic identity achievement).
Various findings were reported. The African-American participants scored higher than Asian Americans and Hispanic Americans on race-related stress (thus revealing greater stress), ethnic identity, and the psychological well-being subscale of the quality of life measure. For the entire sample, it was reported that ethnic identity and the cultural racism subscale of the race-related stress measure significantly predicted quality of life, with the former being the best predictor.

The finding that African-Americans reported significantly higher psychological well-being is consistent with a number of studies, which might be explained by how this racial group obtains support from their religious affiliations (i.e., churches), ethnic community, and family when faced with race-related stress (Utsey, Chae, Brown, & Kelly, 2002). While this explanation is certainly plausible, the same reasoning could be applied accordingly to Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans but yet these groups were not found to have greater levels of psychological well-being. Therefore, future research should aim to unravel why African-Americans report greater levels of psychological well-being while Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans do not.

In a related study, Utsey, Payne, Jackson, and Jones (2002), utilizing a sample of elderly African Americans, examined the association among stress related to race, life satisfaction, and quality of life indicators. The results revealed that elderly African American men reported greater levels of stress (than their female counterparts) related to race in regards to collective and institutional racism. Collective and institutional racism refers to the government-approved discrimination that African-Americans as a minority group had to experience across a wide variety of societal institutions such as housing, health care, and employment. The finding that African American men experience greater race-related stress is consistent with what Utsey, Chae, Brown, and Kelly (2002) found in
their study. Furthermore, it was reported that institutional racism significantly predicted the mental health component of the quality of life measure, which the authors attributed to the elderly subjects direct experiences with racial segregation.

The findings that African American men experience higher levels of race-related stress gives credence to the argument that they are especially vulnerable to the adverse effects of oppression and racism (Utsey, Payne, Jackson, & Jones, 2002). This has real implications for mental health professionals. For example, when conducting therapy with African-American men, it is critical to openly explore the clients' experiences with racism and oppression in order to avoid assigning labels of pathology (e.g., paranoia) to symptoms that could be adaptive as a response to experienced racism.

Relatedly, Thompson, Bazile, and Akbar (2004) examined, via focus groups, African Americans' views of psychotherapy and those who practice it. The authors reported that the African American individuals who participated in the focus groups were concerned that psychologists (who they perceived as typically an older, Caucasian male) could not appreciate the socioeconomic difficulties that they have to experience. Participants were also apprehensive regarding the therapist's potentially held stereotypes of African Americans and how that would impact their treatment. Furthermore, the focus group participants looked at therapists' discomfort and anxiety regarding racial issues and their unwillingness to address issues such as discrimination as indicators of their aptitude to work with them and their concerns.

Research is slowly starting to critically examine how positive strengths and virtues might be culturally embedded. For example, Sandage, Hill, and Vang (2003) examined the virtue of forgiveness in traditional Hmong culture. The authors write that there are four aspects of Hmong culture that are interrelated which assist in comprehending
forgiveness: spirituality, collectivism, third-party mediation, and acculturation challenges.

In regard to spirituality, the Hmong hold an animistic worldview (i.e., natural objects have spirits and natural and spiritual dimensions interact), which is clearly distinct from the prevailing models of psychology and medicine in Western societies, and which is intricately tied to how and why they forgive. Regarding collectivism, Hmong culture is collectivistic and their worldview is very different than the individualistic worldview. For example, paradigms of forgiveness, from an individualistic framework, entail making a personal choice to forgive and tend to emphasize the personally healthy advantages to forgiving. In contrast, a collectivistic worldview views forgiveness as being comprehensible only if it benefits one’s community or group and operates according to social norms. In regards to third-party mediation, the Hmong commonly emphasize the utilization of third parties (e.g., a shaman) to help resolve conflict and negotiate forgiveness, which could be negatively viewed as “triangulation” by subscribers of Western psychotherapy. Lastly, acculturation conflicts have not been sufficiently incorporated into therapeutic models of forgiveness. For example, acculturation challenges (e.g., intergenerational conflict between acculturated younger generations and older, traditional generations) can contextually define family conflict and who seeks forgiveness and what is considered disrespectful. The authors conclude that it is critical to remember that Western models of forgiveness might not easily apply to the Hmong population and that future research should seek to investigate various multicultural perspectives to forgiveness.
Conclusions

In sum, there has been a limited amount of scientific research generally conducted in the field of psychology involving ethnic minorities. As discussed throughout this paper, this is particularly evident in the examination of ethnic minorities regarding positive constructs such as character strengths, satisfaction with life, and psychological well-being. Research conducted to date suggests inconsistent findings.

For example, on the one hand, it has been revealed that African Americans experience lower levels of well-being (Woody & Green, 2001). Conversely, it has been reported that African Americans have higher psychological well-being even though they experience greater stress related to race (Utsey, Chae, Brown, & Kelly, 2002). For Asian Americans, previous research has revealed that ethnic identity is not in and of itself enough to buffer against the adverse effects of discrimination (Lee, 2003). On the other hand, it has been reported that collective self-esteem (a similar construct to ethnic identity) is associated with greater levels of psychological well-being (Crocker, Luhtanen, Blaine, & Broadnax, 1994). Regarding Hispanic Americans and other ethnic groups (e.g., Native Americans), there has been very little research (or none at all) conducted on the various positive constructs such as character strengths, psychological well-being, and satisfaction with life.

Hence, in addition to there being incongruent findings regarding some of these concepts, there is also a general lack of knowledge on how these constructs specifically relate to individuals from ethnic minority groups. The field of positive psychology is burgeoning and it is imperative that it widen its perspective to include how its various constructs apply (or might apply differently) to ethnic minorities. Furthermore, it is critical that we not consider all ethnic minorities as a monolithic group. It is very
plausible that some of these concepts might apply differently, or be more salient, for certain ethnic groups more than others. Therefore, further research investigating positive constructs with various ethnic minority groups needs to be conducted in order to shed light on these significant topics of inquiry.

It is imperative that the domain of psychology strive to be more democratic and egalitarian by broadening the lens through which it views human functioning to include ethnic minorities. This will, in turn, provide a more accurate and comprehensive portrayal of individual psychological functioning and ensure that the field of psychology is relevant to individuals of color. As a result, it will have started to successfully meet one of its forgotten missions: improving the lives of all individuals (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Purpose of the Present Study

The goal of the present study was to examine character strengths and psychological well-being as predictors of life satisfaction. To date, no known study has examined these positive constructs among the following multicultural populations: Caucasians, African-Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans. This study has the potential of expanding the knowledge base of how these positive psychology constructs relate to these various ethnic minority groups.

Hypotheses

The present study tested the hypothesis that significant racial differences would be revealed on the constructs of character strengths, satisfaction with life, and psychological well-being. The specific hypotheses were as follows:

For Caucasians, it was hypothesized that emotional strengths (of the character strengths) would be the most significant predictor of life satisfaction whereas purpose in
life would be the most significant psychological well-being predictor. Considering that the sample consists of young adults, it seems that emotional strengths such as hope and zest, which tend to characterize younger individuals, would significantly predict satisfaction with life. In a similar vein, finding purpose in life is an important factor for young adults as they are trying to find a direction for their lives and thus it was expected that it would be the most significant predictor of life satisfaction.

For African-Americans, it was anticipated, based on previous research (e.g., Peterson & Seligman, 2004) that theological strengths (of the character strengths) would be the most significant predictor of satisfaction with life. Spirituality and religion have been shown to be significant sources of support for African-Americans (see Wilson & Stith, 1998). In regards to psychological well-being, it was hypothesized that environmental mastery would be the most significant predictor of life satisfaction as a result of African-Americans having to historically cope with societal racism and discrimination (as discussed earlier in this paper).

For Hispanic Americans, it was expected that strengths of restraint (of the character strengths) would be most predictive of satisfaction with life whereas positive relations with others (of psychological well-being) would account for most of the variance in life satisfaction. Hispanics tend to overwhelmingly subscribe to the Catholic religion, which stresses humility and modesty (strengths of restraint). Furthermore, Hispanics place great significance on having nonconflicting and congenial interpersonal relationships, especially within the family, therefore positive relations with others was expected to be a significant predictor of life satisfaction (Altarriba & Bauer, 1998).

For Asian Americans, it was predicted that interpersonal strengths (of the character strengths) and positive relations with others (of psychological well-being) would be the
most significant predictors of satisfaction with life. This group strongly emphasizes interpersonal harmony and familial relationships are particularly considered critical (Sue, 1998).

It was hypothesized that the factors of character strengths, satisfaction with life, and the various dimensions of psychological well-being would be significantly correlated with one another (for all of the ethnic groups) except for intellectual strengths correlating with life satisfaction (as revealed in previous research; see Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Therefore, it was not expected that intellectual strengths would correlate significantly with satisfaction with life (see Peterson & Seligman, 2004).
CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants were university students \( N = 586 \) recruited from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Psychology Department research subject pool. Because the small number of Native American \( n = 9 \) and Middle Eastern/Arab \( n = 3 \) participants did not allow comparisons of members of these groups with members of the four more prevalent racial groups, these participants were dropped from the sample. Furthermore, one participant chose not to provide her race and another participant’s race could not be classified according to one of the racial groups. Therefore, the following statistics reflect this adjusted sample pool \( N = 572 \).

The racial composition of the remaining sample was as follows: Caucasian, 39.7%; Asian/Pacific Islander, 31.8%; Hispanic/Latino, 15.7%; and African American, 12.8%. The racial composition of undergraduate students at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas was as follows: Caucasian, 49%; Asian/Pacific Islander, 14%; Hispanic/Latino, 11%; and African American, 8% (University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2005). Thirty-eight percent of participants were male and sixty-two percent of participants were female. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 to 51 years \( M = 19.80, SD = 2.96 \) and their grade point averages ranged from 1.00 to 4.00 \( M = 3.04, SD = .54 \). In regards to the marital status, 96.7% were unmarried, 2.1% were married, and 1.2% were divorced. In regards to educational level, freshmen made up 60.1% of the sample, sophomores made up 24.7%
of the sample, juniors comprised 10.5% of the sample, seniors comprised 3.7% of the sample, and returning students with a Bachelor's degree made up .5% of the sample.

In regards to church attendance, 54.5% of the sample endorsed attending church (or other place of worship) or were a member of a church whereas 45.5% reported they did not attend church or were not a member. Of the individuals who revealed attending or being a member of a church, 25% stated they were Catholic, 11.4% were Christian/non-denominational, 4.9% were Baptist, 4.4% were Mormon/LDS, 1.9% were Methodist, 1.6% were Lutheran, 3.0% were “Other,” and the remaining religious affiliations each comprised less than 1%.

Although parental income was not available from all participants due to experimenter error (N = 250), the range was 0 to 1,500,000 (M = $93,334.90; SD = $135,043.12). There were two extreme outliers ($1,500,000 and $1,196,000) that were subsequently dropped from the analysis of income because they were eleven and nearly nine standard deviations above the mean, respectively. For the subset of the sample for which income data were available, there were racial differences in income, F (3, 244) = 3.88, p = .01. Regarding income, Scheffé post hoc tests revealed statistically significant differences between Caucasians (M = $104,640; SD = $83,691.04) and African Americans (M = $61,291.41, SD = $39,062.65). However, because these data were not available for the entire sample, controlling for income in subsequent analyses was not possible.

Measures

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire covering the basic demographic characteristics reviewed above. They were also asked about the degree to which they identify with their respective ethnicity/racial group: “not at all;” “a little;” “moderately;” and “very much.”
Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS; Peterson & Seligman, 2001). The VIA-IS is a 240-item instrument designed to assess 24 distinct character strengths including creativity, curiosity, open-mindedness, love of learning, perspective, bravery, persistence, integrity, vitality, love, kindness, social intelligence, citizenship, fairness, leadership, forgiveness and mercy, humility and modesty, prudence, self-regulation, appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality. There are 10 items measuring each character strength. Individuals respond to each item according to a 5-point Likert rating scale with a response format that ranges from “very much like me” to “very much unlike me.” Within each scale, responses are averaged. Higher numbers are indicative of more of that particular strength being reflected by the individual. Internal consistency (alpha) coefficients for all the scales of the measure and 4-month test-retest correlations for all the scales exceed .70 (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Regarding this study’s sample ($N = 572$), the overall internal consistency (alpha) coefficient of the measure is .98. Exploratory factor analyses have revealed five factors that emerge from the 24 character strengths: strengths of restraint, intellectual strengths, interpersonal strengths, emotional strengths, and theological strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Strengths of restraint consist of the following individual character strengths: self-regulation, prudence, modesty/humility, and forgiveness. Intellectual strengths are comprised of the following individual character strengths: curiosity/interest, love of learning, judgment, originality, and perspective. Interpersonal strengths consist of the following individual character strengths: personal intelligence, kindness/generosity, capacity to love and to be loved, citizenship/teamwork, equity/fairness, and leadership. Emotional strengths are comprised of the following individual character strengths: valor, industry/perseverance, integrity/honesty, and
zest/enthusiasm. Theological strengths consist of the following individual character strengths: appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope/optimism, spirituality, and humor/playfulness.

**Scales of Psychological Well-Being (SPWB; Ryff, 1989).** The SPWB is an 84-item instrument designed to measure six domains of psychological well-being. These domains are autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance (14 items assess each of these six domains). The domains were derived from descriptions of positive mental health, various theories of life span development, and clinical perspectives on positive functioning. The scales have internal consistency (alpha) coefficients ranging from .86 to .93 and a six-week test-retest reliability period ranging from .81 to .88 (Ryff, 1989). Regarding this study’s sample ($N = 572$), the overall internal consistency (alpha) coefficient of the measure is .84. Scale items were mixed in order to generate a single self-report inventory in which individuals respond according to a 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) response format.

**Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985).** The SWLS is a 5-item instrument that measures a person’s global judgment of life satisfaction. Individuals respond to the items on a 7-point Likert rating scale with 1 representing “strongly disagree” and 7 representing “strongly agree.” Sample items from the SWLS include “In most ways my life is close to my ideal,” “I am completely satisfied with my life,” and “If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.” Scores are calculated by adding up all of the items. Each individual’s score is compared against six qualitatively descriptive categories, ranging from very dissatisfied (with their life) to extremely satisfied (with their life). The SWLS has a reliability coefficient alpha of .87 and a two-month test-retest stability coefficient of .82 (Diener et al., 1985). Regarding this study’s
sample (\(N = 572\)), the overall internal consistency (alpha) coefficient of the measure is .83.

Procedure

Participants completed the questionnaires in a large classroom in groups of varying sizes. After reading the informed consent form, participants were given various assessment instruments to complete. Although there was no time limit to complete the questionnaires, it took approximately one hour and participants received one research credit. To control for order effects, the assessment instruments were distributed in a random order, which was created by the computer program RANPER.

Due to experimenter error, the random order as created by RANPER was not followed for approximately 22 packets. Moreover, two slightly different versions of demographics questionnaires were accidentally provided to subjects due to experimenter error. In order to correct for this, the experimenter collapsed two marital status categories, “single” and “in a relationship,” into “unmarried.”

Participants were asked to write in their race on the demographics questionnaire (see Appendix) provided to them. In cases in which they identified being of two or more ethnicities/racial groups, the first one reported was used to classify them into a racial group for purposes of analyses, unless otherwise noted by the participant.

As mentioned, previous research on the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) has revealed that the 24 character strengths can be reduced to five overarching factors (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Those five factors—strengths of restraint, intellectual strengths, interpersonal strengths, emotional strengths, and theological strengths—were utilized in the statistical analyses of this study. Furthermore, all six
dimensions of psychological well-being and the total score of life satisfaction were utilized in the statistical analyses.
CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics on the dissertation variables for the four racial groups are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Caucasians</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>Asians</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>SIG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWLS</td>
<td>25.42</td>
<td>6.28</td>
<td>24.92</td>
<td>6.01</td>
<td>25.28</td>
<td>6.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPWB-AUTO</td>
<td>47.54</td>
<td>4.77</td>
<td>48.21</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>47.62</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPWB-EM</td>
<td>49.07</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>48.77</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>49.75</td>
<td>6.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPWB-PG</td>
<td>52.35</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>52.10</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>53.07</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPWB-PRWO</td>
<td>49.18</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>47.74</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>49.46</td>
<td>5.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPWB-PIL</td>
<td>46.85</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>46.75</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>47.45</td>
<td>5.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPWB-SA</td>
<td>47.45</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>48.09</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>47.31</td>
<td>6.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIA-IS-INTEL.</td>
<td>188.40</td>
<td>22.27</td>
<td>186.53</td>
<td>17.35</td>
<td>191.62</td>
<td>19.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIA-IS-INTER.</td>
<td>236.37</td>
<td>24.70</td>
<td>238.81</td>
<td>22.76</td>
<td>243.06</td>
<td>25.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIA-IS-EMOT.</td>
<td>154.25</td>
<td>16.62</td>
<td>155.74</td>
<td>15.08</td>
<td>157.52</td>
<td>19.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIA-IS-REST.</td>
<td>137.74</td>
<td>18.31</td>
<td>141.46</td>
<td>17.74</td>
<td>143.17</td>
<td>19.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIA-IS-THEO.</td>
<td>189.83</td>
<td>23.98</td>
<td>195.74</td>
<td>21.96</td>
<td>197.11</td>
<td>21.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*statistically significant

Note: SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale; SPWB-AUTO = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Autonomy; SPWB-EM = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Environmental Mastery; SPWB-PG = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Personal Growth; SPWB-PRWO = Scales Of Psychological Well-
Chi-Square Test

A chi square test was conducted to examine if there were differences among the four ethnic groups in the extent to which they identified with their respective group (see Table 2). Statistically significant differences among the four ethnic groups regarding their self-reported group identification were found, $\chi^2(9, N = 569) = 37.75, p = .00$; $\Phi = .26, p = .00$; and Cramer’s V = .15, $p = .00$.

Table 2  Racial Groups and their Degree of Identification with their Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Caucasians</th>
<th>Blacks</th>
<th>Hispanics</th>
<th>Asians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
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<td>24.7%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
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<td>67.1%</td>
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ANOVAS and Post Hoc Tests

An ANOVA was conducted on degree of racial group identification in order to detect differences among the four racial groups. Race was used as the independent variable and degree of racial identification was used as the dependent variable with “not at all” = 1 to “very much” = 4. The ANOVA was significant, $F(3, 565) = 6.72, p = .00$, with an effect size of .03. Scheffe post hoc tests revealed statistically significant differences with African Americans ($M = 3.60, SD = .66$) having greater racial group identification than Asians/Pacific Islanders ($M = 3.23, SD = .75$), Caucasians ($M = 3.13, SD = .88$), and
Hispanics ($M = 3.11, SD = .83$). There were no differences between the other three groups.

A second series of ANOVAS was conducted to examine whether differences in levels of racial group identification was associated with differences in life satisfaction for each of the four racial groups. The independent variable for each of these ANOVAS was degree of racial group identification and the dependent variable was life satisfaction. For Caucasians, identifying with one's racial group was not associated with differences in life satisfaction, $F (3, 221) = 1.42, p = .24$. For African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans, racial group identification was associated with differences in life satisfaction, $F (3, 68) = 2.74, p = .05$; $F (3, 85) = 2.76, p = .05$; and $F (3, 177) = 3.15, p = .03$, respectively. Scheffe post hoc tests were conducted for each of these three racial groups.

Regarding African Americans, the “not at all” level of racial group identification was dropped from analysis because there was only one person in that cell, $F (2, 68) = 3.35, p = .04$. The post hoc analysis revealed a significant difference between the racial group identification levels of “a little” and “very much,” again indicating that higher racial group identification was associated with higher levels of life satisfaction. For Hispanic and Asian Americans, post hoc tests were not significant, although there was a trend towards significance ($p = .053$) for the latter group between the racial group identification levels of “a little” and “very much.” Mean scores for both of these groups suggested that higher racial group identification was generally associated with higher levels of life satisfaction.

A series of ANOVAS were conducted on the dimensions in order to detect any differences among the four racial groups. When the ANOVA was significant, $R^2$ was
calculated as a measure of the effect size and Scheffe post-hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted. Differences were found on four of the twelve dimensions (see Table 1 for F and p values). The ANOVA on the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) total score was significant with an effect size of .02. Scheffe post-hoc tests revealed a statistically significant difference between Caucasians \((M = 25.42, SD = 6.28)\) and Asians/Pacific Islanders \((M = 23.64, SD = 6.41)\) on the SWLS total score. The ANOVA for the Scales of Psychological Well-Being subscale of Positive Relations With Others (SPWB-PRWO) was significant with an effect size of .02. Scheffe post-hoc tests revealed statistically significant differences between African Americans \((M = 47.24, SD = 5.69)\) and Caucasians \((M = 49.18, SD = 4.42)\) and between African Americans \((M = 47.24, SD = 5.69)\) and Hispanics \((M = 49.46, SD = 5.51)\) on the SPWB-PRWO. The ANOVA for the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths Emotional Strengths (VIA-IS-EMOT.) factor was significant with an effect size of .03. Scheffe post-hoc tests revealed a statistically significant difference between Hispanics \((M = 157.52, SD = 19.51)\) and Asians/Pacific Islanders \((M = 149.20, SD = 19.89)\) on the VIA-IS Emotional Strengths factor. The ANOVA for the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths Theological Strengths (VIA-IS-THEO) factor was significant with an effect size of .02. Scheffe post-hoc tests revealed no statistically significant differences among the four ethnic groups on the VIA-IS Theological Strengths factor.

**Correlations among the Dimensions**

Correlation analyses were conducted for each racial group to determine the strength of relationships among the dimensions. Tables 3-6 display the various correlations for each respective racial group. For the Caucasian participants (see Table 3), all of the correlations were statistically significant except: satisfaction with life and
intellectual strengths and positive relations with others and intellectual strengths. The highest correlation was between emotional strengths and intellectual strengths, \( r (220) = .72, p < .01 \).

For the African-American participants, all of the correlations were statistically significant except for fourteen of them (see table 4). The highest correlation was between emotional strengths and interpersonal strengths, \( r (68) = .69, p < .01 \).

For the Hispanic/Latino participants, all of the correlations were statistically significant except for eight of them (see table 5). The highest correlation was between emotional strengths and interpersonal strengths, \( r (85) = .80, p < .01 \).

For the Asian/Pacific Islander participants, all of the correlations were statistically significant (see table 6). The highest correlation was between theological strengths and interpersonal strengths, \( r (167) = .83, p < .01 \).

In examining the patterns of correlations among the four ethnic groups, emotional strengths and interpersonal strengths were the strongest correlation for both African Americans and Hispanic Americans. For the Asian Americans, all six dimensions of psychological well-being and all five character strength factors significantly correlated with one another. For Caucasians, all but two correlations among the dimensions of psychological well-being and character strengths were statistically significant.
Table 3 Correlations among Caucasians

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** Significant at .01 level (2-tailed); * Significant at .05 level (2-tailed).
Note: SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale; SPWB-AUTO = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Autonomy; SPWB-EM = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Environmental Mastery; SPWB-PG = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Personal Growth; SPWB-PRWO = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Positive Relations With Others; SPWB-PIL = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Purpose In Life; SPWB-SA = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Self Acceptance; VIA-INTEL = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Intellectual Strengths; VIA-INTER = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Interpersonal Strengths; VIA-EMOT = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Emotional Strengths; VIA-REST = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Strengths Of Restraint; and VIA-THEO = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Theological Strengths.
Table 4 Correlations Among African Americans

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** Significant at .01 level (2-tailed); * Significant at .05 level (2-tailed).
Note: SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale; SPWB-AUTO = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Autonomy; SPWB-EM = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Environmental Mastery; SPWB-PG = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Personal Growth; SPWB-PRWO = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Positive Relations With Others; SPWB-PIL = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Purpose In Life; SPWB-SA = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Self Acceptance; VIA-INTEL = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Intellectual Strengths; VIA-INTER = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Interpersonal Strengths; VIA-EMOT = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Emotional Strengths; VIA-REST = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Strengths Of Restraint; and VIA-THEO = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Theological Strengths.
Table 5 Correlations Among Hispanic Americans

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Table 6 Correlations Among Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders

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</tbody>
</table>

** Significant at .01 level (2-tailed); * Significant at .05 level (2-tailed).
Note: SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale; SPWB-AUTO = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Autonomy; SPWB-EM = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Environmental Mastery; SPWB-PG = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Personal Growth; SPWB-PRWO = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Positive Relations With Others; SPWB-PIL = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Purpose In Life; SPWB-SA = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being-Self Acceptance; VIA-INTEL = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Intellectual Strengths; VIA-INTER = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Interpersonal Strengths; VIA-EMOT = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Emotional Strengths; VIA-REST = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Strengths Of Restraint; and VIA-THEO = Values In Action Inventory Of Strengths-Theological Strengths.
Multiple Regressions

In order to determine which of the psychological well-being and character strength dimensions accounted for most of the variance in satisfaction with life for each of the four racial groups, two standard multiple regression analyses were conducted for each of the racial groups. The psychological well-being domains consisted of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance; all of them were entered at one time into the regression. The character strength factors consisted of intellectual strengths, interpersonal strengths, emotional strengths, strengths of restraint, and theological strengths; all of them were entered at one time into the regression.

The psychological well-being domains of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance were all regressed on life satisfaction. For the Caucasian participants, overall, the psychological well-being model was significant \( p = .00, R^2 = .35, \) adjusted \( R^2 = .33 \). Two domains made significant contributions to the model (in this order): self-acceptance \( (\beta = .44, p = .00) \) and environmental mastery \( (\beta = .18, p = .02) \). The other four psychological well-being domains did not make significant contributions to the model. See Table 7 for multiple regression results of psychological well-being among Caucasians. The character strength factors of intellectual strengths, interpersonal strengths, emotional strengths, strengths of restraint, and theological strengths were all regressed on life satisfaction. Overall, the character strengths model was significant \( p = .00, R^2 = .18, \) adjusted \( R^2 = .16 \). Two factors made significant contributions to the model (in this order): intellectual strengths \( (\beta = -.33, p = .00) \) and emotional strengths \( (\beta = .29, p = .01) \). It should be
noted that intellectual strengths is functioning as a suppressor variable in this equation with the sign of the beta weight (-.33) being the reverse of the sign in the zero-order correlation (+.10) between it and satisfaction with life. The other three character strength factors did not make significant contributions to the model. See Table 8 for multiple regression results of character strengths among Caucasians.

The psychological well-being domains of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance were all regressed on life satisfaction. For the African American participants, overall, the psychological well-being model was significant ($p = .00, R^2 = .37, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .31$). None of the six psychological well-being domains made significant contributions to the model. However, the domain of autonomy revealed a trend towards significance. It should be noted that the psychological well-being domain of autonomy is functioning as a suppressor variable in this equation with the sign of the beta weight (-.20) being the reverse of the sign in the zero-order correlation (+.03) between it and satisfaction with life. See Table 9 for multiple regression results of psychological well-being among African Americans. The character strength factors of intellectual strengths, interpersonal strengths, emotional strengths, strengths of restraint, and theological strengths were all regressed on life satisfaction. Overall, the character strengths model was significant ($p = .00, R^2 = .41, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .36$). The factor making a significant contribution to the model was theological strengths ($\beta = .40, p = .02$). The other four character strength factors did not make significant contributions to the model. See Table 10 for multiple regression results of character strengths among African Americans.

The psychological well-being domains of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance were all
regressed on life satisfaction. For the Hispanic/Latino participants, overall, the psychological well-being model was significant ($p = .00, R^2 = .31$, adjusted $R^2 = .25$). The domain making a significant contribution to the model was self-acceptance ($\beta = .46, p = .00$). The other five psychological well-being domains did not make significant contributions to the model. See Table 11 for multiple regression results of psychological well-being among Hispanics/Latinos. The character strength factors of intellectual strengths, interpersonal strengths, emotional strengths, strengths of restraint, and theological strengths were all regressed on life satisfaction. Overall, the character strengths model was significant ($p = .00, R^2 = .26$, adjusted $R^2 = .21$). The factor making a significant contribution to the model was theological strengths ($\beta = .39, p = .03$). The other four character strength factors did not make significant contributions to the model. See Table 12 for multiple regression results of character strengths among Hispanics/Latinos.

The psychological well-being domains of autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance were all regressed on life satisfaction. For the Asian/Pacific Islander participants, overall, the psychological well-being model was significant ($p = .00, R^2 = .49$, adjusted $R^2 = .47$). The domains that made significant contributions to the model (in this order) were environmental mastery ($\beta = .42, p = .00$) and self-acceptance ($\beta = .32, p = .00$). The other four psychological well-being domains did not make significant contributions to the model. See Table 13 for multiple regression results of psychological well-being among Asians/Pacific Islanders. The character strength factors of intellectual strengths, interpersonal strengths, emotional strengths, strengths of restraint, and theological strengths were all regressed on life satisfaction. Overall, the character strengths model
was significant ($p = .00, R^2 = .35, \text{adjusted } R^2 = .33$). The factors that made significant contributions to the model (in this order) were theological strengths ($\beta = .54, p = .00$), emotional strengths ($\beta = .48, p = .00$), and intellectual strengths ($\beta = -.28, p = .01$). It should again be noted that intellectual strength is functioning as a suppressor variable in this equation with the sign of the beta weight (-.28) being the reverse of the sign in the zero-order correlation (+.28) between it and satisfaction with life. The other two character strength factors did not make significant contributions to the model. See Table 14 for multiple regression results of character strengths among Asians/Pacific Islanders.
Table 7  Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Psychological Well-Being Domains Predicting Life Satisfaction among Caucasians

(N =194; SPWB = Scales of Psychological Well-Being).

<table>
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<th>Significance</th>
<th>Tolerance</th>
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Table 8  Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Character Strength Factors Predicting Life Satisfaction among Caucasians

(N =212; VIA-IS = Values in Action Inventory of Strengths).

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Table 9 Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Psychological Well-Being Domains Predicting Life Satisfaction among African Americans

(N =61; SPWB = Scales of Psychological Well-Being).

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Table 10 Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Character Strength Factors Predicting Life Satisfaction among African Americans

(N =65; VIA-IS = Values in Action Inventory of Strengths).

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Table 11 Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Psychological Well-Being Domains Predicting Life Satisfaction among Hispanic Americans

\( (N = 78; \text{SPWB} = \text{Scales of Psychological Well-Being}) \).

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Table 12 Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Character Strength Factors Predicting Life Satisfaction among Hispanic Americans

\( (N = 79; \text{VIA-IS} = \text{Values in Action Inventory of Strengths}) \).

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Table 13 Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Psychological Well-Being Domains Predicting Life Satisfaction among Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders
(N = 157; SPWB = Scales Of Psychological Well-Being).

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Table 14 Summary of Standard Multiple Regression Analysis for Character Strength Factors Predicting Life Satisfaction among Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders
(N = 158; VIA-IS = Values in Action Inventory of Strengths).

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CHAPTER 4

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study contributes to the overall body of knowledge on the constructs of life satisfaction, character strengths, and psychological well-being. Results indicated that there were differences among the four racial groups in the extent to which they identified with their respective racial group. Differences among the four racial groups were revealed on four of the twelve dimensions: life satisfaction, positive relations with others, emotional strengths, and theological strengths. In general, the dimensions correlated with one another within each of the four racial groups. In regards to the multiple regression models for character strengths and psychological well-being, they were statistically significant for all four racial groups. These results will be discussed in detail next, followed by a discussion of the implications, limitations, and conclusions of the present study.

Racial Group Identification

Significant differences were revealed among the four racial groups in the extent to which they identified with their respective racial group: “not at all,” “a little,” “moderately,” and “very much.” Specifically, African Americans scored higher on racial group identification compared to Caucasians, Hispanic Americans, and Asians/Pacific Islanders. For example, sixty-seven percent of African Americans reported identifying with their racial group “very much” as compared to forty-one percent of Asian
Americans, nearly thirty-nine percent of Caucasians, and thirty-seven percent of Hispanic Americans.

Upon further analysis, nearly ninety-two percent of African Americans reported identifying with their racial group either “very much” or “moderately” as compared to eighty-three percent of Asian Americans, nearly eighty-one percent of Caucasians, and nearly seventy-five percent of Hispanic Americans. Seven percent of Caucasians endorsed identifying “not at all” with their racial group as compared to marginally over one percent of Asian Americans, slightly over one percent of African Americans, and slightly over two percent of Hispanic Americans. Furthermore, racial group identification was not associated with life satisfaction for Caucasians whereas it was for the three minority racial groups, thus highlighting its importance for these groups.

Research has been conducted on the racial identity of African Americans and its relation to their psychological well-being. For example, Cross (1978) discussed his seminal model of nigrescence (i.e., evolution from being Negro to Black) in which he provided empirical support for the five stages that Blacks go through in search of a genuine identity: pre-encounter; encounter; immersion-emersion; internalization; and internalization-commitment.

The pre-encounter stage entails having a Euro-American frame of reference, which devalues blackness and holds in esteem Caucasian ways of thinking and behaving. The encounter stage involves experiencing a critical event that challenges one’s worldview, which results in the commencement of adopting a Black identity. The immersion-emersion stage is two-fold. First, the Black individual delves into his or her own culture while retreating from the dominant one; Black pride is increasing although this new identity is minimally internalized. Second, the individual takes a more balanced
approach to viewing Blackness, strong emotions taper off, and pride increases. In the internalization stage, the Black individual has internalized his or her new identity and has become secure with his self and in interacting with others. The last stage, internalization-commitment, entails the individual internalizing his or her Black identity and utilizing it to advance the progress of all Black people (e.g., via social activism).

Parham and Helms (1985) examined the association among racial identity attitudes, self-actualization, and affect in a sample of African American university students. The authors reported that racial identity attitudes predicted self-actualization. Specifically, greater levels of pre-encounter attitudes (i.e., devaluing blackness and holding Caucasians in high esteem) were related to lower levels of self-actualization whereas encounter attitudes (i.e., rethinking one’s world view as a result of an external event) were associated with greater levels of self-actualization. Furthermore, higher immersion attitudes (i.e., identifying with one’s blackness) were related with lower self-actualization.

Regarding the relation between racial identity attitudes and affect, Parham and Helms (1985) reported pre-encounter and immersion attitudes were positively related to interpersonal sensitivity, indicating greater levels of these attitudes were associated with personal inadequacy, inferiority, and hypersensitivity. Encounter attitudes were negatively related to anxiety with pre-encounter and immersion attitudes being positively related to anxiety. Furthermore, higher levels of immersion predicted anger, indicating problack-antiwhite attitudes were related to hostility and anger.

Similarly, Suzuki-Crumly and Hyers (2004) investigated the relationship among ethnic identification, psychological well-being, and intergroup competence in two different bi-racial groups (Black/White and Asian/White). In regards to the participants
answering how they identify themselves, they were given the following options: their minority culture, Caucasian, both cultures (i.e., minority culture and Caucasian), or neither one of them.

Suzuki-Crumly and Hyers (2004) reported various findings. First, Black/White and Asian/White participants were both more likely to identify with both of their cultures, then their minority culture, and then identifying with neither one of the groups. There was one Asian/White participant who identified with the majority group. Second, although no interaction between identity and individuals identifying as bi-cultural holding the highest self-esteem was found, the results revealed that those identifying bi-culturally or as a minority exhibited marginally greater self-esteem than those individuals who did not identify with either group. Third, individuals who identified with a minority showed the most life satisfaction, followed by those identifying as bi-cultural and then the non-identified participants. Fourth, there were no differences among the group identifications in respect to depression and those who identified with a minority exhibited the least amount of anxiety in their interactions with individuals from the majority group, with this effect being more salient for Asian/Whites than for Black/Whites. Fifth, no interaction was revealed in regards to anxiety during interactions with individuals of the same minority group. Sixth, an overall main effect of identification was found in both groups with post hoc tests revealing that bi-culturally identified Black/White individuals and non-identified Asian/White individuals were the most anxious.

First, they revealed that the following were associated with less self-esteem and higher levels of psychological distress among African American men: not opposing anti-Black initiatives; holding black-denigrating attitudes while holding Caucasians in higher esteem, and being intimately involved in the African American culture and holding angry attitudes towards Caucasians and their institutions.

Second, the following was associated with higher levels of self-esteem among African American men: holding a racial identity that was self-affirming (i.e., positively acknowledging one’s Black self) while also comprehending the pros and cons of Caucasian culture (thus being able to oppose anti-Black initiatives) and personally identifying less with African Americans.

Regarding this latter unanticipated result, Pierre and Mahalik (2005) revealed that the interpretation is unknown: either African American men have lower self-esteem when identifying with other African American men relative to African American men identifying with Caucasians or African American men with low self-esteem more readily identify with African Americans than Caucasians. They reported that both of these interpretations highlight that identifying with other African Americans is negatively associated with self-esteem for African American men.

Furthermore, the authors indicated that one of the limitations of their study was that it consisted strictly of men and that further research conducted with women is warranted. Pierre and Mahalik (2005) also noted that employment status and level of education may play a role in these findings and that further studies are needed to explore this.

Besides one’s level of racial identity, there could be a host of other factors that potentially explain the significant differences that were revealed among the four racial groups in the extent to which they identified with their respective group such as
socioeconomic status, level of acculturation/immersion, and personal experiences with racism and discrimination.

For example, results from this study revealed differences in income among the four racial groups with Caucasians having the highest income and African Americans having the lowest. As previously mentioned, it is critical to note that data on this demographic variable was collected from only a portion of this study’s total sample due to experimenter error.

In regards to previous research, Broman, Neighbors, and Jackson (1988) examined the relationship between sociodemographic variables and racial group identification in a national sample of African Americans. The authors reported that sociodemographic variables predicted racial group identification.

Specifically, the least educated urban African Americans and older African Americans endorsed strong identification with their racial group. There was a significant interaction between education and region, indicating that African Americans with high levels of education, living outside the West, have strong identification with their racial group. The authors noted that gender and income were not associated with identification with one’s racial group.

In another study, Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999) investigated individual differences among African Americans in their attributions of prejudice and its impact on their psychological well-being. The authors developed and tested a rejection-identification model in which making attributions about one’s experiences with discrimination to racial prejudice (i.e., rejected by the majority group) leads to lower levels of well-being. However, this model also predicts that identifying with one’s minority group will act as a mediating variable, which will, in turn, increase well-being.
In other words, the authors argue that the deleterious effects of racial prejudice can be, in part, ameliorated by racial group identification.

Branscombe, Schmitt, and Harvey (1999) reported various results from their study. First, they revealed that attributions to prejudice did not predict well-being but instead there was a tendency for those individuals more likely to make attributions to prejudice to have reduced well-being. Second, identifying with one's minority group was related with personal and collective well-being. Third, structural equation modeling analyses supported the rejection-identification model.

Furthermore, the authors modified their model in order to examine both directions of the association between attributions to prejudice and racial group identification. They reported that, although this modified model fit well, it did not fit as well as their original model, in addition to the former revealing a nonsignificant path from racial group identification to attributions to prejudice. Hence, the authors revealed more unidirectional evidence supporting the idea of attributions to prejudice influencing racial group identification rather than the existence of a bidirectional association between them.

Sanders Thompson (1999) examined factors impacting racial identity salience and its relationship to racial identification in a community sample of African Americans. The author reported various results. First, it was found that identity as an African American was important to comprehending self. Second, it was revealed that the following factors predicted racial identity salience: having an African American social network, racial socialization, and political activism. Third, level of racial integration and experience of discrimination did not predict racial identity salience. However, the author noted that one of the study's methodological limitations was that participants revealed very high rates of interactions with members of the same racial group (i.e., African American) and low rates.
of integration with non-group members. Therefore, this might explain the third result.


Thus, based on previous research, it seems that healthy identification with one’s racial group and heritage is critically important for the psychological well-being of minority groups. Racial group identification seems to have protective effects for minority individuals’ psychological well-being and therefore exhibit healthier adjustment as a result.

*Racial Group Differences*

Differences among the four racial groups were found on four of the twelve dimensions: satisfaction with life, the psychological well-being domain of positive relations with others, the character strengths factor of emotional strengths, and the character strengths factor of theological factors. In regards to satisfaction with life, it was revealed that Caucasians exhibited the highest levels of this dimension with post hoc tests indicating a small difference between Caucasians and Asian Americans. It should also be noted that Caucasians shared similar levels of life satisfaction with Hispanic Americans and African Americans.

The difference between Caucasians and Asian Americans might be due to the emphasis that is placed on the “self,” happiness, and being satisfied with one’s life in our society as opposed to that which is typically found in Asian cultures in which there is much less emphasis on the “self” and is more collectivistic in nature. Hence, one’s life satisfaction is not emphasized as much whereas one’s group’s satisfaction is.
For example, Markus and Kitayama (1991) discuss that there are cultural differences in how we construe ourselves, others, and our relationships with others. They differentiate two views of the self: independent and interdependent. The former view, which is reflected in American and Western European cultures, entails construing individuals as being autonomous agents whose actions derive from their internal thoughts and feelings free from the context they are situated in. The latter view, found in Asian, African, and Latin American cultures, emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals and puts one’s behavior in the context of one’s social relationships with others and is organized around others’ cognitions, affect, and behaviors. Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue that an independent construal of self is a myopic view of selfhood for various world cultures.

Similarly, Kwan, Bond, and Singelis (1997) examined relationship harmony and self-esteem in the prediction of life satisfaction in a cross-cultural sample of university students situated in Hong Kong and the United States. The authors revealed two significant findings. First, they reported that both relationship harmony and self-esteem were predictive of life satisfaction in both samples but self-esteem was relatively more important than relationship harmony in the American sample. In the Hong Kong sample, both of these variables were statistically equivalent. Second, they revealed that relationship harmony and self-esteem mediated the significant relationships between two self-construals (independent and interdependent) and life satisfaction, and, between the five-factor model of personality (i.e., NEO-FFI) and life satisfaction.

Kwan, Bond, and Singelis (1997) noted that self-esteem mediated the influence of independent self-construal on life satisfaction whereas relationship harmony did the same for the interdependent self-construal’s effect on life satisfaction. In regards to the five
factors of personality, self-esteem mediated cross-culturally the influence of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, and Conscientiousness on life satisfaction whereas relationship harmony did the same for the influence of Agreeableness and Extraversion on life satisfaction. The authors reported that although no cultural differences were revealed, there were significant mean differences across all of the variables, with the American sample exhibiting greater life satisfaction than the Hong Kong sample. This latter finding is congruent with this study’s finding reflecting Caucasians’ higher levels of life satisfaction relative to Asian Americans.

In regards to positive relations with others, it was revealed that Hispanic Americans scored the highest with post hoc tests indicating a small difference between Hispanic Americans and African Americans and between Caucasians (scored higher) and African Americans. This result is not surprising as the Hispanic culture tends to value interpersonal harmony and places importance on the family.

For example, Sue and Sue (1999) reported that family unity, cooperation, and interpersonal relationships (with friends, family, and extended family) are critical components of family tradition among Hispanic Americans. Similarly, Negy (as cited in Sue & Sue, 1999) revealed that religiosity, being respectful towards adults, family loyalty, and child rearing strictness are all more likely to be important to Hispanic American students than Caucasian students.

In regards to emotional strengths, Hispanic Americans revealed the highest levels of this domain with post hoc tests indicating a small difference between Hispanic Americans and Asian Americans. This finding makes sense considering that Hispanics scored the highest on positive relations with others as well, as the latter has been conceptualized as contributing to emotional health and well-being. In regards to theological strengths, it
was found that Hispanic Americans scored the highest but post hoc tests revealed no significant differences among the four racial groups. Emotional strengths, positive relations with others, and theological strengths can be conceptualized as all being intimately related with one another, with all of them contributing to one’s satisfaction with life and well-being.

These findings might be explained by the importance of spirituality and religion (e.g., the Roman Catholic church in particular) in the lives of Hispanic Americans and its use as an active source of support (e.g., emotionally and socially). For example, Sue and Sue (1999) stated that Catholicism has often provided comfort, and has generally been a significant influence, for Hispanic Americans with prayer and Mass participation being particularly important.

This latter finding (i.e., theological strengths) is contrary to research, which has revealed that African Americans tend to score higher on theological strengths than other racial groups (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Theological strengths consisted of the following subscales: appreciation of beauty, gratitude, hope/optimism, spirituality, and humor/playfulness.

Upon further analysis, Hispanic Americans primarily subscribed to the Catholic religion whereas African Americans predominantly subscribed to the Christian and Baptist denominations. Perhaps, Hispanic Americans, as a result of their strong identification with Catholicism, more readily identified with and endorsed the items (e.g., maybe due to their religion’s tenets) of the various theological strengths subscales than African Americans with their corresponding religious affiliations. Further research would be needed to confirm this possibility. It is highly critical to note that all of the
above mentioned differences should be considered in the context that the effect sizes for all of them were small.

**Associations Among Dimensions**

The original hypothesis of this study was that all of the dimensions would generally correlate with one another for all four racial groups. The exception was that intellectual strengths would not correlate with life satisfaction as revealed in previous research (see Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It was found that intellectual strengths and life satisfaction did not correlate with one another among Caucasians but did for the three minority racial groups.

In trying to discern patterns among the correlations, African Americans and Hispanic Americans held the same highest correlation (i.e., emotional strengths and interpersonal strengths). Emotional strengths and interpersonal strengths were each individually part of the highest correlation for three of the four racial groups (but for different groups). It is difficult to interpret the significance of these correlational findings as comparisons with previous research are not possible due to the limited number of studies previously conducted, especially considering that these constructs have not been examined with multicultural populations. Caution is also warranted in interpreting these relationships because of the large number of correlations.

**Associations With Life Satisfaction**

A total of eight multiple regressions were examined in this study to answer the primary question of interest: do facets of character strengths and psychological well being differentially predict satisfaction with life among the four primary racial groups in the U.S.? For each of the four racial groups, two multiple regressions were conducted: psychological well-being dimensions were regressed on life satisfaction and character
strength factors were regressed on life satisfaction. A comparison of the four racial
groups on the various psychological well-being dimensions being regressed on
satisfaction with life will now be discussed, followed by a comparison of the character
strength factors being regressed on satisfaction with life.

Regarding the various psychological well-being domains, self-acceptance and
environmental mastery were associated with satisfaction with life for Caucasians, which
was incongruent with this study’s original hypotheses (i.e., purpose in life would be most
related). For African Americans, none of the psychological well-being domains were
associated with life satisfaction, revealing an inconsistency with this study’s original
hypothesis (i.e., environmental mastery would be most related). For Hispanics/Latinos,
self-acceptance was associated with life satisfaction, which was incongruent with the
original hypothesis (i.e., positive relations with others would be most related). For Asian
Americans, environmental mastery and self-acceptance were associated with life
satisfaction, revealing an inconsistency with the original hypothesis (i.e., positive
relations with others would be most related).

Self-acceptance was a significant domain associated with life satisfaction for three of
the four groups (except African Americans) and environmental mastery was associated
with life satisfaction for two of the groups: Caucasians and Asian Americans. These two
latter groups shared the same associated domains (i.e., self-acceptance and environmental
mastery) in regards to life satisfaction with just their respective strength being reversed
for each group.

In regards to self-acceptance being a prevalent predictor, a common belief in our
society, perhaps in part attributable to the self-help movement, is that accepting oneself is
necessary to be psychologically healthy, perhaps explaining why self-acceptance was
such as common domain in predicting life satisfaction. The result that environmental
mastery was associated with life satisfaction for two groups is somewhat surprising in
that one could plausibly hypothesize that this construct would be important for the three
minority groups (due to having to cope with racism and discrimination) and not
necessarily for Caucasians.

Regarding previously conducted research, Ryff, Keyes, and Hughes (2004)
investigated psychological well-being in their MIDUS national survey. In regards to
race, they reported various findings pertaining to the six dimensions of psychological
well-being drawn from a national sample of Caucasians and African Americans, along
with subsamples of African Americans from New York and Mexican Americans from
Chicago.

For example, the authors revealed that race predicted the domain of self-acceptance,
with African Americans (from both samples) and Mexican Americans having higher
scores than Caucasians. However, race was found to interact with education, with higher
educated African Americans (from national sample) revealing no difference in self-
acceptance with Caucasians (greatest difference is at the lowest education levels).
Furthermore, perceived discrimination was found to have a strong negative effect on self-
acceptance, which led to the interaction between race and education being non-significant
when it was added to the model. In this study, as previously mentioned, Caucasians,
Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans revealed self-acceptance as being predictive
of life satisfaction.

In respect to the domain of environmental mastery, ethnic status (for both groups)
was found to be a positive predictor (compared with Caucasians) and perceived
discrimination was revealed as a negative predictor. In this study, as previously

90
mentioned, Caucasians and Asian Americans revealed environmental mastery as being predictive of life satisfaction. Being Mexican American (compared to being Caucasian) was negatively related with the domain of purpose in life (but not when education was added) and race interacted with age, indicating higher purpose in life levels in midlife Caucasians than midlife African Americans from the national sample. Furthermore, African Americans (from national sample) exhibited greater purpose in life with corresponding increases in educational level relative to the other racial groups. Perceived discrimination negatively predicted purpose in life.

In regards to the domain of personal growth, Ryff, Keyes, and Hughes (2004) reported that being African American (both samples as compared to being Caucasian) was a positive predictor and this effect remained when education (positive predictor) and perceived discrimination (negative predictor) were added to the model.

Minority status (for both groups as compared to Caucasians) positively predicted the domain of positive relations with others in addition to there being a race-gender and race-age interaction. Regarding the former, it was found that Mexican American and African American (from national sample) women revealed lower scores on the domain of positive relations with others as compared to males from these groups. Regarding the latter, higher positive relations with others was exhibited by older African Americans (both samples) than their younger counterparts (Caucasians revealed minor variation in age). Perceived discrimination negatively predicted positive relations with others.

On the domain of autonomy, being African American (New York sample) was a positive predictor and a race-age and race-education interaction was revealed. Regarding the former, older African Americans (from New York sample) exhibited lower levels of autonomy than the other two younger age cohorts (across the other three racial groups).
In regards to the latter, Mexican Americans exhibited greater levels of autonomy with corresponding increases in education, which was not found with the other racial groups. Perceived discrimination negatively predicted autonomy.

Regarding the character strength factors, intellectual strengths and emotional strengths was associated with life satisfaction for Caucasians. The latter finding is consistent with one of this study's original hypotheses. However, the former finding is inconsistent with previous research revealed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) in which they reported a lack of association between intellectual strengths and satisfaction with life. For African-Americans, theological strengths was associated with life satisfaction as originally hypothesized and as revealed in previous research (see Peterson & Seligman, 2004). For Hispanics/Latinos, theological strengths was associated with life satisfaction, revealing an inconsistency with this study's original hypothesis (i.e., strengths of restraint would be most related). For Asian Americans, theological strengths, emotional strengths, and intellectual strengths were associated with life satisfaction, revealing incongruencies with this study's original hypothesis (i.e., interpersonal strengths would be most related).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) noted that various character strengths could be conceptualized as approximately corresponding to the various dimensions of psychological well-being. For example, they reported that the individual character strength of creativity (an intellectual strength) corresponded to the psychological well-being domain of environmental mastery. This is consistent with this study's finding in which both environmental mastery and intellectual strengths were associated with life satisfaction for Caucasians and Asian Americans. Due to approximately corresponding with one another, it makes sense that both of these domains would be associated with life satisfaction for both racial groups. However, Peterson and Seligman (2004) noted that
social intelligence (an interpersonal strength) approximately corresponded to self-acceptance. This study’s findings did not show this correspondence despite the fact that self-acceptance was a significant predictor for three of the four racial groups.

All three of the minority racial groups had theological strengths as a significant predictor of satisfaction with life with this factor being the only predictive one for African Americans and Hispanics. This might be due to religion and spirituality serving as a protective factor against racism and discrimination experienced by all of these groups in our society. For example, spirituality and religion have been shown to be significant sources of support for African-Americans (see Wilson & Stith, 1998). Moreover, Peterson and Seligman (2004) cite research that reveals that African American and Hispanic youth endorse higher spirituality and religiousness and that adult samples of the former group score higher than Caucasians on assessments of spirituality and religiousness. Peterson and Seligman (2004) conclude that although there is research that reveals racial differences in regards to spirituality and religiosity, psychological research has yet to determine how race informs spirituality and religiosity.

Similar to the pattern revealed regarding psychological well-being domains, Caucasians and Asian Americans shared intellectual strengths and emotional strengths as predictive factors of life satisfaction, with just their respective strength being different for each group. Theological strengths was associated with life satisfaction for Asian Americans.

It is remarkable that Caucasians and Asian Americans shared the same psychological well-being predictors and almost identical character strength predictors of satisfaction with life. It is difficult to explain these findings but perhaps Asian Americans hold nearly identical life satisfaction predictors as Caucasians due to arguably assimilating more
readily than the other groups in our society and consequently becoming more acculturated into the mainstream culture. Further research would be needed to confirm this plausibility even though there is some existing confirming evidence.

For example, Sue and Sue (1999) reported that Asian Americans tend to have high levels of education, tend to be well-adjusted, and have reduced their social distance from Caucasians (e.g., by marrying them). However, they warn that Asian Americans should not be perceived as the “model minority” as they also experience various difficulties (e.g., higher poverty rates) similar to other minority groups.

The findings of this study revealed that certain character strength factors (e.g., strengths of restraint) were not associated with life satisfaction among any of the four racial groups. Relatedly, Harvey and Pauwels (2004) have remarked about the weak relationship between modesty/humility and life satisfaction as evidenced by previous research. In trying to decipher reasons for this, they noted that perhaps it is because we live in a society in which modesty/humility are not emphasized and indicated that the self-esteem movement has shunned these values. Furthermore, they suggested that modesty/humility might result from traumatic experiences in which individuals have experienced tragedy and loss and advocated for further research in positive psychology to confirm this.

Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) further examined the relationship between character strengths and well-being based on Harvey and Pauwels’ (2004) recommendation. They revealed that modesty increased with the number of traumatic events experienced, noting that trauma does not make individuals modest, but instead, seems to alter how modesty functions psychologically. That is, survivors with extensive
past histories of trauma may believe that being ordinary provides life satisfaction whereas other individuals might not be as appreciative due to the lack of tragedy in their lives.

In trying to compare the findings from this study with previous research, Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) examined the relationship between character strengths and satisfaction with life among three internet samples consisting of a total of over 5000 adults. They reported that the following character strengths were consistently and substantially associated with satisfaction with life: hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity. The following character strengths were weakly related with satisfaction with life: modesty and the intellectual strengths of judgment, love of learning, appreciation of beauty, and creativity.

Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) acknowledged that one of their study’s limitations was their method of collecting data (i.e., via the internet), thus not being able to accurately determine the representativeness of this sample. It is this writer’s contention that Caucasians were most likely overrepresented in that study’s sample and minority group members were probably severely underrepresented due to the issues of having the financial means to own a computer and having access to the internet (i.e., minority group members tend to generally have lower socioeconomic status and thus have less opportunity to own a computer and have less access to the internet).

Of the five character strengths most strongly associated with life satisfaction in Park, Peterson, and Seligman’s (2004) study, two were theological strengths (hope and gratitude), one was an emotional strength (zest), one was an interpersonal strength (love), and one was an intellectual strength (curiosity). These results reveal that there was a broad array of character strength factors that were associated with life satisfaction. Due to the authors not reporting the racial composition of their sample, it is impossible to
make direct comparisons of this study with theirs. Also, the authors’ study consisted of participants that were older (35-40 years old on average) than the participants in the present study ($M = 19.80$, $SD = 2.96$), however; the gender compositions of both samples were similar. Furthermore, their study consisted of examining the association of individual character strengths with life satisfaction whereas this study focused on the relation between character strength composite factors and life satisfaction.

In trying to make loose comparisons between this study’s results and theirs (Park, Peterson, and Seligman, 2004), this study’s overall results also revealed that there was a broad array of character strength factors that were significantly associated with life satisfaction: intellectual strengths, emotional strengths, and theological strengths. The only difference between the two studies’ results was that interpersonal strengths (i.e., love) were significantly associated with life satisfaction in their study, which was not found in this study. Again, it is critical to note that the representativeness of the other study is unknown whereas the purpose of this study was to specifically examine how various racial groups differed on character strengths and life satisfaction. Of course, this study’s sample is also not representative of the general population.

In another related study discussed earlier, Isaacowitz, Vaillant, and Seligman (2003) examined the strengths and life satisfaction of young, middle-aged, and older adults. There were three community samples of adults ranging in age from 18 to 93 and one sample consisting of older, surviving individuals of the Grant study of graduates from Harvard University. Even though the authors reported a number of results (which were discussed earlier), the focus at this juncture will be on those from the young adult sample as that is directly relevant to this study’s sample.
Among the young adult sample, hope emerged as the sole strength that significantly predicted satisfaction with life with greater satisfaction with life associated with greater levels of strengths. This is congruent with what Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) reported with the addition that other character strengths were also significantly associated with satisfaction with life. Furthermore, the results of Isaacowitz, Vaillant, and Seligman’s study (2003) is somewhat consistent with this study’s findings in that hope is a theological strength and theological strengths were found to be predictive of life satisfaction for three of the four racial groups (except for Caucasians).

**Implications**

There are both clinical and nonclinical implications from this study’s findings. Regarding the former, it is imperative that the field of psychology start assessing strengths and “what is going right” with individuals, in conjunction with assessing their deficits, in order to attain a more accurate and informed picture of psychological functioning. Relatedly, it is critical that our therapeutic interventions aim at not just relieving symptoms but also strive to build upon peoples’ strengths and resources. Psychological studies are starting to now focus on this.

For example, Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) examined various therapeutic interventions aimed at increasing individual happiness. In a randomized controlled trial, the authors designed five exercises focused on increasing happiness and one exercise that served as a placebo control.

The exercises were: 1) writing and delivering a letter expressing gratitude to an unthanked individual who had been kind to them; 2) writing three things that had gone well each day for one week and their causes; 3) writing and reviewing every day for a week about a period in their life when they believed they were at their best and reflecting
on those respective personal strengths; 4) taking the authors’ online version of the VIA-IS, receiving feedback regarding their highest five strengths, and utilizing one of them in a unique manner on a daily basis for one week; and 5) the same as number four except without the directive to utilize one of their highest five strengths in a new manner (instead they were asked to utilize one of them more often during the week). The exercise that served as a placebo control consisted of participants writing daily for one week about memories occurring early in their lives.

Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson (2005) found that utilizing one of your strengths in a new way (i.e., number four above) and writing about three good things (i.e., number two above) decreased symptoms of depression and increased happiness for a six month period whereas writing a gratitude letter (i.e., number one above) created positive changes for a one month period. The other two exercises, along with the placebo control, caused fleeting positive effects on symptoms of depression and happiness.

The authors acknowledged that their study’s population consisted of mostly well-educated and higher socioeconomic Caucasians who were motivated to be happier due to being mildly depressed, and, explicitly stated that future research on positive interventions should examine individuals from other backgrounds with varying degrees of depression and happiness (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

In a similar vein, Fava and Ruini (2003) reported on the development and implementation of a new psychotherapeutic strategy, well-being therapy, which is based on the six dimensions of psychological well-being discussed in this paper. By applying cognitive-behavioral techniques, the goal of well-being therapy is to improve clients’ overall level of well-being according to the six dimensions. This therapy (although it is in its preliminary stages) has been utilized in various clinical studies and has shown
efficacy in the residual phase of various affective disorders and recurrent depression, although limitations have been noted (e.g., small sample size). Well-being therapy may also be potentially beneficial when clinically applied to individuals with body image disorders, somatization disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and in geriatric populations (Fava & Ruini, 2003). Therefore, although this strategy offers promise, further empirical research needs to be conducted.

Relatedly, Fujita and Diener (2005) investigated the stability of life satisfaction over time utilizing a large and longitudinal sample of Germans followed over a period of seventeen years. The primary question of inquiry was whether individuals have a set-point (similar to weight set-point), or baseline, for life satisfaction, which people eventually return to despite their life experiences. They reported that there seems to be modest stability ($r = .51$) in life satisfaction over an extended period of time with nearly a quarter of individuals changing significantly in their levels of life satisfaction and nine percent of them exhibiting a change of an average of 3 or more points (out of a 10-point scale). In regards to these results, a first five-year average was compared with a last five-year average.

Fujita and Diener (2005) stated that although life satisfaction tends to be stable for most individuals, it does seem to fluctuate for some individuals and this is where mental health professionals can clinically intervene. Moreover, there are frequent fluctuations in life satisfaction from year to year in even stable individuals, lending support to the idea that situational life events can affect self-reports of life satisfaction. In considering past findings, they noted that there seem to be subjective well-being influences of varying lengths: short-term, intermediate, and long-term, thus highlighting their notion that the set-point for life satisfaction is a “soft” one.
In a similar vein, Diener, Lucas, and Scollon (2006) advocated for the modification of the adaptation theory of well-being, which hypothesizes that individuals eventually adapt to positive or negative life events and end up reverting back to a homeostatic level of happiness and life satisfaction. They proposed five modifications that should be made to the theory based on recently conducted empirical research.

First, individuals do not revert to a neutral baseline of emotion but rather to a positive one, as evidence reflects that most people experience positive emotions and moods. Second, people vary considerably in their individual set points due to inborn personality factors. Third, there seem to be multiple set-points of happiness representing different domains of well-being and not just a unitary set-point of happiness. Fourth, levels of happiness can appreciably change. And, fifth, there is individual variability in the degree of adaptation exhibited by people (even to the same event). The authors remarked that adaptation patterns need to be understood in order to design and implement efficacious interventions aimed at increasing individual well-being.

Thus, emerging evidence seems to indicate that it is possible to appreciably change peoples’ levels of life satisfaction and psychological well-being. Unfortunately, present standard clinical practice seems to more heavily emphasize symptom reduction. A balanced clinical intervention approach could prove to be beneficial in which symptom reduction and well-being enhancement are equally utilized as treatment strategies. Further research would be needed to empirically validate this integrated approach.

In addition to starting to widen our diagnostic and therapeutic lens to incorporate more positive psychological functioning, the results of this study highlight that the “one size fits all” model of psychology (based on Eurocentric functioning) can be shortsighted and inaccurate. That is, the field of psychology must turn its attention to whether its
theories, assessments, and interventions have been empirically validated with non-
Caucasian individuals or it might risk becoming irrelevant in the future as minority
populations continue to grow in this society. Further studies are warranted investigating
racial and ethnic differences in positive psychological constructs and psychopathology, as
one is likely to inform the other.

As a point of comparison, for example, Zhang and Snowden (1999) investigated
ethnic and racial differences in psychological disorders across five communities in the
United States. The sample consisted of over eighteen thousand individuals comprised of
Caucasians, African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Americans taken from
the Epidemiological Catchment Area (ECA) study.

The authors reported several findings. There were differences across ethnic groups in
the lifetime prevalence of the following psychological disorders at all sites:
schizophrenia, schizophreniform disorder, major depressive episode, major depression,
manic episode, bipolar, panic, phobia, somatization, drug and alcohol abuse or
dependence, antisocial personality, and anorexia nervosa. Differences among the ethnic
groups in psychological disorders were revealed at all of the study’s sites even after
controlling for demographic variables.

Compared to Caucasians, African Americans exhibited lower rates of major
depressive episode, major depression, dysthymia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, drug
and alcohol abuse or dependence, antisocial personality, and anorexia nervosa, while
showing comparable rates of schizophrenic disorders, manic episode, bipolar disorder,
atypical bipolar disorder, and panic disorder along with a greater likelihood of having
phobia and somatization.
Compared to Caucasians, Hispanics were less likely to exhibit schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic, and drug abuse or dependence while showing comparable rates of schizophreniform disorder and affective disorders with no other differences revealed.

Compared to Caucasians, Asians exhibited lower rates of schizophreniform disorder, manic episode, bipolar disorder, panic, somatization, drug and alcohol abuse or dependence, and antisocial personality while revealing comparable rates of schizophrenia, major depressive episode, major depression, dysthymia, atypical bipolar disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, phobia, and anorexia nervosa.

Zhang and Snowden (1999) concluded by remarking that ethnicity is related to the prevalence of psychological disorders even after controlling for demographic variables. Moreover, the risk of being diagnosed with a particular psychological disorder varies by ethnicity with certain groups being more vulnerable to specific forms of psychopathology. The authors advocate that an assessment of symptoms that are ethnically specific to particular groups would be beneficial for purposes of improving mental illness identification among minority individuals.

It is also equally critical to note that the results of this study indicate that there were many shared similarities among the racial groups, which should be emphasized just as much as the differences that exist among these populations in order to prevent a "difference bias." That is, it is important to note both the similarities and differences among these groups in respect to their endorsement of positive psychological constructs.

In a similar vein, it should be noted that there are likely to be as many within-group differences as there are between-group differences for all four of these racial groups. For
example, Hispanic Americans consist of individuals from distinct cultures who vary in respect to their level of acculturation, values, and difficulties (Sue & Sue, 1999).

In trying to develop an initial taxonomy of positive traits, Dahlsgaard, Peterson, and Seligman (2005) revealed six essential virtues that were prevalent in the religious and philosophical traditions of the West, China, and South Asia, suggesting that these virtues broadly converged across time and these respective cultures. While these authors’ attempts to create a universal and inclusive classification scheme is laudable, it is critical to note that in their taxonomy they have left out an analysis of other critical intellectual traditions from other parts of the world such as Africa and Latin America.

Dahlsgaard, Peterson, and Seligman (2005) acknowledged that in deriving their taxonomy they reluctantly excluded other cultures that lacked written texts. It is this writer’s contention that this may possibly bias their taxonomy of positive traits. For example, there exists the tradition to pass down knowledge orally in Africa and the intellectual contributions from this region of the world are therefore not included in this taxonomy of human virtues. Despite this, the intention of positive psychology to develop a universal classification scheme is praiseworthy and would do well to incorporate contributions from nonwritten, as well as written, traditions of other important regions of the world.

Lastly, it is imperative that the field of psychology strive to be more responsive to the mental health needs of ethnic minority groups as a way of attracting more of them to participate in clinical research and psychotherapy. Bernal and Scharron-Del-Rio (2001) write that while the field of psychology has strongly emphasized empirically supported treatments these interventions may not be applicable with individuals of color due to their methodological limitations. They write, ...“it is essential that researchers construct
theories of psychotherapy and evaluate treatments grounded in the realities and experiences of ethnic minority populations (Bernal & Scharron-Del-Rio, 2001, p.337).

For example, Morris (2001) advocates an integrated clinical approach in working with African American clients, which combines standard clinical practices and an Africentric perspective. He proposes various strategies for clinicians in working with African American clients.

First, be open to adopting various roles and serving various functions (e.g., psychologist being a therapist, advocate, case manager, etc.). Second, be open to discussing race and racial differences. Third, incorporate the assistance of the extended family and church in the assessment and treatment process. Fourth, utilize a therapeutic approach focused on problem-solving and the client’s daily life experiences. Fifth, focus on client’s strengths as well as their deficits. Sixth, utilize client’s culture as the context for accurate diagnosis and treatment.

Morris (2001) concludes stating that clinicians must move beyond what they are comfortable with by incorporating non-Eurocentric worldviews and models in their clinical conceptualizations. Moreover, clinicians should utilize effective culturally-sensitive strategies in their practices with diverse clients.

Relatedly, Cardemil and Battle (2003) delineated various recommendations for infusing race and ethnicity in psychotherapy. First, withhold preconceived notions about a client’s race or ethnicity in order to prevent misunderstandings. Second, recognize individual variability within racial/ethnic groups. Third, acknowledge racial/ethnic differences between client and mental health professional and its impact on psychotherapy. Fourth, acknowledge the therapeutic impact of racism, power, and privilege. Fifth, discuss race and ethnicity when it is indicated. Sixth, keep learning
about race and ethnicity and stay current with relevant sociopolitical events and their impact on the mental health professions.

Furthermore, the American Psychological Association (2003) has proposed broad guidelines for psychologists to assist them in the application of multiculturalism to various areas germane to the profession of psychology. A total of six guidelines were recommended, which have an anticipated expiration date of 2009, as this document is expected to continue to evolve over time and be shaped by relevant forces (e.g., empirical research).

First, it is critical that psychologists be cognizant of their attitudes and beliefs, which could deleteriously affect their perceptions of racially different individuals and their interactions with them. Second, psychologists should acknowledge the significance of multiculturalism and the understanding of diverse individuals. Third, psychologists should incorporate diversity and multiculturalism in psychological training. Fourth, researchers in psychology should acknowledge the significance of conducting culturally-based research with diverse individuals. Fifth, psychologists should implement culturally-sensitive interventions across their domains of practice. Sixth, psychologists should promulgate multicultural organizational development that is informed by culture.

For non-clinical populations, it is imperative for societal institutions to emphasize the significance of character strengths and psychological wellness to an individual’s satisfaction with life. By infusing these issues into a school curriculum, many societal problems could possibly be ameliorated such as substance abuse, gang membership, or sexual promiscuity.

For example, Park (2004) reported that volunteering has been incorporated in certain high school curriculums as a way of enhancing the character strengths of students via
involvement in community service activities such as assisting the geriatric population and tutoring. Park (2004) cites research stating that these types of programs yield many positive benefits for students: enhanced self-concept, improved scholastic achievement, more favorable attitudes towards school, reduced dropout rates, reduced juvenile delinquency, and reduced teenage pregnancy.

Relatedly, Damon, Menon, and Bronk (2003) reviewed the critical importance of adolescents developing purpose in life, which extends well beyond their stage of adolescence and continues throughout their lifespan. They reported that it is likely that adolescents who have purpose in life exhibit greater levels of achievement, moral commitment, self-esteem, and prosocial behavior although they noted that further research needs to be conducted in order to confirm this. Conversely, they stated that a lack of purpose in life is likely to yield a variety of individual and social problems.

It is also critical that governments at all levels (e.g., local, state, national) disseminate scientific findings on these themes of positive psychology as a way of improving the overall welfare of its citizens. For example, doing public service announcements on the significance of psychological well-being and/or providing free workshops to the public on ways to improve psychological health could substantially reduce the cost of healthcare and other social programs. Furthermore, having knowledge of the similarities and differences among racial groups would be very useful in developing and delivering culturally sensitive interventions, which would, in turn, likely increase their effectiveness.

Similarly, teaching about the importance of identifying and utilizing one’s character strengths would be critical at any age, from younger individuals to older ones. This could be done through the above-mentioned formats, or through educational programs at schools up to and including the college and university level.
For example, character education programs have now started to become more prevalent in our society. Park (2004) notes that these programs are types of moral education geared towards instructing students about moral virtues (e.g., personal responsibility). It is critical that these types of programs be culturally sensitive and emphasize the salient values and virtues of their intended audience.

For example, Zayas and Solari (1994) examined the socialization of young children in Hispanic families and the distinct child rearing values and practices of Hispanic parents (different from other ethnic groups). As a result, the authors noted that an awareness of, and sensitivity to, cultural values and expectations about child socialization are needed when conducting parenting skills programs with Hispanic parents if they are to be ultimately successful.

Relatedly, one of the missions of positive psychology was to scientifically examine positive institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Gable and Haidt (2005) reported that the field of positive psychology has generated less research on positive institutions and communities than on the examination of positive subjective experiences and positive individual characteristics (the other two missions of positive psychology).

Therefore, further research in this area is critical and warranted, especially considering recent current events in our society, which suggest a lack of positive institutions and an erosion of public confidence in our institutions (e.g., Enron scandal and ethical violations of various public government officials).

Limitations

Although this topic is important, it should be noted that the results are preliminary and it is critical to consider them in the context of the limitations of this study. First, even though the sample size was substantial, the sample consisted of university students.
Additionally the reported parental income of the participants was well above the median income of the metropolitan area. Both of these factors may limit the generalizability of the results.

Second, another limitation is the utilization of strictly self-report assessment instruments. These instruments are convenient for the following reasons: ease and speed of administration, completion, and scoring; accessibility, lack of cost (i.e., free); and they are psychometrically sound. However, they do have limitations.

For example, it is possible that subjects responded in a socially desirable manner in order to appear in a more favorable light. However, Peterson and Seligman (2004) reported that scores on social desirability were not significantly correlated with scores on the VIA-IS scales except in two domains: spirituality ($r = .30$) and prudence ($r = .44$). Furthermore, individuals’ responses could potentially vary depending on their state at the time of responding. For example, a student might have been more satisfied with his or her life at the time of filling out the measures due to having found out he or she got an ‘A’ on a research paper. Of course, this is a consideration when completing any self-report instrument and not just ones that are assessing positive aspects of psychological functioning.

Third, there was a shortage of an ideal number of African American and Hispanic American participants, which were needed in order to draw more statistically confident conclusions from the multiple regression analyses. Thus, future studies interested in measuring these constructs should attempt to utilize a more representative sample of the adult population, utilize multiple methods of assessment, and recruit a statistically adequate number of subjects in order to derive more confident and sound conclusions.
Conclusions

This was the first known study to examine the association of character strengths and psychological well-being with life satisfaction among a multicultural sample. There was a moderate number of individuals recruited representing each of the four racial groups and the total sample size was large. Moreover, a uniform recruiting strategy was utilized for the entire sample. Furthermore, the racial composition of the sample closely reflected the racial composition of the undergraduates of a diverse urban university.

Research in positive psychology is burgeoning and further studies are greatly warranted in order to make this field empirically sound. New journals in psychology have been recently created to publish increasing research on the positive aspects of psychological functioning such as the Journal of Happiness Studies and the Journal of Positive Psychology. Furthermore, academic courses on happiness are now being taught in major universities (e.g., Harvard University), graduate degrees in Positive Psychology are now being offered (e.g., Master’s degree at the University of Pennsylvania), and positive psychology conferences are being held internationally.

Relatedly, the rise of coaching, such as executive coaching, has coincided with the positive psychology movement, which aims at enhancing the performance of those individuals who lead organizations (Kilburg, 2004). In fact, there are psychologists who have now complemented their clinical practices and work with coaching, as this seems to be an emerging trend in our society in which individuals want to gain an “edge” over their competition and others.

Several conclusions can be drawn from this study’s findings. There were some significant differences among the four racial groups in the extent to which they identified with their respective racial group, which is a critical factor that needs to be further
researched when examining positive psychology constructs and race in order to see how one informs the other. Significant differences were found on four of the twelve dimensions among the four racial groups, although their effect sizes were small. In general, the dimensions correlated with one another across the four racial groups.

Different psychological well-being domains were associated with life satisfaction among the four racial groups. Similarly, the four racial groups differed in respect to the character strength factors that were related with life satisfaction. However, Caucasians and Asian Americans shared similar patterns in regards to significant psychological well-being and character strength predictors of satisfaction with life. In contrast, regarding character strengths, Peterson and Seligman (2004) reported that they found only a small number of ethnic differences among the primary racial groups in the United States in validating the VIA-IS with the notable exception that African Americans tend to endorse spirituality more than the other groups.

As demonstrated by the results of this study, individuals, by the nature of their race and ethnicity, vary in terms of the character strengths they endorse and differ in their psychological well-being and life satisfaction. Further research on the examination of character strengths, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction among multicultural populations is warranted in order to more clearly explicate these complex relationships and to learn how race informs these constructs.

The field of positive psychology must include individuals of color in its inquiry of positive psychological functioning if it is to remain a viable field in the future. For example, it has been reported that, in the United States, Hispanics are quickly becoming the largest ethnic minority (Valdez, 2000). The domain of psychology will need to adjust accordingly in order to respond to the increasing influx of immigrants to this country.
from different parts of the world, many who will arrive with pre-existing psychological
difficulties (e.g., traumas due to ethno-political conflict).

Furthermore, it is imperative that future psychological research focus not only on the
etiology, assessment, and treatment of psychological dysfunction but that it also examine
the factors that cause and contribute to positive psychological health. Research should
strive to find ways to assess and promote those salutogenic factors in the greater society
to the largest number of individuals possible in order to prevent mental illness from
taking root in the first place. In doing so, the field of psychology will have answered one
of its original callings: to strive to improve the lives of all individuals (Seligman &
Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).
APPENDIX

PLEASE CLEARLY ANSWER ALL OF THE FOLLOWING:

GENDER (circle one): Male Female

MARITAL STATUS (circle one):
Single In a relationship Married Divorced Widowed

CLASS (circle one): Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

AGE: ____________________________

CURRENT UNLV GPA: __________

DO YOU ATTEND CHURCH OR ARE YOU A MEMBER OF A CHURCH? ______

IF YES, WHICH RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION? (E.G., CATHOLIC, JEWISH, LDS, METHODIST, BAPTIST, EPISCOPALIAN, ETC.) ______________________________

ETHNICITY/RACE: ____________________________

TO WHAT DEGREE DO YOU IDENTIFY WITH YOUR ETHNIC/CULTURAL GROUP? (circle one):

1--------------------------2-----------------------------3---------------------------4
Not at all A little Moderately Very much

PARENTAL LEVEL OF INCOME (I.E., TOTAL ANNUAL INCOME):
____________________________________________

MOTHER’S HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION: ______________________

FATHER’S HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION: ______________________

112
REFERENCES


120


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