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# THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG PERSONALITY TRAITS, CHARACTER STRENGTHS, AND LIFE SATISFACTION IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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# ABSTRACT

Utilizing a sample of college students who completed the Adolescent Personal Style Inventory for College Students (Lounsbury & Gibson, 2004), the VIA Classification of Strengths (Peter, Park, & Seligman, 2004), and a Quality of Life Scale, specific relations between the Big Five Factor Model personality traits, character strengths, and life satisfaction in college students were hypothesized and examined. With the exception of the Big Five trait, Conscientiousness, all of the hypothesized correlations were found to be significant at the .05 level. This study also investigated whether the character strengths model and the Big Five model were significant predictors of life satisfaction in college students. Hierarchical regression analyses revealed that the character strengths model added validity above and beyond the Big Five in predicting life satisfaction in college students. Results are discussed in terms of implications for clinical aspects (e.g. treatment modalities) in the field of psychology.

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## Overview

Within the past decade, researchers have increasingly turned their interest toward examining the relationship between personality variables and subjective well being (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000). DeNeve and Cooper (1998) conducted a meta-analysis that illuminated the sizeable amount of research conducted on the relationship between these two variables. More specifically, DeNeve and Cooper focused on two dimensions of subjective well being: affective and cognitive. The affective dimension includes both positive and negative affect, as well as the balance between them. The cognitive dimension of subjective well being particularly refers to life satisfaction. Among the plethora of personality models available, the five factors proposed by Costa and McCrae (1992) are typically utilized most frequently. There is a broad consensus among researchers that the Big Five model represents a unified and parsimonious theoretical framework for personality (Digman, 1990; Digman, 1997; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997). The individual constructs (i.e., Agreeableness/Teamwork, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability/Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Openness) as well as the overall structure of the model have been supported in a variety of settings with a wide range of populations (Costa & McCrae, 1992; De Raad, 2000; Digman, 1990).

Researchers have also begun to focus their attention toward positive psychology and its relationship to subjective well being. Central to positive psychology are what are

known as character strengths (McCullough & Snyder, 2000; Seligman, 2002). Character strengths, or positive traits that individuals reflect through feelings, behaviors, and thought, exist in varying degrees (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). Although research examining positive psychology and subjective well being is still somewhat limited, several researchers have been able to ignite increasing interest in this field. For example, Park, Peterson, and Seligman studied character strengths and aspects of subjective well being, namely life satisfaction. Through their work, support for existing literature in this field has increased. Both personality and positive psychology seem to be meaningful to the area of subjective well being, and specifically to its cognitive dimension of life satisfaction. However, no research exists that considers the possible relationship among these three variables taken together.

## The Five Factor Model of Personality

Personality can be divided into several different levels according to the degree of the human behavior that is displayed (Paunonen, Haddock, Forsterling, & Keinonen, 2003). Behaviors that are narrow can be found at the lowest level of the hierarchy, followed by increasingly broader characteristic behaviors at the next level. Accordingly, trait characteristics can be found at the third highest level. At the top of the hierarchy are the personality factors, or broad dimensions of behavior that are amalgamations of several of the lower level traits (Paunonen et al.).

Through factor analytic investigations, many researchers have found that the factors in the top of the personality hierarchy fall into exactly five domains. These domains constitute the core of the Five Factor Model of personality (Paunonen et al.,

2003) and are labeled Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism (or its inverse, Emotional Stability), and Openness to Experience. These factors, also more commonly known as the Big Five, have emerged as a unified framework for personality (De Raad, 2000; Digman, 1990, 1997; Wiggins & Trapnell, 1997) and is currently the most prominent model of normal personality (Lounsbury, Tatum, Chambers, Owens, & Gibson 1999). The overall structure and integrity of this model has been confirmed in several studies (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1994; De Raad). The Big Five model has also been described as being robust, comprehensive, and generalizable across a broad spectrum of cultural and demographic populations (Tokar, Fischer, & Subich, 1998; Costa & McCrae; De Raad).

*Extraversion*

Factor I of the Big Five, also known as Extraversion, includes personality traits with a specific focus on the quantity and intensity of interpersonal relationships, the energy level involved in these relationships, positive emotionality, and excitement seeking (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). Extraversion has also been described by Lounsbury and Gibson (2004) as the, "...tendency to be sociable, outgoing, gregarious, warmhearted, congenial, and affiliative; attentive to and energized by other people and social/interpersonal cues..." (p. 4). Persons who score low on Extraversion are usually referred to as introverts (e.g. they desire to spend most of their time alone), while individuals who score high on this construct are typically referred to as extroverts (e.g. they desire to spend more time with others rather than by themselves). Extraversion continues to be a widely used construct and has been used in several assessments such as

the NEO-PI-R (Costa & McCrae, 1992) and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985).

*Agreeableness*

Factor II, or Agreeableness, refers to the quality of one's interpersonal relationships. Examples of quality include warmth, empathy, cooperation with others, and trust in others (DeNeve & Cooper). It has also been described as "...being agreeable and participative; and contributing to interdependence and cohesion in a work group." (Lounsbury & Gibson, 2004, p. 4). Individuals who are typically perceived by their peers as being good team members, easy to get along with, and focus towards group harmony tend to score high on Agreeableness. In contrast, individuals who score lower on Agreeableness are more likely to be perceived as being argumentative, critical, and difficult to get along with in group settings.

*Conscientiousness*

Conscientiousness, or Factor III, includes goal-directed behaviors (e.g. efficacy) and impulse control. Loyalty, dedication, and reliability are also characteristics of conscientious individuals (Lounsbury & Gibson, 2004). Barrick, Mount, and Judge (2001) stated that Conscientiousness has been one of the most widely studied traits of the Five Factor Model, especially as it relates to performance outcome. This is due to its direct linkages to task completion and performance-related behaviors.

*Neuroticism/Emotional Stability*

Factor IV of the Big Five is Neuroticism and is often referred to by its inverse, Emotional Stability. This factor focuses primarily on adjustment or lack of adjustment in normal populations. In other words, it refers to one's tendency to face difficulty and

stress with calmness, resolve, and security. Lounsbury and Gibson (2004) described high scorers on this scale as emotionally stable, secure, and resilient. Emotional Stability also includes behavioral and emotional traits that are negative (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). Therefore, persons who score low on this scale experience emotional and behavioral difficulty in stressful situations (e.g. emotionality, frustration, distress, anxiety and aggression).

*Openness to Experience*

The fifth and final factor, Openness to Experience, has sometimes been described as being the most controversial of the five (DeNeve & Cooper). This factor is intended to include different aspects of intelligence, creativity, culture, and openness to change, new tasks, and novel experiences. Low scorers on Openness have a tendency to not try new things, and will easily follow conventional ways of acting or approaching a situation. The opposite is true for high scorers.

*The Big Five Model, Subjective Well-Being, and Life Satisfaction*

The Big Five model has been used in several studies to examine a possible relationship with aspects of subjective well being, and sometimes more specifically, the cognitive aspect of subjective well-being- life satisfaction. McCrae and Costa (1991) found Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness to be significant predictors of life satisfaction. Gutiérrez, Jiménez, Hernández, and Puente (2005) examined the association between subjective well being, demographic factors (e.g. age, sex, and relationship status), and the Big Five. They found that personality was an important indicator of subjective well being. More specifically, Gutiérrez et al.

discovered that Extraversion and Neuroticism were the most significant correlates of subjective well being. These authors found Neuroticism to be closely associated with negative affect, while Extraversion was closely associated with positive affect. The Big Five Factor of Openness to Experience was associated with both positive and negative affect.

When demographic variables were taken into account, gender became an important influence. Women tended to obtain higher scores than men for affect balance. In general, women tend to score higher than men in the Neuroticism dimension (Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001). When Neuroticism was controlled for, women were found to obtain lower scores of negative affect than men (Gutiérrez et al., 2005). Age was another important correlate in the Guitérrez et al. study. A slight decrease was found in positive affect as age increased. These findings support those of Srivastava, John, Gosling, and Potter (2003) who also stated that Extraversion declines only for women as age increases. The final demographic variable studied, relationship status, was also shown to have significant results. Individuals who had stable relationships with a significant other obtained higher scores in positive affect and in well being versus those without a stable partner. These findings are supportive of similar findings by Acock and Hurlbert (1993), Campbell, Converse and Rodgers (1976), Glenn and Weaver (1981), Mastekaasa (1993), Wood, Rhodes, and Whelan (1989), and Headey, Veenhoven and Wearing (1991).

On a similar level, Hayes and Joseph (2003) showed the significance of the Big Five as it relates to subjective well being. Just as Costa and McCrae (1980) showed that happiness was associated with greater levels of Extraversion and lower levels of

Neuroticism, Hayes and Joseph also found comparable results. They also found Conscientiousness to be a better predictor of life satisfaction when compared to Extraversion. These authors provided a possible explanation for this finding. They suggested that individuals who are high in the Conscientiousness dimension tend to function more effectively in society and to achieve their goals. Neurotic people tend to experience more negative life events than others because they place themselves in situations that foster negative affect (Magnus, Diener, Fujita, & Pavot, 1993) and because they show preferential attention to negative stimuli (Emmons, Diener, & Larson, 1985). Extraverts place themselves in more social situations, have more friends, and find these social interactions rewarding (Watson & Clark, 1997). Results from Hayes and Joseph also support those of DeNeve and Cooper (1998). In their meta-analysis of personality traits associated with subjective well-being, they showed that Conscientiousness and Neuroticism were the best predictors of life satisfaction- the cognitive aspect of subjective well-being- and that Extraversion and Neuroticism were the strongest predictors of happiness.

Researchers from previous studies have also focused on finding which individual personality traits were most important to subjective well being detailed the relationships among these groups. Wilson (1967) found that emotional stability and Extroversion were positively correlated to subjective well being, while neurotic tendency was negatively related. Diener (1984) also found Extraversion to be positively related to subjective well being, as well as several other personality variables (e.g. internal locus of control and perceived control).

In reviewing the literature on the Big Five Factors and subjective well being, specifically life satisfaction, results from Heller, Judge, and Watson (2002) took this relationship one step further. In a previous study, Judge and Watanabe (1993) argued that job and life satisfaction are reciprocal. Heller et al. suggested that the link between these two variables was personality. Theorists have developed two explanatory models for both job and life satisfaction. The bottom-up model pertains to one's situation. In other words, because jobs are an important part of individuals' daily lives, people who enjoy their jobs will report greater satisfaction with their lives (Brief et al., 1993; Diener, 1984). However, in the second model, the top-down view, it is suggested that basic personality and affective differences predispose people to have differences in the level of satisfaction they obtain in various aspects of their lives (Brief et al.; Diener). It appears that traits that predict job satisfaction are the same traits that predict life satisfaction (Heller et al.). Given these numerous findings on the relationship between the Big Five and elements of well being, it seems clear that personality has a significant impact on these elements. It has even been posited that personality factors may exert broad influences across cultures (Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997).

## Narrow Versus Broad Debate

Research using the Big Five also includes a concentration on whether these factors are adequate in describing the dimensions of personality. Broad traits are defined as being general, more inclusive, and abstract (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1996). Narrow traits are concrete and more specific (Ones & Viswesvaran). The Big Five factors are broad traits, while their facets are narrow traits (Schneider, Hough, & Dunnette, 1996).

In the broad versus narrow debate, a review of the literature revealed increased interest in whether or not narrower traits seem to enhance the validity of relationships studied. These areas of relationships include personality and cognitive ability (Lounsbury, Welsh, Gibson, & Sundstrom, 2005), personality and academic performance in adolescents (Lounsbury, Sundstrom, Loveland, & Gibson, 2003), and personality and prediction of cultural behaviors (Paunonen, Haddock, Forsterling, & Keinonen, 2003), to name a few. Results have been mixed as researchers have found supportive and non-substantive evidence of increased prediction or validity due to the addition of narrow traits (Paunonen et al.; Lounsbury et al.; Schneider et al.; Paunonen & Nicol, 2001). In addition to the broad versus narrow debate, researchers have tried to answer the question of the possible existence of higher order factors of the Big Five (Lounsbury et al., 2005; Digman, 1997; Ones and Viswesveran, 2001). Research on the possibility of a higher order for the Big Five revealed two higher dimensions (Digman). The existence of these two dimensions may be explained through the hierarchical ordering of personality or through broad personality theoretical constructs that explain the relationship of the Big Five factors (Digman).

## Positive Psychology

One of the distinguishing characteristics in the field of counseling psychology is a focus on the strengths of individuals, as opposed to a concentration on pathology. Researchers have claimed that unfortunately, psychology in general has become more like the medical model with an emphasis on healing within a disease model of human

functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Within the past several years, there has been an exponential interest in redirecting the field of psychology away from its preoccupation with "repairing" people and more towards building and reinforcing positive qualities of individuals (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi).

*Three Levels: Subjective, Individual, and Group*

Positive psychology has been described as the scientific study of human strengths and virtues (Sheldon & King, 2001) and as an avenue for researching and theorizing about what makes life worthwhile (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). It can be broken down into three different levels. The first of these levels is the subjective level. This includes subjective experiences pertaining to well being, satisfaction, and contentment from the past, optimism and hope for the future, and happiness in the present (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The second level, or the individual level, encompasses individual traits that are positive in nature. Examples of some of these traits are the capacity for love, forgiveness, spirituality, interpersonal skill, and future mindedness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi). Researchers have shown that these human strengths actually help to buffer against mental illness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi). For example, the character strengths hope, kindness, social intelligence, and self-control can serve as buffers against negative effects of stress and trauma, thus preventing some mental disorders from occurring (Park, 2004). The third level of positive psychology is the group level. It is in this level that institutions that encourage individuals to move toward social growth are included. In other words, individuals are pushed to become more responsible, more nurturing, more civil, and more tolerant, to name a few (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi).

*Positive Psychology and Personality Traits*

Four different personality traits actually contribute to positive psychology. These include subjective well being, happiness, self-determination, and optimism (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The first of these traits, subjective well being, refers to how individuals think and feel about their lives (Diener, 2000). This includes how they cognitively and affectively evaluate their lives. The second trait, happiness, refers to how content people feel in their lives. Myers (2000) concluded that four elements add to one's happiness: economic growth, income, close personal relationships, and religious faith. Self-determination is the third trait and includes three things: need for competence, need for autonomy, and need for belongingness (Ryan &Deci, 2000). Lastly, optimism mediates between external experiences and how one interprets them (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi). Optimism involves emotional, cognitive, and motivational aspects as well.

Positive psychology is thus an attempt to drive psychologists to attain a more open and appreciative stance with regard to the potential and capacities of humans. In revisiting the "average person", positive psychology allows one to find out what is right, what works for individuals, and what is improving (Sheldon & King, 2001). Several important questions can be raised in relation to positive psychology. The first of these questions is why are positive emotions so important (Sheldon & King). Frederickson (2001) suggests that positive emotions are responsible for facilitating the creation of important skills and resources. Meyers (2000) poses the question why are most humans

satisfied with their lives regardless of difficulties they experience? Researchers like Masten (2001) feel that resilience is the key to this answer.

*Pathology Versus Positive Psychological Health*

Given the recent push for integrating a positive outlook on human nature rather than the typical pathology stance, researchers have given suggestions as to plausible ways for doing so. Lampropoulos (2001) suggested that psychologists merge aspects of positive psychology into both models of psychopathology and into treatment modalities. Three focus points for achieving this amalgamation include a) incorporating positive strengths/traits of clients when studying psychopathology and treatment effectiveness, b) reinforcing and utilizing self-help modalities (they tend to build on positive qualities of people), and c) combining therapeutic factors of positive psychology into current treatments (Lamprpoulos). With changes in the field of psychology continuously moving towards a healthier focus, Resnick (2001) cautions professionals to remain modest in making suggestions for the field as well as justifying them.

The strides that have been made in the field of positive psychology have been numerous and successful. However, there is still room for growth. Walsh (2001) discussed cultural differences within the field of positive psychology. This author focused on a specific gap in the field- there is no mention of non-Western approaches within positive psychology. Walsh cites this as being critical given that non-Western practices are becoming more accepted and more effective. These psychologies also have a strong focus on "positive well being and development"- both of which fit well with the goals of positive psychology (Walsh). For example, Buddhism and yoga contain a plethora of information on positive psychological help, as well as exceptional abilities

and how to cultivate them, despite its lack of information on major psychopathologies (Tart, 1992; Walsh, 2000). Meditation alone can enable one to experience positive traits such as enhanced empathy, creativity, and a positive sense of self-control (Walsh). Researchers can use evidence from these non-Western approaches as they continue to incorporate aspects of positive psychology into mainstream psychology. Bacigalupe (2001) cites another example where positive psychology can grow. This author noted that there is a lack of perspective from people of color with regards to positive psychology. Therefore, he concluded that positive psychology cannot be fully comprehensive.

## Character Strengths

Central to positive psychology are what are known as character strengths (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). These can be defined as "positive traits reflected in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. They exist in degrees and can be measured as individual differences." (Park et al., p. 603). Currently, there are twenty-four characters of strengths that fall into six broad groups (See Table 1). These six groups are: a) wisdom and knowledge, b) courage, c) love, d) justice, e) temperance, and f) transcendence (Steen, Kachorek, & Peterson, 2003). A few examples of the character strengths within these groups include bravery, curiosity, integrity, humor, love of learning, prudence, spirituality, kindness, and zest ((Park et al.).

*Historical Development*

In reviewing the existing literature on character strengths, a historical perspective of character development can be found. Although research is somewhat scant, empirical studies shed some light on the development of individual components of character. A variety of influences contribute to this development. The first of these influences are biological factors (Park, 2004). Matthews, Batson, Horn, and Rosenman (1981) and Zahn-Waxler, Robinson, and Emde (1992) have shown that empathic behaviors and prosocial patterns of behavior are heritable. Second, it has been argued that social factors such as having a positive role model plays an important role in character development (Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-Waxler, & Chapman, 1983). These researchers suggest that guidance from adults help in the development of prosocial behaviors. Third, close relationships with family and friends, via secure attachment, have been shown to be positively related to the development of character (Waters, Hay, & Richters, 1986; Londerville & Main, 1981; Dunn, 1988; Birch & Cillman, 1986). Fourth, positive institutions like schools play an important role in character development (Park). The moral atmosphere of such institutions is critical in character development (Higgins, Power, & Kohlberg, 1994). Lastly, parental styles such as authoritative parenting have been consistently shown to be associated with positive character development (Baumrind, 1998). This is partly due to the responsive and respectful environment that this type of parenting style provides, in addition to the firm guidance of constructive behaviors (Park).

*Character Strengths and Positive Psychology*

The increased and renewed interest in character strengths of humans has spurred researchers to conduct numerous studies in an attempt to further understand positive psychology. A large number of this research has had adolescents as the focus group (Larson, 2000; Catalano et al., 1999). A reason for concentrating on this particular developmental level is because character strengths have a "developmental trajectory" (Steen, Kachorek, & Peterson, 2003). In other words, adult character strengths may not have exact counterparts in adolescents and children. Steen et al. focused on character strengths in youths. Their goal was to find a better way to measure character strengths in adolescents. They wanted to see what type of influence character strengths had on youths as well as which ones were important to them, if any. This, in turn, would help pave the way towards developing programs focused on positive youth development.

Research on youth development has typically been concentrated on negative aspects, such as school absenteeism, school dropout rates, delinquency, alcohol and drug use, and unwanted pregnancy (Steen, Kachorek, & Peterson, 2003). As such, these researchers took a different route in their research by focusing on positive aspects of youth development. It was their conclusion that giving attention to positive aspects, or character strengths, has the added effect of reducing negative outcomes. In their discussion groups with high school students, these researchers were able to learn what character strengths were most important to them. The results from these discussion groups allowed Steen et al. to then give suggestions for how to implement and structure youth development programs.

Park (2004) also concentrated on character strengths and positive youth development. She found consistent evidence for the important role that character strengths play in positive youth development. Park re-emphasized the importance of positive youth development in helping youth to build upon their assets. As a result, these youth will have some of the characteristics that are needed to thrive throughout life. Park agreed with Seligman's (2004) proposition that the good life can be encouraged by recognizing and fostering individual character strengths. Strengths among youth can be specified and measured, but Park suggests that more research needs to be done in the area of developing programs that help to build character in youth and promote well being.

*Character Strengths and Life Satisfaction/Well-Being*

Other researchers have studied the relationship between character strengths and several variables such as well-being and life satisfaction. Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) investigated the relationship of these variables in adults. They found the character strengths of hope, zest, love, curiosity, and gratitude to be most strongly correlated with life satisfaction. Park et al. provided a possible explanation for these findings. They suggested that gratitude is a positive link to one's past, while hope is a positive link to one's future. These authors also proposed that curiosity and zest are positive links to the here and now, while love helps to enable one to live a fulfilling life. Love has even been frequently associated with life satisfaction (Diener & Seligman, 2002). A weak association with life satisfaction was found with modesty and the intellectual strengths of creativity, judgment, love of learning, and appreciation of beauty. Another aspect of their study was to investigate what effect character strengths in excess have on life satisfaction.

All of the character strengths studied, with the exception of modesty, beauty, and creativity, had significant correlations with life satisfaction. Results from Park et al. confirm the authors' hypothesis that the more intense the character strength is, the higher an individual will rate his or her life satisfaction.

The findings from Park et al. (2004) are consistent with other similar studies in which the relationship between personality and well being were examined (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wilson, 1967). When the Big Five traits were studied in conjunction with life satisfaction, researchers found that Agreeableness and Extraversion are positively associated with life satisfaction. The Big Five trait of Agreeableness is parallel to the VIA classification of love and gratitude while the trait Extraversion is related to curiosity and zest (Park et al.).

Harvey and Pauwels (2004) challenged researchers to take Park et al.'s (2004) study one step further. These authors did not understand why such a weak association was found between modesty and humility with life satisfaction. They were surprised that since the population used in the Park et al. study included a very large number of adults in their mid-life, more of these participants did not endorse modesty and humility as being vital to life satisfaction. Harvey and Pauwels gave suggestions for future research in the area of character strengths and life satisfaction. For example, they proposed that researchers examine these variables with a different population- perhaps a population of persons who have experienced some type of loss. After all, it has been posited that modesty and humility are qualities that most likely result from the experience of loss (Harvey & Pauwels). Another suggestion from these authors is that future researchers

focus on how certain character strengths may predict overall life satisfaction after the experiencing a loss. Lastly, Harvey and Pauwels recommended that researchers place their concentration on developing more efficient and valid ways of measuring character strengths instead of just focusing on the effect these strengths may have on aspects of life.

Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) further examined the link between character strengths and well being per the suggestions made by Harvey and Pauwels (2004). They found that trauma (e.g. loss of a family member) was an important moderator in the association between modesty and well being. More specifically, as trauma increased, so did the correlation between these two variables. Park et al. also ran new statistical analyses on their data. They originally found statistically significant relationships for individual character strengths. After a new inspection, Park et al. were able to examine which strengths predict life satisfaction regardless of the contributions of other strengths. Their findings were similar to the original results.

Another area of research with a focus on character strengths involves the September 11th terrorist attacks. Peterson and Seligman (2003) examined data from individuals pre- and post September 11th to see if these persons experienced any changes in character strengths. These authors had originally collected data while studying character strengths, via the VIA Classification of Strengths, between January 2001 and June 2002. When the pre- and post data were compared, the results showed that there was an increase in seven character strengths for respondents two months after September 11th. The seven strengths are hope, gratitude, kindness, love, leadership, spirituality, and teamwork. Peterson and Seligman also found that ten months after September 11th, the increased level of these character strengths remained high, although not quite as high as

they were immediately after the terrorist attacks.

## Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is sometimes referred to as the "ultimate motivator" for human behavior (Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997). It is a person's assessment of his or her satisfaction with various aspects of their existence throughout their lifetime (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). Campbell (1981) gave twelve domains that contribute to life satisfaction. These include finances, health, family relations, friendships, paid employment, housing, recreational activity, living partner, religion, transportation, self-esteem, and education. As a result of the continuous attention given to life satisfaction across the past few decades, a number of predictors of this construct have been identified (Bradburn, 1969; Campbell; Diener, 1984). It can be concluded that because life satisfaction is integrative across numerous activities, culture plays a valuable role in the factors that contribute to it (Kwan et al.). However, there is scant cross-cultural evidence on the construct life satisfaction. A few studies by Diener and Diener (1995), Diener, Diener, and Diener (1995), and Michalos (1991) have created the possibility for cross-cultural comparisons of factors that influence life satisfaction (e.g. self-esteem). Kwan et al. also concentrated on examining life satisfaction from the cross-cultural perspective. They studied the effect of relationship harmony, self-esteem, and two self-construals, independent and interdependent, with personality factors on life satisfaction. Self-construals are thought to be determinants of thoughts, feelings, and actions and can affect how independent individuals are as well as how well they can interact with others (Kwan et al.). These

authors found that the two self-construals and the five factors of personality are correlated to life satisfaction, with self-esteem and relationship harmony acting as mediating variables.

*Life Satisfaction and Personality/Big Five Factors*

Research on variables related to personality and life satisfaction include important work by Lounsbury, Tatum, Chambers, Owens, and Gibson (1999). These authors added another variable- career decidedness. Specifically, they examined the effect of career-decidedness in college students on the Big Five factors of personality as well as the relationship between career-decidedness and life satisfaction. Lounsbury et al. found a significant relationship between career-decidedness and three personality constructs- Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Neuroticism- the latter having a negative correlation. These authors also found that higher levels of career-decidedness were associated with higher levels of life satisfaction.

Boland and Cappaliez (1997) examined the Big Five factor Neuroticism and several other factors as predictors of life satisfaction. Higher Neuroticism scores were found to predict lower levels of life satisfaction. Other predictors included income, social support, health, stress, and optimism. For example, higher scores on social support, daily stress, optimism, and health predicted greater life satisfaction.

*Life Satisfaction and Perceived Quality of Life*

Another area of research concerning life satisfaction is gaining increased attention. It involves children's perceived quality of life (PQOL). Researchers have recognized the importance of positive psychological constructs such as life satisfaction (or PQOL) and hope in adults and are beginning to explore these same constructs in

children. PQOL has been studied in two domains- an overall evaluation of quality of life and specific life domains such as family, school, and peers (Huebner, Suldo, Smith, & McKnight, 2004). Although a number of PQOL measures have been developed for adults, very few exist for children and adolescents. Huebner et al. examined existing literature on PQOL in children. They found early efforts to identify important correlates of children's PQOL. For example, a study by Ash and Huebner (2001) found that frequent experiences of negative events in life were correlated with decreased PQOL. Fogle, Huebner, and Laughlin (2002) examined the relationship among several of the Big Five factors (Extraversion and Neuroticism), social self-efficacy, and PQOL. They found social self-efficacy to be a mediating factor between Extraversion and PQOL. Overall, researchers in this specific area of study have shown that PQOL has a wide- ranging influence on personality, environment, and behaviors.

# CHAPTER II

# EXAMINATION OF PERSONALITY TRAITS, CHARACTER STRENGTHS, AND LIFE SATISFACTION IN COLLEGE STUDENTS

## Objectives

Previous studies contain evidence supporting the relationship between personality factors (i.e., The Big Five) and life satisfaction (Acock & Hurlbert, 1993; Campbell, 1981; Converse, & Rodgers, 1976; Costa, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001; DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Diener, 1984; Glenn & Weaver, 1981; Gutiérrez, Jiménez, Hernández, &Puente, 2005; Hayes & Joseph, 2003; Headey, Veenhoven & Wearing, 1991; Heller, Judge, & Watson, 2002; Kwan, Bond, & Singelis, 1997; Magnus, Diener, Fujita, & Pavot, 1993; Mastekaasa, 1993; McCrae & Costa, 1991; Srivastava, John, Gosling, & Potter, 2003; Watson & Clark, 1997; Wilson, 1967; Wood, Rhodes, & Whelan, 1989). Evidence also exists for the relationship between character strengths and life satisfaction (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Seligman, 2004; Wilson; Harvey & Pauwels, 2004). Given the plethora of studies in these areas, researchers have questioned whether there is an association between the Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths (which measures character strength) and the Big Five factors of personality (Park et al.). Correlations, although modest, were found in a sample of adults, the majority of which were middle-aged (Park et al.). However, no research to date has investigated this relationship in college-aged persons. Individuals in this stage of life are continuously experiencing new things and their personality is not yet set in

stone. For example, Costa and McCrae (1982) suggest that personality is not stable until after 30 years of age. Other researchers have challenged this argument and have stated that personality changes depending on stability of environment (Ardelt, 2000). College students are active in selecting, shaping, and transforming their environment to fit their personalities. Transition periods, like those during college, provide the greatest opportunity for personality change because successful coping with new and unpredictable situations often requires reorganization of one's priorities and adaptations to the environment (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996).

As such, one of the goals of this study was to examine the relationship between the Big Five factors of personality and life satisfaction, as well as the relationship between character strengths and life satisfaction among college students. A second goal was to determine if there is an association between the Big Five factors of personality and the VIA Classification of Strengths. Lastly, this study examined the relationship between the Big Five Factors of personality and character strength models in predicting life satisfaction among college students

## Hypotheses

Focusing on the relationship among the Big Five factors of personality, character strengths, and life satisfaction, the following hypotheses are offered:

- Hypothesis 1: Based on extant research, the Big Five factor personality traits of Neuroticism/Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Extraversion,

and Conscientiousness will be most significantly correlated to life satisfaction in college students.

- Hypothesis 2: The character strengths hope, zest, love, curiosity, and gratitude will be most strongly correlated to life satisfaction in college students.
- Hypothesis 3: The Big Five factors of personality, taken as a set, significantly predict life satisfaction in college students.
- Hypothesis 4: Character strengths, taken as a set, significantly predict life satisfaction in college students.
- Hypothesis 5: Character strengths add incremental validity beyond the Big Five Factors of personality in predicting life satisfaction in college students.
- Hypothesis 6: There will be significant correlations between the Big Five factors of personality and character strengths.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants in this study included 228 undergraduate students at a large Southeastern university. The goal was to get representation from students from a variety of demographic variables. Participants were recruited through class announcements and received extra credit for their participation.

*Measures*

The three measures that were used in this study were available for participants online. The first measure, the Adolescent Personal Style Inventory for College Students (Lounsbury & Gibson, 2004), was used as a measure of the Big Five factors of personality (Extroversion, Neuroticism/Emotional Stability, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness). This self-report questionnaire contains 118 items based on personality. This measure contains wording tailored for student populations and has been used for early, middle, and late adolescents (see Adolescent Personal Style Inventory Constructs, Appendix A) (Jaffe, 1998). Responses are based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (2). Several researchers have established information on norming, reliability, criterion-related validity, construct validity, and scale development.

The second measure, the Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004), was used as a measure of character strengths. The VIA is a 240-item self-report questionnaire that uses a five-point Likert scale to measure the degree to which respondents endorse strength-relevant statements about themselves. The range was from 1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree, with a midpoint of 3=Neutral/Undecided. There are a total of 24 strengths of character in the VIA classification and includes 10 items per strength. Responses are averaged within scales, all of which have satisfactory internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alpha coefficient ($\alpha s > .70$) and test-retest correlations ($rs = .70$)

The third measure used in this study was the Quality of Life Scale and was adapted directly from Lounsbury et al's. (2005) study, which used a set of 22-items to measure General Life Satisfaction and College Satisfaction. This measure was constructed based on measures presented by Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) and Andrews and Whitney (1976). Within this scale are 15 items that measure domains of life satisfaction such as friends, free-time, social life, health, fun, major, and one's life in general, as well as 7 items that measure domains of college satisfaction such as school learning, progress towards college degree, and availability of needed courses. A 7-point Likert scale is the form of measurement used, and ranges from "Very Dissatisfied" (1) to "Very Satisfied" (7).

*Procedure*

Data from this study comprised a sub-set of a larger data set of ongoing study by researchers Drs. Jacob Levy and John Lounsbury. This study had human subject approval. Participation in this study was voluntary and participants were made aware that their results were going to be used for research purposes. Participants for this study were solicited through class announcements in psychology courses. All study materials were available online. Participants entered an individualized passcode that allowed access to the study materials. After the participant completed the material (i.e., PSI, VIA, LSQ), a customized report of their results was made available for download from their personal computer.

# CHAPTER III

# RESULTS

## Overview

The present investigation examined specific, correlational relationships among study variables: personality traits, character strengths, and life satisfaction. A detailed description of the 24 character strengths is provided under the section Character Strength Constructs in Appendix A (all tables and constructs are found in Appendix A). The results of correlational analyses for Character Strengths and Life Satisfaction are provided in Table 1; the results of correlational analyses for Big Five Factors and Life Satisfaction are provided in Table 2; the results of correlational analyses for Character Strengths and Big Five Factors are provided in Table 3. Next, hierarchical regression analyses were performed to analyze how the personality traits and character strengths measures jointly and uniquely contributed to the prediction of life satisfaction. A summary of the hierarchical regression analysis with character strengths entered before the Big Five Factors is provided in Table 4. A summary of the hierarchical regression analysis with the Big Five Factors entered before character strengths is provided in Table 5.

## Hypothesized Relations Between Study Variables

*Hypothesis 1*

Table 2 reports the findings for the correlation between the Big Five factors of personality and Life Satisfaction in college students. This analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between Neuroticism/Emotional Stability and life satisfaction ($r = .493$, $p < .05$). A significant positive relationship between Extraversion and Life Satisfaction was also found ($r = .330$, $p < .05$). Statistical analysis revealed that Openness and Life Satisfaction had a significant positive relationship with one another ($r = .241$, $p < .05$). Lastly, results showed that there was a significant positive relationship between Agreeableness and Life Satisfaction. Thus, Hypothesis 1 was substantially supported in that a significant relationship was found among Neuroticism/Emotional Stability, Extraversion, and Agreeableness with Life Satisfaction. Hypothesis 1 was partially unsupported in that no significant relationship was found between Conscientiousness and Life Satisfaction, but instead, Openness and Life Satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 2*

As can be seen in Table 1, there was a significant positive relationship among all of the character strengths and life satisfaction. The character strengths curiosity ($r = .421$, $p < .05$), hope ($r = .430$, $p < .05$), love ($r = .450$, $p < .05$), self-regulation ($r = .405$, $p < .05$), gratitude ($r = .346$, $p < .05$), and zest ($r = .493$, $p < .05$) were found to have the highest correlations with life satisfaction. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was supported with the addition of the character strength, self-regulation.

*Hypothesis 3*

A second hierarchical regression analysis was performed to address the issue of predictability of the Big Five model, taken as a set, on life satisfaction. When the Big Five model was added first, it was shown in table 5 that this model was a significant predictor of life satisfaction, accounting for 31% of the variance ($R2 = .313, p < .01$). Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported.

*Hypothesis 4*

A hierarchical regression analysis was performed to address the issue of predictability of the Character Strengths model, taken as a set, on Life Satisfaction. The character strengths model was entered first. As such, results in table 4 revealed that the character strengths model was a significant predictor of life satisfaction and accounted for 36% of the variance in life satisfaction ($R2 = .357, p < .05$). As such, hypothesis 4 was supported in that the character strengths model was found to be a significant predictor of life satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 5*

When both the Big Five model and the Character Strengths model are added one after the other, they both accounted for 50% of the total variance of life satisfaction ($R2 = .500, p < .01$) (see Tables 4 and 5). The hierarchical regression analysis also demonstrated that character strengths added incremental validity (14%) to the prediction of life satisfaction above that offered by the Big Five model ($R2\Delta = .143, p < .01$). Thus, hypothesis 5 was supported.

*Hypothesis 6*

Table 3 provided support for Hypothesis 6 and revealed several strong correlations between the majority of the Big Five factors of personality and Character Strengths. Each of the Character Strengths was significantly correlated with at least two of the Big Five factors, on average. These findings are consistent with those of previous personality researchers (Park, Peterson, Seligman, 2004).

# CHAPTER FOUR

# CONCLUSION

## Discussion

The present study evaluated six hypotheses regarding specific relationships among personality traits, character strengths, and life satisfaction in college students. All of the hypotheses were at least partially supported. The results of this study helped to confirm findings from previous researchers, as well as added new findings to the field of psychology. Consequently, the constructs of personality traits, character strengths, and life satisfaction can be further understood and new areas of research within these domains can be ascertained.

Hypothesis 1 stated that the Big Five factors of Neuroticism/Emotional Stability, Agreeableness, Extraversion, and Conscientiousness would all be significantly correlated to life satisfaction in college students. Results substantially support this hypothesis in that the first three were found to be strong correlates of life satisfaction. These findings support those by McCrae and Costa (1991) and Gutiérrez, Jiménez, Hernandez, and Puente (2005), among others. However, as previously thought, Conscientiousness was not determined to be a significant correlate of life satisfaction. This is surprising as researchers like Hayes and Joseph (2003) purported that individuals who score high on Conscientiousness tend to function more effectively in society and to achieve their goals. Therefore, it would be expected that they would have a higher degree of life satisfaction. Instead, the Big Five factor, Openness, was found to have a significant correlation to life

satisfaction. A possible explanation for the current contrary finding may be a result of common tendencies for persons who score high on Openness. These types of individuals are said to embrace change well, accept new tasks, and seek novel experiences. It may be posited that Openness was found to be significantly correlated to life satisfaction because these persons are better able to handle the constant changes that life brings, as well as are more willing to seek experiences and challenges that will bring more pleasure to them. This may be especially true for college students as college years are years of incredible growth, exploration, and new experiences.

In reviewing Hypothesis 2, the character strengths of hope, zest, love, curiosity, and gratitude will be most strongly correlated with life satisfaction in college students. This hypothesis was supported and confirmed findings by Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004). Park et al. suggested that these five character strengths would be most strongly correlated to life satisfaction because of what they are linked to. For example, gratitude is a positive link to one's past, hope is a positive link to one's future, curiosity and zest are links to the here and now, and love enables one to live a fulfilling life. In addition to support for this hypothesis, another character strength, self-regulation, was found to be one of the strongest correlates with life satisfaction. As cited in the Character Strength Constructs section, self-regulation (also known as self-control) refers to regulating what one feels and does, being disciplined, and controlling one's appetites and emotions. A possible explanation for this new finding may be found in the idea that these types of individuals are better able to exert more control over their desires, actions, and emotionality. Therefore, these persons may perceive a higher degree of life satisfaction

because they may not have to experience a higher degree of intrinsic turmoil as those who have a more difficult time controlling internal factors.

Hypothesis 3 posited that the Big Five factors of personality, when taken as a set, significantly predict life satisfaction in college students. Support for this hypothesis was provided in the results of the hierarchical regression used in the current study. These results also support those of McCrae and Costa (1991) and Gutiérrez, Jiménez, Hernandez, and Puente (2005). It can be inferred that with four of the five Big Five factors of personality being strongly correlated to life satisfaction and several of them as individual predictors (McCrae & Costa; Gutiérrez et al.), this model would most likely be a significant predictor of life satisfaction.

As stated in Hypothesis 4, the character strengths model, taken as a set, would be a significant predictor of life satisfaction. Analyses revealed support for this hypothesis. This would seem logical as Yearley (1990) stated that character strengths lead to human excellence and human flourishing, as well as contributes to fulfillment. A review of the literature also suggests that character strengths are associated with indices of well-being (e.g. life satisfaction). Life satisfaction is the perception of how well we perceive our lives to be. Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004) found that the higher the degree of a given character strength, the more life satisfaction was reported.

Hypothesis 5 focused on the concept that Character strengths add incremental validity beyond the Big Five Factors of personality in predicting life satisfaction in college students. Validating findings in support of this hypothesis concur with those of Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2004), who found that character strengths do indeed reflect

something beyond what the Big Five can reach. The distinction between what the VIA Classification of Strengths measure and what the Big Five Factors of personality measure have can be seen in the definition of character strengths. Character strengths are viewed more as moral virtues rather than traits (as the Big Five are). As such, the lexical terms used to delineate character strengths were never incorporated into the Big Five (Cawley, Martin, & Johnson, 200).

The final hypothesis, Hypothesis 6, stated that there would be several significant correlations between the majority of the Big Five factors of personality and character strengths. Correlational analysis revealed that each of the character strengths were indeed highly associated with at least two of the Big Five factors, on average. This may be explained by the notion that both character strengths and the Big Five are related to concepts of identity of the self. Previous researchers have also found both to be associated with the impact and perception of one's mental and emotional state (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004).

## Limitations

While the present investigation has contributed significantly to the body of knowledge regarding personality traits, character strengths, their relationships to each other, and their ability to predict life satisfaction in college students, there were several limitations that must be considered. One of these limitations is that the data was collected from two undergraduate courses at a large southeastern university. Future researchers should attempt to diversify the sample by acquiring data from a larger geographical region- inclusive of other universities and colleges. A second limitation is

the homogeneity of the sample. The population from which this data was collected was mostly Caucasian, and therefore leaves the question as to replication for various ethnic groups. Although the Big Five factors of personality have been shown to be fairly consistent across cultures (Paunonen, Haddock, Forsterling, & Keinonen, 2003), indices of life satisfaction and character strengths have not yet been established as being consistent across culture. The facets of life satisfaction can be influenced by between-group differences (e.g. values, priorities, meaning of happiness and fulfillment). Character strengths, being virtuous in nature, can also be influenced by these differences. Bacigalupe (2001) found that there is a lack of perspective from people of color with regards to indices of positive psychology (e.g. character strengths and life satisfaction). As such, positive psychology cannot be fully comprehensive.

While gender and age group were considered as demographic variables, college classification was not. Future researchers should include all pertinent demographic variables as it will allow further investigation of group-specific differences (e.g. do results hold as true for upperclassmen as they do for underclassmen?). Also, while some demographic variables were accounted for, none were incorporated into the statistical analyses and therefore, group differences could not be studied. Finally, efforts should be made to replicate these results with a sample larger than the 226 participants available for the present investigation.

## Implications for Future Research

Although this study attempted to fill in the gap of information regarding character strengths, personality traits, and life satisfaction in the college student population, there are other areas that warrant further investigation. Lampropoulos (2001) suggested that psychologists merge aspects of positive psychology into both models of psychopathology and into treatment modalities. With changes in the field of psychology continuously moving towards a healthier focus, it would seem important to further our understanding of how character strengths and personality affect life satisfaction. Perhaps extending the current study from association and prediction of life satisfaction to causality of life satisfaction could further positive growth in the field of psychology. Also, future researchers could focus on ways to investigate and incorporate information regarding this relationship into clinical domains. As psychologists attempt to move more towards prevention rather than mediation, further research into causality of life satisfaction could expedite implementation of this type of modality. As Lampropoulos suggested, the focus points could be incorporating positive strengths/traits of clients when studying psychopathology and treatment effectiveness and reinforcing and utilizing self-help modalities (they tend to build on positive qualities of people).

Results from this study have other important functions in applied settings. Future researchers can address the implications from a counseling perspective in two ways. The first of these two ways would be to use the information gathered in this study to help therapists and clients to be able to identify where their strengths are as it relates to personality and character strengths. An important factor in doing so is to recognize that every individual will have their own signature strengths. Psychologists can reinforce this

concept to clients in an attempt to encourage clients to learn about their strengths and use them to their advantage. One way clients can benefit would be to increase their level of character strengths. This can be taught to clients in therapy through various techniques and treatment modalities. Previous research has shown that the greater the degree of character strengths, the higher the level of life satisfaction reported. As this present study has shown that 50% of the total variance of life satisfaction can be accounted for by character strengths and personality, it will be crucial to disseminate this positive and reinforcing information to clients.

Secondly, once therapists are able to help clients identify their signature personality traits and character strengths, they can then move forward to building upon that understanding. The goal then is to find ways to maximize this information. Looking towards the person-environment theory, therapists can aid clients in important aspects such as career choice by focusing on their specific character strengths and personality traits. This information can help clients find the best fit between the person and the environment. For example, if a client has an interest in becoming a physician, his/her therapist could help them determine which personality traits and character strengths are present in them to determine if this career choice would best fit them. They could then use this information to ascertain what type of environment they would thrive most in (e.g. clinical work in hospitals and private practice where the client would be in constant contact with patients and other professionals, or in a medical research lab where the client could be more isolated and structured).

Another area for future research has been indicated by Walsh (2001). This author suggests bridging the gap between cultures as it relates to positive psychology and its determinants. For example, focusing on non-Western approaches to psychological health is an area needing further investigation. With the strong focus of these approaches on positive well-being and development, researchers could attempt to investigate how these modalities affect the formation and maintenance of character strengths across cultures. Also, as this study has shown that character strengths add more to what personality traits offer with respect to life satisfaction, future researchers could investigate how to use each of these, individually and collectively, to improve one's perception and development of overall life satisfaction.

## Summary

In relation to prior research, the present study provided consistent evidence regarding relational aspects among personality traits, character strengths, and life satisfaction in college students. Significant correlations were found between character strengths and life satisfaction in college students. The character strengths of hope, zest, love, curiosity, and gratitude were found to be the most correlated variables with life satisfaction. Results from this study also added self-regulation as one of the highest correlates of life satisfaction. Significant correlations were also found between the Big Five factors of personality and life satisfaction in college students. The Big Five factors of Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Emotional Stability were found to have the highest correlations with life satisfaction. Surprisingly, no significant correlation was found between Conscientiousness and life satisfaction, as previous research suggested.

The current study also revealed several correlations between character strengths and the Big Five factors of personality. In addition, character strengths were found to add validity above and beyond the Big Five factors in predicting life satisfaction.

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# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A

# Appendix A

Character Strength Constructs

**Appreciation of beauty and excellence** [awe, wonder, elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience.

**Bravery** [valor]: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; includes physical bravery but is not limited to it.

**Citizenship** [social responsibility, loyalty, teamwork]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share.

**Creativity** [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it.

**Curiosity** [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience; finding all subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering.

**Fairness**: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.

**Forgiveness and mercy**: Forgiving those who have done wrong; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful.

**Gratitude**: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.

**Hope** [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about.

**Humor** [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes.

**Integrity** [authenticity, honesty]: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions.

**Judgment** [open-mindedness, critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly.

**Kindness** [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, "niceness"]: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them.

**Leadership**: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintaining good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.

**Love**: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people.

**Love of learning**: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows.

**Modesty and humility**: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not seeking the spotlight; not regarding oneself as more special than one is.

**Persistence** [perseverance, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; "getting it out the door"; taking pleasure in completing tasks.

**Perspective** [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people.

**Prudence**: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted.

**Self-regulation** [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions.

**Social intelligence** [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit in to different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick.

**Spirituality** [religiousness, faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort.

**Zest** [vitality, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated.

Table 1

*Correlations Between Character Strengths and Life Satisfaction (General Life Satisfaction and Satisfaction with College (N=228)*

| | Life Satisfaction | |
|---|---|---|
| Character Strengths | General (General Life Satisfaction) | College (Satisfaction with College) |
| Beauty | .274* | .121 |
| Bravery | .360* | .134* |
| Citizenship | .395* | .199* |
| Creative | .210* | .034 |
| Curiosity | .421* | .142* |
| Fairness | .383* | .227* |
| Forgiveness | .396* | .180* |
| Gratitude | .346* | .123 |
| Hope | .430* | .294* |
| Humor | .389* | .074 |
| Integrity | .387* | .198* |
| Judgement | .255* | .226* |
| Kindness | .368* | .115 |
| Leadership | .398* | .204* |
| Love | .450* | .090 |
| Love of Learning | .227* | .107 |

Table 1 Continued

| Character Strengths | Life Satisfaction | |
|---|---|---|
| | General (General Life Satisfaction) | College (Satisfaction with College) |
| Modesty | .152* | .222* |
| Persistence | .324* | .306* |
| Perspective | .377* | .212* |
| Prudence | .219* | .277* |
| Self-regulation | .405* | .300* |
| Social IQ | .372* | .078 |
| Spirituality | .293* | .073 |
| Zest | .493* | .245* |

*$p < .05$. 2-tailed.

Table 2

*Correlations Between Big Five Factors and Life Satisfaction (General Life Satisfaction and Satisfaction with College (N=148)*

| | Life Satisfaction | |
|---|---|---|
| Big Five Factors | General (General Life Satisfaction) | College (Satisfaction with College) |
| Neuroticism/Emotional Stability | .493* | .284* |
| Extroversion | .330* | .112 |
| Openness | .241* | .188* |
| Conscientiousness | .024 | .230* |
| Agreeableness | .262* | -.009 |

*$p < .05$. 2-tailed.

Table 3

*Correlations Between Character Strengths and Big Five Factors (N=148)*

| Character Strengths | Big Five Factors | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | EmotStab | Extro | Openness | Conscien | Agreeable |
| Beauty | .090 | .231* | .239* | -.026 | -.038 |
| Bravery | .261* | .355* | .412* | .099 | -.025 |
| Citizenship | .275* | .340* | .137 | .254* | .324* |
| Creativity | .090 | .137 | .287* | -.072 | .048 |
| Curiosity | .373* | .329* | .389* | .031 | .132 |
| Fairness | .210* | .267* | .243* | .145 | .086 |
| Forgiveness | .363* | .153 | .079 | .173* | .128 |
| Gratitude | .159 | .407* | .277* | .108 | .067 |
| Hope | .374* | .302* | .192* | .236* | .028 |
| Humor | .248* | .466* | .259* | -.048 | .207* |
| Integrity | .259* | .363* | .213* | .153 | .121 |
| Judgment | .281* | .103 | .147 | .334* | .012 |
| Kindness | .099 | .425* | .228* | .074 | .188* |
| Leadership | .132 | .330* | .207* | .177 | .137 |
| Love | .207* | .317* | .175* | .052 | .177* |
| Love of Learning | .149 | .101 | .330* | .093 | -.016 |
| Modesty | .142 | -.086 | -.275 | .190* | .047* |

Table 3 Continued

| Character Strengths | Big Five Factors | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | EmotStab | Extro | Openness | Conscien | Agreeable |
| Persistence | .308* | .150 | .035 | .445* | .026 |
| Perspective | .257* | .241* | .179* | .208* | .026 |
| Prudence | .291* | .035 | -.099 | .491* | .022 |
| Self-Regulation | .427* | .155 | .060 | .327* | .054 |
| Social IQ | .212* | .468* | .296* | .053 | .155 |
| Spirituality | .295* | .207* | .100 | .183* | -.023 |
| Zest | .325* | .419* | .298* | .171* | .161 |

*$p < .05$. 2-tailed.

Table 4

*Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Life Satisfaction with Character Strengths Entered Before Big Five Factors (N=228)*

Dependent Variable: Life Satisfaction

| Step | Variable | Multiple R | $R^2$ | $R^2$ Change |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Character Strengths | .598* | .357* | .357* |
| 2 | Big Five Factors | .707* | .500* | .143* |

*$p < .05$

Table 5

*Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Life Satisfaction with Big Five Factors Entered Before Character Strengths (N=228)*

| Dependent Variable: Life Satisfaction | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Step | Variable | Multiple R | $R^2$ | $R^2$ Change |
| 1 | Big Five Factors | .559* | .313* | .313* |
| 2 | Character Strengths | .707* | .500* | .188* |

*$p < .05$

Adolescent Personal Style Inventory Constructs

**Aggression:** an inclination to fight, attack, and physically assault another person, especially if provoked, frustrated or aggravated by that person; disposition to become angry and engage in violent behavior.

**Agreeableness:** being agreeable, participative, helpful, cooperative, and inclined to interact with others harmoniously.

**Career Decidedness:** the degree to which an adolescent knows what occupational field she or he wants to go into after leaving school.

**Conscientiousness:** being conscientious, reliable, trustworthy, orderly, and rule-following.

**Emotional Stability:** overall level of adjustment and emotional resilience in the face of stress and pressure.

**Extraversion:** tendency to be sociable, outgoing, gregarious, warmhearted, expressive, and talkative.

**Openness:** receptivity and openness to change, innovation, new experience, and learning.

**Optimism:** having an optimistic, hopeful outlook concerning prospects, people, and the future, even in the face of difficulty and adversity, as well as a tendency to minimize problems and persist in the face of setbacks.

**Self-Directed Learning:** inclination to learn new materials and find answers to questions on one's own rather than relying on a teacher to provide answers; initiating and following through on learning without being required to for a course or prompted by a teacher.

**Sense of Identity:** knowing one's self and where one is headed in life, having a core set of beliefs and values that guide decisions and actions; and having a sense of purpose.

**Tough-Mindedness:** appraising information and making decisions based on logic, facts, and data rather than feelings, sentiments, values, and intuition.

**Work Drive:** being hard-working, industrious, and inclined to put in long hours and much time and effort to reach goals and achieve at a high level.

# APPENDIX B

## Appendix B

## INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Project: The Relationship Among Personality Traits, Character Strengths, and Life Satisfaction in College Students

The objective of this project is to investigate relationships among normal personality traits, character strengths, and life satisfaction in college students.

Your participation in this study involves three parts:
1) Gaining your informed consent to analyze your Personal Style Inventory, VIA Classification of Strengths, and Quality of Life Assessment results.
2) Completion of three scales: Personal Style Inventory, VIA Classification of Strengths, and Quality of Life Scale.
3) Completion of demographic information.

Your participation in this study entails no unusual risks or discomforts. A research paper based on this research will be prepared. The knowledge gained from this research may be presented to others through published works and/or presentations.

The only potential risk of participation in this study is your identification. No stresses or dangers to participants are anticipated. Your scores on the assessments will be available to the instructor of CECP 205 and BA 201 regardless of participation in the research project. Therefore, by volunteering to participate, you assume no greater risk to confidentiality than you would already bear as a student in the course. Student names will be included on the scales for matching purposes; however, the names will be deleted immediately after the data have matched and merged. Only the principal investigator and faculty advisor will have access to the merged data.
The informed consent statements will be retained in a private access file cabinet for three years on the campus of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Every precaution will be made to insure confidentiality of records.

I have read the above statement and agree to participate in the research. In addition, I am aware that:

1. I am entitled to have any further inquiries answered regarding the procedures.
2. No royalties are due to me for any subsequent publication.
3. Participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time and for any reason without penalty.

For further information about this study or your role in it, contact:

Principal Investigator:
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Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

# QUALITY OF LIFE SCALE

Using the scale below, indicate how satisfied you are with various aspects of your life. Leave the item blank if it is not applicable.

VD = Very Dissatisfied
D = Dissatisfied
SD = Slightly Dissatisfied
N = Neutral
SS = Slightly Satisfied
S = Satisfied
VS = Very Satisfied

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Yourself..... | VD | D | SD | N | SS | S | VS |
| b. How much fun you are having..... | VD | D | SD | N | SS | S | VS |
| c. The amount of free time you have..... | VD | D | SD | N | SS | S | VS |
| d. Your own health and physical condition..... | VD | D | SD | N | SS | S | VS |
| e. Your friends ..... | VD | D | SD | N | SS | S | VS |
| f. Your social life..... | VD | D | SD | N | SS | S | VS |
| g. Your academic major..... | VD | D | SD | N | SS | S | VS |
| h. Your GPA..... | VD | D | SD | N | SS | S | VS |
| i. Your job (if applicable)..... | VD | D | SD | N | SS | S | VS |
| j. Your future career prospects..... | VD | D | SD | N | SS | S | VS |
| k. **YOUR LIFE AS A WHOLE**..... | VD | D | SD | N | SS | S | VS |

ADOLESCENT PERSONAL STYLE INVENTORY

Using the scale below, indicate to what degree you agree or disagree with the following personality traits. Leave the item blank if it is not applicable.

1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Neutral/Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly Agree

a. Aggression..... 1 2 3 4 5
b. Agreeableness..... 1 2 3 4 5
c. Career Decidedness..... 1 2 3 4 5
d. Conscientiousness..... 1 2 3 4 5
e. Emotional Stability ..... 1 2 3 4 5
f. Extraversion..... 1 2 3 4 5
g. Openness..... 1 2 3 4 5
h. Optimism..... 1 2 3 4 5
i. Self-Directed Learning..... 1 2 3 4 5
j. Sense of Identity..... 1 2 3 4 5
k. Tough-Mindedness..... 1 2 3 4 5
l. Work Drive..... 1 2 3 4 5

# VITA

Nalini Maria West Conner was born on November 3, 1976 and was raised in Washington, D.C. She attended private schools in the District of Columbia, and later Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia. After majoring in Biology and minoring in Chemistry, she graduated in 1998 with a Bachelor of Science degree. Nalini has spent the past four years pursuing the Ph.D. degree in Counseling Psychology at The University of Tennessee. During that time, she was employed as a graduate assistant at The Black Cultural Center, The Psychological Clinic, and Student Counseling Services Center. Nalini is currently completing a pre-doctoral internship at The Guidance Center in Murfreesboro, TN. After finishing her degree, she will begin post-doctoral work with children, adolescents, and adults at Vanderbilt Psychiatric Hospital in Nashville, TN. Nalini is married to Isaac T. Conner, Esq., a civil and criminal defense lawyer with Lewis, King, Krieg, and Waldrop in Nashville, TN.

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