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Character Strengths and Positive Institutions: Effects on Psychological Wellness

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Abstract

The current study explored relationships among religiosity, forgiveness, perceived institutional support, and psychological wellness, using positive psychology and the ecological counseling approach as the theoretical framework. There were two hypotheses tested in the current study. The first hypothesis was that there would be differences between a public and religious-affiliated school on measures of character strength, perception of institution, and psychological wellness. The second hypothesis was that religiosity and forgiveness influenced psychological wellness with perceived institutional support as a mediating variable. The Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, 1998) was used to measure the tendency to avoid or seek revenge from a person who has harmed them. The Modified Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiosity/ Spirituality (Fetzer Institute, 1999) was used to measure participants’ active involvement in religious beliefs and practices. A Positive Institution Inventory was created by the researcher to measure participants’ perception of their institution to enable their character strengths. The Psychological Well-Being Scales (Ryff, 1995) were employed to collect participants’ evaluation of their own psychological health, specifically in the following areas: autonomy,
environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self acceptance.

The instruments were administered to 172 undergraduate students from two Midwestern universities, one public and the other religious-affiliated. Chi-square test results revealed significant gender and class disproportionality between the public and religious-affiliated schools. Therefore, a two-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of gender and school (i.e. public vs. religious-affiliated) on levels of religiosity, forgiveness, positive institution, and wellness subscales. There were no significant interactions or main effects found significant. Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to examine the relationship among predicting variables (forgiveness & religiosity) and the outcome variable (psychological wellness), with the mediator being positive institution. The results yielded a marginal fit for the hypothesized model. A modified version of the original model was tested, revealing a good fit. However, forgiveness was not found to have any impact on either perception of institutional support or psychological wellness. The findings from this study did not support the hypothesis that perceived institutional support mediated character strengths and psychological wellness. The limitations of this study, as well as recommendations for future research, are discussed.
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I dedicate this work with love to my children, who teach me daily to live out my passions and to live up to my potential as a mother and as a human being. May God continually bless you with his grace and love, and may you color all things in your life with hues of faith, to see a divine meaning in every event, that you may thrive and become wise...

“Without the burden of afflictions it is impossible to reach the height of grace. The gifts of grace increase as the struggles increase.” –Saint Rose of Lima
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Chapter 1
Introduction

The introduction chapter was organized into subsections: problem statement, purpose of current study, research questions and hypotheses, significance, and summary.

Problem Statement

The question of what factors lead to psychological wellness has been extensively investigated by researchers (Campbell, 1981; Ryff, 1989). More specifically, colleges and universities across the nation have been challenged to encourage wellness in their student population (Mahoney, 2007). Although current indexes of psychological wellness have been evaluated at length (Diener, 1984; Larson, Diener, & Emmons, 1985), such assessments have largely focused on the distinction between positive and negative affect and life satisfaction (Bryant & Veroff, 1982; Diener & Emmons, 1984; Stock, Okun, & Benin, 1986). The extensive literature about psychological wellness also includes such perspectives as Maslow’s (1968) conception of self-actualization, Roger’s (1961) view of the fully-functioning person, Jung (1933) and Von Franz’s (1964) formulation of individuation, and Allport’s (1961) conception of maturity. Another theoretical perspective for defining psychological wellness follows from life span developmental perspectives.
that emphasize Erikson’s (1959) psychosocial stage model, which explains the various challenges confronted at different phases of the life cycle.

Other researchers have defined psychological wellness as being the absence of illness (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). More recently, investigators have become interested in character traits as factors that are the building blocks of psychological wellness (Jorgensen & Nafstad, 2004; Stenson, 2003; Bretherton & Orner, 2004; Diener, 2000). Character determines what we are at the center of our self, and has been shown to prevent mental illness (Stenson, 2003). It directly affects how we go about living with others. One study of a college student population demonstrated that a lack of character can have disastrous effects on students, families, and entire schools, thus negatively impacting students’ psychological well-being (Garmezy, 1985; Harris & Thoreson, 2003).

Garmezy (1985) proposed from his findings that character strengths are those qualities that make up healthy habits and protect us from harm. Two prominent character strengths, religiosity and forgiveness, are highlighted in the literature for their influence on psychological wellness and capacity to prevent mental illness (Worthington, 1998; Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander
Laan, 2001; Rye, Pargament, Amir, Beck, Dorff, Hallisey, Narayanan, & Williams, 2000).

The research on religiosity was vast and suggested that being religious provides a sort of psychological immune system (Allport, 1950; Edwards et al., 2002; Johnson et al., 2001). The Fetzer Institute (1999), a research entity devoted to increasing understanding and assessment of spirituality, defines religiosity as an individual’s active involvement in religious beliefs and practices. Religious beliefs and practices include private prayer and meditation, reading the Bible or other religious literature, and the belief that God is good and supportive during difficult periods of life (Fetzer Institute, 1999; Koenig et al., 2001). Lewis and Cruise (2006) discovered that beliefs and practices such as praying and reading religious literature improved psychological wellness. Based on these findings, it was argued that religiosity and its accompanying beliefs and practices prevent individuals from harm. This is not to say that they will not be affected by life tragedies, rather they would have specific traits that would buffer them from maladaptive responses to life’s inevitable disappointments (i.e. the ability to recover from tragedy). Character creates hardiness in those that embody it (Stenson, 2003).

McCullough (2000) found a link between forgiveness and psychological wellness. Forgiveness has been commonly defined
as the process in which people inhibit their usual negative response to transgressors (revenge and avoidance) and become increasingly motivated to enact positive ones instead, thus significantly increasing well-being (McCullough, 2000). McCullough (2000) and others (e.g. Enright & Coyle, 1998; Exline & Baumeister, 2000) found that forgiving others allowed the individual to release feelings of control over the offender, instead, making him/her own self responsible for letting go of anger and resentment that results from not forgiving. Other studies provide empirical support for a positive correlation between religiosity and forgiveness (Rye, Pargament, Amir, Beck, Dorff, Hallisey, Narayanan, & Williams, 2000; Shoemaker & Bolt, 1977). In sum, religiosity and forgiveness have been shown to impact mental health in a positive manner; therefore, further investigation into other factors that may contribute to psychological wellness was warranted.

The premise of the current study was based on research and scholarly writing in the area of positive psychology, which has explored psychological wellness from the time of its inception. Positive psychology research offered a theoretical framework that is founded on three main points: individual strengths of character, positive institutions, and the experience of wellness (Peterson, 2006). Using positive psychology as a theoretical framework for the
current study added the perceived environment as a possible contributing factor to psychological wellness, in addition to character strengths.

Hence, positive psychology theory suggests that the ideal situation for a person to achieve wellness is one in which an individual’s personal character strengths are expressed in an enabling environment (known as a positive institution for the purposes of this study), therefore, allowing that person to experience higher degrees of wellness (see Figure 1). Positive psychology theory endorses religiosity and forgiveness as strengths in character that may enhance mental health (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

In addition, the ecological counseling approach provided a theoretical foundation for the current study. The ecological counseling approach suggested that the expression of characteristics may be influenced by interaction with the environment (Lewin, 1951; Conyne & Cook, 2004). This relatively new viewpoint provided a lens through which to examine the complex, mutually dependent environmental influences that interact with individuals’ character strengths within a specified setting, such as a college or university. The ecological counseling approach emphasizes the goodness of fit between an individual and
his or her environment as the determinant of outcome behavior. Seligman (2002) suggested that although there was much research that supported reasons in the environment for causing illness in an individual, there was a need to further examine the interaction between the environment and an individual’s character strengths, thus influencing psychological wellness. Researchers have looked to character strengths as the structure of psychological wellness, however there is still much to learn regarding the third and least researched aspect, the positive institution (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The university, as an institution, would be one that embraces characteristics such as contributing to overall fulfillment in life, preparing one to be a good learner and a good citizen, and offering programs that increase a sense of belonging to the institution. Consequently, a positive institution has been commonly defined as one that enables the individuals who make up that institution to express their character strengths (Peterson, 2006). Though the research has found that character strengths, also known as virtues, or habits, are significantly linked to our psychological wellness (Savig, Roccas, & Hazan, 2004; Feather, 1975; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Segall, 1979), more research was needed that explained in detail the specific relationships between character strengths
and psychological wellness, and particularly more about the role of the perceived institution’s influence on strengths of character and psychological wellness. In other words, if a student perceives his university as enabling his strengths of character, would it lead to increased likelihood of achieving psychological wellness?

Despite research findings demonstrating a significant relationship between positive individual characteristics and psychological wellness, there is little to no research that examined the impact of perceived environment on the relationship between religiosity and forgiveness with psychological wellness. By utilizing the ecological counseling approach and positive psychology as the theoretical framework, the current study examined whether religiosity and forgiveness were correlated to psychological wellness, and further, whether such relationship was mediated by positive institution. A hypothetical model was proposed to depict the interrelationship among character strengths, positive institution, and psychological wellness. See Figure 1 for details.
Purpose of study

Understanding the factors that influence psychological wellness is crucial for preventing mental illness in college students (Felner, Felner, & Silverman, 2000; Mahoney, 2007). This study examined the relationships between two character strengths (i.e., religiosity and forgiveness) and psychological wellness, as well as the role of perception of institution in the relationship. The study was attempting to examine the applicability of positive psychology theory and the ecological counseling approach. Past research illuminated that human characteristics, such as honor, integrity, self-mastery,
courage, courtesy, conscience, and love, buffer psychological
distress and promote psychological wellness (Anthony & Cohler,
1987; Felner, 2000; Garmezy, 1985; Gillham, Shatte, & Freres,
2000). Yet it was unknown how character strengths pertaining to
psychological wellness was influenced by institutional support.

The main goal of the current study was to investigate
whether religiosity and forgiveness impact psychological
wellness and, furthermore, whether the relationships are
mediated by perception of the support from the university. This
study examined both individual and institutional factors for
psychological wellness. Structural equation modeling was
utilized to investigate the mediating role of positive
institution to the development of psychological health.

Research Questions

In addition to the overall research goal, the specific
research questions were listed below:

1. Are there differences in psychological wellness, positive
   institution, religiosity, and forgiveness between students
   in a public institution and those in a religious-affiliated
   institution?

2. Are there interrelationships between character strengths
   (i.e., religiosity and forgiveness) and psychological
   wellness mediated by positive institution?
Hypotheses

The hypotheses based on the research questions above were as follows:

1. There will be a significant difference in forgiveness, religiosity, positive institution, and psychological wellness between students in a public institution and those in a religious-affiliated institution.

2. The paths from religiosity and forgiveness to positive institution as well as the paths from positive institution to psychological wellness will be found significant.

Significance

This study will contribute to the positive psychology literature by investigating two specific character strengths and their relationship to psychological wellness while simultaneously expanding the research on how the environment influences the relationships. Also, the findings of the current study will contribute to empirical exploration of the ecological counseling approach, an approach which emphasizes the importance of contextual impact on human behavior.

By examining psychological wellness through the lens of a well-researched, strength-based theoretical model, the current study will not only contribute to the advancement of theories in positive psychology and ecological counseling, but also understanding of psychological wellness in college students.
The findings of this study will help the counseling profession to better understand the interdependent relationships among perceptions of one’s environment and character strengths in individuals, and the impact of the dynamic between the two on psychological wellness, and therefore lend useful information for improving wellness in our colleges. Given that many college students suffer from mental illness and discord with their environment (Mahoney, 2007), this study may have great potential to provide evidence for developing intervention programs that promote psychological health on college campuses.

The implications of the current study may influence the development of prevention programs in universities aiming to increase psychological wellness and prevent distress. In addition, the current study will contribute to the exploration of a theoretical framework for institutions that desire putting into place practices that are engineered so that moral excellence and personal fulfillment of its members can be achieved.

Summary

Guided by the ecological counseling approach and positive psychology, this study investigated whether positive institution would mediate the relationships among religiosity, forgiveness, and psychological wellness in college students. Early studies in positive psychology generally concluded that certain positive
traits in humans predicted psychological wellness. Similarly, research on the positive effects of religiosity and forgiveness has significantly contributed to our understanding of psychological wellness. The current study contributed to ongoing efforts to explain the attributes of psychological wellness. Further, the study provides implications for future research in the area of positive psychology and the ecological counseling approach.
Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

This chapter reviewed the literature pertaining to positive psychology and the ecological counseling perspective, the character strengths of forgiveness and religiosity, person-environment interaction, and psychological wellness.

Positive Psychology Development

Positive psychology provided a shared language that describes character strengths as building blocks of psychological wellness (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Linley, Joseph, Harrington, & Wood, 2006; Snyder & Lopez, 2007; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Increased interest in the study of the structure of psychological wellness followed from the recognition that the field of mental health has devoted much more attention to human unhappiness and maladaptation than to the causes and consequences of optimal well-being (Diener, 1984; Jahoda, 1958). Positive psychology has lead to discoveries on increasing happiness, wellness, and the quality of life. It was positive psychology’s theoretical foundation that guides the current study and brings to life the purpose of examining the relationships between character strengths, positive institutions, and psychological wellness.
There were three main aspects of positive psychology: character strengths, positive institutions, and psychological wellness (Peterson, 2006). Each of these aspects was explored and utilized as a structure for the current research. Character strengths were discussed in the following subsection, leading to a focused discourse of research on forgiveness and religiosity. Stemming from the ecological counseling perspective, person-environment interaction was then examined and utilized as the environmental aspect of the study. And lastly, psychological wellness was explored.

Character strengths

There has been much controversy over the ways that clinicians, researchers, and scholars think about psychological illness and wellness (Maddux, Synder, & Lopez, 2004; Joseph & Linley, 2004). Traditional conceptions have lead practitioners to aim to decrease pathological symptoms. The traditional viewpoint lends an illness ideology, stigmatizing those who seek counseling as having a mental illness. Terms such as illness, disorder, treatment, and clinic are all in line with an ideology of illness and disease (Joseph & Linley, 2004). Furthermore, embedded in the illness ideology is a categorical model in which individuals are determined to either have or not have a disorder. Mental health professionals often utilize the Diagnostic Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders, published by
the American Psychiatric Association (2004), to classify individuals and determine treatment for mental health problems. The DSM manual led professionals to assume that people are either well or ill with no in between. In other words, an individual was viewed to be paranoid or not paranoid, anxious or not anxious, with little to no room for variance.

In response to the illness-model and its shortcomings, researchers have initiated a revolution in the way mental health professionals view human behavior. Rather than only locating personal deficits, it was recommended to examine problems in the person’s interactions with the surrounding environment and institutions (Maddux et al., 2004; Conyne & Cook, 2004). Furthermore, some research examined character strengths as buffers to mental disorder (Peterson, 2006). A character strength was commonly defined as a habit that protects a person from harm, in their personal lives, their marriages, their careers, their souls (Stenson, 2003). In accordance, Peterson (2006) stated that positive behaviors such as kindness and hope improved psychological wellness by promoting healthy relationships. The widened lens through which professionals view a person also has led to a more accurate and effective approach to human nature, thus promoting health, strengths, and psychological wellness.
Positive psychology supporters endorsed the widened lens to the traditional viewpoint that is dimensional in nature (Keyes & Lopez, 2002). This model suggested that psychological disorders are acute variants of normal psychological phenomena. The dimensional model was not concerned with classifying people with disorders but rather was concerned with identifying and measuring individual differences along a continuum of wellness and illness, character strengths and deficits.

One way to contribute to a wellness-oriented model was to conduct more research using positive psychology as a frame of reference, therefore changing the context in which behavior is evaluated. If we are to contribute to a paradigm shift in our field, Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000) suggest that “we need to acknowledge that much of the best work that we already do in the counseling room is to amplify strengths rather than repair the weaknesses of our clients” (Pg. 5). In sum, the current study was equally concerned with enhancing psychological wellness as it was with decreasing distress and maladaptive functioning in both individuals and institutions.

Religiosity

Religiosity was commonly defined as a personal set or institutionalized system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices (Fetzer Institute, 1999). The first psychologist, William James, was concerned with subjective religious
experiences in his 1902 book entitled The Varieties of Religious Experience, and often wrote about topics such as repentance and forgiveness of sins. Since then, the psychology of religiosity has been studied habitually by social scientists on a quest to demonstrate the benefits of living a life of principles. Around 1960, journals such as the Review of Religious Research and the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion were started and helped to advance the empirical examination of religiosity.

An individual’s religious life and affiliated institution are essential components of properly conceptualizing a person (Conyne & Cook, 2004). Furthermore, religiosity has been repeatedly linked to mental and emotional wellness (Peterson, 2006; Pargament, 1997). Peterson (2006) and Pargament (1997) have found that religious practice such as confession and prayer helped increase an individual’s psychological wellness by freeing the confessor from bondage to guilt and bitterness that could potentially darken his or her view of life. Another similar study found that religiosity such as going to church and looking to God for strength during crises helps a person to cope with life and even buffers against emotional problems while promoting wellness (McCullough, Hoyt, Larson, Koenig, & Thoresen, 2000). McCullough et al. (2000) established that having high levels of religious activities such as working with God to get through hard times and feeling loved by members of
one’s congregation was positively correlated with wellness while high levels of activity such as feeling punished and abandoned by God were positively correlated with psychological distress.

In addition, faith-based institutions have been found to promote psychological wellness in members (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Miller and Thoresen (2003) found that students at faith-based institutions reported higher levels of well-being than students at public universities. In addition, the students who reported higher levels of religious activity also had higher levels of psychological wellness.

Meanwhile, as mental health professionals began to incorporate their clients’ religious beliefs and practices into their research and clinical assessment, many more books and research emerged and the American Psychological Association devoted a division to the psychology of religion in 1975. The Fetzer Institute, a private foundation, began to support research in the psychology of religion (Fetzer Institute, 1999). The Fetzer Institute was largely interested in the important domains of religiosity and developing empirical measurements. Over the last 30 years, research findings have accumulated showing that religiosity has certain benefits in a variety of psychological wellness domains, including improved relationships, forgiveness, and purpose in life (Fetzer Institute, 1999; Peterson, 2006).
For example, religiosity among young people in the United States has been associated with a tendency to avoid all manner of antisocial activities (Johnson, Jang, Larson, & Li, 2001). Children and adolescents who scored higher on indices of religiosity (i.e. church attendance, prayer) showed greater emotional self-regulation, engaged in fewer acts of aggression, had better records of academic performance, were less likely to use drugs or alcohol, and tended to delay their sexual involvement (Johnson, Jang, Larson, & Li, 2001). Much the same results were found for adults (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). Furthermore, religiosity among adults predicted individual happiness and family wellness (Stenson, 2003). In addition, shared religious beliefs and practices have been shown to positively affect married couples’ views of themselves and their partnership (Gordon, Baucom, & Snyder, 2001).

Although research in the psychology of religion was producing significant results linking religiosity to psychological wellness, there was still much more to explore. Kenneth Pargament (2002), one of today’s leading psychologists of religion, has phrased well the need for more comprehensive research questions:

“Religion is a richer, more complex process than psychologists have imagined, one that has the potential to both help and harm. Questions about the general efficacy of religion should give way to the more difficult but appropriate question, How helpful or harmful are particular
forms of religious expression for particular people dealing with particular situations in particular social contexts according to particular criteria of helpfulness or harmfulness?" (p. 168)

In sum, religiosity might be explored in the context of an individual's life circumstance as increasing or decreasing psychological wellness. As a side-effect of the aforementioned findings, there has been increased interest in character strengths and virtues, including the explicitly theological (faith, hope, and charity) and the more secular but still religiously linked (gratitude and forgiveness) (Stenson, 2003). More specifically, as questions like those proposed by Pargament began to be answered, religiosity as a character strength that interacts with the surrounding environment was increasingly embraced by the counseling profession as an essential part of an individual's psychological makeup.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness has been commonly defined as the release of a transgression by the victim so that the offender may receive mercy (McCullough, 2002). Forgiveness has been studied intensely as a psychological process by social scientists for the past decade. Forgiveness was considered character strength because it protected the forgiver from being bonded to a life of resentment and bitterness. Robert Enright (1998), leading researcher in forgiveness processes, found that almost all human
beings have been deeply hurt at some point in their lives, and that we all seek ways to deal with that hurt. Enright and Coyle (1998) cited many important findings: forgiving others improved health more than being forgiven, forgiveness boosted mood and reduces anger, forgiveness reduced stress hormones (Kaplan, 1992), and it preserved close relationships (Exline et al., 2000). An important study by Enright (Post & Neimark, 2007) found that teaching forgiveness in schools in violent and impoverished areas in inner-city Milwaukee, Wisconsin, significantly improved depression and anxiety among two-hundred twelve students who went from clinical disorders to normal on measures of depression and anxiety.

Being wronged by another person was an almost certainty in life (Enright, 1997). In response to injury, negative feelings, including anger, resentment, and disappointment, were likely to occur (Enright, 1997). Another study found that avoiding of the source of harm, and sometimes even seeking revenge, were typical reactions that may be deeply ingrained in the biological, psychological, and cultural levels of human nature (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). However, reciprocating harm was usually more detrimental to the victim than the original offense (Reiss & Havercamp, 1998). Considerable evidence documented the harmful effects of avoiding an individual who has done wrong, including psychosomatic symptoms (Fincham, 2003). In developing a measure
of forgiveness, Mauger et al. (1992) found that forgiveness of self and others was inversely related to indicators of psychopathology as measured by the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory. Forgiveness allowed for increasing assertive boundaries with those who have harmed us, while negating harmful behaviors such as avoidance or revenge (McCullough et al., 1998).

There were several other studies that provide evidence suggesting a link between forgiveness and psychological wellness. Wuthnow (2000) surveyed 1,379 people in small religious groups and found that being a member who had been helped to forgive someone was related to attempts and successes in overcoming an addiction, overcoming guilt, and perceiving encouragement when feeling down. Similarly, Toussaint et al. (2001) found that both self-forgiveness and forgiveness of others was inversely related to a measure of psychological distress in all age groups and that the tendency to forgive was related to overall life satisfaction. Tangey, Fee, and Lee (1999) found a negative relation between a dispositional tendency to forgive others and depressive symptoms and hostility.

James G. Williams (Rye et al., 2000) stated that forgiveness was generally understood as an act of pardon or release from an injury, offense, or debt. On behalf of the
forgiving individual, it entailed having compassion for the offender, realizing their own sinfulness, and releasing the other person from their transgression so that they themselves may be forgiven and receive God’s mercy (Rye et al., 2000). The offender, in turn, showed signs of repentance for the wrong done and acts of contrition and love, in keeping with the graciousness shown by the forgiver (Rye et al., 2000). James (Rye et al., 2000) also stated that forgiveness was at the core of the religious tradition. “It represents the possibility of change and transformation of the individual in relation to others” (Pp. 31).

Furthermore, some empirical studies found that people who were more religious value forgiveness more than people do who were less religious (Gorsuch & Hao, 1993; Poloma & Gallup, 1991). Religious variables such as frequency of church attendance, self-rated religiousness, intrinsic religious orientation, importance of religion, feeling close to God, and measures of personal prayer, have been positively linked to self-reported values and attitudes toward forgiveness (Edwards et al., 2002; Poloma & Gallup, 1991). When asked how a Christian should live, students ranked “forgiving” second only to “loving” as an ideal Christian value (Shoemaker & Bolt, 1977). These findings support the idea that religious
individuals placed a high value on forgiveness as a desirable character trait.

As a human strength, forgiveness had the potential to enhance functioning and not simply protect against dysfunction. However, because measurement of forgiveness has focused on its negative dimension (avoidance, revenge, McCullough et al., 1998), most of what has been learned about forgiveness rests on inferences made by the absence of the negative. Thus, the absence of a negative quality is not necessarily the same as the presence of a positive one.

Finally, positive psychology brought attention to different ways in which forgiveness functioned in relation to psychological wellness. Fincham and Kashdan (2004) added two important caveats to the research examined. First, forgiveness did not necessarily contribute to a meaningful life among the faithful; it did so only when exercised freely and not as the mindless exercise of a religious obligation (Huang & Enright, 2000). Second, the exercise of forgiveness also contributed to a meaningful life for nonreligious forgivers (Fincham & Kashdan, 2004). However, to do so, it was likely to require the forgiver to be conscious of a motivation to better a community or society and to view his action as contributing to that goal.

Forgiveness has been connected to and encouraged for thousands of years by major world religions and has been
identified as an important characteristic encouraged by some religious leaders to live a holy life (Rye et al., 2000). Other research has purported that forgiveness leads to emotional and spiritual wellness (Pargament, 2002). In the past decade, more social scientists have done studies that agree with this supposition (Enright, R.D., & Coyle, C.T., 1998; Gorsuch, R.L. & Hao, J.Y., 1993). As a result, forgiveness has been included in new theoretical models and other empirical studies, especially in the field of positive psychology (Enright & Coyle, 1998; Gorsuch & Hao, 1993). Additionally, positive psychology research has named forgiveness a character strength that improved the psychological wellness of the individual who embodied it (Fincham & Kashdan, 2004). In sum, the character strength of forgiveness provides meaning for the forgiver as an individual wanting to protect themselves and others, therefore buffering against mental distress.

Classification and measurement of character strengths

As mentioned previously, a character strength was a trait that protects an individual from harm. In addition, character strengths were the psychological processes that characterize the virtues (Peterson & Park, 2004). The core virtues were wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2002). These six broad
categories emerged consistently from historical surveys (Dahlsgaard, et al.).

Each virtue had a specific definition, and practicing specific deeds and making the deeds a habit helped one develop the virtue, thus protecting oneself from psychological distress. For example, the virtue of temperance, defined as a balance in regards to appetite, including emotions and desires such as vengeance, and especially regarding physical pleasures, has been linked to decreased impulse problems, such as substance abuse and obesity (Stenson, 2003). One might develop temperance by enjoying things in moderation—using self control. Temperance was achieved through strengths such as forgiveness and mercy, humility, prudence, and self-control (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2002). Essentially, the virtues were all similar in that the characteristics protect against harm, but they were also distinct traits that may vary within any one individual depending largely on opportunities in the individual’s environment to express each one.

Peterson and Park (2004) found that character strengths are dimensional traits, existing along a continuum. Peterson and Park (2004; pg. 433) winnowed the list of criteria to seven as follows:
1. A strength needs to be manifest in the range of an individual’s behavior—thoughts, feelings, and/or actions—in such a way that it can be assessed.

2. A strength contributes to various fulfillments that comprise the good life, for the self and for others.

3. Although strengths can and do produce desirable outcomes, each strength is morally valued in its own right, even in the absence of obvious beneficial outcomes.

4. The display of a strength by one person does not diminish other people in the vicinity but rather elevates them.

5. As suggested by Erikson’s (1963) discussion of psychological stages and the virtues that result from their satisfactory resolutions, the larger society provides institutions and associated rituals for cultivating strengths and virtues.

6. Yet another criterion for a character strength is the existence of consensually recognized paragons of virtue.

7. A final criterion is that the strength is arguably one-dimensional and not able to be decomposed into other strengths in the classification.

When Peterson and Park (2004) and others applied these criteria to the potential strengths identified through literature searches, factor analysis revealed 24 positive traits organized under six broad virtues. Included within the 24
character strengths were religiosity and forgiveness. Peterson and Park’s (2004) research contributed to the validity of religiosity and forgiveness as psychological constructs and affirmed that the characteristics are quantifiable.

Ecological Counseling Perspective

The ecological counseling perspective was an approach used to examine the person-environment interaction. The ecological approach to viewing individuals within their specific contexts was comprehensive and looked at more than the person-level aspects of any given problem. The surrounding environment was viewed as interacting with individuals, who in turn make meaning of these interactions and develop their strengths and weaknesses based on interpretations of the interaction. The ecological approach often allowed researchers to better identify and alleviate discordance between person and environment (Conyne & Cook, 2004; Savig & Schwartz, 2000). In other words, noteworthy changes in an individual required a harmonious relationship with the context in which they live.

Perhaps the most influential contribution to understanding diverse human contexts was provided by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). Bronfenbrenner’s human ecology model was the concept that four sequentially broader levels of systems exist in relation to an individual. First, the individual did not exist in isolation, but rather existed interdependently with others,
such as family, workplace, or school (microsystem). Also included in the model were connections between systems. One example was the connection between home life and behavior at school (mesosystem). The third level included the effects of major social institutions, such as local government or health care system, on an individual (exosystem). The largest level permeated all other levels and contains general values, political and social policy, and ideology that influenced an individual’s everyday way of life (macrosystem). Overall, Bronfenbrenner’s human ecology model prompted further exploration of the person-environment interaction.

Influence of the Institution

One study displaying the person-environment interaction was Savig and Schwartz’s (2000) study which demonstrated that neither students’ values, nor the department they studied in, directly affected their psychological wellness. The interaction between the two, however, had a significant effect on psychological well-being. Savig and Schwartz’s (2000) results suggested that behavior is a function of individuals interacting within their environments.

Person-environment fit

Conyne and Cook (2004) stated that a term commonly found in ecological counseling discussion is ecosystem. Ecosystem has been defined as the “sum total of interacting influences
operating in a person’s life, including such diverse factors as his or her biological makeup, interpersonal relationships, the physical environment, and the broader sociocultural context” (Conyne & Cook, 2004, pg. 7). The level at which an individual was functioning in his ecosystem, in his relationships with others, the surrounding environment, and the current context of his situation determined the person’s functioning, or “fit” with the environment. Just as the individual influences his environment, so does the environment influence the individual, thus it was the interaction between the two that ultimately determines psychological adjustment (Conyne & Cook, 2004).

Positive Institution

Christopher Peterson (2006), one of the most well-known positive psychologists, researched positive characteristics of institutions or “enabling institutions” as he called them. He asserted that some institutions are environments that enable certain behavioral outcomes better than others (Peterson, 2006). According to Peterson (2006; Pg. 279), an institution was commonly defined as “an enduring and structured group, containing a body of traditions and customs, while its member’s think of the organization as a whole with their roles being differentiated and specialized.”

Positive Institution was one that is perceived to contribute to human freedom and enable the expression of
positive character strengths that lead to psychological wellness (Peterson, 2006). Research suggested that positive institutions contribute to the fulfillment and enable the good life of its members (Peterson, 2006). Peterson (2006) proposed that a positive institution facilitates psychological wellness and generally endorses positive character traits. Although positive character traits such as forgiveness are by definition characteristics of the individual, research showed that counterparts exist at the institutional level (Park & Peterson, 2003) and contribute to the psychological wellness of its members.

As institutions, colleges have distinctive characteristics, or counterparts. For example, if an institution valued the virtue of forgiveness, it was likely put into place programs and materials that would encourage forgiveness among the members of the institution. Because students made up the most important aspect of the institution, their development was the ultimate goal of the institution. Discussions of excellent colleges often touched upon the ability to reduce negative outcomes in students, such as substance abuse and violence, while also enabling positive character development in its students and as a whole school. One study found that students rated their college as good when they perceived that the school prepared them simultaneously to be good learners and good citizens (Weissberg,
Barton, & Shriver, 1997). Literature on good schools suggested the following list of characteristics that comprise a school that contributes to the psychological wellness of its students (Felner, 2000; Felner, Felner, & Silverman, 2000; Hunter & Elias, 1998):

1. Students perceive courses to be relevant.
2. Students perceive that they have control over what happens to them at school.
3. Students perceive the discipline policies to be fair, firm, clear, and consistently enforced, with a focus on skill-building rather than punishment.
4. Students see the reward system as rational.
5. There exists a strong and effective school governance.
6. The administration displays strong leadership.
7. Students report a sense of belonging and connectedness.

The aforementioned characteristics were helpful in identifying areas of resistance as well as strengths within the structure of the institution. Environments that were congruent with an individual’s character strengths afforded them with opportunities to attain their central goals and achieve wellness. On the other hand, incongruent environments did not provide individuals with opportunities to express their strengths and, consequently, obstruct psychological wellness. 

Summary
Research reviewed took into consideration the person-environment interaction that contributed to a person’s level of psychological wellness. In addition, research demonstrated that institutions that put stock into this interactional approach tend to fulfill its members by enhancing member’s character strengths.

Psychological Wellness

Overview

Joining character strengths and positive institution, psychological wellness added a third aspect to positive psychology framework. Psychological wellness was commonly defined as an individual’s evaluation of their own life (Seligman and Peterson, 2000; Ryff, 1995). The extensive literature geared toward defining psychological wellness and the factors that contribute to it included perspectives such as Maslow’s (1968) conception of self-actualization, Roger’s (1961) view of the fully functioning person, Jung’s (1933) formulation of individuation, and Allport’s (1961) conceptualization of maturity (Ryff, 1989). Life span developmental perspectives, such as Erikson’s (1959) psychosocial stage model, emphasized the different challenges confronted at various phases of the life cycle (Ryff, 1989). Jahoda’s (1958) positive criteria for mental health, produced to replace the absence of mental
illness, also offered extensive descriptions of what factors contribute to good psychological health (Ryff, 1989).

Psychological wellness was defined by Edward Diener (2000) as what we think and how we feel about our lives. Diener’s (2000) all-encompassing cross-cultural research on psychological wellness suggested interesting links between macro-social conditions and wellness. Diener’s study reflected an ecological approach by stating that behavior is how a person’s values and goals mediate between the environment and the quality of experience in that environment (Diener, 2000). Diener’s (2000) investigation brought scientists closer to understanding the insights of philosophers who argued that it is not what happens to us that determines how psychologically sound we are, but how we perceived the events in our environment.

Subsets of psychological wellness

In this section of the literature review, the focus was on psychological wellness and its many psychological components, including purpose in life, autonomy, environmental mastery, self acceptance, personal growth, and positive relationships (Ryff, 1995). Researchers were able to identify people who are doing well in one or more of these domains and ask what else is true about them. Marie Jahoda (1958) made the case for understanding psychological wellness in its own right, not simply as the absence of disorder or distress. Around the same time Jahoda
published her research on wellness, William Scott (1958) surveyed the existing literature on psychological wellness, focusing on research definitions of wellness and empirically established correlates of these measures. Scott (1958) drew firm conclusions about the factors that characterized lack of pathology; positive social relationships were the most common factor.

Carol Ryff and her colleagues (1989; 1995; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1996, 1998) extended Jahoda’s analysis by surveying and integrating what different theorists said about psychological wellness and its components. The components identified were called points of conversion, and substantially agreed with those specified decades earlier by Jahoda (1958) and Scott (1958): These points of convergence stemmed from prior theories on wellness and constitute the core dimensions of psychological wellness. They were briefly summarized in Chapter 3 (Pg. 44). According to Ryff’s (1989 & 1995) studies, the greater the fulfillment of these needs, the higher overall psychological wellness that was achieved.

Protective factors and psychological wellness

More than 30 years ago, researchers studying children in high-risk environments observed that many children achieve positive developmental outcomes despite adverse experiences (Murphy & Moriarty, 1976). As a side effect of this study and
others like it (Garmezy, 1974; Rutter, 1979; Werner & Smith, 1982), prevention scientists and advocates of a positive approach to psychology have developed a resilience framework for its’ potential to inform efforts to foster positive developmental outcomes among disadvantaged children, families, and communities (Yates & Masten, 2004).

According to Yates and Masten (2004), the resilience framework was comprised of protective factors that moderate the effect of adversity on psychological wellness. Decades of research on a variety of at-risk populations have converged on several factors that are reliably associated with resilience (Garmezy, 1985; Anthony & Cohler, 1987; Rolf, Masten, Cicchetti, Neuchterlein, & Weintruab, 1990). Protective factors included positive peer relations, good intellectual and problem-solving skills, safe housing and neighborhoods, identification of talents, and religiosity (Garmezy et al. 1985).

Religiosity as a protective factor

Researchers have long been interested in the relation between religiosity and psychological wellness. The emergence of the positive psychology movement increased attention on the question of not just whether religiosity is related to the absence of problems in mental health, but also whether religiosity is related to the presence of positive psychological states. Lewis and Cruise (2006) identified mechanisms for the
relationship between religiosity and psychological wellness as found in the mediating roles of increased social relationships and purpose in life. Lewis and Cruise (2006) suggested that religiosity may act as a buffer against mental distress by improving aspects of psychological wellness.

After reviewing the breadth of research in the positive psychology of religion, Joseph, Linley, and Maltby (2006) pointed out that there is a high need for high-quality empirical research into the causal relationship between religiosity and psychological wellness, and the factors that mediate and moderate this relationship. Does religiosity prevent mental illness in some cases? There was a need to better understand how character strengths such as religiosity are related to different aspects of psychological wellness, such as positive relationships and purpose in life.

Forgiveness as a protective factor

Research suggested that the ability to see one’s own capability for wrongdoing predicts forgiveness (Exline, Kraft, Baumeister, Zell, & Witvliet, 2008). Other studies showed that self-evaluation was positively correlated with forgiveness and that people must forgo bitter feelings and desires for revenge and pride in order to increase their own psychological wellness (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Exline & Baumeister, 2000). According to findings cited, research suggested that being
humble and insightful are building blocks that predict virtuous behavior such as forgiveness and therefore also predicted better psychological wellness (Exline, Kraft, Baumeister, Zell, & Witvliet, 2008).

As previously mentioned, a protective factor was one that moderates the effect of adversity on psychological wellness (Yates & Masten, 2004). Religiosity has been identified as a protective factor (Garmezy et al. 1985). Religiosity and forgiveness have been positively correlated (Worthington, 2005), although there were also studies suggesting that there is a discrepancy between religiosity and forgiveness (Tsuang, McCullough, & Hoyt, 2005). Because forgiveness has been linked to religiosity in some robust studies (Worthington, 2005) and also requires an individual to harbor positive qualities such as humbleness and insight (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2000; Exline & Baumeister, 2000), forgiveness may be referred to as a protective factor.

Prevention

Population-based studies allowed researchers not only to establish how traits, strengths, and conditions are distributed throughout a population, but also to establish the demographic, psychosocial, health, and biological variables that are associated with them (Huppert, 2004). A population approach to improving psychological wellness was first introduced by
Geoffrey Rose (1992). Rose demonstrated that the prevalence of many common diseases in a population is directly related to the population mean of the underlying risk factors (1992). Therefore, by changing the mean, we would be able to change the prevalence. Rose’s findings have influenced the development of population prevention programs (Gillham, Shatte, & Freres, 2000; Seligman, Schulman, DeRubeis, & Hollon, 1999). The old approach—efforts at individual treatment—did nothing to reduce the rate of mental and emotional disorders in the population (Albee & Gullotta, 1997).

Research indicated that 25% to 50% of young adults engage in multiple high-risk behaviors—such as drug abuse, unprotected intercourse, and violence—that interfere with their character development (Dryfoos, 1990). Although many young adults do not engage in these activities, they still require guidance to avoid involvement and to protect themselves from the harmful behaviors of others. The prevalence of high-risk behavior called for effective school-based prevention programs to address psychological health needs. The universality of schooling made schools the ideal place for delivery of programs aimed at promoting positive characteristics in individuals that prevent mental illness (Weissberg et al., 1997).

The positive institution variable was described as one that enables the individuals to express their character strengths,
which in turn prevent mental distress. Institutional-level characteristics were an enduring part of the culture of the school, and therefore designed to prevent mental distress over time and throughout the school population (Huppert, 2004). Institutional-level characteristics served the moral goals of the institution. Any institution may have multiple goals, including profit, power, or persistence (Peterson, 2006). This distinction was challenging as researchers worked to separate institutional attributes related to the formation of character in its members from characteristics that achieved other desirable goals. Huppert (2004) found that in order for a population intervention to promote wellness and prevent disorder, the institution must be purposefully striving to enhance the character formation of its members.

There were many other empirical studies that describe what makes some organizations better at promoting wellness among its members than others (Collins, 2001; Collins & Porras, 1997; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Shaw, 1997). These studies compared and contrasted good organizations with those that were presumably not so efficient at encouraging members’ character strengths, with the goal of discerning critical features of both. However, more research was needed to define how organizations pursue morally praise-worthy activities that encourage the strengths in their members. This fulfillment of
an institution’s members makes the world better and more positive because it teaches character—a concept that transcends all other initiatives of an organization. Whether it is a large university or a small family-owned business, the goal of a positive institution was to enable its members to be a morally good person in society. Rose’s (1992) findings suggested that a school is an institution that’s educational practices affect the students not just in the here and now but also across the lifespan in settings far removed from the classroom.

Summary of Literature Review

Research on character strengths, positive institutions, and psychological wellness illuminated characteristics that buffer psychological dysfunction and promote wellness. Character strengths were defined as traits that protect individuals from harm. For some, religiosity was a motivation for good character. For others, contributing to the betterment of community and society as a whole was reason for developing strong character. Forgiveness has been shown to prevent illness in individuals. Colleges exist mainly for the purpose of making its members good learners and good citizens. Finally, dimensions of psychological wellness may be determined by the inhabitation of specific character strengths and the enabling of these strengths by the surrounding environment. The result of
this person-environment interaction was level of psychological wellness.
Chapter 3

Method

The Methods section presents the following: participants, definitions of the variables, instruments, procedure, and statistical analysis.

Participants

The participants in this study were recruited from the undergraduate student body enrolled in courses at two universities. One university was a public institution with an enrollment of more than 38,000 students. The other university was a private, Catholic institution with close to 7,000 students enrolled. Potential participants were located by contacting faculty who were currently teaching required introductory Math and English classes at the two universities (i.e., the same classes) in order to achieve a representative sample of the entire university population at each institution. Initially, 235 undergraduate students were approached; eighty-five percent of all students contacted actually volunteered to participate. Of those students, twenty did not complete the survey, and seven left more than half of the survey blank.

Conceptual Definitions of Variables

Forgiveness: An individual’s general tendency toward letting go of responses of avoidance and revenge towards a person who has caused him harm. The definition was
conceptualized after reviewing literature on forgiveness (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoreson, 2000).

Religiosity: An individual’s active involvement in religious beliefs and practices.

Positive Institution: A student’s perception of the ability of the university to enable student’s character strengths.

Psychological Wellness: An individual’s evaluation of their own overall psychological health consisting of specific attitudes, such as autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self acceptance (Ryff, 1989).

Operational definition of variables

Forgiveness: The conceptual variable forgiveness was measured using the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM) developed by McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, (1998). Responses to 12 statements referring to a transgression recipient's current thoughts and feelings about the transgressor are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale. There were two subscales in this instrument that measure tendencies toward revenge and avoidance, 6 items for each. A total score and two subscales with two total scores were created for avoidance and revenge by computing two new variables in SPSS. The answer continuum was on a Likert
scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Higher scores on both subscales reflected higher levels of forgiveness. It took approximately 5 minutes to complete the inventory. Sample items are (#1) “I’ll make him/her pay” and (#6) “I want him/her to get what he/she deserves.” See Appendix B for the entire items.

The instrument was chosen after reviewing relevant literature on forgiveness (McCullough, 2002; Fincham & Kashdan, 2004; Enright, & Coyle, 1998; Gorsuch & Hao, 1993). Content and construct validity are considered good as the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM) has been well documented to be correlated with similar instruments (Seligman, 2002; McCullough, 2002). For example, scores on the TRIM were found to be significantly correlated with scores on the Forgiveness Quiz (Kamat, Jones, & Row, 2006). Within the measurement, the subscales (i.e. revenge and avoidance) were found to be weakly correlated at .39. McCullough (2002) reported a Cronbach alpha of .78. The Cronbach alpha for the Transgression Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory for the current study was .82.

Religiosity: Religiosity, an active set of personal religious beliefs and behaviors, was measured by the Modified Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiosity/ Spirituality (Fetzer Institute, 1999; see Appendix C). The measure was
created in an effort to bridge religiosity/spirituality research with health outcomes. The answer continuum is on a Likert scale from 1 (Several times a day) to 8 (Never). All items are reverse-coded in accordance with the instrument manual. Sample items are (#13) “How often do you pray privately in places other than church?” and (#14) “I work together with God to get through hard times.” Construct and content validity is considered good as the Modified Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiosity (MBMMR) correlates well with similar instruments measuring religious beliefs and practices (Joseph, Linley, and Maltby, 2006). The reliability was deemed adequate based on past research using the instrument (Hill & Pargament, 2008; Fetzer Institute, 1999). The Fetzer Institute (1999) reported a reliability alpha of .75. The Cronbach alpha for the current study was .62.

Positive Institution: Positive Institution, an individual’s perception of whether their institution is enabling their character strengths. The Positive Institution Inventory, a new instrument, was created by the researcher for use in this study (see Appendix D). The scale consists of eight items that describe characteristics of the enabling school that is enhancing their strengths. A Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) was used. Higher scores reflect a more positive perception that the school is
enabling his or her character strengths. The total score was used to indicate levels of positive perceptions of the participants’ school.

The literature was searched extensively for an assessment tool of positive institutions, but no validated instruments were located that measured the concept of positive institution as defined in this study. The instrument used was developed by the researcher and involved the following procedures in development.

The items were first developed based on review of the literature in positive psychology. A Primer in Positive Psychology (Peterson, 2006) was the primary source, with an entire chapter devoted to outlining and describing the characteristics of institutions that enable its member’s character strengths. An untested list of qualities of positive institutions was synthesized from this book. Once the inventory was developed, the items were evaluated by a panel of experts who had expertise on institutional characteristics and notable publications in the area of organizational psychology. The purpose of this step was to examine face validity and content validity for the Positive Institution Inventory. Revisions were made to the items based on the feedback received from the expert panel. Content validity was achieved given that the expert panel agreed that the content of the inventory’s items seemed to match the reported content of positive institutions according to
the literature. The Cronbach alpha for reliability of the instrument in current study was .78.

*Psychological Well-Being*: The conceptual variable, psychological well-being, or an individual’s evaluation of their own quality or state of being in good health was assessed by the six subscales of the *Psychological Well-Being Scales* (Ryff, 1995; see Appendix E). Ryff (1995) conceptualized psychological well-being as consisting of 6 dimensions: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life, self-acceptance. These points of convergence were based on prior theories constituting the core dimensions of the alternative formulation of psychological wellness by Ryff (1989). The six subscales are described below:

*Autonomy*: There was considerable emphasis in the literature on such qualities as self-determination, independence, and the regulation of behavior from within (Ryff, 1989). Self-actualizers, for example, are described as showing autonomous functioning and resistance to enculturation (Maslow, 1968). The autonomous individual was also described as having an internal locus of evaluation, whereby one does not look to others for approval, but evaluates oneself by personal standards (Rogers, 1961). Individuation was seen to involve a deliverance from convention (Jung, 1933). The process of turning inward in the later years was also seen by life span developmentalists to give
the person a sense of freedom from the norms governing everyday life (Erikson, 1959).

Environmental mastery: The individual’s ability to choose or create environments suitable to his or her strengths was defined as a characteristic of mental health (Ryff, 1989). Maturity was seen to require participation in a significant sphere of activity outside the self (Allport, 1961). Life span development was also described as requiring the ability to control complex environments (Erikson, 1959). These theories emphasized one’s ability to advance in the world and change it creatively through mental or physical activities.

Personal growth: Wellness required that one continue to develop one’s potential, to grow and expand as a person (Ryff, 1989). Such an individual was continually developing and becoming, rather than achieving a fixed state wherein all problems are solved. Life span theories also gave emphasis to continued growth and the confronting of new challenges at different stages of life (Erikson, 1959). Self-actualizing included openness to experience and learning (Maslow, 1968).

Positive relations: Past theories emphasized the importance of warm, trusting, interpersonal relationships (Rogers, 1961). The ability to love was considered a crucial factor in achieving psychological wellness. Self-actualizers have been described as having strong feelings of empathy and affection for all human
beings (Maslow, 1968). Warm relating to others was posed as a criterion of maturity (Allport, 1961). Intimacy and generativity are identified in developmental theories as vital aspects to wellness (Erikson, 1959).

*Purpose in life:* Belief that there is purpose and meaning in life was essential for wellness. The definition of maturity emphasized a clear comprehension of life’s purpose, a sense of directedness, and intentionality (Allport, 1961). Developmental theories referred to a variety of changing purposes in life, such as being productive and creative (Erikson, 1959).

*Self-acceptance:* The most recurrent criterion of psychological wellness was the individual’s sense of self acceptance. This was defined as a characteristic of self-actualization, optimal functioning, and maturity (Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961; Allport, 1961). Life span theories also emphasized acceptance of self and of one’s past life (Erikson, 1959).

The self-report scales were designed to assess an individual's well-being at a particular moment in time within each of these 6 dimensions (Ryff, 1995). Individuals responded to various statements and indicate on a 6-point Likert scale how true each statement is (e.g. 1 = Not at all like me; 6 = Very much like me). Higher total scores on each scale indicated greater well-being in that dimension. All six subscales were
measured with 14 items. There were a total of 84 items. Sample items were (#79) “I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions” and (#112) “For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.” The scales had adequate construct validity based on its significant correlations with prior measures of psychological wellness (i.e. life satisfaction, affect balance, self-esteem, internal control, and morale) with the positive and significant coefficients ranging from .25 to .73 (Ryff, 1989). Intercorrelations among the scales also provided evidence for the validity of the scales (see Table 4). Because the subscales were all considered aspects of psychological wellness, positive correlations were to be expected. The coefficients between scales were all positive and range from .32 to .76 (Ryff, 1989). For coefficients between the subscales in the current study, see Table 4. Cronbach’s alpha for subscales of psychological wellness were as follows: Autonomy = .71; Personal Growth = .76; Positive Relations = .70; Purpose in Life = .81, Self-Acceptance = .75; and Environmental Mastery = .78.

Instructional environment: The independent variable, college instructional environment, included two levels: public and religious-affiliated. This variable was a selection variable rather than a manipulated variable. A sample of students was collected at a public, research intensive
university, and a second sample was recruited at a university affiliated with a religious denomination.

**Sex, Race, and Class:** Information regarding participants’, sex, race, and class standing (i.e. freshman, sophomore, junior, senior) was collected on a demographic questionnaire to assess whether the public and religious-affiliated samples were comparable. The demographic questionnaire developed by the researcher is displayed in Appendix A.

**Procedure**

Following the university IRB approval, five professors who taught large, mandatory, introductory English and Math classes at each of two universities were contacted via email regarding recruitment of participants from their classes. Each professor and the researcher agreed upon a time and day that the researcher would be allowed access to classrooms with undergraduate students. At each classroom, the researcher was given 15 minutes to complete recruitment and gather data at the end of class. The researcher visited four classes at the public university, and five classes at the faith-based university. After a short introduction by the instructor, the researcher introduced herself and explained that the survey was part of data collection for dissertation research. The researcher explained that the students’ participation was voluntary and would not have any bearing on their grade for this class. The
researcher then explained that the current study was exploring character strengths and psychological wellness, and how institutions help students to express one’s character strengths.

Those students who volunteered to participate in the study received a packet containing an information sheet, demographic questionnaire, and all the instruments. The responses were anonymous and no identifying information was collected. The purpose of the information sheet was to provide information about the study, its purpose, and how student anonymity would be preserved. The researcher explained that the information sheet was to be kept by each participant. Participants were then informed that consent was taken as given on completing the questionnaire.

Statistical Analysis

Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the demographic information, such as gender, race, and year in school. Chi Square tests were used to determine whether the distribution of gender, race, and year in school varied when the public and religious-affiliated institutions were compared. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were calculated for religiosity, forgiveness, positive institution, and psychological wellness. Two-way between groups analyses of variance were conducted to explore the impact of gender and school (i.e. public vs. religious-affiliated) and
class standing and school, on levels of religiosity, forgiveness, positive institution, and psychological wellness due to significant disproportions of gender and class standing found by the use of Chi-square testing. Pearson correlations were conducted to determine significant relationships among religiosity, forgiveness, positive institution, and psychological wellness.

Furthermore, since the purpose of the study was to explore how factors such as character strengths and institutional support related to psychological wellness, the analysis needed to determine how these variables contributed to the outcome (psychological wellness), and how perception of institution (i.e., positive institution) functioned as a mediating variable. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was an appropriate method to test the primary hypothesis (i.e. Hypothesis 2) in this study because it tested the proposed model (see Figure 1). Structural equation modeling was chosen as the statistical method to test Hypothesis 2 because it was able to relate a dependent variable (i.e., psychological wellness) to various structural components (i.e., forgiveness, religiosity, and positive institution) believed to have direct or indirect influence on the dependent variable.

A noted benefit of SEM was that it overcame the limitation of measurement errors associated with single measures by
implementing multiple indicators. This made SEM a powerful alternative to path analysis in that measurement errors could now be assessed and controlled (Kline, 2005). By controlling for measurement error, unbiased estimates of relationships were possible in SEM. As a result, an SEM model was proposed. The estimated path coefficients were used to explore which variables had significant effects, and model-fit indices were examined to test if the SEM model fit the data in the current study.
Chapter 4

Results

The Results section presents a description of data treatment, details of the participant’s demographics, and descriptive statistics. The last part of the chapter explains the results pertaining to each hypothesis.

Data Treatment

Once collected, data were entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and the Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) for analysis (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). A frequency test was run to check the data for errors, specifically, missing data. Several strategies were used to correct the errors found. Mean substitution was used for replacing all missing values. A total of 14 missing data were replaced with the mean value of that variable. The rationale for using mean substitution was based on the acceptable method that the sample mean is the best estimate of the population mean if no further information is available (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006). The data set was also examined by descriptive statistics so that numerical responses that fell outside the possible range would be recognized. There were 5 total responses that needed to be corrected in the data set. The incorrect numbers were compared to the corresponding raw data on
the paper surveys. The correct response was then entered into the data set.

Description of Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 172 undergraduate students from both a public and religious-affiliated university. Frequencies were computed for each of the three demographic variables for each school (i.e., gender, race, and year in school). The majority of participants were female (70.1%, \(n = 127\)) and Caucasian (77%, \(n = 139\)). Fifteen percent (\(n = 27\)) indicated that they were freshman, 35% (\(n = 63\)) were sophomores, 24% (\(n = 43\)) were juniors, and 26% (\(n = 47\)) were seniors.

Preliminary inspection of the frequencies suggested that there might be disproportionality in demographic composition across schools. The degree of proportionality for each demographic variable across schools was tested with the chi-square test. For example, regarding the gender of the participants, 70% of the sample was female (\(n = 120\)) and 30% of the sample was male (\(n = 52\)). Table 1 illustrates the frequencies and chi-square test results for gender, race, and year in school for two institutions. While racial composition across the two schools appeared to be proportional (\(X^2 = 2.30, p > .05\)), participants showed significant disproportionality in gender, \(X^2(1, n = 172) = 6.23, p < .05\), and year in school, \(X^2(3,
$n = 172) = 28.03, p < .001$. For example, across the two schools, there was significantly greater gender disproportionality at the public institution (F to M: 7 to 2) than at the religious-affiliated institution (F to M: 3 to 2). In addition, while the two schools seemed to have similar proportions of freshman and juniors, the public institution had a disproportionally greater number of sophomores while the religious-affiliated institution had a disproportionally greater number of seniors (see table 1). Although the results of the Gender and Year in School main effects are being reported for the sake of completeness of reporting, the researcher had no theoretical reasons to hypothesize Gender or Year in School main effect differences.
Table 1.

Frequencies and Chi-Square Test Results of Sex, Race, and Year in School by Institution (N = 172)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Public (n = 99)</th>
<th>Religious-Affiliated (n = 73)</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>78</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year in School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Means and Standard Deviations

Participants were asked how they handled transgressions against them in the Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM) (see Appendix B). The two sub-scales measured responses of revenge and avoidance of the transgressor. The highest average score was reported for question #6) “I want him/her to get what he/she deserves.” The lowest average score was reported for question # 9) “I’m going
to get even.” The mean score of revenge ($M = 21.2$, $SD = 3.9$) for the students in the public institution was higher than the students in the religious-affiliated institution ($M = 19.9$, $SD = 4.6$). The students in the public institution had a slightly lower avoidance score ($M = 15.5$, $SD = 4.6$) than students in the religious-affiliated school ($M = 16.1$, $SD = 5.7$).

The scale measuring religiosity yielded a slightly higher average for the public university ($M = 41.2$, $SD = 8.8$) than religious-affiliated university ($M = 40.3$, $SD = 9.8$) which indicated that the sample in the public school reported slightly more religious practices and beliefs than the religious-affiliated school. The meaning of this result was discussed in detail in the following chapter.

There were 10 questions on the survey that measured perception of the participant’s university as enabling their character strengths (see Appendix D). Participants could answer how strongly they agree or disagree to each statement. The majority of students in the overall sample reported agreeing most strongly with question # 25) “My school contributes to my overall fulfillment in life.” The participants reported disagreeing most strongly with question #33) People tend not to compete with one another at my school.” The mean score of positive institution for the public school sample ($M = 26.6$, $SD$
was slightly higher than the mean for the religious-affiliated school sample ($M = 26.5$, $SD = 5.04$).

Among the six sub-scales of psychological wellness measured using the Psychological Well-Being Scales (Ryff, 1995), participants from both schools rated personal growth and environmental mastery as the highest aspect of wellness in their lives, and purpose in life and autonomy as the lowest overall aspect of wellness in their lives. Table 2 demonstrates the means and standard deviations for each of the six sub-scales.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations for each variable for each institution ($N = 172$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Public ($n = 99$)</th>
<th>Religious-Affiliated ($n = 73$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness- Revenge</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgiveness- Avoidance</td>
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<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
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<td>Religiosity</td>
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<td>Positive Institution</td>
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<td>26.5</td>
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<td>53.6</td>
<td>54.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Relations</td>
<td>52.2</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose in Life</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Acceptance</td>
<td>50.5</td>
<td>51.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Mastery</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>52.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesis 1. It was hypothesized that there would be a significant difference in forgiveness, religiosity, positive institution, and psychological wellness between students in a public institution and students in a religious-affiliated institution. While the hypothesis suggests conducting a standard independent samples t-test, the finding that sex and year in school were confounded with institution suggests that before testing for the main effect difference between institutions, first the possible interactive effect of these demographic variables must be ruled out. Therefore the analysis of variance was to test for the interactive effect of sex and year in school before testing the main effect for institution. More specifically, a two-way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of gender and school (i.e. public vs. religious-affiliated) on levels of religiosity, forgiveness, positive institution, and wellness subscales. Across the set of dependent variables, neither sex nor year in school proved to have a significant interactive effect. In addition, there was no significant difference in the effect of class standing on any dependent variable for public and religious-affiliated students. The result of no significant interaction allowed for further exploration of the main effects for school differences. None of the main effects were found
statistically significant, ranging from .16 to .89 (see Table 3). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was not supported.

The main effect for sex and the main effect for year in school are reported in Table 3 in order to provide complete reporting of the analysis of variance conducted. No hypotheses were made about the effects of these demographic variables on the dependent variables and the ANOVA results suggest that there was no significance in the main effect or interaction for gender and school variables.

Table 3. Two-way ANOVA test for gender and class standing differences per each dependent variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main Effect</td>
<td>Main Effect</td>
<td>x Gender</td>
<td>Main Effect</td>
<td>x Year</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.39</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.38</td>
</tr>
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<td>Avoidance</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
<td>.40</td>
</tr>
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<td>Religiosity</td>
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<td>.11</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Institution</td>
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<td>.94</td>
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<td>Autonomy</td>
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<td>.32</td>
<td>.56</td>
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<td>Self-acceptance</td>
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<td>.73</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.95</td>
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<td>Environmental Mastery</td>
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<td>.84</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
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<td>Personal Growth</td>
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<td>Purpose in Life</td>
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<td>.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Relations</td>
<td>.90</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (F, P) values reported; *P < .05
Hypothesis 2. It was hypothesized that the paths from religiosity and forgiveness to positive institution as well as the paths from positive institution to psychological wellness would be found significant. Prior to testing Hypothesis 2, an analysis was conducted to determine whether the relationships between the dependent variables differed across the two institutions. Pearson r correlations were run to examine relationships among the variables. The bivariate Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was conducted to describe the strength and direction of the linear relationships among the variables. The size of the value of Pearson correlation, ranging from 1.0 to -1.0, was interpreted using Cohen’s (1988) guideline: \( r = .10 \) to \( .29 \) or \( r = -.10 \) to \( -.29 \) small; \( r = .30 \) to \( .49 \) or \( r = -.30 \) to \( -.49 \) medium; \( r = .50 \) to \( 1.0 \) or \( r = -.50 \) to \( -1.0 \) large. Based on examination of the differences of the magnitude of the correlations, the variables did not differ across campuses (see Tables 4, 5, & 6). Determinations of the differences between the magnitudes of the correlations were conducted by checking the coefficients for each school for each dependent variable. A difference of more than .2 would indicate significance because the correlation would change from one level (e.g. small, medium, large) to another based on Cohen’s (1988) suggestion. Upon examination of the correlation coefficients, no differences were found between the two institutions.
Because no differences were found across institutions, structural equation modeling was conducted on the pooled data using the Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS) to examine the research question. Maximum likelihood estimation was used to obtain the parameter estimates of the relationships among the predictors (forgiveness, religiosity), the mediator (perception of institution), and the outcome variable (psychological wellness).

The model fit to the data for the multiple relationships was evaluated through the following model-fit indices: Chi-square of the estimated model ($\chi^2$), goodness of fit index (GFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Chi-square probability ($p > .05$) indicates a good overall fit for the model. For GFI and CFI, values larger than .90 indicate that the model provides a good fit to the data, whereas RMSEA should be below .06. These fit indices and their criteria are commonly recommended in the literature (Kline, 2005).

An initial model of the mediation effects of positive institution (perception of university to enable character strengths) on the relationships among forgiveness, religiosity, and psychological wellness and its subscales (autonomy, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, purpose in life, personal growth, & positive relations) was presented in Figure
2. Marginal support was found for the initial model (i.e., the model fit needed improvement) with $X^2 (31) = 59.3$, $p = .002$, GFI = .94, CFI = .89, and RMSEA = .07. Contrary to the hypothesis, no significant path existed from either of the two character strengths to perception of institution to psychological wellness. However, the construct religiosity was significantly correlated with psychological wellness.

The model modifications were performed in an attempt to develop a better-fitting, more parsimonious model. On the basis of the modification indices and theoretical relevance, some residual covariances were added and nonsignificant paths were removed. Specifically, non-significant paths from forgiveness were removed. However, forgiveness was kept in the model due to the theoretical support of this variable to psychological wellness based on literature and hypotheses and a significant correlation to religiosity. Additional covariances were added based on modification indices recommended by AMOS. The final model (Figure 3) was significantly improved after the model modification.

The final model fit the data well with $X^2 (28) = 26$, $p = .57$, GFI = .97, CFI = 1.0, and RMSEA = .00 and no further modifications were suggested by AMOS. Covariances were drawn between positive institution and positive relations through their errors and between religiosity and personal growth through
their errors, both of which yielded significant relationships. Of the indicators of psychological wellness, two covariances yielded significant relationships: purpose in life was significantly correlated to both autonomy and self-acceptance through their errors. As in the initial model, religiosity was found to be correlated with psychological wellness. Despite the significant relationships found and the improved model fit, the paths from religiosity to perception of institution to psychological wellness did not yield significance. Overall, the analysis did not support the hypothesis. The final model, including coefficients in standardized estimates, was illustrated in Figure 3.
Table 4. Correlation Matrix among the Variables for all Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>(2)</th>
<th>(3)</th>
<th>(4)</th>
<th>(5)</th>
<th>(6)</th>
<th>(7)</th>
<th>(8)</th>
<th>(9)</th>
<th>(10)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Revenge (2)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance (3)</td>
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<td>.34**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Institution (4)</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>-.03</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<td>.00</td>
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<td>-.06</td>
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<td>.31**</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
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<td>.37**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
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<td>-.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
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<td>.25**</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.59**</td>
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<td>-.01</td>
<td>.02</td>
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<td>.46**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Note: * Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed, **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 5. Correlation Matrix among the Variables for Public School

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
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<td>-.05</td>
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<td>.35**</td>
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<td>-.05</td>
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<td>.40**</td>
<td>.45**</td>
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</table>

Note: * Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed, **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
Table 6. Correlation Matrix among the Variables for Religious-Affiliated School

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<tbody>
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<td>Religiosity (1)</td>
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<td>-.05</td>
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<td>.02</td>
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<td>-.04</td>
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<td>.43**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose in Life (8)</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self Acceptance (9)</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.42**</td>
<td>.27**</td>
<td>.52**</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental Mastery (10)</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.30**</td>
<td>.40**</td>
<td>.45**</td>
<td>.35**</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed, **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
Figure 2. The initial model

- Forgiveness
- Avoidance
- Revenge
- Perception of Institution
- Religiosity
- Psychological Wellness
  - Autonomy
  - Environmental Mastery
  - Purpose in Life
  - Self Acceptance
  - Positive Relations
  - Personal Growth
Figure 3. The final model with coefficient estimates

$p < .05 \ast, p < .01 \ast\ast, p < .001 \ast\ast\ast$
Additional findings

As mentioned previously, several significant correlations were found. Specifically, a small, positive correlation was found between personal growth and religiosity ($r = .29$) among all participants, and again for public and religious-affiliated schools. Also, positive relations and positive institution were weakly correlated ($r = .23$) among all participants, and for both schools.

Assessment of the construct validity of the subscales for the TRIM revealed a notable significant relationship between the indicators, which purports to measure tendency towards forgiveness. The subscales were weakly correlated ($r = .34$) for all participants. This demonstrates that there is a relatively small relationship between revenge and avoidance, meaning that the two scales are likely independent.

Furthermore, the subscales within the measure of psychological well-being were positively correlated (see Tables 4, 5, & 6). The significant relationships between subscales (i.e. autonomy, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, self acceptance, and environmental mastery) ranged in strength from small to large (.25 to .59).

In sum, intercorrelations among the measures themselves are of importance because the dimensions are all facets of the construct being measured, and therefore positive correlations
are to be expected. However, small associations provide more validity for the scales as being independent domains of wellness. The implications of these results are discussed at length in chapter 5.

Summary of results

Chi Square results revealed significant disproportions of gender and class-standing, leading to two-way ANOVA analysis in order to examine any potential interactions. Results of ANOVA did not support the hypothesis that there would be differences between the public and religious-affiliated schools on factors of forgiveness, religiosity, perception of school, and well-being. There were no significant findings, thus rendering Hypothesis 1 inconclusive.

Testing of Hypothesis 2 demonstrated similar non-significant findings. Though the final model demonstrated good fitness, the path from religiosity to perception of institution to well-being was not found significant. Overall, the paths from the predictor variables (forgiveness & religiosity) to the mediating variable (positive institution) to the outcome variable (psychological wellness) were found not statistically significant.

The results of correlation analysis and SEM showed that religiosity had a significant positive relationship to psychological wellness. Other significant relationships found
were between religiosity and personal growth, and religiosity and forgiveness. A significant link was found between positive relations and positive institution.
Chapter 5
Discussion

The Discussion chapter includes a review of the background of the current study, methodology, and major findings related to the hypotheses. The last part of the chapter discusses study limitations and suggestions for future research in the field of counseling.

Background of study

Undeniable evidence informs the researcher that universities and colleges across the nation are challenged to facilitate psychological wellness among their students (Mahoney, 2007). Similarly, the factors that lead to psychological wellness have been investigated at length by researchers (Campbell, 1981; Ryff, 1989). Previous efforts have been grouped around five topics: 1) positive and negative affect and life satisfaction (Bryant & Veroff, 1982; Diener & Emmons, 1984; Stock, Okun, & Benin, 1986), 2) self-actualization (Maslow, 1968), 3) Roger’s (1961) view of the fully-functioning person, 4) Jung’s (1933) formulation of individuation, and 5) Allport’s (1961) conception of maturity. Life span developmental perspectives that emphasize Erikson’s (1959) psychosocial stage model, which explains the various challenges confronted at different phases of the life cycle, have also aimed to uncover the factors contributing to psychological wellness.
More recently, investigators have explored character strengths as factors that lead to psychological wellness (Jorgensen & Nafstad, 2004; Stenson, 2003; Bretherton & Orner, 2004; Diener, 2000). Specifically, previous studies have demonstrated that a lack of character strengths can have disastrous effects on students and entire schools (Garmezy, 1985; Harris & Thoreson, 2003).

In addressing the need to improve wellness on college campuses, this study made the initial effort to identify factors (i.e. character strengths) that contributed to psychological wellness. The goal was to examine the impact of perception of institution on the relationships between religiosity, forgiveness, and psychological wellness. The endeavor was founded on two theories, (i.e. positive psychology and the ecological counseling approach), both of which emphasized the interaction between individuals and their environment (i.e. institution) as significantly impacting psychological wellness.

Methodology

The positive psychology theory and the ecological counseling approach provided a theoretical framework for the research design and hypotheses of the current study. Specifically, the mediation effect of positive institution on the relationships between character strengths and psychological wellness was examined. It was hypothesized that there would be
significant differences between a public and religious-affiliated school on measures of forgiveness, religiosity, positive institution, and psychological wellness. It was also hypothesized that the paths from character strengths (i.e., forgiveness and religiosity), to positive institution, to psychological wellness, would be found significant.

The study sample included 172 undergraduate students from both a public and a religious-affiliated university. Participants rated their own level of religiosity, forgiveness, perception of institution, and psychological wellness by completing the instruments described in the Methods section. Participants at both schools completed all instruments.

Data was entered into SPSS after collection, and descriptive statistics were performed. ANOVA’s were run to test the effects of gender and class standing for two different campuses on the dependent variables. The AMOS program software was used in conjunction with SPSS to do Structural Equation Modeling to test the hypothesis that the paths from character strengths (i.e., forgiveness and religiosity) to positive institution to psychological wellness would be found significant.

Discussion of Major Findings

Neither of the two hypotheses were supported by the results of this study. While analysis revealed the final model to be a
good fit to the data, the path from character strength (i.e. forgiveness and religiosity) to perception of institution to psychological wellness was not found significant. The results of this study did not support hypothesis 2, which suggested that the environment plays a role in mediating character strengths and psychological wellness. While this study was based on several works which suggest there should be a link between character strengths, perception of institution, and psychological wellness, (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Savig & Swartz, 2000; Conyne & Cook, 2004; Peterson, 2006), other studies suggest no clear linkage of these variables should be expected (Allport, 1950; Allport & Ross, 1967; Exline & Baumeister, 2000; Johnson, Jang, Larson, & Li, 2001; Pargament, 2002; Tsang, McCullough, & Hoyt, 2005).

A review of previous research revealed that there is little evidence supporting relationships between religiosity and psychological wellness. Among the studies reviewed, one found two distinct types of religiosity, and furthermore, that the types of religious people may be linked to wellness in various ways depending on the type. Specifically, Allport and Ross (1967) asserted that it is important to make a distinction between individuals motivated by goals intrinsic to religious life from people motivated by values extrinsic to the character of religion, such as a desire for social status or interpersonal
power. Another empirical study linked intrinsic motivation to improved psychological wellness, lower levels of prejudice, and extrinsic motivation to prejudice (Allport, 1950). In addition, without an appreciation for spiritual criteria of psychological wellness, research can yield only a one-dimensional, psychologically biased view of religious life, particularly with regard to religious expressions that depart from the mainstream (Pargament, 2002). Consider, for example, the psychological literature on religious fundamentalism. Fundamentalism has been critiqued for its associations with prejudice and narrow-mindedness (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996), and in fact, empirical literature has demonstrated links between strong unwavering devotion to strict religious interpretations and practices with prejudice and bigotry to groups, including Blacks, women, Jews, homosexuals, and communists (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992).

In empirical studies of college student and Protestant church samples, higher levels of internalization (i.e. internal motivation) were linked to less anxiety, depression, and social dysfunction and higher self-esteem (Kirkpatrick, 1993). The same study also demonstrated that greater perception of external motivation, in contrast, was associated with higher levels of anxiety, depression, and somatization and poorer self-esteem. In addition, Altemeyer and Hunsberger (1992) found that greater
fundamentalism was associated with more willingness to support the arrest, torture, and execution of political radicals.

Furthermore, these findings are not restricted to fundamentalist Christians; fundamentalist Hindus, Muslims, and Jews also report greater prejudice toward homosexuals (Hunsberger, 1996). Other studies have tied fundamentalism to rigid thinking and right-wing authoritarianism. For example, working with a sample of religious college students, Bergin, Masters, and Richards (1987) found that greater intrinsic religiousness was related to higher scores on several scales on the California Personality Inventory (i.e., sociability, sense of well-being, tolerance, intellectual efficiency), whereas extrinsic religiousness was negatively correlated with these same scales. In a similar study, Ryan, Rigby, and King (1993) distinguished between people who personally choose and value their religion (internalization) from those who involve themselves in religion out of fear, guilt, or external pressure. It is clear that some empirical studies do not support the theory that character strengths such as religiosity as a simple concept increases psychological wellness, and in fact, may actually work against it. The literature shows religiosity to be a highly complex construct that requires much more scientific focus to be clearly understood as a contributing factor to mental status.
In contrast, other studies found significant links between religiosity, forgiveness, and wellness (Worthington, 2005; Worthington, 1998; Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001; Rye, Pargament, Amir, Beck, Dorff, Hallisey, Narayanan, & Williams, 2000). For example, Pargament (1997) found that religious practice such as confession and prayer helped increase an individual’s psychological wellness by freeing the confessor from bondage to guilt and bitterness that could potentially darken his or her view of life. Another similar study found that religiosity such as going to church and looking to God for strength during crises helps a person to cope with life and even buffers against emotional problems while promoting wellness (McCullough, Hoyt, Larson, Koenig, & Thoresen, 2000). McCullough et al. (2000) established that having high levels of religious activities such as working with God to get through hard times and feeling loved by members of one’s congregation was positively correlated with wellness while high levels of activity such as feeling punished and abandoned by God were positively correlated with psychological distress.

In addition, faith-based institutions (i.e. environments) have been found to promote psychological wellness in members (Miller & Thoresen, 2003). Miller and Thoresen (2003) found that students at faith-based institutions reported higher levels of well-being than students at public universities. The
students who reported higher levels of religious activity also
had higher levels of psychological wellness. It is clear that
there is research that supports investigation of the hypotheses
in this study that purport that character strengths and positive
institutions are integrally related to psychological wellness.

Despite insufficient evidence for Hypothesis 2, several
significant relationships were found in the zero-order
correlation tests. The significant relationships found in this
study should be interpreted with caution and a clear
understanding of the magnitude of the relationships found.
Consistent with prior research (Felner, Felner, & Silverman,
2000), the current study found a weak relationship between
personal growth and religiosity in both the final model (p <
.05) and correlation tests ($r = .29$). Although significant, the
finding should be interpreted with caution considering its small
strength. It is possible that the desire for personal growth
may develop and increase as a result of religious teachings on
the importance of humility. It is also possible that engaging
in religious activities such as prayer before mealtime and
reading religious literature might be linked to an individual’s
feeling of continued development and seeing oneself as growing
and expanding. Also, religious beliefs such as looking to God
for strength and working together with God through hard times
may increase a sense of realizing his own potential, seeing
improvement in self and behavior over time, and influence changes in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness. It is suggested that the preceding ideas be further explored in future studies to determine applicability.

Another relationship was indicated in the correlation tests between positive institution and positive relations. However, the relationship found, while significant, was quite small ($r = .23$). Still, in accordance with prior research on positive institutions (Peterson, 2006), this finding may suggest the importance of warm, trusting interpersonal relations as being encouraged by the school. Hence, the ability to love has been called a central component of mental health (Ryff, 1989) and can be enhanced by the surrounding environment. According to Maslow’s (1968) theory, self-actualizers are described as having strong feelings of empathy for all human beings and as being capable of greater love, deeper friendship, and more complete identification with others. Engaging in warm relationships with others has been described as an indicator of wellness (Allport, 1961). Developmental theories also emphasized the achievement of close union with others (intimacy) and the guidance and direction of others (generativity) as signs of psychological well-being (Erikson, 1951). Thus, the finding that positive relations and positive institution were weakly correlated adds appreciation to the possibility that a person’s perception of
their surrounding environment, specifically their school, may be related to another aspect of wellness: positive relationships with others.

Also worth discussion is the observation that forgiveness (i.e. absence of revenge or avoidance) was weakly related to religiosity in the final model \((p < .05)\). In stark contrast, religiosity was not significantly (negatively) correlated with revenge or avoidance in the zero-order correlation tests. This finding suggests that the significant relationship found in the SEM models between forgiveness and religiosity should be interpreted with much skepticism and could be the result of measurement error. Still, the finding in the model is consistent with previous research that found one behavior of religiosity, private prayer for a transgressor, helped one avoid ruminating over transgressions and overcome anger (Stoia-Caraballo, Rye, Pan, Kirschman, Lutz-Zois, Lyons, 2008). Stoia-Carraballo et al. (2008) found that ruminating over past injuries may increase worry therefore decreasing overall health. The relationship between forgiveness and religiosity found in the model supports Stoia-Caraballo et al.’s finding that aspects of religiosity, such as prayer, decrease worry and improve overall health. Other studies have discovered that people who are more religious moderately value forgiveness more than people do who are less religious (Gorsuch & Hao, 1993; Poloma & Gallup,
Religious variables such as frequency of church attendance, self-rated religiousness, intrinsic religious orientation, importance of religion, feeling close to God, and measures of personal prayer, have been positively linked to self-reported values and attitudes toward forgiveness (Edwards et al., 2002; Poloma & Gallup, 1991). For example, when asked how a Christian should live, students ranked “forgiving” second only to “loving” as an ideal Christian value (Shoemaker & Bolt, 1977). Despite previous findings, it is clear that the relationship between religiosity and forgiveness needs further empirical support in order for applications to be suggested.

Results of hypothesis-testing also revealed a lack of evidence to support hypothesis 1. Hypothesis 1 proposed that there would be a significant difference between a public school and religious-affiliated school on measures of character strengths, perception of institution to encourage character strengths, and psychological wellness. This finding, the lack of difference between the two types of schools, might be due to the fact that the identified faith-based school in this study is not well-represented for its category.

The Congregation for Catholic Education (2008) conducted a study that suggested that the religious identity of a school, and thus its students, was significantly impacted by the teachers’ commitment to modeling the religious beliefs and
values consistent with the teachings of the church that the school was founded upon. It is possible that the religious-affiliated school sampled in the current study did not accurately represent a religious environment due to a lack of teachers’ commitment to teach the virtues and encourage traits such as religiosity and forgiveness. In a campus climate survey conducted in 2004 at the sampled religious-affiliated school, a mere 49% of faculty reported actively participating in the faith that the school was founded upon. It is noted here that the religious-affiliated school sampled in the current study adheres to a policy that it hires the best qualified candidates with no consideration of religious-affiliation. Probably few would disagree with George Marsden, a Notre Dame professor of history who specializes in the secularization of U.S. Protestant colleges and universities. He has predicted, “Once a church-related institution adopts the policy that it will hire simply ‘the best qualified candidates,’ it is simply a matter of time until its faculty will have an ideological profile essentially like that of the faculty at every other mainstream university” (www.nd.edu). Stringent religious-affiliated institutions hire faculty with a very clear preference for persons who embody and live out the religion that the institution is founded upon. For example, the University of Notre Dame reports that 80% of their faculty report being active Catholics. The religious identity
of the university depends upon, and is nurtured by, the continuing presence of a predominant number of religious intellectuals. Because research agrees that the underlying factors for creating an environment founded on virtue is carried not by students or the administration but by faculty, attention has centered on the process by which an effective spiritual presence can be maintained in the body of scholars and researchers constantly renewing itself in the nation’s Church-related institutions of higher learning.

In light of the non-confirmatory results, it would be interesting to sample the student population in an institution that strongly prefers a specific religious orientation for its faculty in order to explore the hypothesis further. Questions to ask would be: Does the practice of the institution in religious activities, including the hiring of faculty, affect the perception of the school by students? Do these factors influence psychological wellness? These are all questions that could be answered by further research and more pointed sampling techniques than those used in the current study.

Additional Findings

As mentioned in the results chapter, evaluation of the TRIM (Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory), developed by McCullough, Rachal, Sandage, Worthington, Brown, & Hight, (1998), revealed a significant small correlation between
the subscales (i.e. revenge and avoidance) ($r = .34$). Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan (2001) found a significant correlation between revenge and avoidance ($r = .38$). Witvliet et al.’s findings were consistent with results of the current study.

The findings of the current study suggest that a tendency toward one response of being harmed cannot be predicted by the other. Revenge and avoidance are independent domains of forgiveness. Historically, the TRIM subscales not only correlate with a variety of relationship, offense, and social-cognitive variables; they have also demonstrated strong relationships to a single-item measure of forgiveness (McCullough and Witvliet, 2001; Witvliet, Ludwig, & Vander Laan, 2001). Certainly, more validational research is needed to further substantiate the scale.

Another contribution of the current study includes significant correlations within the six psychological well-being scales, ranging in strength from small to large (.25 to .59). Previous outcomes provided preliminary evidence for the validity of the newly constructed scales of well-being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). That is, correlations with prior measures of positive functioning (i.e., life satisfaction, affect balance, self-esteem, internal control, and morale) were all positive and significant, with coefficients ranging from .25 to .73. Similarly, correlations with prior measures of negative
functioning (i.e., powerful others, chance control, depression) were all negative and significant, with coefficients ranging from $-0.30$ to $-0.60$ (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The intercorrelations among the measures themselves were of importance because the dimensions are all facets of psychological well-being, and therefore positive correlations are to be expected. However, as the coefficients become stronger, they raise the potential problem of the criteria not being empirically distinct from one another. A small association between the scales would indicate distinct dimensions. The larger the correlation coefficient, the less likely they are to be distinct from one another. Such comparisons are meant to clarify whether the Psychological Well-Being Scale affords criteria of psychological well-being that are empirically distinct from one another, and therefore valid domains of psychological well-being.

This appears to be the case with certain relationships, such as the one between self-acceptance and purpose in life, which correlate .59. Such an outcome suggests that the scales may be measuring the same underlying construct, which is not what the author intended in creating the scales and threatens the validity of the results. Consistent with these results are the findings of another study that tested versions of the well-being scales with 3-items, 9-items and 14-items. Van Dierendonck (2003) reported that the factorial validity was only
acceptable for the 3-items per scale version. In addition, the internal consistency of these 3-items scales was below generally accepted levels. The current findings along with Van Dierendonck’s (2003) study cast doubt on the success of the author to have pinpointed a valid instrument to measure separate domains of psychological well-being.

The author of the Psychological Well-Being Scales intended to operationalize several aspects of positive functioning based on integration of relevant theoretical domains in order to define new dimensions of psychological wellness. Overall, the integration of mental health, clinical, and life span developmental theories points to multiple converging aspects of positive psychological functioning, which are the six subscales (Ryff, 1989). Theoretically, certain of these criteria appear to be separate in meaning from the dimensions that have long guided studies of psychological wellbeing (e.g., positive and negative affect, life satisfaction). That is, little in the current empirical literature emphasizes such qualities as positive relations with others, autonomy, purpose in life, or personal growth as key components of well-being. The empirical challenge for the author, therefore, was to operationalize these theory-guided dimensions so that they may be examined vis-a-vis the reigning indexes of positive functioning. Such comparisons were meant to clarify whether the current approach affords
criteria of psychological well-being that are theoretically and empirically distinct from existing formulations.

In sum, Ryff & Singer, 1996 found that the subscales were significantly correlated. Furthermore, although the scales were intercorrelated, the scales showed differential patterns with other measures (i.e., purpose in life is highly related to self-acceptance, but has generally lower correlations with life satisfaction, affect balance, and self-esteem than occur between these measures and self acceptance) (Ryff & Singer, 1996). However, results of the current study demonstrate that some of the six scales are highly related, and therefore, do not corroborate previous findings suggesting that the scales are independent.

The following section explores internal validity of the current study that may have impacted the results, thus rendering the hypotheses unsupported. The limitations of the study are discussed and suggestions are given to guide future research on the topic.

Study limitations and suggestions for future research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when generalizing the findings. The following section provides a discussion of the limitations of the current study, including recommendations for future research.
Sampling Limitations. The design of the current research consisted of undergraduate students from both a public university and a private, religious-affiliated institution. One needs to be cautious to generalize to individuals of other secular and denominational institutions. The current sample lacked a clear differentiation between secular and religious-affiliated participants. For example, it is notable to mention that a school with a religious affiliation does not necessarily have a larger percentage of students, faculty, or programs that promote religiosity. A religious-affiliated institution is associated with a religion; however, schools may vary widely in how much religious practice and values are actually reinforced to manifest this affiliation. As mentioned previously, a major limitation of the current study was that the representation of religious versus public in the sample may not be accurate. Furthermore, in order to maximize the variance of the independent variable (i.e. public vs. religious-affiliated institution), future research may sample a religious-affiliated university that is known for its stringent religious teachings and practices.

Additionally, future research could explore ways to determine the degree to which a school integrates its religious affiliation and thus ensure a comparison between a highly-integrated, religious-affiliated school and a school void of
religious affiliation. This would better demonstrate the effects of a religious-affiliated environment on psychological wellness. Also, a lack of random sampling from the population of secular and religious-affiliated students limits the generalizability of the results to other schools. Future researchers may select a sample via random sampling so that the results are generalizable to other institutions.

Another important limitation to mention is that the sample obtained was disproportional in its representation of gender and year in school, reflecting mostly Caucasian women in their early twenties pursuing a college degree. Further, the comparison of public and religious-affiliated campuses was confounded by a disparity between the campuses in the relative proportions of men and women and the relative proportions of freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Random sampling of students within the schools may have prevented the confounding of institution with gender and year in school. In order to get a more balanced and representative sample, it would be necessary to include an appropriate representation of participants from various backgrounds (i.e., gender, race, and year in school) in future sampling.

Instrument Limitations. The Positive Institution Inventory was created by the researcher and reviewed by a panel of experts in the field. However, there was no empirical data validating
the instrument at the time of this study. Although the instrument was based on the literature and was endorsed by the experts in the field as being a valid measure of positive institution, a field testing of validity and reliability was still needed to provide actual psychometric information for the instrument. Also, the researcher recommends that the items on the Positive Institution Inventory ask questions related to specific character strengths in addition to general questions about the perception of the university as enabling character strengths.

Future research may also include measurement of specific virtues to assess the concept of religiosity. As a character strength, the degree to which followers have internalized its teachings may be a good measurement of religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967). As mentioned previously, Gordon Allport made an important distinction between extrinsic religiosity (religion as a means to other ends) and intrinsic religiosity (religion as an end in itself) (1950). The extrinsically religious participate in institutionalized religion because it provides security, satisfies social needs, or confers status. The intrinsically religious, in contrast, internalize religious beliefs and bring their own needs into harmony with them. As a result of Allport’s theory, a brief self-report questionnaire was developed (Allport & Ross, 1967). One of the findings from
Allport and Ross’ study was that extrinsically religious people were the most likely to be prejudiced. Additionally, Allport & Ross suggested that intrinsically religious people were the least likely to be prejudiced. These findings suggested that living out the virtues of religious life, such as forgiveness and compassion, may determine the effects on a person’s psychological wellness. In future studies, it would be interesting to utilize Allport’s questionnaire to measure the difference between extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity and to compare which type lives out the virtues more fully and which type is more psychologically well.

**Conclusion**

Although results did not confirm the hypotheses that there would be a difference between public and religious-affiliated schools, or that there would be significant paths from character strengths to positive institution to wellness, the results are useful and can guide future endeavors at exploring two theoretical frameworks (i.e. positive psychology theory and ecological counseling approach) to understand the relationship among person’s character strengths, the institutional environment, and psychological well-being. By considering the limitations mentioned in this chapter, future researchers may find evidence of the theories and pinpoint factors that directly and indirectly influence college student’s mental health.
Serious attention might be given to the positive institution inventory, which could be tested for validation as an instrument that measures an institution’s ability to enable character strengths in its students. Another worthy future goal would be to explore how institutional practices can be improved so that all institutional members can increase psychological wellness.
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Appendix A

Anonymous Survey for Research Study
Effects of Character Strengths and Positive Institution on Psychological Wellness

PLEASE NOTE: Completing this anonymous survey DOES NOT COUNT toward earning class credit.

REMEMBER: You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. By completing this questionnaire you indicate your consent to participate in this research study. Please place your completed survey face down on the desk indicated by the researcher.

Demographic Questionnaire

Code:

Age:

Sex:  Male  Female

Race:

Year in School (circle one):  Fr.  So.  Jr.  Sr.

Major:

Today’s Date:
Appendix B

**Transgression-Related Interpersonal Motivations Inventory (TRIM)**

*Directions:* Choose the best description of your typical response toward someone who has offended or injured you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree= 1</th>
<th>Agree= 2</th>
<th>Neutral= 3</th>
<th>Disagree= 4</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree= 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1. I’ll make him/her pay.
   1     2     3     4     5

2. I am trying to keep as much distance between us as possible.
   1     2     3     4     5

3. I wish that something bad would happen to him/her.
   1     2     3     4     5

4. I am living as if he/she doesn't exist, isn't around.
   1     2     3     4     5

5. I don't trust him/her.
   1     2     3     4     5

6. I want him/her to get what he/she deserves.
   1     2     3     4     5

7. I am finding it difficult to act warmly toward him/her.
   1     2     3     4     5

8. I am avoiding him/her.
   1     2     3     4     5

9. I'm going to get even.
   1     2     3     4     5

10. I cut off the relationship with him/her.
    1     2     3     4     5
11. I want to see him/her hurt and miserable.

12. I withdraw from him/her.
Appendix C

Modified Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religiosity/ Spirituality

Directions: Choose the best description of your typical response.

Several times a day= 1
Once a day= 2
A few times a week= 3
Once a week= 4
A few times a month= 5
Once a month= 6
Less than once a month= 7
Never= 8

13. How often do you pray privately in places other than at church?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

14. How often do you read the Bible or other religious literature?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

15. How often are prayers or grace said before or after meals in your home?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

16. I work together with God to get through hard times.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

17. I look to God for strength, support, and guidance through crises.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

18. How often do you attend church services?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

19. How often do you rely on your spirituality to guide your behavior?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8
Appendix D

Positive Institution Inventory

Directions: Please circle the answer that best describes your perception of your university.

Strongly agree= 1
Agree= 2
Not sure= 3
Disagree= 4
Strongly disagree= 5

20. My school contributes to my overall fulfillment in life.
   1 2 3 4 5

21. My school prepares me simultaneously to be a good learner and a good citizen.
   1 2 3 4 5

22. The courses that I am required to take are relevant to my goals and future.
   1 2 3 4 5

23. I have a sense of belonging and connectedness to my school.
   1 2 3 4 5

24. My college environment is congruent with my character strengths and value.
   1 2 3 4 5

25. Around here people tend to hide their feelings from one another.
   1 2 3 4 5

26. People around here are always trying to win an argument.
   1 2 3 4 5

27. Around here discussions frequently turn into verbal duals.
   1 2 3 4 5
Appendix E

**Psychological Well-Being Scales**

Answer on a six-point scale: (1= Not at all like me; 6= Very much like me)

28. Sometimes I change the way I act or think to be more like those around me.

1 2 3 4 5 6

29. I am not afraid to voice my opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people.

1 2 3 4 5 6

30. My decisions are not usually influenced by what everyone else is doing.

1 2 3 4 5 6

31. I tend to worry about what other people think of me.

1 2 3 4 5 6

32. Being happy with myself is more important to me than having others approve of me.

1 2 3 4 5 6

33. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.

1 2 3 4 5 6

34. People rarely talk me into doing things I don't want to do.

1 2 3 4 5 6

35. It is more important to me to "fit in" with others than to stand alone on my principles.

1 2 3 4 5 6

36. I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.

1 2 3 4 5 6
37. It's difficult for me to voice my own opinions on controversial matters.
   1 2 3 4 5 6

38. I often change my mind about decisions if my friends or family disagree.
   1 2 3 4 5 6

39. I am not the kind of person who gives in to social pressures to think or act in certain ways.
   1 2 3 4 5 6

40. I am concerned about how other people evaluate the choices I have made in my life.
   1 2 3 4 5 6

41. I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.
   1 2 3 4 5 6

42. In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.
   1 2 3 4 5 6

43. The demands of everyday life often get me down.
   1 2 3 4 5 6

44. I do not fit very well with the people and the community around me.
   1 2 3 4 5 6

45. I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life.
   1 2 3 4 5 6

46. I often feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities.
   1 2 3 4 5 6

47. If I were unhappy with my living situation, I would take effective steps to change it.
48. I generally do a good job of taking care of my personal finances and affairs.

49. I find it stressful that I can't keep up with all of the things I have to do each day.

50. I am good at juggling my time so that I can fit everything in that needs to get done.

51. My daily life is busy, but I derive a sense of satisfaction from keeping up with everything.

52. I get frustrated when trying to plan my daily activities because I never accomplish the things I set out to do.

53. My efforts to find the kinds of activities and relationships that I need have been quite successful.

54. I have difficulty arranging my life in a way that is satisfying to me.

55. I have been able to build a home and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my liking.

56. I am not interested in activities that will expand my horizons.

57. In general, I feel that I continue to learn more about myself as time goes by.

58. I am the kind of person who likes to give new things a try.
59. I don't want to try new ways of doing things--my life is fine the way it is.

60. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.

61. When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years.

62. In my view, people of every age are able to continue growing and developing.

63. With time, I have gained a lot of insight about life that has made me a stronger, more capable person.

64. I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time.

65. I do not enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things.

66. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.

67. I enjoy seeing how my views have changed and matured over the years.

68. I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago.
69. There is truth to the saying you can't teach an old dog new tricks.

70. Most people see me as loving and affectionate.

71. Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.

72. I often feel lonely because I have few close friends with whom to share my concerns.

73. I enjoy personal and mutual conversations with family members or friends.

74. It is important to me to be a good listener when close friends talk to me about their problems.

75. I don't have many people who want to listen when I need to talk.

76. I feel like I get a lot out of my friendships.

77. It seems to me that most other people have more friends than I do.

78. People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.

79. I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others.
80. I often feel like I'm on the outside looking in when it comes to friendships.

81. I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me.

82. I find it difficult to really open up when I talk with others.

83. My friends and I sympathize with each other's problems.

84. I feel good when I think of what I've done in the past and what I hope to do in the future.

85. I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.

86. I tend to focus on the present, because the future nearly always brings me problems.

87. I have a sense of direction and purpose in life.

88. My daily activities often seem trivial and unimportant to me.

89. I don't have a good sense of what it is I'm trying to accomplish in life.

90. I used to set goals for myself, but that now seems like a waste of time.
91. I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality.

92. I am an active person in carrying out the plans I set for myself.

93. Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.

94. I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life.

95. My aims in life have been more a source of satisfaction than frustration to me.

96. I find it satisfying to think about what I have accomplished in life.

97. In the final analysis, I'm not so sure that my life adds up to much.

98. When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out.

99. In general, I feel confident and positive about myself.

100. I feel like many of the people I know have gotten more out of life than I have.

101. Given the opportunity, there are many things about myself that I would change.
102. I like most aspects of my personality.

103. I made some mistakes in the past, but I feel that all in all everything has worked out for the best.

104. In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life.

105. For the most part, I am proud of who I am and the life I lead.

106. I envy many people for the lives they lead.

107. My attitude about myself is probably not as positive as most people feel about themselves.

108. Many days I wake up feeling discouraged about how I have lived my life.

109. The past had its ups and downs, but in general, I wouldn't want to change it.

110. When I compare myself to friends and acquaintances, it makes me feel good about who I am.

111. Everyone has their weaknesses, but I seem to have more than my share.