

**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SUPPORT AND PURPOSE IN THE
PROMOTION OF CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT¹**

A dissertation

submitted by

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Abstract

Positive purpose during adolescence can lead to a variety of positive outcomes, such as prosocial behavior, moral commitment, character, and competence (Damon, 2003). A review of the literature suggests that three components of positive purpose are important to examine further: presence of meaning in life, goal-directedness, and contribution to the world beyond the self. In addition, social networks have the potential to foster purpose, which, in turn, promotes positive youth development (PYD), and these potential contextual influences merit investigation. Accordingly, this research sought to understand the importance of purpose and social support from family, peers, and religious communities in the formation of character, one of the defining features of PYD (Bowers et al., 2010; Lerner et al., 2005; Phelps et al., 2009).

Data from 430 participants between the ages of 10 and 19 years from the John Templeton Foundation-sponsored study of the Role of Spiritual Development in the Growth of Purpose, Generosity, and Psychological Health in Adolescence were used in the current research. Hierarchical regression analyses, using multiple imputation (MI) methods to account for missing data (Rubin, 1976), were used to assess the role of social support and the presence of meaning in life (one component of purpose) in youth character status. Analyses indicated that religious social support and presence of meaning in life were positively associated with higher reported scores of character status, after accounting for demographic characteristics.

In addition, four qualitative case studies were presented to illustrate how adolescents on either end of the character status continuum (i.e., scores reflecting either high or low levels of character) engaged in “positive purpose” behaviors (i.e., contribution behavior and goal-directedness). Case studies indicated relationships among instances of goal-directed behavior, contribution to others, and character strengths in participants with higher character status scores. On the other hand, reflections of goal-directedness and contribution to others were less prevalent in the case studies of participants with lower character status scores.

Limitations of the current cross-sectional data set and implications of the quantitative and qualitative findings for practical application are discussed. Future research should focus on mixed method, longitudinal data in order to explore the concept of character development rather than character status. In addition, survey items and interview questions that specifically ask participants to elucidate the relationship among social support, purpose, and character development in their lives should be included. Finally, issues for the practical application of the present findings are discussed.

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CHAPTER 1

Problem Statement

Historically, the field of psychology viewed adolescence from a deficit perspective. That is, adolescence was seen as a time of “storm and stress” (Hall, 1904; Lerner, 2004; Lerner et al., 2005). Within this tradition, healthy development was seen as the absence of negative behaviors (e.g., not drinking, not smoking, abstaining from unsafe sex, etc.) rather than as the growth of positive behaviors, such as well-being and a sense of purpose in one’s life (Benson, 2003; Damon, 2004; Lerner, 2004).

More recently, scholars in the developmental sciences have shifted focus from a deficit approach to a focus on the strengths of youth and the promotion of positive development (Benson, 2003; Damon, 2004; Lerner et al., 2005). Predicated on a relational, developmental systems theoretical perspective (Overton, 2010) that emphasizes the potential for plasticity, or for systematic change, in human development, adolescents are viewed as having strengths (because of their capacity to change), and as such are seen as “resources to be developed” (Benson, 2003; Damon, 1997; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner, 2002; Lerner, 2004; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray, & Foster, 1998). That is, this developmental systems-based conception of youth arises as a result of the mutually influential relations among biological, individual, and contextual levels of organization within the ecology of youth development (e.g., Gottlieb, Wahlsten, & Lickliter, 2006; Suomi, 2004), relations that afford plasticity, and thus the potential for positive change, across adolescence.

Given that, within developmental systems theory, humans have the potential for plasticity, based on their mutually influential relations with their complex and changing ecology, a key hypothesis was formulated that, when the strengths of adolescents are aligned with the contextual resources necessary for healthy development, positive youth development (PYD) is promoted (e.g., Lerner, 2002). Several characteristics have been identified as indicators of PYD: competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring (e.g., the Five Cs of PYD; Lerner et al., 2005). When these five Cs are present in an adolescent, Lerner et al. (2005) suggested that a sixth C emerges. This sixth C, identified as youth contribution to their families, schools, and communities, indicates that a young person may contribute positively to his or her social world. Therefore, it is necessary to understand and promote the indicators of PYD (the Five Cs) in order to develop active citizens and to build a healthy society (Lerner, 2004, 2007).

Although the Five Cs are all important to understand, such a goal goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. Because of its theoretically-specified link to contribution and, in particular, positive citizenship (Lerner, 2004; Zaff, 2010), I focus this dissertation on understanding the development of one indicator of PYD: character.

The role of character in the development of youth contribution

In recent years, character education has grown in focus in practical settings (e.g., McClellan, 1999). All societies recognize the importance of the positive socialization of youth in order to promote the progress and survival of society (Berkowitz & Hoppe, 2009). As such, deliberate attempts to promote

character in families, schools, faith institutions, and youth organizations must occur to promote positive development in youth. In line with current theoretical and practical interests, this dissertation seeks to understand the components of the ecology of youth that may promote character development, which in turn, may promote contributions to society.

Components of the ecology of youth that promote character development

Damon (1997) asserted that character development occurs when young people are provided with guidance to give them direction and a sense of purpose. It is insufficient to merely prescribe moral behavior through mandated laws, since external forces may not change the intentions of the individual. Therefore, societies need people who can provide guidance to youth with regard to prosocial behavior (e.g., Berkowitz, Sherblom, Bier, & Battistich, 2006).

Similar to Damon's (1997) assertion that guidance is essential for positive development, Theokas and Lerner (2006) stated that committed, caring adults in adolescents' lives are the most important assets associated with higher levels of PYD and lower levels of risk behaviors. Moreover, proponents of the character education movement have specifically emphasized the importance of families and communities in enhancing the healthy development of adolescents (e.g., Berkowitz & Hoppe, 2009). In line with the work of the character education proponents, this research will examine if social support is necessary for the promotion of character development.

Although numerous individuals within an adolescent's community can provide the support needed to promote character, I will concentrate on the

connections among family, peers, and religious communities in the development of character. These relationships may be key sources of character development among adolescents. For example, some researchers believe character education relies on how people model healthy relationships and relate to the child (Berkowitz & Hoppe, 2009; Howes & Richie, 2002; Watson, 2003). For instance, Oman and Thoresen (2003) use a social learning perspective to explain how character development is a product of observational learning. In addition, as already noted, a sense of purpose may also be a key basis for the development of character (Damon, 1997). Positive purpose during adolescence can lead to a variety of positive outcomes, such as prosocial behavior, moral commitment, high self-esteem, and achievement (Damon, 2003). In fact, Damon (1997, 2008) suggests that, and the present research assesses if, character development occurs most strongly when social support and purpose are coupled in the lives of youth.

Before assessing the relationship among social support, purpose, and character development, it is essential to define the various constructs of interest. This discussion will occur in Chapter 2. Social support can be confused with various terms that have some degree of overlap, such as social networks, social integration, and support system (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2009). However, social support is dependent on many personal, environmental, and cultural factors that cannot be assumed to be unconditional based solely on the presence of people within an individual's context (Barrera, 1986). Therefore, clarification is required in regard to the definition and measurement of social support so that greater

precision can be achieved with regard to understanding the relationship between social support and character development.

Similarly, there are also measurement issues concerning purpose. For example, meaning in life and goal-directedness have been conflated with purpose (e.g., Ryff & Singer, 1998). Therefore, differentiating purpose from meaning and goal-setting behavior will help clarify the relationship of purpose to character development. This research uses Damon, Menon, and Bronk's (2003) definition of purpose—"a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self" (p. 121)—in order to explore the relationship between purpose and character development. First, I used quantitative data to assess the relationship between meaning to the self (one component of purpose) and character development. Then, to further illustrate how adolescents engage in purposeful behavior (i.e., goal-directedness and contribution to the world beyond the self), qualitative analyses of adolescent purpose were used to assess how adolescents' purposes relate to their character development.

In sum, the purpose of this study was to use quantitative and qualitative data from the John Templeton Foundation-supported study, "The role of spiritual development in the growth of purpose, generosity, and psychological health in adolescence," to assess the relationships among the young person's experience of social support, purpose, and indicators of character status. Given that this research used cross-sectional data, I cannot explore the interrelation of these constructs with respect to character *development*. Instead, I sought to understand social

support and purpose in relation to character *status*. First, I explored the covariation between a young person's level of guidance (provided by family, peers, and faith institutions) and indicators of his or her character status. Second, I explored the covariation between a young person's presence of meaning in life and indicators of his or her character status. In addition, this dissertation qualitatively assessed levels of engagement of "positive purpose behaviors," ones that fall on either end of the character status continuum. Given the vast nature of the theoretical relationships among the variables of interest in this research, the present study is only one step towards elucidating the above-noted links. Nevertheless, it is an empirically useful step, as a presentation in Chapter 3 of the methods used in this study will indicate. However, before describing the methodology, the conceptual framework for the above-noted assessments will be presented in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The Character Education Partnership defined being a citizen as understanding self, morality, and society; being motivated to act in the best interest of the common good; and having the skills to act in such ways (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). This definition of citizenship is consistent with Damon's understanding that "the future of any society depends upon the character and competence of its young" (Damon, 1997). Accordingly, to socialize youth to contribute to putting society on a positive path inclusive of individuals who have good character, a vision for character development that integrates cognition (knowing the good), affect (desiring the good), and behavior (doing the good) is necessary.

Damon (1997) stated that character development occurs when young people are provided with guidance to give them direction and a sense of purpose. This research will examine the role of social support, as a source of guidance, in the promotion of character development. Numerous researchers have already indicated the importance of family and peer support in the positive adjustment of youth (e.g., Demaray & Malecki, 2002; Domitrovich & Bierman, 2001; Dunn, Putallaz, Sheppard, & Lindstrom, 1987). However, fewer researchers have explored how support from other social contexts of adolescents influence positive development. For example, research by Smith and Denton (2005) indicated that American youth are interested in religion and spend a great deal of time in religious settings. Therefore, adolescents may find sources of support in these

faith settings. In line with this research, this dissertation will examine the support provided by faith institutions in addition to family and peers in the development of character.

The other component that Damon (1997) emphasized in the development of character is a sense of purpose. Positive purpose during adolescence can lead to a variety of positive outcomes (Damon, 2003). Damon (1997, 2008) suggests, and this dissertation will argue that character development occurs most strongly by coupling the scaffolding provided by social support (i.e., gaining knowledge, or “knowing good”) with a sense of purpose (i.e., long-term goal planning translated into “desiring good;” contribution beyond the self translated into “doing good”). This dissertation will study all of these components of character.

In order to understand this process of character development, however, some definitional clarifications should be made. First, purpose must be conceptualized as a distinct construct from meaning and goal-setting behavior. Indeed, this dissertation also points to the positive outcomes of purpose, especially with regard to character. As such, the components of character development will be described. Then, I will discuss the contexts in which character development can occur. In particular, I will explore the relationships among familial, peer, and religious contexts and character development. Finally, the process through which social support, in combination with purpose, impacts character development will be explored. Discussion of these various pieces will help rationalize the current research undertaken in this dissertation.

Differentiating Purpose, Meaning, and Goal-Setting Behavior

Many researchers conflate the concept of purpose with meaning (e.g., Ryff & Singer, 1998) or goal-setting behavior (e.g., Locke, 1969). The conflation of these terms makes it more challenging to study purpose given the various scales that claim to study the same concept but rely on different items. This challenge makes it imperative to use definitions that clearly differentiate purpose from meaning and goal-setting behavior.

Meaning is a broader concept than purpose. In fact, purpose is only one component of meaning (Baumeister, 1991; Morgan & Farsides, 2009a, 2009b). Meaning in life, as understood by Frankl (1963), includes five factors, as studied through the Meaningful Life Measure (MLM): accomplished life, exciting life, principled life, valued life, and purposeful life (Morgan & Farsides, 2009a). In addition, purpose includes a beyond-the-self aspect, while meaning does not necessarily include this other-than-self oriented component (Damon et al., 2003). Moreover, meaning may or may not be oriented towards a defined endpoint, whereas, purpose is always directed at an end toward which one can make progress (Damon et al., 2003). Purpose, as measured by the Purpose in Life (PIL) scale, comprises a sense of having clear goals, aims, and intentions (Frankl, 1963; Kierkegaard, 1988; Ryff, 1989; Yalom, 1980).

Similarly, purpose and goal-setting behavior are not synonymous. Goal-setting behavior is only one component necessary to provide a sense of meaning and purpose in life (Damon, 2008; Emmons, 1999). Goal-setting behavior focuses on an endpoint and serves to guide behavior towards or away from the endpoint

(Elliot, 2006). A prosocial component and a personal sense of meaning are not essential in goal-setting behavior. Purpose, on the other hand, provides a motivational component towards goals. Purpose does not necessarily have a specific attainable endpoint, but it does motivate the individual to become goal oriented. The differentiation between goal-setting behaviors and purpose indicates that an individual can reach an endpoint or even achieve a goal without having a purpose, but an individual cannot have a purpose without a goal (Damon, 2008; Damon et al., 2003; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). The differentiation of purpose from meaning and goal-setting behaviors begs the question, “What is purpose?” This question will be addressed next.

Defining Purpose

Purpose during adolescence can lead to a variety of outcomes, which can either be positive or negative. Researchers have stated that people have purposes beyond the basic drives of sex and food (e.g., Frankl, 1963; Seligman, 1992; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Indeed, people have purposes that have larger meaning systems, such as morality and spirituality. Frankl (1963) stated that purpose in life is only achieved by going beyond self-interests.

Damon et al. (2003) expanded upon Frankl’s (1963) conceptualization by stating that purpose, in fact, has three distinct features. First and foremost, purpose must have a stable and far reaching goal from the more day-to-day goals that adolescents might strive for. Second, purpose is directed at an accomplishment towards which one can make progress. Finally, purpose is part of one’s personal search for meaning but is also an intention to contribute to matters

larger than the self. Damon's (2003) definition conceptualizes purpose in such a way that it considers that adolescents may have positive or negative purposes.

Differentiating positive and negative purpose

Not all purposes are directed towards noble outcomes. In fact, there are instances that substantiate the fact that purpose can be directed toward negative (or ignoble), rather than prosocial, goals. Many negative goals have been set in the name of positive purpose. However, ignoble purposes harm others through hate, prejudice, deception, disrespect, or damaging actions (Damon, 2008). These aversive and hostile attitudes and actions can target others through discrimination, attacks, and genocide, which harm individuals and societies (Lerner, Balsano, Banik, & Naudeau, 2005). In order to overcome destructive actions, the pursuit of positive purpose must be fostered in order to promote healthy development of self and society.

A developmental perspective, especially if framed within a relational systems theoretical orientation (Overton, 2010), can provide ideas that may help nurture the growth of positive purpose in adolescence. A key idea in relational, developmental systems theories is that there is a potential for systematic change, for plasticity, across the life span (Lerner, 2002). The presence of plasticity affords individuals the capacity to move toward positive purpose from more destructive paths. Consequently, a change in individual-context relations can lead to reductions in ignoble purposes (and thus, decreased hate-based behavior), and the growth of positive purposes in adolescents (Cairns, 1998; Lerner, 2002; Lerner et al., 2005). The growth of positive purpose and the reduction of hate-

based behavior are mutually beneficial for the health of the individual and his or her community and society (Lerner et al., 2005).

A positive, or noble, purpose is demarcated by two qualities. A positive purpose must have a moral motivation for the action to be carried forward, and the actions to obtain the completion of the goal must be noble (Damon, 2008). In other words, finding a positive purpose means devoting oneself to something worth doing and doing it in an honorable manner. In addition, it means setting a goal that matters beyond the self. In the following section, the outcomes of positive purpose are discussed.

Outcomes of positive purpose

A purposeful life that is positive provides individuals with inspiration, motivation, and resilience, which lead to physical and psychological health (Antonovsky, 1987; Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1967; Kish & Moody, 1989; Shek, 1993). For example, generativity, a construct that shares with purpose a concern for matters beyond the self, correlates with high life satisfaction and well-being (McAdams, 2001; McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998; Peterson, Smirles, & Wentworth, 1997). For instance, African American adolescents who were exposed to violence in the home were more resilient to negative social and psychological factors when they had a higher sense of purpose (DuRant, Cadenhead, Pendergrast, Slavens, & Linder, 1994). Erikson (1968) also reported positive outcomes of purpose. Having purpose helped young people resolve issues surrounding identity.

On the other hand, adolescents who do not have a sense of purpose are more likely to have a sense of aimlessness (Damon, 1995), act in antisocial manners (Shek, Ma, & Cheung, 1994), dwell on problems (Sappington & Kelly, 1995), and report higher levels of negative affect (Sappington & Kelly, 1995). In addition, lower scores on the PIL scale correlates with alcoholism and drug use among adolescents (Padelford, 1974).

In addition to personal benefits, positive purpose also promotes the well-being of others by a “beyond the self” focus. For example, purpose has been related to adolescents’ commitment to social action (Butler & Carr, 1968). Similarly, McAdams (2001) found that generativity was associated with higher levels of social activity and political activism. Furthermore, Damon (2008) noted that having a positive purpose in one’s life can provide “moral elevation.” The “beyond the self” quality of purpose can help adolescents think beyond personal gains and help promote moral actions for the sake of others. Morality is recognized as essential to societal progress and survival (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006; Templeton, 2000; Wilson, 1993). As such, designed attempts to promote the development of virtues, moral values, and moral agency in youth have been undertaken (Berkowitz & Hoppe, 2009; Damon, 2008). Indeed, programs to promote character development, and to thereby enhance moral functioning and actions promoting the social good, are found frequently in the U.S. (e.g., Damon, 1997, 2008).

Accordingly, it is useful to now review the literature on features of morality as an outcome of purpose. However, rather than solely discuss moral

development per se, this dissertation focuses on the construct of character development. Character development includes both social and moral competencies, such as the ability to reason about moral and ethical issues (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005). Considering that morality is one component of character, it comes as no surprise that character would evolve from having a positive purpose in a manner similar to morality. To address how character develops in adolescents, it is important to define character and to look at the contexts in which character is promoted.

Defining Character Development

Much of contemporary character research has stemmed from the research on moral development. In fact, character may be defined to include many characteristics describing morality: moral reasoning, moral values, moral identity, and moral sensitivity (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

James Q. Wilson (1993) claims “to different degrees among different people, but to some important degree in almost all people, moral sense shapes human behavior and the judgments people make of the behaviors of others” (p. 2). If moral sense is so important to societal and individual functioning, as Wilson (1993) believes, then it becomes all the more important to define it, and understand the contexts in which it is fostered.

Moral development involves how people think about moral dilemmas and their resolution (Kohlberg, 1963; Piaget, 1965), in addition to moral conduct and prosocial behavior (Fabes, Carlo, Kupanoff, & Laible, 1999). Although many scholars use moral and character development interchangeably, the present

approach regards the two constructs as reflecting a part-whole relationship, respectively. Moreover, proponents of character education tend to include moral education as only part of the curriculum (e.g., Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Lickona, 1991). Nevertheless, because work on moral development is a key part of and led to the more targeted focus on character development, it is important to understand the early work on moral development to understand more recent work on character development.

Perspectives on moral development

Jean Piaget's (1965) work on children's moral judgments provided an early cognitive-developmental perspective on moral development. From his observations and interviews of children, Piaget identified two broad stages of moral understanding. He concluded that children begin in a heteronomous stage of moral reasoning between the ages of five and ten years, characterized by a strict adherence to rules and duties as handed down by authority figures (e.g., parents, teachers, God). At this stage, children's moral understanding is limited by two factors. The first factor is the young child's cognitive immaturity.

According to Piaget, the thinking of young children is characterized by egocentrism; thus, young children are unable to take on the perspective of others. Their lack of perspective taking leads them to the misunderstanding that rules cannot be modified and are fixed external features of reality (i.e., realism). The second major factor that limits young children's moral understanding at this stage is their relationship with adults. Authority figures in children's lives tend to exert power, and children are expected to comply unwaveringly. As such, children

gravitate towards a fixed understanding of right and wrong.

As children mature, they enter an autonomous stage of moral reasoning, from about ten years on (Piaget, 1965). This stage is characterized by the ability to consider rules critically and to selectively apply these rules based on a goal of mutual respect and cooperation. The ability to act from a sense of ideal reciprocity is associated with a shift in the child's cognitive structure from egocentrism to perspective taking.

In addition, Piaget believed that children are only capable of distinguishing intentionality as they reach cognitive maturity when making moral decisions. In the stage of heteronomous morality, he believed that children are incapable of understanding intention, and they focus on outcomes rather than intent to do harm when judging an act's wrongness. Only when children reach autonomous morality did he believe them to be able to distinguish intentionality when judging an act. Piaget concluded from his work that children's cognitive maturity, release from adult control, and increased peer interaction advance children's moral reasoning.

Lawrence Kohlberg (1976) elaborated Piaget's work and suggested that the process of moral reasoning development took longer and was more gradual than Piaget had proposed. However, many components of Kohlberg's theory remained similar to Piaget's theory of moral reasoning development. For instance, Kohlberg viewed advances in cognition as a result of disequilibrium (e.g., which might occur through debating moral issues and noticing weakness in one's current thinking) and advances in perspective taking. In addition, he viewed his stages of

moral reasoning development as invariant and universal. He also believed each new stage was more cognitively mature than the stage before it. Finally, each stage was an organized whole, a structure that applied across all contexts (Colby & Kohlberg, 1987).

On the basis of his research, Kohlberg (1976) identified six stages of moral reasoning grouped into three major levels from about age 10 through adulthood. At the preconventional level, morality is seen as externally controlled. Children accept the rules of authority figures without question, and they see behaviors that lead to rewards as good. At the conventional level, children still view conformity to social norms as necessary to uphold the current social system. Finally, individuals in the postconventional level move beyond following rules and laws and define morality in terms of abstract principles and values across all situations and societies.

In the latter half of the 1970s, Turiel proposed a theory of moral reasoning that deviated from the cognitive-developmental theories of Piaget and Kohlberg. Prior to Turiel (1975), Kohlberg (1976) suggested that moral reasoning at a social conventional level displayed less cognitive maturity than that at a postconventional level. However, Turiel's (1975) model distinguished the moral domain from the social convention and personal choice domains, and indicated that the respective concepts form developmental systems are distinct from each other (e.g., Nucci, 1981, 1985; Nucci & Turiel, 1978, 1993; Smetana, 1983; Turiel, 1983; Turiel, Killen, & Helwig, 1987; Weston & Turiel, 1980).

Within the two domain approach, the personal domain applies to the self,

and can be alterable depending on one's own desires. Desires can include topics or issues such as one's choice of friends and recreational activities, which do not violate anyone's rights and are left to the discretion of the individual. The social conventional domain is the belief that acceptable behaviors and thoughts are determined by the social order in which the individual exists. For example, the way to address elders in a society may differ based on the particular community. Based on the noted example, one sees that social conventions themselves are arbitrary, and alternative actions can serve similar functions if a consensus is reached within the social system. The moral domain, on the other hand, is not dependent on the existence of a consensus in the social order. For example, if someone hits another person, a rule does not need to be in place for an individual to understand this action as a wrongdoing. Instead, this understanding stems from features intrinsic to the event, such as viewing the negative consequences to the victim. The difference among the domains of personal choice, social convention, and morality is that a personal choice and a social convention are structured by one's concepts of self and by the social organization (respectively), whereas, morality is structured by concepts of justice and welfare for others.

Several years after Turiel's work, Carol Gilligan (1982) argued that Kohlberg's approach did not sufficiently represent moral reasoning among females. In fact, she claimed that research on moral reasoning development had been too limited by its focus on rights and justice and by its lack of attention to caring and responsiveness. Subsequent research has suggested, however, that moral reasoning does not follow the distinct gender lines that Gilligan originally

reported (Turiel, 2006; Walker, 2006). Evidence suggests that both males and females reason based on justice and care, and some research indicated that females displayed reasoning at the same stage or higher stage as their male counterparts (Jadack, Hyde, Moore, & Keller, 1995; Jaffee & Hyde, 2000; Walker, 1995). However, other research supports the idea that in moral reasoning females stress an empathetic orientation, whereas males focus on justice or on justice and care equally (Jaffee & Hyde, 2000; Wark & Krebs, 1996; Weisz & Black, 2002). While this gender differences controversy still remains, Gilligan's (1982) work has contributed to an increased awareness that care is an integral component of moral reasoning. Educational approaches based on Gilligan's work have emphasized efforts to foster empathy and care responses in students (Noddings, 1992).

More recently, Richard Shweder (1990) has suggested the need to consider cultural variations in moral reasoning. Unlike Kohlberg's belief that each moral reasoning stage was an organized whole that applied across all contexts, Shweder (1990) took a more relativistic cultural psychology approach involving his theory of three ethics. Shweder argued that moral reasoning is culturally dependent, and moreover, that there can be more than one correct path to mature moral reasoning.

Three types of ethics described by Shweder (1990) were the Ethic of Autonomy, the Ethic of Community, and the Ethic of Divinity. The Ethic of Autonomy is concerned with the fulfillment of one's needs and desires, especially with regard to developing autonomy, independence, and personal responsibility.

In the Ethic of Community, people are integrated into a social group, which can encompass smaller groups like the family, peer group, or school, or larger groups, such as the nation or ethnic community. Within this ethic, morality is defined in terms of the rules and customs of a particular community to ensure the welfare of the group. The Ethic of Divinity is an orientation in which the individual can become closer with the Divine. Within this ethic, sacred texts and leaders are sources of moral guidance to ensure spiritual development.

Unlike the cognitive-developmental approach, the three ethics are not stages. Individuals can make decisions by drawing upon one or more of the ethics when faced with a moral dilemma. This approach is a culturally-dependent perspective. For instance, research has suggested that American participants use the Ethic of Autonomy concept more so than do participants in countries such as Brazil, India, and the Philippines (Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993; Jensen, 1998; Vasquez, Keltner, Ebenbach, & Banaszynski, 2001). In addition, research in India, Finland, and the U.S. indicated a difference between religious groups, such that religiously liberal individuals reason more in terms of Autonomy and less in terms of Divinity than do religiously conservative individuals (e.g., Jensen, 1997, 1998). In essence, Shweder's work highlights the importance of understanding the role of culture and context in the moral reasoning of individuals.

Lene Jensen (2008) added to Shweder's theory by proposing a cultural-developmental template for moral reasoning. Not only does moral reasoning depend on culture, but also on developmental stage. Within this framework, Jensen (2008) proposed that the Ethic of Autonomy emerges early in childhood;

the degree to which the individual uses this ethic stays relatively stable across adolescence and into adulthood. However, the types of autonomy concepts mentioned by individuals change over time (e.g., Turiel, 2002; Walker, 1989). With regard to the Ethic of Community, Jensen (2008) proposed that the degree of usage and the types of concepts that arise increase throughout childhood and into adolescence and adulthood. Finally, the degree to which the Ethic of Divinity is used is low among children, and then rises in adolescence to become similar to adult use. Moreover, the types of Divinity concepts used by older adolescents are similar to those used by adults. Jensen (2008) suggested that this path may exist for the Ethic of Divinity because adolescents, unlike younger children, have the advanced cognitive skills necessary to think abstractly with regard to spiritual concepts.

Furthermore, these developmental paths become more complex when taking into consideration the cultural variations in ethics. For example, some religiously liberal cultures may use the Ethics of Autonomy and Community more than the Ethic of Divinity (e.g., Jensen, 1997, 1998). As a result, individuals within a religiously liberal culture have a vastly different developmental trajectory for moral reasoning than individuals in a religiously conservative culture. In sum, the cultural-developmental approach forwarded by Shweder and by Jensen considers morality in such a way as to account for the complexities added by both culture and development.

The various perspectives on moral development link to numerous views about character development as well. Different scholars have noted numerous

attributes of character, but the question of universal values has still not been definitively answered (e.g., Power & Khmelkov, 1998). Nevertheless, similar to the moral development literature, themes of morality, justice, caring, rights, and responsiveness are also found within the character development literature (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The moral reasoning processes research noted above focuses on the ability of “cognitively” mature children to make moral decisions within hypothetical situations. However, character development research not only focuses on moral reasoning within children, but also on how children can translate virtuous and moral thoughts into moral actions. In fact, acting with character is believed to involve three attributes: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior (Lickona, 1991). As such, it is useful to now consider the components of character development.

Perspectives on character development

Davis (2003) described character as a set of traits, such as courage, temperance, honesty, perseverance, responsibility, and caring. However, just the presence of these traits does not lead to character development. Instead, these traits must be organized in such a way that the organization leads to positive outcomes. For example, a terrorist who destroys a building in the name of God may have the courage to carry out the actions, but this act leads to destruction. Such an example shows the importance of not defining character as just a sum of its parts. Instead, character is a set of psychological characteristics to do what is morally good, and consists of virtues organized in such a way that it leads to positive outcomes for self and society (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Davis, 2003;

Power & Khmelkov, 1998). Character is an integrative concept of thought and action that can be observed within a person across contexts and time.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) identified six virtues endorsed by multiple cultures that promote healthy development: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Within the six virtues, the researchers further identified 24 character strengths, such as, creativity, authenticity, love, fairness, forgiveness, and gratitude. This organizational system suggests that the six virtues emerge in behavior and development through the paths of character strengths. For example, the presence of kindness, love, and social intelligence is the pathway through which the virtue of humanity emerges. The full list of virtues and character strengths are presented in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

This classification system provides a vocabulary that can be used across the fields of psychological science, developmental science, and with lay people as well, to dissipate disagreements about character definitions. When adults across 54 different countries were asked which character strengths were most like them, most identified kindness, fairness, honesty, gratitude, and judgment. Furthermore, there was agreement in the rankings between adults and adolescents (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006). To the extent that these findings indicate that a common language exists for character strengths, scholars can utilize this system to promote character development.

Currently, the promotion of character development relies on fostering virtues and morals in youth, especially within schools (e.g., Lickona, 1991). Proponents of character education emphasize the importance of integrating character education into established curricula. For example, Berkowitz and Bier (2005) suggest building an implicit culture of ethics and care in classrooms through focus on character, morality, ethics, values, and virtue within readings, lessons, and curricular issues.

Furthermore, Berger (2003) states that schools need to move away from merely incorporating character education into established curricula, and in turn toward connecting character education to the lives of students and the world. Given this movement to incorporate character education into schools, there has been an emphasis on building character in students through service learning. Service learning typically includes the following components: active learning through a service project, experiential reflection to integrate the course content into youth identities, and teacher-student interactions to link classroom curriculum with service activities in the community (Dymond, Renzaglia, & Chun, 2008). This classroom-community bridge attempts to build students' ability to think beyond themselves and to increase their sense of social responsibility, and thus, promote the development of their character (Leming, 2001; Mayhew & King, 2008).

Such attempts to promote (develop) character have been instantiated in literally hundreds of programs across the United States. These programs provide curricula aimed at promoting character in youth (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis,

2007). It is useful to briefly consider the features of such character education programs.

Prototypic character education programs

As noted by the Character Education Partnership (CEP), there are numerous programs across the nation that attempt to build character (e.g., CHARACTER COUNTS!, Project PEACE, Positive Action). The CEP advocates for quality character education, and recognizes various K-12 schools and districts for their achievements in character education each year. Although each program is unique in its curricula and contexts, the objective of the programs is similar: to create a caring community to foster an ethic of care in youth. Indeed, the schools have found that character education has yielded positive results in student behavior, citizenship and leadership, school climate, and academic performance (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2007). The recognized schools are given a grant to enhance their programs and to serve as models for other school districts that also seek to improve their character education efforts.

Given the diversity of curricula and contexts in each school, it is not possible to depict briefly the range of ideas, goals, and outcomes of character education programs. Nevertheless, the CEP offers a useful summary of the principles upon which prototypic effective character education programs should be based (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 2007). These principles are presented in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

In sum, character education highlights the importance of the ecological context on character development. Students are expected to learn good character from teachers, peers, and the community at large. Moreover, each individual is part of a society, and that society's norms must be accounted for in the development of character. Lerner et al. (2005) defined character in a developmental context. According to Lerner et al. (2005), character is having: respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong (i.e., morality), and integrity. Given society's influence on the correct standards of behavior and values, it is necessary to understand the impact of context on character development.

Contexts for Character Development

Consistent with a developmental systems framework, PYD does not occur in the absence of a relation with context (Lerner et al., 2005). Development in adolescence involves mutually influential relations between the young person and his or her complex and changing world (Lerner, 2004). Therefore, it becomes important to focus on mutually beneficial person-context relations in order to promote a moral orientation among youth. This moral orientation must consider the individual and the social precursors of this orientation (Staub, 1978).

Proponents of the character education movement have emphasized the importance of families and communities to enhance the healthy development of

adolescents. In fact, character education relies on how people model healthy relationships and relate to the child (Berkowitz & Hoppe, 2009; Howes & Richie, 2002; Watson, 2003). The relationships that are formed between an adolescent and members of his or her social context can be characterized under the overarching terms of “mentorship” or “social support.” Consequently, I will distinguish between mentorship and social support in the following section. Then, given this dissertation’s specific focus on social support, I will discuss the relationships among social support provided by family, peers, religious communities, and character development.

Differentiating mentorship and social support

Bronfenbrenner (1979) believed that reciprocal activities among adults and youth were essential for learning and development to take place. Moreover, the strong and enduring relationships that may be formed in the context of these activities can help adolescents achieve a positive life path (Hamilton et al., 2006). These relationships can be referred to as “mentorship.” However, the term “social support” is often used to describe a component of mentoring relationships. So, how does one define these individual terms, and what are their respective roles in adolescent development?

Mentoring relationships can occur across a range of youth-serving organizations (Zeldin, Larson, & Camino, 2005), as well as in more informal settings, such as in extended families, neighborhoods, and communities (Scales, 2003). The National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR, 2003) defines mentoring as “a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with

caring individuals who offer guidance, support, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee.” These relationships have traditionally been formed in more structured programmatic settings, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters. During these programs, volunteers or part-time paid adults are coupled with their mentees for a period of time to empower youth, promote their personal development, and compensate for their lack of role models (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005; Rhodes, 2002; Rhodes, Bogat, Roffman, Edelman, & Galasso, 2002).

More recently, alternative approaches to youth mentoring have been undertaken to provide outreach to a greater number of adolescents. These newer models of mentoring include: e-mentoring (i.e., online mentoring), group mentoring, peer mentoring, and mentoring initiatives in youth-serving organizations, schools, and communities (DuBois & Rhodes, 2006).

These structured programs are effective when there is careful screening and ongoing supervision of the mentors, monitoring of program implementation, and frequent contact over long periods of time between the mentor and mentee (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). When these mentoring programs are effective, it can lead to reports of higher levels of self-worth, social acceptance, and scholastic competence in adolescents (DuBois & Rhodes, 2006).

However, when these structured programs are unavailable, it may be necessary to look within an adolescent’s own social ecology to find strong non-parental adult relationships to provide support. Although much of the research has focused on formal mentorship in adolescent lives, there has been a growing

interest in exploring how existing relationships in adolescent lives impact positive development (Beam, Chen, & Greenberger, 2002; Hirsch, Mickus, & Boerger, 2002; Liang, Tracy, Taylor, & Williams, 2002; Panzarine, 1986; Rhodes & Davis, 1996; Sullivan, 1996; Zimmerman, Bingenheimer & Notaro, 2002). Rhodes and Davis (1996) define these existing relationships with such people as aunts, neighbors, or teachers as “natural mentorship.” These relationships arise within an adolescent’s existing social network, and are characterized by bonds between an older, more experienced adult and a younger protégé (Klaw, Rhodes, & Fitzgerald, 2003). The non-parental adult within the relationship provides ongoing guidance, instruction, and encouragement, which lead the adolescent into a smooth transition to adulthood (Beam et al., 2002; Liang et al., 2002; Rhodes et al., 2002; Rhodes & Davis, 1996; Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006).

Natural mentors help adolescents cope with everyday stressors, and provide a model for effective coping. In fact, there is an array of positive benefits from fostering such relationships, such as improving school attendance and educational achievement (e.g., Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002). These outcomes may occur through mentors serving as direct models of positive behavior, or they can help adolescents focus on positive life goals. For example, mentors can advocate on behalf of their protégé, open doors for new opportunities, or increase their social network in the community (Klaw & Rhodes, 1995).

Rhodes (2002, 2005) proposed that mentoring affects adolescents through three interrelated processes: by enhancing youth's social relationships and emotional well-being; by improving their cognitive skills through conversation and instruction; and by promoting positive identity development through serving as role models and advocates. In sum, mentors serve as sources of support, encouragement, and trust within an adolescent's ecology to foster positive development and health (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005).

Mentors differ from social support in that they not only provide support in times of need, but they also teach adolescents necessary skills to transition into adulthood and serve as models of behavior (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). Formal mentorship is structured, whereas social support does not have such specificity. Moreover, non-parental adults outside of the adolescent's immediate sphere of contact provide formal mentorship (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). Social support, on the other hand, can come from parents, siblings, or peers (Demaray, Malecki, Davidson, Hodgson, & Rebus, 2005).

Natural mentorship is more closely linked to social support in that those who engage in this type of mentorship have an existing relationship with the adolescent (e.g., aunts, religious leaders, teachers, etc.; Zimmerman et al., 2002). However, natural mentorship relies on adults (Rhodes et al., 2006), whereas, social support can come from peers and siblings (Demaray et al., 2005). Overall, social support is only one component of the mentoring relationship.

Although mentorship provides great assets to the lives of youth, this dissertation focuses on more informal relationships that come from a wider array

of individuals. Therefore, I will now discuss the defining features of social support, and how social support provided by families, peers, and religious communities can affect character development.

Defining social support

A variety of measures exist to explore the concept of social support. For example, the Social Support Questionnaire (Sarason, Levine, Basham, and Sarason, 1983), the Social Support Scale for Children (SSSC; Harter, 1985), the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988), Student Social Support Scale (SSSS; Nolten, 1994), and the Child and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS; Malecki, Demaray, Elliott, and Nolten, 1999) are only a handful of measures designed to assess aspects of social support. Although the measures may assess various elements of social support (e.g., global support, perceived support, types of support), the underlying theoretical conceptualization of social support remains consistent. This dissertation, in line with the work of other research projects, seeks to understand social support as an individual's perception that he or she is cared for, esteemed, and valued by people in his or her social network (e.g., Cobb, 1976; Malecki & Demaray, 2002; Sarason et al., 1983).

Tardy (1985) proposed that instead of having researchers reach a consensus on the measurement of social support, it may be more valuable to discuss the elements of social support that can be explored. As such, a five-dimension conceptualization was proposed to organize the different approaches

that researchers can take to investigate social support: direction, disposition, description/evaluation, content, and network (Tardy, 1985).

These five dimensions can be used to operationalize social support in the field. First, direction reflects an understanding that social support can be given and received. Next, disposition refers to two components: availability and enactment. Availability refers to the quantity or quality of support to which people have access, whereas, enactment refers to the utilization of these supports. The third dimension, description/evaluation, refers to whether researchers will assess people's satisfaction with their social support (evaluation), or will describe the social support (description). The fourth dimension, content, refers to the content of support, which may vary depending on the situational context. House (1981) determined that there are four types of support: emotional, instrumental, informational, and/or appraisal. Emotional support includes qualities, such as trust, love, and empathy. Instrumental support includes resources, such as time and money. Informational support refers to information or advice provided on a particular area. Appraisal is the evaluative feedback to individuals. As such, researchers must determine what content of support will be investigated in their studies. Finally, the fifth dimension of Tardy's (1985) model refers to network, which is the source of the individual's support network (i.e., who provides and/or receives support). These five elements encompass the conceptualization of social support. Moreover, given the interdependence of these elements, researchers can touch upon more than one of these dimensions within their investigation (Tardy, 1985).

Benefits of social support

Given that the conceptualization and definition of social support have been discussed, it is useful to turn to some of the potential benefits afforded by social support in the lives of individuals. Individuals within the home and the community play a critical role in shaping children's immediate environment and influencing children's experiences (e.g., Fitzpatrick & Vangelisti, 1995). Social support enhances personal functioning (e.g., Cauce, Felner, & Primavera, 1982; Forman, 1988; Malecki & Elliott, 1999), assists in coping with stressors (e.g., Malecki & Demaray, 2002; Waldrip and Jensen-Campbell, 2008), and may provide resilience from adverse situations (e.g., Casey-Cannon, Pasch, Tschann, & Flores, 2006; Rhodes et al., 2002; Zimmerman et al., 2002). Furthermore, Krause (2007) found in a longitudinal study of older people that greater anticipated and emotional support from family members and friends were associated with a deeper sense of meaning over time. This finding shows that social support is not only a protective factor within adolescence, but is also an essential component of the developmental process throughout the lifetime. Therefore, it is even more important to explore its relationship to PYD, given its potential longitudinal impact.

Numerous articles have suggested the significance of social support on character development (e.g., Berkowitz & Grych, 1998). Consequently, I will now consider three possible contexts in which character development can occur: families, peers, and religious institutions.

Families and character development

Family relationships influence components of character development (e.g., Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1999). The social interactions within the family structure are important in nurturing moral identity (e.g., Hart, Atkins, & Ford, 1999) and prosocial reasoning and behavior (e.g., Eisenberg, 1995). In fact, Darling and Steinberg (1993) proposed that three elements of parent-child interactions may lead to the development of virtues: parenting goals or values, parenting practices, and parenting styles.

Parenting goals, such as encouraging children to develop the virtue of caring, can support advanced reasoning surrounding issues of caring or compassion (Pratt, Skoe, & Arnold, 2004). In addition, parenting practices, such as modeling of prosocial behavior and encouragement of perspective taking, are useful in fostering key virtues of character (Eisenberg, 1995). Families that provide an emotionally supportive and intellectually stimulating environment (e.g., democratic decision-making) are more adept at fostering the development of moral judgment (Walker & Taylor, 1991). Similarly, high levels of parent-child joint activities are associated with advanced moral reasoning (Hart, 1988). Furthermore, parenting styles also influence character development. For instance, authoritative parenting has been linked to fostering social responsibility and care in adolescents (e.g., Chase-Lansdale, Wakschlag, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995; Pratt, Arnold, Pratt, & Diessner, 1999; Skoe, 1998).

Although parent-child interactions are linked to character development, other contexts of development must be considered as well. Given that time spent

with peers overshadows the time spent with parents during adolescence (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984; Larson & Richards, 1991), it is important to understand the role of peer interactions during this period of time. Indeed, research has found a link between peer interactions and morality during adolescence (e.g., Berkowitz, Oser, & Althof, 1987; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 1998). As such, I will now explore the relationship between peers and character development.

Peers and character development

Numerous studies have demonstrated that peers are essential in the character development of youth. Although this research focuses primarily on character development in adolescence, the influence of peers exists in early childhood as well. For example, children's conflicts, such as turn-taking, rights, and sharing, are all moral issues resolved with peers in early childhood (e.g., Nucci & Nucci, 1982; Piaget, 1965; Ross & Conant, 1992). Moral development research has confirmed Piaget's (1970) view that socio-moral changes occur primarily through conflict resolution among children. Specifically, moral development occurs because conflict resolution allows the child to take another's perspective and to integrate reasonably conflicting points of view (Maitland & Goldman, 1974; Piaget, 1965; Youniss, 1987)

In addition to peer relations in early childhood, peer relations during adolescence can also influence character development. During adolescence, close friendships are considered to be the basis of adolescent morality (e.g., Bukowski & Sippola, 1996). Walker, Hennig, and Krettenauer (2000) found that supportive

peer relationships positively influence adolescent moral reasoning in late childhood and early adolescence. In particular, reciprocal experiences of responsibility and support within the emotional ties of friendships can foster moral virtues (e.g., Keller & Edelstein, 1993; Selman, 1980).

Another source of character development, aside from parents and peers, is the religious context. Youniss, McLellan, and Yates (1999) suggested that adolescents who are more committed to religion are also more committed to bettering their communities and to developing personal identities that lead to healthy lives. Given that one indicator of healthy (or positive) development is character, I will now describe the role of faith institutions on adolescent character development.

Religious contexts and character development

In addition to families and peers, faith institutions are also contexts for positive development (Bjarnason, 1998; Gonzalez, 1999; Jessor, Van Den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1995; King & Furrow, 2004), and more specifically, for moral development (Hart & Fegley, 1995; Nasir & Kirshner, 2003; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1999). Indeed, over a century ago, William James (1902) suggested an interdependence between religious experience and moral functioning. Therefore, it may be important to understand the influence of the religious context on character development.

In this regard, King and Furrow (2004) stated that a link between religious institutions and moral outcomes exists through social interactions within the religious context. The presence of religious peers and nonfamilial social support

from adolescents' religious communities can provide social capital to promote character development. Social capital provides adolescents with a network of relationships (Bourdieu, 1986; King, 2003; King & Furrow, 2004; Smith, 2003). In turn, this network of relationships with adults, friends, and parents can increase moral orientation and altruism in adolescence (Colby & Damon, 1995; Damon, 1988; Hart & Fegley, 1995; King & Furrow, 2004; Youniss, 1980). In fact, social interactions, trust, and shared values between religious social support and adolescents help to foster moral development (King & Furrow, 2004).

The previous sections have identified the importance of family, peers, and religious contexts in the development of character. However, although the contexts in which character development occurs have been described, it is useful to specify *how* character development occurs. This process remains unclear. Consequently, the following section seeks to elucidate this process.

The Process of Character Development

Character development can occur as an outcome of multiple processes. Although the context of character development was discussed above and various instances of links between individuals, contexts, and character were identified, a more nuanced understanding of the process forging these links is needed. The question remains as to how social support leads to character development. Accordingly, I will now discuss two processes that may lead to character development in adolescence. One direct relationship may be elucidated by using a social learning perspective to explain the role of adolescent observational learning in character development. A second idea about process involves the coupling of

social support with positive purpose in adolescence, an integration that, when it exists in the lives of youth, then leads to character development.

Character development as an outcome of observational learning

One process through which character development may occur can be derived from the spiritual mentoring literature. Spiritual mentors are both facilitators of the development of spirituality as well as exemplars of character strengths and virtues essential in PYD (Lerner, 2008; Oman, Flinders, & Thoresen, 2008). Character strengths exemplified by mentors allow adolescents to integrate these qualities into their lives through processes of social learning (Bandura, 1986). More specifically, mentors may foster youth altruistic behavior and volunteerism through observational learning (Bandura, 1986; Oman et al., 2008).

Historically, observational learning has been an important aspect of all the world religions. Many religions use exemplars (e.g., Jesus in Christianity, Buddha in Buddhism, Muhammad in Islam, etc.) as models to follow values and behaviors (Schwartz, Bukowski, & Aoki, 2006). For example, Jesus commands his disciples, “Love one another, as I have loved you” (John 13:34). Jesus is seen as a model of moral behavior, which is expected to be upheld in Christian faiths as an ideal of the followers of Christ.

Mentors can also enhance adolescents’ commitment to positive purposes (Oman et al., 2008; Lerner, 2008). They are able to help adolescents construct a path and choose goals that have positive purpose. Such mentoring may lead to contributions to community and to the larger society. The combination of

wisdom, positive purpose, and spirituality can lead to a “good life,” which consequently leads to positive development (Lerner, 2008).

Character development as an outcome of social support and positive purpose

I propose that a second, stronger link between social support and character occurs by coupling social support with adolescent purpose. When young people are provided with guidance from their social support network, the integration of cognition (knowing the good), affect (desiring the good), and behavior (doing the good) occurs. Together, these three components are able to transform adolescents’ understanding, that thoughts of being good must be translated into actions of doing good in order to build a better society, into actual youth behaviors.

As described in the previous section, social support (e.g., by parents, peers, religious leaders) can act as facilitators in the transmission of character strengths and virtues (Lerner, 2008; Oman et al., 2008). Adolescents must have mastery of the moral norms and rules that govern the context in which they find themselves (Moberg, 2008). Given society’s influence on the correct standards of behavior and values, those with more experience within a societal context can transmit the moral norms that adolescents must learn in order for them to “know the good,” and to thus promote character development. Mastery of the moral norms by adolescents can occur by communicating with individuals, and also observing individuals who are more experienced. When adolescents are able to discuss and observe moral actions, they are able to identify the moral behavior and consider taking a step to carry out the moral behavior.

However, Lickona and Davidson (2005) have suggested that merely understanding moral actions is not sufficient for performing moral actions and developing character. It is unreasonable to expect adolescents to be provided with expert models and expect them to learn; knowledge must be nurtured and developed over time (Lake & Jones, 2008). Once adolescents understand good character on a cognitive level, they must then desire moral behavior and carry out prosocial actions (Elias, Parker, Kash, & Kunkeblau, 2007). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that adolescents must then pursue positive purposes for those two components to be carried out.

As already noted, Damon et al. (2003) stated that purpose encompasses three characteristics. Adolescents with purpose have a far-reaching goal, they find themselves having a personal meaning, and also a desire to contribute to matters beyond themselves. In other words, the pursuit of a purpose can organize an adolescent's entire life, which brings meaning, motivation for learning, and achievement (Damon, 2008). For example, adolescents can set far-reaching goals such as eradicating hunger or disease in third world nations. When young people are able to set prosocial goals and target the steps needed to reach the goal, they can work to change their orientation to the world, and thus attain a commitment to character development. Consequently, adolescents are able to move from a cognitive understanding to an affective change (i.e., desiring good).

Finally, shifting from cognition and affect to the enactment of good behavior is necessary to internalize character virtues, and to lead to a commitment to something beyond the self. Adolescents who pursue a purposeful path must

accomplish something of consequence to the world beyond themselves.

Consequently, pursuing purpose can lead to character development. For example, by participating in service activities, character virtues such as diligence, responsibility, confidence, and humility can be fostered. In fact, Mayhew and King (2008) found that students enrolled in a service-learning course had significant gains in moral reasoning.

Dewey (1916) noted the importance of reflective experience in the context of students' participation in service learning aimed at fostering citizenship and democracy. Bowen (1977), Astin and Astin (2000), and Butler (2000) also emphasized the importance of having students understand, make meaning, and apply skills to be contributing members of society. Therefore, at least insofar as active citizenship is concerned, it may be that a commitment to promoting changes in cognition, affect, and behavior in adolescents is necessary in order to promote character development.

Conclusions

Various researchers have suggested that when youth positively contribute to a context that, in turn, is supporting the young person's healthy development, thriving occurs (Lerner, 2004). Furthermore, considerable research has assessed how such mutually beneficial individual-context relations may be the basis of PYD. This idea is the basis for undertaking the current research.

Although there is limited research charting the relationship coupling social support and purpose in the development of character, there is reason to believe that this path exists given the literature reviewed above. The moral growth

towards becoming an active citizen has positive implications for the progress of society. By fostering the growth of such character strengths as humanity and social justice, more positive human development can be observed. Moreover, moral growth can increase adolescents' pursuit of going beyond the self to become more civically engaged, which fosters societal progress (Donnelly, Matsuba, Hart, & Atkins, 2006). Actively engaging youth in order to increase societal functioning is a goal that has been undertaken by educators, parents, and politicians alike (e.g., Sherrod, 2005). Therefore, this research is timely.

This dissertation speaks to the importance of parents, peers, and religious contexts in increasing knowledge of the pursuit of good behavior, and thus promoting character development. Moreover, the adolescent also plays an important role in his or her own development. Adolescent purpose (i.e., a sense of meaning, contributing beyond the self, and goal-directedness), something found within the individual, is theoretically linked with character development. This argument is consistent with the idea that various ecological systems interact in bidirectional relationships to influence children's development. Indeed, Bronfenbrenner (1979) wrote that the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and the chronosystem are essential contextual influences on children's development. Moreover, these various systems interact with the individual for development to take place. This research aligns with this bidirectional theoretical approach by elucidating the role of purpose and social support on one indicator of PYD, character.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

The purpose of the present study was to move toward an understanding of hypothesized relations among purpose, social support, and character development. As detailed in Chapter 3, the present study utilized cross-sectional data from a sample of participants comprising of adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 years. Given the cross-sectional nature of these data, this research does not speak of character development, but rather of character status. Specifically, the work undertaken in this dissertation explored three objectives:

1. The first objective was to undertake an expert rater validation process (cf. Bobek, 2008; Bobek, Zaff, Li, & Lerner, 2009; Perkins, 1996; Warren, 2009) in order to compose a measure for one component of purpose: presence of meaning in one's life. The Presence of Meaning in Life scale (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006) does exist; however, the full scale was not used in the present study. Therefore, an expert rater validation process was employed to identify similar items reflective of this construct of the "presence of meaning in life." Then, a principal component analysis was conducted to confirm the presence of an underlying construct from the set of indicators assessed by expert raters as relevant to the "presence of meaning in life." The validation process will be detailed in the Measures section in Chapter 3.

2. The second objective of this research was to assess the hypothesized links among presence of meaning in one's life (one component of purpose), social support, and character status. Specifically, to what extent did meaning in one's life and social support provided by family, peers, and the religious community

predict adolescent character status? Moreover, did this relationship differ for members of certain subgroups (as defined by age, sex, religion, and mother's education)?

3. The third objective was to gain a richer understanding of purpose. Although the quantitative data assessed the relationship between presence of meaning in life and character status, contribution beyond the self and goal-directedness still needed to be explored. By using qualitative case studies of four participants, the two remaining components of purpose were investigated as it relates to character status. Two participants who fell above the median score of character status and two participants who fell below the median score of character status were chosen to illustrate ways in which purpose manifests itself within participant lives.

Accordingly, to meet these objectives, the features of the data set used in this research, and the overall method I employed, are discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

Method

The current investigation used quantitative and qualitative data available from the John Templeton Foundation (JTF)-sponsored study, “The role of spiritual development in growth of purpose, generosity, and psychological health in adolescence,” a cross-sectional and multi-method study conducted in the greater Boston area. The JTF study was designed to be both “field building” and “field defining” in the study of spirituality and positive development during adolescence. As such, the study was comprised of three phases: 1. the assembly of a national group of scholars committed to the study of spirituality and youth development, who were given the task of defining the measures and methods employed in the study; 2. the execution of a collaborative, cross-sectional research study, composed of several distinct sub-investigations, or “modules,” and spanning the second decade of life; and 3. the dissemination of findings and preparation for the launch of a national longitudinal study aimed at elucidating the psychological, behavioral, and ecological (e.g., family and community) bases of spirituality and positive development. Full details of the methodology of the JTF study have been presented in prior reports (e.g., Lerner, Roeser, & Phelps, 2008; Roeser et al., 2007).

Accordingly, only those features of the methodology pertinent to the focus of this research are presented here. The first part of this research involved data from Module 3, an investigation involving a survey administered through a personal digital assistant (PDA) or through a web-based survey. The second part

of this research involved data from Module 2, an investigation involving one-on-one interviews.

Module 3 design

The data employed in the first part of the present investigation came from Module 3 (M3), the PDA Survey Study, which was conducted during the 2006-2007 academic year. M3 was designed with the primary goal of assessing relations between spirituality and PYD among youth in the Boston, Massachusetts area. This module assessed these relationships among youth found within secular settings, such as public schools and youth-serving organizations (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs). The module was designed to assess whether spirituality, regardless of its roots in religion, was essential in the development of PYD. Individuals completed either voice-enhanced personal digital assistant (PDA)- or web-based surveys consisting of closed-ended items that included assessments of demographic characteristics, frequency of religious activity participation, frequency of spiritual practices, and indicators of PYD. PDA-surveys were used primarily for a middle school- and high school-aged subsample, whereas web-based surveys were used for college-aged subsample. Further descriptions on the use of PDAs for survey-based research can be found in Abo-Zena et al. (2009).

A one-hour protocol was designed for M3. The protocol included a brief introduction to the study foci/objectives and an overview of the data collection tasks; the presentation of consent and review of confidentiality procedures; directions and explanations for the use of the PDA in the data collection; PDA and web-based survey measures; and, finally, a debriefing session.

Module 2 design

The data from Module 2 (M2), The Life Narrative and Interview Study, was designed with the primary goal of assessing mutually influential contribution (or generosity) \leftrightarrow spirituality relations among youth in the Boston, Massachusetts area. M2 was designed with the primary goal of assessing the percentage of young people who were highly involved in service activities and for whom spirituality was an important underlying system of meaning and motivation.

A two-hour, multi-method protocol was designed for M2. The protocol included a brief introduction to the study foci/objectives and an overview of the data collection tasks; the acquisition of consent and review of confidentiality procedures; a sentence completion task (i.e., the Sentence Completion Test for Children and Youths, SCT-Y; Westenberg, Treffers, & Drewes, 1998); the production of a life narrative (the Life Narrative Task, LNT; Habermas, 2007); a semi-structured interview covering multiple content areas (i.e., life goals and values, character, spirituality and religion, community and contribution, and imagined future); a paper-and-pencil survey; and a debriefing session.

Once M2 data were collected from all participants, youth who indicated on their paper-and-pencil surveys that they would be interested in participating in an interview on the same topics in the future were contacted once again via email to inquire about their interest in participating in a web-based survey (M3). The web-based survey covered content areas that were not covered in M2 (e.g., social

support), thus making it possible to gain a richer understanding of youth development.

For the present report, I used information from the M3 survey data and from the semi-structured interviews from the subsample of M2 youth who also participated in the M3 web-based survey. While complete details of the protocols from both modules can be found in Roeser et al. (2007), I describe below the portions of the modules that were used in the present study.

Participants

Four hundred thirty participants ranging in age from 10 years to 19 years ($M = 15.83$, $SD = 2.13$) were studied. The sample was 46% female, and 31% of the participants were first and second generation immigrants. Mother's education levels included 28% who had up to a high school education, 22% who had some college education, and 50% who had graduated college or had education beyond college. The ethnicity of the participants included 43% European American, 21% Multiethnic, 17% African American, 8% Hispanic, 5% Asian American, and 3% other. Religious affiliations of the participants were 33% Catholic, 25% Christian (Other), 5% Jewish, 7% other, 12% who were not sure of their religious affiliation, 14% Atheist or identified with no religion, and 3% identifying with multiple religions.

Module 3 measures

This present study focused on measures of perceived levels of social support and presence of meaning in one's life. In addition to these predictor

variables, I also assessed character status as the key outcome variable. Finally, several demographic variables were assessed.

Perceived levels of social support. Levels of social support were measured using a Yes/No/Not Sure response format indicating whether or not youth perceived key members of their community as those he/she can rely upon (e.g., “If you had a personal problem, could you rely on support from...”). Items were adapted from Roeser et al. (2008)². To index family support, five items were summed to form a composite score. These items pertained to parent support, sibling support, grandparent support, aunt/uncle support, and cousin support. To index peer support, two items were summed to form a composite score. These items pertained to friend support and significant other support. To index religious support specifically, four items were summed to form a composite score. These items pertained to religious leader support, religious community support, spiritual teacher support, and support from God. Higher composite scores indicated higher levels of perceived social support.

Presence of meaning in life. The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (see Appendix A) is a scale used successfully in prior research (Steger et al., 2006); however, it was not included in the initial survey construction for the current research. Therefore, an expert rater validation process identified closed-ended items within the M3 survey that could be used to operationalize the presence of meaning in life. Then, a principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted on the items identified by the expert raters to confirm that the items loaded on one

component. In the present investigation, this process involved several steps for establishing convergent validation and measurement reliability.

First, I reviewed the complete list of M3 closed-ended survey items (specifically, ordinal and interval scale items) and identified items I judged to be conceptually relevant to the presence of meaning in life. Steger et al. (2006) defined meaning in life as the individual's perception of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one's being and existence. Moreover, two distinct constructs were identified in order to assess meaning in life: the presence of meaning and the search for meaning. The Presence of Meaning subscale measures the subjective sense that one's life is meaningful. The Search for Meaning subscale measures the drive and orientation toward finding meaning in one's life (Steger et al., 2006). In this dissertation, the expert rater validation process identified items assessing the presence of meaning, given this scale's link to one component of purpose (Yeager & Bundick, 2009). As such, the presence of meaning in life referred to items that assessed whether or not individuals:

- have a meaning in life;
- have a purpose in life.

This definition of presence of meaning in life should be construed as an overarching construct, that is, a construct that could be applied to any specific means through which a person can find meaning (e.g., through one's social relationships, career, or civic contributions). Accordingly, for the present investigation, I used items that elicit responses to this overarching "meaning" without specifically identifying the means through which meaning is constructed.

Table 3 presents the four items judged by the author as conceptually relevant to the presence of meaning in life. These items were expected to be judged by the expert raters as applicable to the construct.

Insert Table 3 about here

The 26 remaining items that comprised the set of substantive M3 survey items that I deemed to be conceptually irrelevant to presence of meaning in life served as “distractor” (or “control”) items, and were expected to be judged as “not applicable” to the construct. These items are presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

Next, 10 expert raters (100% female) who were doctoral students or recent graduates in the field of developmental science coded each item in the complete item list as either “applicable” or “not applicable” to the construct of presence of meaning in life, as defined above.

Expert raters familiarized themselves with the above-noted definition of presence of meaning in life, as well as with the Steger et al. (2006) scale. The raters examined the complete item list and put an “X” next to every item that, in their opinion, related to the construct (i.e., to *either* having meaning or not having meaning, or anywhere in between). In other words, for each item listed, raters were instructed to ask themselves: “Would a response to this item allow one to

make *a specific* determination about where the respondent fits along the continuum asking whether or not the individual has meaning in his or her life, yes or no?” The goal here was for raters to identify items that reflected these ideas. After completing this process for each item listed, raters were asked to return the coded items to the author. Based on past research using similar expert rater validation methods (e.g., Perkins, 1995; Warren, 2009), a minimum 80% agreement level was used for indicating whether an item was relevant to the construct (i.e., at least 8 of the 10 raters agreed that an item was pertinent in order for it to be included in further steps). All three items identified by the expert raters as relevant to presence of meaning in life converged with the author’s a priori categorization of the items. Cronbach’s alpha for this item set was .71. Table 5 presents the three items identified as relevant to presence of meaning in life in addition to the one item (identified by the author) that did not meet the 80% criteria; the percent agreement associated with each items is indicated as well.

Insert Table 5 about here

Then, I considered the one item that I had expected to be judged pertinent to “meaning in life,” but was only empirically identified by 60% of the expert raters as reflecting this construct. In my view, this item was important to enhancing the theoretical substance of the item pool. Accordingly, I sought to determine if use of this item would negatively impact the measurement of the construct. This exploratory procedure was used in past research (e.g., Bobek et al.,

2009; Warren, 2009). Cronbach's alpha for the item set increased to .79. Given the increase in alpha, all four items were included in the PCA.

PCA was conducted with the above-noted four-item set in order to assess if the four items loaded on one strong principal component. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .73, indicating that the data were suitable for PCA (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006). In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($p < .001$), indicating sufficient correlation among the variables to proceed with the analysis. Because of the large sample size ($N = 430$), the variables-to-cases ratio for this analysis was satisfied.

Initial eigenvalues indicated that there was one component that explained 61% of the variance. The magnitude of the eigenvalue was 2.43; no other eigenvalue met the root 1 criterion. Based on a rigorous item-loading criterion of .4, the four items loading on the first principal component were used to create the scale for presence of meaning in life (Table 6).

Insert Table 6 about here

Two items in this scale index how strongly a participant agreed with how much he/she believed there was a larger meaning to life and how much he/she believed there was a larger plan to life. The response scale ranged from 1= not at all true of me to 5 = very true of me (Piedmont, 1999). The third item asked individuals to rate how true it was that they believed that they had a purpose in life. The response scale ranged from 1= not at all true of me to 5 = very true of

me. This item was adapted from the Search Institute's Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors (PSL-AB; Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998; Leffert, Benson, Scales, Sharma, Drake, & Blyth, 1998). The fourth item asked participants if they believed that life did not have any higher meaning or purpose (Davis, Smith, & Mardsen, 2005). The response scale ranged from 1 = yes, definitely to 4 = no, definitely not. The presence of meaning in life measure was calculated by standardizing and averaging the z-scores of the four items ($\alpha = .79$).

Character status. Character was measured using 10 items related to youth self-reports on questions asking how much youth emphasize the importance of valuing diversity and having a social conscience ($\alpha = .91$). These 10 items came from three sources. The values diversity scale asked two questions regarding how important it was to the individual to get to know people who are of a different race and who have a different religion. The response scale ranged from 1 = Not at all important to 5 = Extremely important. The two items were adapted from PSL-AB (Benson et al., 1998; Leffert et al., 1998).

The other eight items that compose the character status scale are part of a social conscience scale. These items index how important it is to the individual: to speak up for equality; to help reduce hunger and poverty in the world; to help make the world a better place to live; to help make sure all people are treated fairly; to give his/her time and money to make life better for other people; to do things so that other people in the future can have things better; to contribute to his/her community and society; and to be a morally good person. The response scale ranged from 1 = Not at all important to 5 = Extremely important. The items

related to equality, reducing hunger and poverty, helping to make the world a better place, making sure all people are treated fairly, and giving time and money to help others. These five items were adapted from PSL-AB (Benson et al., 1998; Leffert et al., 1998). The two items related to doing things so that people in the future can benefit and contributing to community and society were adapted from the Social Responsibility Scale (SRS; Greenberger & Bond, 1984). The one item related to being a morally good person was adapted from Kasser and Ryan (1996).

Demographic variables. In addition to the substantive items noted above, information regarding age level, sex, mother's education, and religion from the M3 survey will also be used in the present investigation.

Age. Age was determined by subtracting participants' date-of-birth from the date-of-testing.

Sex. Sex was measured with a single item in which participants were asked to check one of the following options: female or male.

Mother's education. The mother's education scale had eleven responses from no formal education to receiving an advanced degree (e.g., Master's, Law Degree, Ph.D., or M.D.).

Religion. Religion was measured with a single open-ended question: "What religion do you consider yourself currently, if any?" The responses were aggregated to form the following categories: Catholic, Christian (Other), Jewish, Other religion, Atheist or those with no religious identification, those who are not sure of their religious affiliation, and those identifying with multiple religions.

Module 2 measures

Goal-directedness. Qualitative case studies within M2 explored the different ways that goal-directedness, an aspect of purpose, was manifested in adolescents on either end of the character status continuum (i.e., scores reflecting either high or low levels of character). Participants were asked the following question: Do you have any long-term goals in your life? Additional questions were asked as follow-ups. If participants answer affirmatively, they were asked what are a few important goals in their lives; why are the goals important to the participant; and if they are doing anything now to achieve these goals or objectives. If participants were doing anything to achieve their goals, they were then asked what specifically they were doing. If they answered that they were not specifically doing anything to achieve their goals, then they were asked what was keeping them from meeting their goals.

Contribution. Qualitative case studies within M2 also explored the different ways that contribution, an aspect of purpose was manifested in adolescents on either end of the character status continuum (i.e., contribution reflects purpose in that behavior is directed o a specific goal or enhancing a target person, cause, or situation). Participants were asked the following question: Do you do any community service or volunteer work? If participants answered affirmatively, they were then asked a follow-up question that asked them to describe the specific community service or volunteer work that they do.

Module 3 procedure

Middle school- and high school-aged participants, along with some college-aged participants, were primarily recruited through networking and personal connections between local area school and youth-serving organization administrators and project staff. The youth were asked to participate in a PDA-based survey. Additional college-aged participants were recruited through advertising on local university websites and Facebook (a personal networking website) to participate in a web-based survey.

PDA-based survey procedure. Once access to a data collection site was granted, participants were recruited during site visits made by project staff. Participants were greeted at each respective recruitment site (local Boston area public schools and youth-serving organizations) by a researcher who gave an overview of the study procedure. Participants and parents of minors were required to read and sign a consent form prior to their participation. Upon the return of the consent forms, youth (regardless of participation) received a one dollar gift certificate to a fast-food restaurant. Participants were told that their personal information would be kept confidential and would not be released without their written permission, except as required by law (e.g., in the case of reporting an instance of abuse, or of physically hurting oneself or another person). Participants were also told that they would be assigned a code in place of their name and that their name and other identifying information would not appear in any publication. Finally, participants were told that their participation was entirely voluntary, that

participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time, and that such a decision would not affect them or their relationship with Tufts University.

The survey was designed to index multiple content areas including positive youth development, spirituality and religiousness, time use, personality characteristics, and demographic characteristics. Prior to beginning the survey, participants were reminded that their answers would not be judged as “right” or “wrong,” and that they should answer with complete honesty. They were also instructed to skip any question they did not wish to answer. Surveys were administered on hand-held PDA devices with voice-enhancement for middle and high school students. Each participant was given a PDA, a pair of headphones, a stylus, and instructions about how to complete the survey at their own pace. Once the research team demonstrated how to use the PDA, participants completed the survey independently. Researchers remained available during the completion of the PDA-based survey in order to answer any questions that arose. Participants provided their personal information on an identification page, but were informed that all identifying information would be separate from their surveys and kept confidential. The personal identification page consisted of the name of the participant, date of birth, and the name of the recruitment site. In addition, the top corner of the page consisted of the unique number identifier of the participant. Once researchers inputted survey results and the personal information of the participant into the data base, the name of the participant was deleted in order to protect privacy.

Participants were debriefed after completing the study. They were told the nature of the study and allowed to withdraw if they did not want their data used. However, no participant exercised this option. Participant names were entered into a raffle for an iPod Nano upon completion of the survey. The raffle drawing took place at each recruitment site with 30 or more participants. Each adolescent was given a ten dollar gift card to a local store of his/her choice (e.g., CVS, Best Buy, iTunes, or Target) if they participated within a site with less than 30 participants.

Web-based survey procedure. Additional college students were recruited through advertisements, posted on local university websites and Facebook. The ads stated that researchers were recruiting people between the ages of 18 and 22 to participate in a 45-minute web-based survey assessing the relations between spirituality and positive youth development. All advertisements stated that each participant would be entered into a raffle to win an iPod Nano, with a 1:30 chance of winning. Interested participants emailed a member of the project staff who gave each participant a unique identifier and the weblink of the survey posted on Survey Monkey, a web-based tool to create and disseminate customized surveys.

Additional participants were also recruited from the M2 participant pool. Once M2 data were collected from all participants, youth were contacted once again via email to inquire about their interest in participating in a web-based survey (M3) for additional compensation. Participants were only contacted if they indicated on their paper-and-pencil survey that they would be interested in being contacted for any future interviews about the same subject matter. Interested

participants who completed the web-based survey received an incentive of an additional ten-dollar gift card to a local store of his/her choice (e.g., CVS, Best Buy, iTunes, or Target)

Once participants opened the weblink, they navigated to a consent form page that mirrored the consent forms for on-site participants. Participants were required to check a box stating that they understand the terms of privacy and confidentiality. After participants signed the consent form, they were then navigated to the first page of the survey to begin.

The web-based survey used the same questions as the PDA-based survey, indexing content areas such as positive youth development, spirituality and religiousness, time use, personality characteristics, and demographic characteristics. Once all data collection was completed via the web-based survey, one iPod Nano was raffled away for each 30 participants that completed the online survey.

Treatment of missing data in M3

In the present study, I assumed that the missing data within the items of interest in M3 were missing at random (MAR). MAR implies that the missing values on these variables are not related to the variables themselves, but may be caused by other variables (e.g., sex) measured in the present study (Allison, 2002; Jellic, Phelps, & Lerner, 2009; Schafer, 1997). Such an assumption allows us to use multiple imputation (MI) to draw plausible inferences on incomplete data sets by generating multiple imputed data sets. Multiple imputation, introduced by Rubin (1976), generates a number of imputed data sets, each of which can then be

analyzed. In the current study, I performed multiple imputation using the PROC MI and PROC MI ANALYZE components of SAS 9.1. Twenty imputed data sets were created, combined, and subsequently analyzed using nested multiple regression models.

Module 2 procedure

Once access to a data collection site was granted, participants were recruited via email and/or during site visits made by project staff. Participants received incentives of a \$30.00 gift card and, when applicable, their affiliated institutions were given substantive feedback about the data that were collected. To obtain parent consent for participants under the age of 18 years, each young person was given an envelope to take home to a parent. The envelope contained a letter explaining the study, two consent forms (one to be signed and returned and one for the parent's records) and, when applicable, a self-addressed stamped envelope for returning the signed consent form. Consent was obtained directly from participants 18 years and older.

M2 data collections lasted approximately two hours and were conducted by research staff. A detailed protocol was utilized in order to standardize data collection. The protocol contained information relevant to the sequence and timing of each task, the location of data collection materials, and the standardized administration of and transition between tasks (e.g., suggested transition statements were included to facilitate the smooth transition from one task to the next). Each data collection took place between one participant and one research assistant in a quiet, private space (i.e., in participants' homes, schools, local

libraries, youth-serving organizations, and Tufts University). The session began with a brief description of the study foci and objectives. Participants were told that the focus of the study was on how young people develop and construct their life stories, as well as how these stories reflect important life values, goals, and priorities. The reason for framing the study in these terms was to keep participants unaware of the general purpose of M2, i.e., to assess contribution (generosity) \leftrightarrow spirituality relations, so as to allow these relations to emerge (or not) without specific cues during the course of the data collection. The procedure of M2 followed that of M3.

The semi-structured interview of the larger study was relevant to the present research. This interview took approximately 60 minutes to complete. The interview was designed to index multiple content areas including life goals and values, character, spirituality and religion, community, contribution, and imagined future. Prior to beginning the interview, participants were reminded that their answers would not be judged as “right” or “wrong,” and that they should answer with complete honesty. They were also told to inform the interviewer to skip any question they did not wish to answer.

At the close of the data collection, participants were informed about the purposes of M2 and the larger JTF study, as well as the reasons behind their recruitment (e.g., their affiliation with an organization committed to the engagement of youth in community service). Participants were also given an opportunity to inquire about the study and their data collection experiences, as well as to indicate their interest in receiving all presentations/publications

involving their data. Finally, participants were asked not to talk about the study with potential future participants and were compensated for their time with a gift card for \$30.00. The findings of the present research are presented in the next chapter.

Case study procedure

In order to understand how goal-directedness and contribution beyond the self (as components of purpose) are manifested within individuals, four participants were selected for case study. Given that there was an overlap of 10 individuals who participated in both M2 and M3, these individuals served as potential participants in these case studies. To demonstrate ways in which components of purpose can be manifested within individuals as they relate to character, four cases were chosen to represent either end of the character status continuum. That is, two cases were chosen that fell below and two cases were chosen that fell above the median score on character status (3.47). Case 1, Simon (pseudonym), was selected for his relatively high score on character status (4.80 out of 5). Case 2, Sarah (pseudonym), was selected for her relatively high score on character status (4.2 out of 5). Case 3, Dominic (pseudonym), was selected for his relatively low score of character status (2.2 out of 5). Case 4, Tina (pseudonym), was selected for her relatively low score on character status (2.4 out of 5).

Semi-structured interview transcripts were assessed by the author for illustrative information about the manifestation of goal-directedness and contribution. As such, excerpts that illustrated these constructs were identified.

The intent of this analysis was to obtain information about the manifestation of these two components of purpose among individuals that fell above or below the median character status score. In addition, these case studies were used not only to illustrate whether or not goal-directedness and contribution behaviors were present in the interviews. They were used to illustrate the quality of goal-direction and contribution identified by the four individuals.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The purpose of the analyses reported in this chapter is to address the following questions:

1. To what extent does meaning in life and social support provided by family, peers, and religious context predict adolescent character status? Moreover, does this relationship differ by age, sex, religion, and mother's education?

2. The second objective of this research was to gain a richer understanding of purpose. By using qualitative case studies of participants who fell on either end of the character status continuum, two important components of purpose were investigated (i.e., goal-directedness and contribution to others). Through these cases, details of the different ways that purpose manifests in adolescents on either end of the character status continuum were explored.

Before reporting the interrelational analyses that speak to these questions, information about the frequency of missing data will be presented. In addition, preliminary, descriptive data are presented.

Frequency of Missing Data

Frequencies of missing data for each variable used in analyses are presented in Table 7. As shown in the table, variable non-response ranged from 0% to 22.09%. When considering the overall amount of missing data for each particular variable, most variables had less than 10% missing data. However, mother's education had 22.09% missing data.

Insert Table 7 about here

Examination of missing data

Although the ideal situation would be that research would be conducted without missing data, this situation rarely exists. For this reason, missing data techniques were implemented to report unbiased findings due to item non-response. The multiple imputation (MI) method was used given previous findings of its advantages in comparison to other procedures (e.g., over listwise deletion) in addressing problems of missing data (Jelicic et al., 2009).

MI procedures create a number of data sets. In the present study, 20 imputed data sets were created. With this method, I was able to explore the link among presence of meaning in one's life, social support, and character status using regression analyses on each data set, respectively. The results based on each data set were then combined, which provided combined unstandardized coefficients. However, an overall value cannot be provided for R^2 . Consequently, in reporting these values, I will provide the minimum and maximum values for R^2 as well as the average value for R^2 .

Preliminary Data

Descriptive analyses were conducted to determine the mean levels of age, mother's education, social support, presence of meaning in life, and character status. Table 8 presents means and standard deviations associated with each of these variables. Results indicated that participants, on average, reported getting

social support from three family members. When reporting social support in the peer group, results showed participants, on average, received support from one peer. Results also indicated that participants, on average, received support from one religious community member.

To examine the relationships among the variables of interest, character status, age, sex, religion, mother's education, family support, peer support, religious support, and presence of meaning in life were correlated. The correlations of the variables measured in this study are also displayed in Table 8. Mother's education and character status were significantly positively correlated. Similarly, sex and character status were significantly correlated (i.e., females had higher scores on character status). In addition, family support and religious support were significantly positively correlated with character status, accounting for 2% and 11% of the shared variance, respectively. The presence of meaning in life and character status were also significantly positively correlated, accounting for 22% of the shared variance.

Affiliations with Christianity and multiple religions, as well as being female were also significantly positively correlated with presence of meaning in life. Moreover, religious support was significantly positively correlated with presence of meaning in life, accounting for 16% of the shared variance.

Although most significant relationships were positive, there were some negative relationships. The absence of a religious affiliation was inversely correlated with character, presence of meaning in life, family support, and religious support. Age was also inversely related to presence of meaning in life.

That is, younger adolescents had higher levels of presence of meaning in life. This surprising finding will be discussed in the next chapter. In turn, age was inversely related to religious social support. In other words, younger adolescents had higher levels of religious social support.

Insert Table 8 about here

Assessing the Hypothesized Link Among Social Support, Meaning in Life, and Character Status

To test the relations among demographic characteristics, social support, presence of meaning in life, and character status, hierarchical regression models were examined. Results are shown in Table 9. The first model, M1, was specified as a control model in which character status was regressed on sex, age, mother's education, and religion. Based on past research about indicators of character development, sex (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Weisz & Black, 2002), age (e.g., Pratt, Skoe, & Arnold, 2004), mother's education (e.g., Hoffman, 1971), and religion (e.g., Scheepers, Grotenhuis, & Van Der Slik, 2002) were used as control variables.

In the second model, M2, the family social support variable was added in order to test whether family support significantly contributed to the variance of the outcome variable. In the third model, M3, peer support was added as a predictor variable to test whether social support provided by peers significantly contributed to the variance of character status. In the fourth model, M4, religious

support was added in order to test its contribution to the variance of character status. In the final model, M5, presence of meaning in life was added to examine whether presence of meaning in life significantly contributed to the variance of the outcome variable.

With regard to demographic variables, M1 showed that being female significantly predicted higher scores of character status ($p < .01$). Moreover, older participants had significantly lower character status scores ($p < .01$). Four of the religion dummy variables (i.e., Christian, Jewish, multiple religious affiliations, and other religious affiliation, with non-religious as the reference category) significantly predicted character status as well. That is, participants who identified as Christian ($p < .01$), Jewish ($p < .05$), multiple religious affiliations ($p < .05$), and other religious affiliations ($p < .05$) had significantly higher character status scores than non-religious participants. Higher mother's education scores also significantly predicted higher character status scores ($p < .01$). The overall model accounted, on average, for 8% of the variance in character status. The minimum R^2 (.06; $p < .01$) and maximum R^2 (.10; $p < .001$) of the 20 imputed data sets were both significant.

In M2, when adding family support to the model, the variance in character status predicted by sex and mother's education stayed constant ($p < .01$). Similarly, participants identifying as Christian ($p < .01$), having other religious affiliation ($p < .05$), and having multiple religious affiliations ($p < .05$) had significantly higher character status scores when compared to non-religious participants. Age of participants and being Jewish (in comparison to non-religious participants) were

no longer significantly associated with character status. Family support accounted for a significant portion of the variance in character status ($p < .01$). The overall model accounted for 10% of the variance, on average. The introduction of the family support variable significantly increased the overall model fit, indicating that the addition of the family support variable in M2 made a significant contribution to the variance in character status ($p < .05$).

The demographic predictors stayed constant in M3, such that having higher levels of mother's education and being female were significantly associated with greater scores for character status ($p < .01$). Participants with a Christian affiliation ($p < .01$), other religious affiliation ($p < .05$), and having an affiliation with multiple religions ($p < .05$) had significantly higher character status scores than non-religious participants. In addition, family support accounted for a significant amount of variance in the outcome variable ($p < .01$); however, the added predictor (peer support) did not contribute to the variance of character status. The overall model accounted for 10% of the variance, on average, in character status. However, the addition of the peer support variable in M3 did not make a significant contribution to overall model fit as compared to M2, and thus, did not significantly add to the variance in character status.

When adding religious social support in M4, sex and mother's education continued to be significantly associated with character status ($p < .001$ and $p < .01$, respectively). The dummy religion variables and family support lost significance with the addition of the religious support variable. This loss in significance might suggest that these dropped variables were correlated with the added predictor,

religious support. This predictor was significantly associated with greater levels of character status ($p < .001$). The overall model accounted for 16% of the variance in character status on average. The introduction of the religious support variable significantly increased the overall model fit, indicating that the addition of the religious support variable made a significant contribution to the variance in character status ($p < .001$).

The final model, M5, had demographic predictors stay constant such that sex ($p < .05$) and mother's education ($p < .001$) continued to be significantly associated with character status. Moreover, greater religious support ($p < .01$) and higher levels of presence of meaning in life ($p < .001$) were significantly associated with greater levels of character status. The overall model accounted for 29% of the variance in character status. The introduction of the presence of meaning in life variable significantly increased the overall model fit, indicating that the addition of the presence of meaning in life variable made a significant contribution to the variance in character status ($p < .001$). M5 was determined to be the most parsimonious model given that it accounted for the greatest amount of variance. Although not presented in Table 9, interaction effects were tested. These effects were not significant.

Insert Table 9 about here

Conclusions About Quantitative Findings

These data provide some insight into the association between character status, social support, and presence of meaning in life (one component of purpose). As expected, religious support accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in character status. However, family and peer support were not significantly associated with character status. In addition, presence of meaning in life accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in character status, after controlling for demographic characteristics. Given that one component of purpose was significantly associated with character, the next section of this chapter will explore the two remaining components of purpose as it relates to character status. Through qualitative, person-centered case studies, contribution and goal-directedness will be examined.

Constructing Purpose Profiles of High and Low Scoring Character Status Individuals

This section constructs purpose profiles of individuals at either end of the character status continuum. As detailed in the Case Study Procedure section, four participants were selected based on their quantitative scores for character status: “Simon” (high score), “Sarah” (high score), “Dominic” (low score), and “Tina” (low score). The semi-structured interview data for the four cases were examined and excerpts were identified that, according to the author, illustrated goal-directedness in life and contribution to others. This illustrative information is presented in the following sections.

Case 1: Simon (High Character Score)

Simon is a 19-year-old Jewish male born and raised in the United States, who identifies himself as multiethnic. He lived with both parents and two siblings. Simon was the oldest (he had a younger brother and sister). His mother graduated from a four-year college and his father had a master's degree. When asked about his goals, Simon mentioned both concrete long-term goals and more intangible long-term goals. His goal-oriented path was a running theme throughout his interview. Moreover, these goals molded the activities he chose to do in his life. Simon was chosen from the quantitative sample because of his high score on the character status scale. The next section will introduce excerpts from his interview that illustrate the nature of his goal-directedness.

Goal-directedness

When asked if he has any goals in life, Simon responded:

“Yeah. Some small, concrete long-term goals are learning to play the piano, and reading a lot of good literature. But, the kind of really big long-term goals are making significant contributions to fixing really big problems, like world poverty, education inequality, and economic injustice. It's absurdly large scale, but my goals are really to contribute to fixing things. Not fixing, but really fixing the systems that cause these things. The way I see things is that a lot of the suffering that goes on is caused by people. And, if it's caused by us, we can fix it. I guess my goal is to help end people-caused suffering, at least to fix the systems that we've created that cause them.”

Simon not only identified an endpoint that served to guide his behavior, but his “big long-term goal” also consisted of a prosocial motivational component. His long-term goal of fixing systems that cause suffering gave Simon a purpose. Moreover, his activities and the steps needed to get to this goal were geared towards making this intangible goal possible.

When discussing why these goals were so important, Simon's responses showed characteristics of character as measured in the quantitative analyses, such as the importance of making sure that all people are treated fairly and equally. In addition, these responses used the character language (e.g., justice and humanity) identified by Peterson and Seligman (2004), which provide further evidence that there may be a common language that exists to describe virtues and character strengths. Simon stated:

“Why do I care about people and people's happiness? It's just always seemed to be the right thing...What ought to be, oughtn't to be. Sometimes, that's just about not having those curtains with that furniture, but it's also about how things should work out for people. This is fair and this is not fair. It's a really strong sense of that. I like to say it boils down to love. I love people and I try to love all people. When you love someone you want the best for them...Making things better for people is just a given for me. I feel like this is what I'm supposed to do with my life. It's not an obligation that I resent. It's a duty that I feel is right. I am supposed to make things better.”

Moreover, Simon's educational aspirations and current position at City Year put him on a track to achieve the long-term goals he had set for himself:

“I'm in City Year because I want to get to know the city better and I want to get to know urban public education better. It turns out to be a really good way to know the non-profit world and kind of how that all works. I'm definitely having a good effect on the lives of the children I work with. I tend to think in big scale, but I think I have a good effect on the kids. I'm helping to teach them to read. I'm trying to get them a better attitude about reading and school and about their own power. I also am going to college next year. In September, I'm starting at UMass Amherst. I am going to study a lot of social sciences and history. ‘What has happened?’ ‘What has been done in the world?’ ‘And, what do we understand about how people work and how can we make that better?’ There's also this cool program where I'll be studying community organizing theory and getting internships in the community. I'll actually be doing stuff, and learning about it and getting better at it all at the same time, so I'll be better equipped to go forward and do that.”

These excerpts illustrate the features of goal-directedness as it relates to purpose in Simon's life. Moreover, evidence of character was seen as it connects to goal setting. In the next section, these interview data were used to examine evidence of contribution to others.

Contribution

The discussion of Simon's contribution to others revolved around his involvement with City Year. Simon mentioned being involved with a variety of programs, such as service, social awareness, and civic engagement. The entirety of his contribution was as follows:

“In my in-school service, I'm a classroom aid and literacy tutor in two second grade classrooms... So, I'm helping [students] to improve their skills but also improving their confidence in themselves as readers... I help run an after school program at St. Peter Academy. It's a very unique situation in that they are at a private school. The Archdiocese closed down the Catholic School among many of the cuts... They barely made it, but they are alive and they have no after school program and they invited us... The first half of my day is kind of really seeing the problems with urban education, and the second half of my day is playing games with kids like the kids I went to school with... We do physical service about twice a month. We paint murals in schools. We go to schools and paint the walls. We do landscaping and cleaning out parking lots that are overgrown. Oh yeah, I'm a team leader for the City Heroes program. One to three Saturdays a month, I work with a group of ten high school students who signed up for the service learning program. Most of it is social awareness and civic engagement stuff, learning about social issues and how to be civic leaders. There is a service component, too. You go and paint schools and do that kind of stuff, as well. The rest of City Year is a lot of civic engagement, such as billboards and waving the flag for the service movement. We don't do as much direct service as the other service organizations. I spend a lot more time doing civic engagement workshops and roundtables. It's more time than I'd like to, but it's part of what City Year is.”

As a way to “make the world better,” Simon participated in a variety of service activities to contribute to the world around him in a positive direction.

Simon's interview data illustrated instances of goal-directedness in life and contribution to others. These data allowed for details of the purpose construct to be seen in relation to Simon's character status score. In the next section, another case of purpose is described as it relates to Sarah's high character status score.

Case 2: Sarah (High Character Score)

Sarah is a 17-year-old female who was born in Russia, but moved to the United States sometime between the ages of three and five. She identified herself as European-American, and practices Reformed Judaism. Sarah lived with her mother and had a younger sister. She identified her mother as having a master's degree and her father as having graduated from high school. Unlike Simon, Sarah's goals are set differently and have a more nebulous quality, although they both score high on the character status scale. The next section will introduce excerpts from her interview that speak to the nature of her goal-directedness.

Goal-directedness

Sarah had set a primary goal for herself based on her life experiences within her family. Primarily, observing what her mother had gone through, Sarah believed her main goal was to "be happy." She states:

"And well, my goal in life -- my main goal in life -- is to be happy. Because I've seen my mom, and she hasn't been very happy with herself or with her career, with her relationships, personal relationships, you know. And that's my main goal. I just want to be happy and just be able to do everything that I want to do. I hate being held back and not being able to fulfill anything. That's like my biggest thing, just I have to -- if I set my mind to something, I just have to finish it."

Although it may seem like an unclear goal, Sarah was able to concretely identify areas of her life in which she could pursue happiness based on the

unhappiness that her mother had experienced. For example, happiness is something she wanted to pursue in her own life through her career and personal relationships. Moreover, Sarah stated ways in which she was actively pursuing her goal to be happy:

“Well, career-wise I'm getting a job at Children's Hospital so I'll be able to have that hands on experience. And I'm also doing an internship over the summer at Children's Hospital for people who want to major in nursing or pre-med. Being happy, I guess I'm just doing everything that I can do -- just not holding myself back. I try not to rely on other people a lot. I try to be more independent. Like, I guess, I hate having to ask people for favors. And so I just try to get everything done myself.”

Sarah further stated another goal for herself later in the interview:

“I want people just to see that I'm more than just a person who likes to get things done. Like ‘you're always working’ -- people tell me, ‘You're always working so hard. You're always an over-achiever, blah, blah, blah, rah, rah, rah -- like you're always trying to do something.’ But I don't only want to be remembered as a person who focuses on everything. I want to be remembered as a person who liked doing that kind of stuff and liked helping other people. Because that's like my main goal a lot -- I always do something if I can in any way to help someone.”

Not only did Sarah want to pursue happiness, but she also wanted to contribute to the world around her through helping others. After Sarah stated this goal, she went on to describe an example of helping someone in need. When the interviewer asked Sarah about her reasons for choosing such goals, Sarah's response illustrated an item of the character score measure from the quantitative analyses—to give her time to make life better for other people. Like Simon, Sarah also used vocabulary identified as a character strength by Peterson and Seligman (e.g., kindness; 2004).

“So things like that are just like -- not to feel like I'm doing it out of the goodness of my heart or because I want to be a hero, but just I want to be

remembered as a person who always smiles at you in the hallway or like always said hi or said how are you doing or did something for you.”

These excerpts illustrated the features of goal-directedness as they related to purpose in Sarah’s life. Although different in content than Simon’s goals, evidence of character was seen as it connected to goal setting. In the next section, these interview data were used to examine evidence of contribution to others.

Contribution

Sarah partook of a variety of community service activities that are part of her contribution to others. When asked about her community service, she responded:

“Well, in school I volunteer a lot at the offices during all my studies. And after school, I have my student council, and I'm also part of a club... With the club, we help in everything with food drives, passing out drinks at the Walk for Hunger, or the Bear-a-thon -- cleaning up the Charles River, that type of stuff. Outside of school, I sometimes volunteer at my temple. Not as often as I used to because I've had less time, but I just help with services or like the kids day I'll get guest activities and help around there. At my dance studio, I sometimes teach classes, like at Latin Ballroom Dance Fever. Like -- I don't know -- sometimes I get paid, sometimes I don't. I don't really care. It's just fun for me. And then there's Mayor's Youth Council. That's also outside of school. And we volunteer in order to just basically engage Boston youth that are like in just any type of activity that we offer them. And we provide them resources, everything from jobs to their own after-school activities. And we also help with the elderly. And we also talk to all different kinds of city officials, Mayor Menino, Police Commissioner Davis. So I think Mayor's Youth Council outside of school is my biggest thing.”

Moreover, these activities helped Sarah to move towards her goal of being happy. When Sarah was asked why she participated in these activities, she replied:

“I guess a lot of people would say, "Oh, I like to give back." And I like that too, but I feel like it's more of an accomplishment for me too. Because I feel happier. I feel satisfied when I do something. It's not that I exactly

want someone to note that I do that, or note that I'm Community Service Coordinator on the Mayor's Youth Council or note that I'm president of student council. It's just that I want people just to see like, "Oh, she's helping us." I like that feeling of helping someone. That's a feeling that was one of the most important things. My great grandparents taught me you always need to help someone no matter what. Like in any way, shape or form that's the most important. My great grandmother was like, 'Uphold your image. Your image is very important.' And she was like, by helping that will set your image. And I've always been told that since I was like four that it's a good thing just to help others."

As illustrated in these excerpts, Sarah's long-term goals and her contribution to others works in conjunction with each other. Similar to Simon, Sarah picked a goal and had a plan in place to attain such goals. In addition, both Simon and Sarah participated in activities that contributed to their greater community. They believed that their contributions to the community beyond themselves would lead them to attain their long-term goals. Moreover, evidence of character strengths and virtues were seen in both Simon and Sarah's interview data.

I will turn now to cases of participants that scored low on the character status scale. The next section describes ways in which components of purpose were manifested in Dominic's interview data.

Case 3: Dominic (Low Character Score)

Dominic is a 19-year-old European-American male who was born outside of the United States, but came to the United States at some point between the ages of 11 and 14 years. Although he grew up in a Catholic household, he did not identify himself as either spiritual or religious. Dominic was an only child who lived with his mother. He identified three caregivers: his mother, his father, and his grandmother. His mother and grandmother completed some high school, and

his father completed high school. Dominic was chosen as a case study because of his low character status score. The following sections describe Dominic's goals and contribution behavior.

Goal-directedness

Unlike Simon and Sarah, Dominic did not discuss his goals in great detail, nor did he identify more transcendent goals that go beyond the day-to-day. For example, when asked about his long term goals, Dominic responded, "To stay on-task in school and not to fool around, just get where I want to get things done. That's the task." Moreover, when he is asked why he picked that particular goal for himself, he responded:

"Because it all makes me be on task and helps get me where I want to get. I'm always thinking about my goal, about me getting my career job, and that will just help me out in the long run. And I'll be always on task and doing my work and that's why it's important."

Again, although Dominic identified his personal goal, it seemed to be more in line with a day-to-day goal of getting a career. Dominic then goes on to explain what he is doing to achieve his goal of getting a career, "I'm working, so I can get the money for the college, at least half of it." As illustrated, a difference in goal-directedness exists between Dominic and Simon and Sarah. While Simon and Sarah had evidence of goal direction with a prosocial component, Dominic's interview focused on his own gains through goal direction. The way in which contribution exists in Dominic's life is explored next.

Contribution

Similar to Dominic's responses to questions regarding goal-directedness, his responses to contribution imply that it does not play a large role in his life.

“I used to be. Not anymore. Over the summer, like two summers in a row I used to help this old guy out. I used to work for him. But then when I moved here, I used to come every weekend and just help him out, like his lawn. I would cut his grass in [the fall] sometimes and in winter I would shovel his whole...path to his door. And I would clean his leaves because I felt bad and so I wanted to help, just for the good because he was a nice guy, so I wanted to help him out and he wasn't capable of doing it himself. So I felt bad for him because he was all alone.”

As illustrated, Dominic's goal-directedness and contribution behavior differ from Simon and Sarah's case studies. Dominic did not actively pursue contribution during the time of the interview. These data allow for details of the purpose construct to be seen in relation to Dominic's character status score. Although he did pursue helping others in the past as shown in the previous excerpt, there was no reason given for why he stopped, which may speak more to the limitation of the present dataset rather than speak to the quality of character development that Dominic portrays. The limitations will be addressed in the next chapter. The next section presents another case of purpose as it relates to a low character status score.

Case 4: Tina (Low Character Score)

Tina is a 16-year-old European-American female who was born and raised in the United States. Although she identified her religion by birth as Albanian Orthodox, she described herself as spiritual, but not religious. Tina lived with her mother part of the time and with her father and stepmother the other part of the time. She was the oldest of three children. Her mother had a master's degree, and

her father graduated from a two-year college. Similar to Dominic's case, Tina described her goals and contribution to others with less detail than Simon and Sarah. The following section contains examples of Tina's goal-directedness.

Goal-directedness

Tina described having her long-term goal in life as:

“Just to be successful. I want to work and live in the city eventually after I get out of college, then get married, start a family, but not in the city. I don't know.”

Tina does describe a goal in life from the more day-to-day goals as “to be successful.” It is unclear by this short statement exactly what she means. She mentioned wanting to graduate from college, get married, and start a family. However, she stated at the end, “I don't know,” which may mean that Tina may not have thought about these types of goals thoroughly. The interviewer continued this line of questioning by asking why these goals were important to Tina. Tina responded:

“I just think it's important to make something of yourself. Mostly everyone on my dad's side of my family including my parents have gotten divorced. So I kind of don't want that to happen. Starting a family, that's kind of why that's important to me. Work is important to me too because I want to be successful and stuff like that.”

Furthermore, when Tina was asked what specifically she was doing to attain her goals, she responded, “Just trying to do well in school and get into a good college right now.” In contrast to the qualitatively rich data of goal-directedness that were exhibited in the case studies of Simon and Sarah, Tina did not seem to have goals that were as well formulated or transcending the “here and now” of everyday life. Given the brevity of the answers, it is difficult to find

indications of clear goal-directedness backed by a sense of purpose that leads Tina's life on a particular trajectory. However, this current status does not deny that such specificity could not happen later. Again, this case is not one of "developmental stagnation" since this observation of Tina's life is from one point in time.

One similarity that can be seen between Sarah and Tina is that both females set their goals from their own experiences with their respective families. Sarah chose to pursue happiness because her mother could not find that herself. Therefore, Sarah chose a path to attain something that her mother lacked. In a similar manner, Tina chose a life goal based on her family's history of divorce. Based on her own experiences of divorce involving her parents and other relatives, she wanted to pursue a goal that set her apart from the rest of her family. However, these similarities end here. Sarah used her goal-orientation to contribute to something greater than the self, while Tina was more limited with her contributions. Next, I will explore Tina's contribution beyond the self.

Contribution

Tina's instances of contribution are more limited than Simon and Sarah's as well. When asked about her community service involvement, Tina responds:

"I do community service occasionally. I'm doing Relay for Life this year. I'm team captain for that. I did some last year and volunteered with some other stuff...Last year, I volunteered at my dance studio and did office work and stuff like that."

Although Tina mentioned that she did Relay for Life because she had a relative pass away because of lung cancer, her other choices of volunteering do not have the same sense of meaning to her. When the interviewer asked why she

got involved in the other volunteer opportunities, Tina stated, “The other stuff was kind of like I needed community service hours.” Although Tina engaged in contribution behavior, the “stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” is lacking. In sum, this case lacks a meaningful sense of goal-directedness and contribution.

Conclusions About Qualitative Analyses

Four cases representing the two ends of the character status continuum were selected for qualitative analysis. Simon and Sarah were chosen to represent cases that fell on the high end of the character status scale. Dominic and Tina were chosen to represent the cases that fell on the low end of the character status scale. These case studies were analyzed in order to illustrate ways in which goal-directedness and contribution are manifested within individuals as these variables relate to their character status score. These cases provided more descriptive information than could be represented by quantitative scores alone.

Goal-directedness and contribution were evident in the interviews of Simon and Sarah. When they discussed goals, both participants were able to identify their long-term goals and a path to that specific endpoint. Damon et al.’s (2003) definition of purpose—“a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self” was clearly seen in both cases. Moreover, evidence of the quantitative measure of character status was seen in both Simon and Sarah’s cases. Simon’s responses showed signs of humanity and justice, and Sarah’s

responses showed signs of kindness when they explained their reasons as to why they chose to pursue their respective goals.

Unlike Simon and Sarah, Dominic and Tina did not have as much descriptive data regarding their goal-directedness and contribution. Dominic and Tina identified goals within their lives that were more day-to-day than the more long-term transcendent goals that Simon and Sarah identified. Dominic chose to be on task in school in order to attain a successful career in his future. Tina chose a goal to be successful in terms of family life and professional success in the future. Moreover, these goals that translated to positive consequences to the world around them were lacking, an absence that was also evident in their lack of contribution behavior. Dominic did not participate in any contribution behavior. Tina participated in contribution behavior; however, her volunteer activities were motivated by external forces (i.e., mandatory community service).

Summary of the Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The above-noted quantitative and qualitative analyses were used to explore the links among social support, purpose, and character status. The quantitative data analyses using hierarchical regression analyses revealed the positive association between religious support and character status as well as presence of meaning in life (as one component of purpose) and character status. In addition, qualitative analyses were carried out to explore the link between two remaining components of purpose and character status. Four cases provided illustrations about the manifestations of purpose (in the form of goal-directedness and contribution) in high- and low- character status scoring individuals.

Interpretation of the findings of this chapter, methodological limitations, and suggestions for future directions will be presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore the relationship among character status, social support, and purpose, when controlling for demographic characteristics that have been shown to be predictive of character development in prior research. Specifically, this study sought to understand the role of family support, peer support, religious support, and purpose in the promotion of character status among adolescents.

In order to explore the above-noted relationships, this study set out to:

1. Create a presence of meaning in life scale similar to that of Steger et al. (2006) to measure one component of purpose. Since the original scale for presence of meaning in life was not incorporated into the pilot study used for this research, an expert rater validation process and a principal component analysis (PCA) were undertaken to construct this measure.
2. Explore the relationship among social support, purpose, and character status within the quantitative sample. In order to explore these links, hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to understand the relations among social support and the presence of meaning in life (one component of purpose) in the promotion of character status.
3. Demonstrate ways in which the two remaining components of purpose, goal-directedness and contribution, may be manifested within individuals who are at the extremes of character status. Four qualitative case studies were analyzed to illustrate how themes of goal-directedness and

contribution emerged in interview data from adolescents with either high or low character scores.

Creation of the Presence of Meaning in Life Scale

To explore the relations among social support, purpose, and character status, the first goal of the present research was to assess whether there was evidence within the present data set for a latent construct of presence of meaning in life among the participants. The results of the expert rater validation process and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) confirmed that the construct was present.

While the expert rater validation process and PCA were undertaken to ensure the relevance of items to the construct of interest, it did not ensure that the selected items represented a comprehensive measure. The items identified by the raters may only capture certain dimensions of presence of meaning in life. For example, one of the items included in the scale construction originated from Piedmont's Transcendence Scale (1999). Although worded similarly to the scale constructed by Steger et al. (2006), interpretations of the wording may change the meaning of the item for youth. For example, Steger et al.'s (2006) item states, "I understand my life's meaning," while Piedmont's (1999) item states, "I believe there is a larger meaning to life." Upon first glance, these two items may seem to heavily overlap in meaning. However, the Steger et al. (2006) item specifies *my* life's meaning; whereas, Piedmont's (1999) item asks more generally of participants to identify whether they believe life, on a whole, has meaning.

Therefore, future research should include additional steps for confirming

that the items used from an existing pool capture the various dimensions of the construct of interest. Moreover, triangulation of the rater validation process with multiple indices of the purportedly same construct may shed more light onto measurement issues. For instance, in addition to expert ratings, participant ratings could help provide insight into the interpretation of measurement items.

Despite this limitation, the results of the expert rater validation process and PCA yielded a measure of presence of meaning in life that provided convergent validity and measurement reliability. I hypothesized that this construct, as one component of purpose, would add to the prediction of character status. Multiple regression analyses indicated that, over and above demographic variables, presence of meaning in life was a significant predictor of youth character status. This finding was consistent with theoretical expectations that purpose is a necessary component of youth character development (e.g., Damon, 1997, 2008).

Findings of the Quantitative Relationship Among Social Support, Presence of Meaning in Life, and Character Status

Analyses showed several significant relationships among particular demographic characteristics, social support, presence of meaning in life, and character status. Contrary to prior findings that wisdom (expert knowledge about questions associated with meaning and conduct in life) emerges during late adolescence and early adulthood (Baltes & Kunzmann, 2003), preliminary correlations found that younger adolescents had higher scores on the presence of meaning in life measure within the present data set. However, this surprising

finding might have arisen because the particular items that were used to construct the presence of meaning in life scale were more attuned to younger adolescents, rather than as a result of a relationship between age and meaning in life.

Furthermore, preliminary analyses indicated that mother's education was found to be a significant factor in character status. As mother's education of participants increased, character status scores also increased. Regression analyses further indicated this relationship between mother's education and character status. This relationship may exist because higher maternal education is one factor that is related to authoritative parenting practices (e.g., Fox, Platz, & Bentley, 1995), which is linked to positive character development (e.g., Lickona, 2004).

Sex was also significantly correlated with character status in preliminary analyses. The regression analyses indicated a consistent finding with the correlational matrix as well as with previous research (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Weisz & Black, 2002) that females were associated with higher scores on character status than males.

Contrary to prior reports of the importance of family support in the promotion of character development (e.g., Lickona, 2004), there was no association between family support and character status in the present analyses. In addition, contrary to previous research (e.g., Walker, Hennig, and Krettenauer, 2000), peer support was not found to be a significant predictor of character status within the analyses. However, these insignificant findings might have more to do with measurement limitations, which will be addressed later in this chapter.

Positive role models within the faith-based community have been previously linked with positive development (e.g., King & Furrow, 2004). In line with these findings, religious support was found to be significantly associated with character status. That is, increased positive relationships with members of the participants' faith communities were associated with increased scores on character status. Therefore, this finding confirmed the importance of religious community-based relationships on the character status of youth.

Moreover, this finding has implications for the promotion of character. Youth leaders within faith institutions can serve as character education teachers in addition to their roles as religious teachers. For instance, by using theological reflection, religious leaders might be able to use a common method in pastoral education to bridge character education and religious education in youth groups. Theological reflection is a self-conscious, intentional act to understand the spiritual on a theoretical and practical level, which connects book knowledge (i.e., spiritual texts) and experiential knowledge (Killen & de Beer, 1994; Warren, Murray, & Best, 2002).

For example, when a youth group contributes to the community with a service project, there should be active reflection to integrate these actions in relation to the religious tradition. The reflections should be used as a way to understand why the action is relevant to scripture. In addition, what are the emotions that the youth experienced while taking part in the service project? Furthermore, how does the adolescent's understanding of his/her actions in relation to his/her religious teachings and emotions impact the individual's

relationship to God, others, and the world at large? These questions may be answered as reflective exercises, such as journaling and group discussions among other youth and the youth group leader. These reflections can help confirm, challenge, clarify, and expand the adolescent's experiences within the religious tradition (Killen & de Beer, 1994), and may provide growth in character (through the incorporation of cognition, affect, and behavior) as well as spirituality.

However, the specific path through which character is promoted in youth group settings must still be explored. This point speaks to the importance of longitudinal research. Longitudinal analyses can elucidate the directionality of this relationship, and indicate whether those youth with higher character status scores are more likely to go to religious institutions and build relationships with religious community members, or whether the relationships built within these communities promote character development.

Interestingly, the significant relationship that participants who were Christian, other religious affiliations, or had multiple religious affiliations with higher character status scores disappeared with the presence of the religious support variable. This finding may indicate that it might not be the religious affiliation that predicted character status scores, but rather, the social support found within those religious institutions that are clearer indications of character status scores.

In line with assertions of the importance of purpose on character development by Damon (1997, 2008), the presence of meaning in life was significantly associated with character status in the correlational matrix and the

regression analyses. As such, higher scores of presence of meaning in life were significantly associated with higher scores of character status.

As noted in Chapter 1, adolescents need to understand moral behavior on a cognitive, affective, and behavioral level for the promotion of character (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Specifically, when adolescents are able to find personal meaning behind moral actions, character development is more likely to occur (e.g., Damon, 2008). The current finding that there is a positive association between presence of meaning in life and character status has implications for future character education efforts such as the need for practitioners to incorporate a personal meaning component into curricula that promote character.

Although these analyses provided evidence of the relationship among social support, presence of meaning in life, and character status, a majority of the variance of character status was not accounted for by these variables. Consequently, future research should consider other aspects of adolescent contexts that account for the variance in character development. For example, future research might include the relationship between social support given by the school community and adolescent character development.

Since the primary purpose of the present data set used in this research was not to explore the links among social support, purpose, and character development, extensive, comprehensive measures did not exist for these specific constructs. The use of an existing data set makes it difficult to explore new theoretical objectives from pre-existing measures. For example, the three components of purpose, as defined by Damon et al. (2003), were not included in

the initial survey measures. Therefore, the author had to rely on constructing the presence of meaning in life scale within the quantitative data, while relying on qualitative excerpts within interview data from the data set to illustrate goal-directedness and contribution. Future research should include a composite measure of purpose that includes the three components in order to better understand its role in the promotion of character development.

In light of previous research that shows the importance of goal-directedness and contribution on character development (e.g., Damon, 2008), the next section of this chapter discusses preliminary qualitative findings of ways in which the two other components of purpose were manifested in high- and low-scoring character status adolescents.

Illustrations of Goal-Directedness and Contribution Among High- and Low-Scoring Character Status Scale Adolescents

Qualitative case studies were able to illustrate the variations in the manifestations of goal-directedness and contribution among participants that were high and low on the character status continuum. Goal-directedness and contribution were evident in both the interviews of Simon and Sarah. When they discussed goals, both participants were able to identify long-term goals and a path to that specific endpoint. Damon et al.'s (2003) definition of purpose—"a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at once meaningful to the self and of consequence to the world beyond the self" was clearly seen in both cases. Dominic and Tina, on the other hand, exhibited fewer instances of goal-directedness and contribution to others in their respective interviews. These

participants, who fell on the lower end of the character status continuum, were unable to identify transcendent goals beyond the here and now, which was also evident by their lack of contribution.

The connections between components of purpose and character in the interview data suggest the importance of examining purpose and character further. These cases showed themes of goal-directedness and contribution as it related to character status, such that those that had higher character status scores exhibited greater levels of goal-directedness and contribution. When discussing reasons for goal-directedness, Simon and Sarah both spontaneously mentioned aspects of character within their respective rationales, without any prompting from the interviewer. The spontaneity of the character strength responses might indicate that there is indeed a relationship between purpose and character that should be explored further.

However, it is still unclear as to what exactly caused this difference in contribution and goal-direction between the two groups of character status individuals, given the limitations of the present research. Although there are indications of a relationship between purpose and character, there could be additional demographic variables at play that lead to variations in contribution and goal-directed behavior. For example, Dominic's caregivers had less formal education than Simon's and Sarah's parents. Lower educational achievement might indicate less income, which may then have led to fewer opportunities for Dominic to explore these types of purposeful behavior. Future research should include such demographic variables as moderators of purpose within the home,

school, and community. Exploration of the role of such moderators may enhance understanding of how available opportunities impact the level of exploration of the components of purpose.

Furthermore, future research should focus on interviews that clearly outline the relationship among social support, purpose, and character development. For example, Sarah and Tina both mentioned people within their lives as instigating forces behind their choice of goals. Sarah chose a goal of being happy as a result of her mother's unhappiness, while Tina chose to be successful in her family life as a result of witnessing divorces among her parents and other relatives. Although they fell on either end of the character status continuum, a common thread seemed to be people within their respective lives that impacted their personal goal-directed decisions. Future longitudinal research that explicitly asked participants about the impact of people on purposeful behavior in addition to their character development can help clarify the path through which character development occurs.

These four qualitative case studies illustrate ways in which components of purpose manifest in adolescents who fall on either end of the character status continuum. However, we cannot generalize these findings to larger settings given that only four cases were examined. Although there is evidence that speaks to the link between purpose and character development, examination of more cases is needed in order to make definitive conclusions. Moreover, only longitudinal data can speak to the directionality of such a link. Is it the case that those with greater character development are better able to pick long-term goals that are of

consequence to the world around them? Or, do the actions relevant to picking long-term goals that impact the world lead to character development?

As noted in the previous chapter, the qualitative findings cannot be used as evidence to conclude that “developmental stagnation” exists in the lives of Dominic and Tina. These case studies reflect actions and experiences from one point in time in the lives of these adolescents. The present findings do not say that goal-directedness, contribution, and character may not arise in later years.

Dominic did note that he had helped a neighbor in previous years but, due to the limitations of the interview, there is no way to ascertain the intention in this prior behavior, why he stopped, or if he would help others in the future. Therefore, it is only with longitudinal data and more nuanced interview protocols that character development can be studied optimally.

Given that the primary purpose of these interviews was not to illustrate relationships between purpose and character, more research is needed that explicitly asks youth about character and how components of purpose are inter-related. Furthermore, case study analyses were conducted by the author and were not cross-validated by independent raters. Independent raters, who are not privy to the investigator’s hypotheses, should conduct future research using case study analyses. This point leads to a fuller specification of the limitations of this research and how future research can address these limitations.

Limitations and Future Directions

This research only begins to elucidate the importance of studying the role of social support and purpose in the promotion of character development. Given

the existence of several methodological issues in this study, although this research showed associations between religious support and character status as well as the presence of meaning in life and character status, the direction of the relationship and the path through which character develops cannot be established. These data were cross-sectional in nature, and used a convenience sample from the greater Boston area. In order to speak to the directionality of the relationships among the constructs, and to elaborate on the development of character in adolescents, future research should seek a longitudinal sample coming from a larger, more representative, and more diverse pool of participants.

With such longitudinal data, a change-oriented and potentially more dynamic approach to data analysis may be taken. Cross-sectional data allow only linear analysis of within-time patterns of covariation. If longitudinal data are collected, as here recommended, then models of bidirectional relations and potentially non-recursive and curvilinear patterns of interrelations might be assessed.

In the current data set, the highest amount of missing data was found in the mother's education variable. As expected, adolescents may not know the highest level of their mother's education, thus leading many participants to respond with "I don't know." Future research might consider obtaining such demographic background from parental questionnaires.

Moreover, future research should elicit quantitative and qualitative data from a wider variety of individuals. The present sample consisted of participants in Module 2 who provided both quantitative and qualitative data. Participants in

this module were intentionally recruited as a *specialized* convenience sample. That is, given that the general purpose of Module 2 was to assess the relationship between contribution and spirituality, the majority of participants were sampled as a result of their exceptionality with regard to community service or spirituality. Considering this specialized sample, data obtained from these participants might have skewed findings in such a way that they may not reflect “normal” or “average” responses within a representative sample of adolescents. Furthermore, given that only 10 participants from Module 2 volunteered to participate in Module 3, something about these participants might indicate exceptionality in their responses. This purposive sampling poses a challenge to the generalizability of findings.

In a future longitudinal study, the quality of the data set could be enhanced beyond what is possible using the present cross-sectional pilot data. As noted, item non-response was a problem with the current data set, particularly with regard to mother’s education. However, longitudinal research is always challenged by missing data (Jelicic et al., 2009), and therefore requires such procedures as multiple imputation (MI) to address challenges imposed by missingness. While the MI method used in the present study was adequate to estimate scores for the item non-response, future research might reduce missing data by providing greater participant incentives for complete data and/or by administering surveys with better monitoring conditions.

Another limitation of the present research was the measurement of social support. It is essential not only to identify the sources of social support in

adolescent lives as this research does, but to also understand the qualities of an adolescent's social support system that are essential in promoting character development. For example, future research might evaluate social support received for learning about the content of those relationships that makes adolescents feel supported. More specifically, future research might examine such dimensions of social support as it relates to character development. Using a multi-dimensional model, future research might be able to identify the aspects of social support that are essential in the positive development of character.

This research suggested that social support systems, particularly within religious contexts, are responsible for transmitting knowledge about how to be a "good person." However, future research should consider the characteristics of social support that enable them to make a positive impact on adolescents' character development. Are qualities of honesty, courage, or fidelity essential in individuals to make them better equipped to foster character, or are there other qualities that adolescents with good character are drawn to in their support systems? In addition, do adolescents of different cultures view one support system as more important than another in the development of good character? Similarly, research should explore gender differences in the identification of social support for character development. For example, do males or females identify with one parent over another as an educator of character? Once the positive qualities of social support are identified, practitioners can nurture these qualities in mentors in order to build rapport with adolescents and, as such, increase the productivity of character education efforts.

Future research should include quantitative and qualitative data that distinctly capture the intersection of social support, purpose, and character development. For example, participants should address whether individuals within their social networks influenced their formation of character (e.g., thoughts about fairness, equality, justice, etc.). Moreover, components of purpose in adolescent lives should be clarified. When asking adolescents about contribution behavior, interviewers should note the intention behind the actions rather than just the quantity or types of involvement. Adolescents who participate in community service because it is a requirement may have a different experience than those who participate based on an internal motivation to “do good.” Consequently, these two types of adolescents may translate these intentions into different trajectories of character development.

In addition, future research should have extensive training for interviewers. This omission is likely to have affected the quality of the interviews in this research. For example, Dominic alluded to helping his neighbor in the past, but stated that he no longer participated in community service during the time of the interview. However, there was no follow-up question by the interviewer that asked why he discontinued helping the neighbor. Given the lack of procedural training in place for interviewers in the current study, important aspects of the youth experience may have been lost due to interviewer inexperience in asking necessary follow-up questions to clarify answers.

Furthermore, these data were solely self-report accounts of social support, meaning in life, goal-directedness, contribution, and character. In order to

measure “true” levels of each variable within individuals, triangulated measurements should be used. For example, measures of contribution could be reported by family members in order to get a more accurate account. In the same regard, measures of character could be reported by peers in order to get accurate accounts of behavior as shown in the school community. Given the possible need to respond in a manner that promotes oneself in a more favorable light, participants may be inclined to inflate the reality of their behavior. Future research should include more objective reports from others that can triangulate with the self-report data in order to get more objective measures within the home, school, and society.

Despite the limitations, this research serves as a foundation to build an understanding of the importance of social support and purpose in the promotion of character development. Moreover, given that moral growth has positive implications for the progress of society, it speaks to the importance of continuing this line of research longitudinally. This dissertation begins to describe the importance of having research based on cognition (knowing the good), affect (desiring the good), and behavior (doing the good) in promoting character in adolescence. Social support, as a source of knowledge (i.e., knowing the good), was associated with character status. In addition, goal-directedness (i.e., desiring the good) and contribution (i.e. doing the good) were also associated with character. Although the present data set was limited by its cross-sectional nature, and thus cannot speak of the directionality of the relationship, it does lead to opening up the discussion regarding the relationship among social support,

purpose, and character development. It is therefore essential to incorporate all three components in future research.

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Footnotes

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²When data were collected between 2006 and 2007, the research using the measure of perceived social support was in press. It was subsequently published in 2008.

Table 1

The Six Character Virtues and 24 Character Strengths as defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004)

1. Courage
 - Authenticity
 - Bravery
 - Persistence
 - Zest
 2. Humanity
 - Kindness
 - Love
 - Social intelligence
 3. Justice
 - Fairness
 - Leadership
 - Teamwork
 4. Temperance
 - Forgiveness
 - Modesty
 - Prudence
 - Self-regulation
 5. Transcendence
 - Appreciation of beauty and excellence
 - Gratitude
 - Hope
 - Humor
 - Religiousness
 6. Wisdom and Knowledge
 - Creativity
 - Curiosity
 - Open-mindedness
 - Love of learning
-

Table 2

The Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education forwarded by the Character Education Partnership (CEP)

An Effective Character Education program:

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Principle 1 | Promotes core ethical values and supportive performance values as the foundation of good character. |
| Principle 2 | Defines "character" comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior. |
| Principle 3 | Uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development. |
| Principle 4 | Creates a caring school community. |
| Principle 5 | Provides students with opportunities for moral action. |
| Principle 6 | Includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed. |
| Principle 7 | Strives to foster students' self motivation. |
| Principle 8 | Engages the school staff as a learning and moral community that shares responsibility for character education and attempts to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students. |
| Principle 9 | Fosters shared moral leadership and long range support of the character education initiative. |
| Principle 10 | Engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort. |
| Principle 11 | Evaluates the character of the school, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character. |

Note: The principles in this table have been summarized from the CEP website, www.character.org.

Table 3

The four items judged by the author as theoretically relevant to the presence of meaning in life

Items

I believe that my life has a purpose.

I believe that there is a larger meaning to life.

I believe that there is a larger plan to life.

Do you believe life does not really have any higher meaning or purpose?

Table 4

The 26 items judged by the author as theoretically irrelevant to the presence of meaning in life (i.e., distractor items)

Items

I enjoy giving things or money to charity.

I enjoy sharing my things with other people.

How important is each of these things to you personally...

become a famous entertainer, athlete or performer?

make a lot of money?

find answers to life's "big questions" ("Do we have a soul?", "Is there life after death?")?

be admired for your physical appearance or looks?

be admired by others for your accomplishments?

I consider myself a religious person.

I consider myself a spiritual person.

I consider myself spiritual, but not necessarily religious.

I feel that on a higher level all of us share a common bond.

Although individual people may be difficult, I generally feel an emotional bond with all of humanity.

I believe that all of life is interconnected.

I feel that on some level my life is intimately tied to all of humankind.

Table 4 (Continued)

Do you believe in...

the existence of a Universal Spirit of Universal Life?

there will be a Judgment Day when God will reward some and punish others?

God dwells within you?

we are living in the “End Times” or some other dark period in human history?

human beings have “souls” or some spiritual essence or spiritual nature?

people as a whole are basically sinful

there is a spiritual dimension of the universe that transcends human reason?

human beings control their own destinies?

there is a spiritual world that affects our life in this world?

people as a whole are basically good?

there is only matter and the material world; There is no “spirit” or “spiritual world?”

helping others is an important part of your religion?

Table 5

The three items judged as theoretically relevant to the presence of meaning in life by 80% or more of the expert raters as well as the one item judged as theoretically relevant by the author (that did not meet the 80% criteria) and the percent agreement among them

Items	Agreement
I believe that my life has a purpose.	100%
I believe that there is a larger meaning to life.	100%
Do you believe life does not really have any higher meaning or purpose?	90%
I believe that there is a larger plan to life.	60%

Table 6

Factor loadings based on a principal component analysis for four items related to presence of meaning in life (n = 430)

Item	Original Subscale Item Name	Component Loading
		Presence of Meaning in Life
1	I believe that my life has a purpose.	.73
2	I believe that there is a larger meaning to life.	.86
3	Do you believe life does not really have any higher meaning or purpose?	.69
4	I believe that there is a larger plan to life.	.83

Table 7

Percentage of variable non-response for each variable

	% Missing Data
Demographics	
Sex	0.00%
Age (in years)	0.00%
Mother's Education	22.09%
Religion	3.26%
Social Support	
Familial Social Support	5.12%
Peer Social Support	9.30%
Religious Social Support	13.26%
Purpose Component	
Presence of Meaning in Life	10.93%
Outcome Variable	
Character Status	3.72%

Table 8

Correlations, means, and standard deviations among character status, meaning in life, social support, and demographic characteristics (n = 430)

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	Mean	SD
1. Character	.47***	.13**	.04	.33***	-.01	.14**	.20***	-.07	.06	.07	.06	.09	-.11*	3.43	0.86
2. Presence of Meaning	--	.10	.03	.40***	-.13*	.10*	-.07	.08	.18**	.01	.04	.14*	-.33***	-0.01	0.79
3. Family Support	--	--	.18***	.37***	-.03	-.04	-.05	.06	.05	.09	-.02	.04	-.17**	3.41	1.45
4. Peer Support	--	--	--	.13*	-.05	-.04	.05	.03	.09	-.07	.02	.04	-.05	1.46	0.55
5. Religious Support	--	--	--	--	-.17**	-.08	-.07	.08	.16**	.09	.07	.15**	-.44***	1.73	1.45
6. Age	--	--	--	--	--	-.02	.15**	-.18**	-.08	.12*	-.02	-.02	.21***	15.83	2.13
7. Sex****	--	--	--	--	--	--	.04	.14**	-.10*	-.05	-.02	-.07	-.04	--	--
8. Mother's Education	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	-.11	-.21***	.22***	-.05	-.15*	.22***	7.01	2.22
9. R₁	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
10. R₂	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
11. R₃	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
12. R₄	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
13. R₅	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
14. R₆	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Note: R₁ = Catholic; R₂ = Christian; R₃ = Jewish; R₄ = Other; R₅ = Multiple; R₆ = Non-Religious

Key: * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

****0 = Male; 1 = Female. There were 54% males in the sample.

Table 9

Parameter estimates with corresponding standard errors, approximate p-values, and R² statistics for hierarchical regression models of the relationship between character status and age, sex, mother's education, religion, social support, and presence of meaning in life (n = 430)

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5
<i>Demography</i>					
Intercept	2.68(.40) ^{***}	2.49(.41) ^{***}	2.47(.42) ^{***}	2.37(.40) ^{***}	2.60(.37) ^{***}
Sex (0=male)	.23(.08) ^{**}	.24(.08) ^{**}	.24(.08) ^{**}	.29(.08) ^{***}	.18(.08) [*]
Age (in years)	-.01(.02) ^{**}	-.01(.02)	-.01(.02)	.00(.02)	.01(.02)
Mother's Education	.07(.02) ^{**}	.07(.02) ^{**}	.07(.02) ^{**}	.07(.02) ^{**}	.07(.02) ^{***}
Catholic	.22(.14)	.17(.14)	.17(.14)	-.09(.14)	-.22(.13)
Christian	.43(.14) ^{**}	.38(.14) ^{**}	.38(.14) ^{**}	.10(.15)	-.11(.14)
Jewish	.44(.22) [*]	.36(.22)	.37(.22)	.05(.22)	-.04(.20)
Other	.46(.19) [*]	.43(.19) [*]	.42(.19) [*]	.15(.19)	-.03(.18)
Multiple	.55(.26) [*]	.52(.25) [*]	.53(.26) [*]	.30(.26)	.32(.23)
<i>Social Support</i>					
Family Support		.07(.03) [*]	.07(.03) [*]	.02(.03)	.03(.03)
Peer Support			.02(.08)	-.02(.08)	.01(.07)
Religious Support				.18(.03) ^{***}	.11(.03) ^{**}
<i>Purpose</i>					
Presence of Meaning					.44(.06) ^{***}
R²	0.08	0.10	0.10	0.16	0.29

Key: ^{*}p<.05; ^{**}p<.01; ^{***}p<.001

Appendix A

Items used in the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006)

Steger et al. (2006) used 10 items, shown below, to measure meaning in life. The presence of meaning in life is associated with Items 1, 4, 5, 6, and 9 (which is reverse coded). The search for meaning in life is associated with Items 2, 3, 7, 8, and 10. The items are coded on a seven-point Likert scale, with “1” being equal to “Absolutely untrue,” and “7” being equal to “Absolutely true.” The items are:

1. I understand my life’s meaning.
 2. I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful.
 3. I am always looking to find my life’s purpose.
 4. My life has a clear sense of purpose.
 5. I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful.
 6. I have discovered a satisfying life purpose.
 7. I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant.
 8. I am always seeking a purpose or mission for my life.
 9. My life has no clear purpose.
 10. I am searching for meaning in my life.
-