Reflections on Developmental Growth and Well-Being:  
A Response to Paul T.P. Wong's Editorial: *Existential Psychology for the 21st Century*  
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I was heartened by Paul Wong's (2004) editorial, *Existential Psychology for the 21st Century*. It addressed issues concerning the human condition which have been incorporated into my work and teaching for many years. Foremost, it provides a framework for these topics of long standing to be relevant to our current social needs in this new century. My three comments focus on the content of relevant questions, framing these questions in a developmental context, and embedding the narrative process within quantitative analysis.

First, which questions are pressing ones to study? Paul's (2004) question, "How do we function fully, develop our full potential?" (p. 1) has captured my attention. I would like to spotlight two areas in particular: personal well-being and forgiveness via empathy. a) The refreshing aspect of positive psychology is that it goes beyond the absence of pathology to the presence of something more. Carol Ryff's work on subjective well-being is quite interesting. She and her colleagues make the distinction between hedonic well-being and the Aristotelian concept of eudaimonic well-being. Within the purview of eudaimonic well-being she discusses the intriguing aspect of flourishing. I find that this idea has permeated my thinking. As I am typing this response, I answered a phone call from a student. In closing the conversation, I mentioned to her that in my recent observations of her she seems to be flourishing. As I hung up the phone, I asked myself what I specifically meant by saying that she is "flourishing." This seems to be an important question regarding well-being that we should be studying, beyond the definitional level. b) Then, my colleague and I are looking at a retrospective type of understanding that we are calling deferred empathy (Bruun & Wholeben, 2002). We are finding that people who have empathy for a person later (following triggering events) report a number of personal benefits. Some participants report a connection to forgiveness in this process. Worthington (1997) has developed a pyramid model of forgiveness that includes empathy as an intermediary process. When Paul Wong (2004) asks, "How can we change the conditions that perpetuate human misery and injustice?" (p. 1), the study of empathy and forgiveness seem paramount. This topic seems never more timely than in a world beset by ethnic and religious hatreds, in which political and personal revenge are rampant.

Second, it seems that the existential dimensions we are exploring need to be framed within a developmental context. There is substantial evidence that values, attitudes, sensitivities, behaviours, and aspects of personality can change throughout adulthood. As one example, we are finding that although young and older adults experience episodes of deferred empathy, they do so for different reasons. Tolerance, understanding, and poignancy often seem to increase with age. It is important to focus on the dynamic aspects of the processes we study.

Finally, I certainly agree with Brent Slife (2004) that the emphasis on "real people in concrete situations" (p. 1) is a very hopeful direction. We need to be talking to
specific individuals about their specific lives. There is truth in the idea that the more personal the message, often the more universal the meaning. There is great richness in the personal narratives that individuals construct to give meaning to their experiences. The existential issues that we seek to understand are so complex that the narrative process, at some level, seems to be an essential component in gathering and interpreting information. Telling one's life story is so powerful that it not only contributes to research information but it also has a shaping effect on the individual, adding a psychotherapeutic dimension.

I am heartened and encouraged by the potential forum that the IJEPP may provide for these issues and the many more that have been submitted in the fine responses that I have read.

References