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Character Strengths of Ninth Grade Students in Accelerated Curricula: A Mixed-Methods Investigation

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Character Strengths of Ninth Grade Students in Accelerated Curricula:

A Mixed-Methods Investigation

by

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ABSTRACT

Students in accelerated curricula tend to have greater stress when compared to students in general education (Suldo, Shaunessy, & Hardesty, 2008). It is important for stakeholders to be able to help these students reach their goals and attain happiness. One potential method to help these students is to attend to their character strengths. People who effectively utilize their character strengths have achieved numerous positive outcomes including greater levels of well-being, self-esteem, and positive affect (Proctor, Malby, & Linley, 2011; Quinlan, Swain, Cameron, & Vella-Brodrick, 2014; Wood, Linley, Maltby, Kashan, & Hurling, 2011). Unfortunately, there is a lack of research on students' strengths, and there is no research looking specifically at the strengths of students in accelerated curricula. This study addressed this gap in the literature by examining the character strengths of students in accelerated curricula. Participants included 253 ninth-grade students in accelerated curricula, specifically enrolled in Advanced Placement (AP) classes or a pre-International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma program. A mixed-method design was utilized. For the quantitative part of the study, the researcher looked at the most frequent self-identified character strengths of all the participants and examined if the endorsed strengths differed for subgroups of students based on ethnicity, academic program, academic risk, or emotional risk. The most prevalent strength was humor, followed by love, creativity, kindness and curiosity. More Asian students identified with love of learning compared to students from other ethnic groups, and more White students identified with social intelligence. Across program, more AP students identified with creativity and fairness, and more IB students identified with self-regulation and kindness. In regard to risk status, more students without

academic risk identified with persistence/perseverance. More students without emotional risk identified with creativity, persistence/perseverance, leadership, and teamwork, whereas more students with emotional risk identified with love, hope, and humor. For the qualitative part of the study, the researcher examined a subset of 121 participants who participated in a selective intervention because they were identified as demonstrating early signs of academic or emotional risk. The researcher examined how these students described their behaviors and actions in a way that illustrated their strengths. The qualitative analyses revealed three main themes: Manifestation, Importance, and Origination. This thesis can assist educators understand how high-achieving students describe and view their character strengths as meaningful. The rich descriptions of each character strength can be useful for educators in targeting character strengths in students and creating strengths-based interventions to increase students' happiness and overall flourishing, according to the PERMA framework (which is made up of **p**ositive emotions, **e**ngagement, **r**elationships, **m**eaning, and **a**ccomplishment). Further research should be conducted on why strengths differ between AP and IB students, as those findings may have implications for those who participate and ultimately succeed in these rigorous programs.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Students face many stressors throughout their day to day life as they approach adulthood. Students in accelerated curricula, such as those who are in Advanced Placement (AP) classes or the International Baccalaureate (IB) program, are more likely to have increased stress than those not in accelerated curricula (Suldo, Shaunessy, & Hardesty, 2008). Parents, teachers, and other stakeholders often desire to help these students with challenges in the best possible way, so that the students successfully complete high school and are able to follow whatever possible endeavors they may decide to pursue.

One way to help students is by drawing attention to character strengths. Character strengths were originally studied by Peterson and Seligman (2004) who looked at character traits and advanced a common vocabulary of traits across all humans that explained what made up good character. They identified 24 character strengths, classified according to the Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Character Strengths.

Character strengths are different than talents in several ways. On a very basic level, a person can practice a talent, such as being skilled in an instrument, which could lead to concrete positive outcomes. In theory, using a character strength may or may not lead to any concrete outcomes but can lead to feelings of greater well-being and fulfillment. Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, and Worrell (2011) described how talents often have developmental trajectories in which they can begin, peak, and finish. People with tale1nts tend to be noticed by mentors and then these areas are recognized and developed. Subotnik et al. (2011) proposed a process of

talent development in which being gifted in a specific area is first evaluated in relation to other people, first by looking at potential, then actual achievement, and then finally eminence. This talent or ability goes through phases of being developed from competency, to expertise, andfinally into eminence. Moving across these phases can be affected by several factors including mentoring, enrichment, support, specific mind-sets, and motivation. In contrast to talents, Peterson and Seligman (2004) proposed ten specific criteria for character strengths (described in Chapter II). Character strengths fall under the umbrella of positive psychology, which is a branch of psychology that takes the lens of trying to understand what causes humans to thrive and flourish. Psychologists then attempt to use this gathered knowledge to help others improve their well-being. This thesis focused on character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and not talents (Subotnik et al., 2011).

Alongside character strengths, another important part of positive psychology is looking at what leads people to be happy or to flourish. Flourishing includes both feeling and doing good (Huppert & So, 2013). One model that explores how to achieve a state of flourishing is the PERMA Well-Being Model (Seligman, 2011), which involves five elements: **P**ositive Emotions, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, Purpose and **M**eaning, and **A**ccomplishments. According to Seligman, using character strengths makes up the foundation for each of these five elements. Character strengths are purported to lead to increased well-being in all of the areas of the PERMA model. It could be hypothesized that character strengths use could offset some of the increased stress and risk for psychopathology experienced by AP and IB students.

While there is a lot of research on character strengths in adult populations, there is a lack of information on youth's strengths. In addition, there is no research looking specifically at the strengths of students in accelerated curricula. This thesis explored strengths among this

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population in order to be able to properly direct strengths-based interventions towards students in accelerated curricula. Helping students achieve a state of flourishing is the desired outcome for all students.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to add to the knowledge base on students in accelerated curricula in the United States. A perception among educators is that students who are high achieving, and subsequently are most likely doing well in school do not need additional support. However, research shows that some of these students are likely to have either academic or emotional challenges. Students enrolled in AP and IB classes are at risk for experiencing greater stress than those not in these classes and also have more stressors that correlate with lower life satisfaction (Suldo, Shaffer, & Shaunessy, 2008). In other words, these students face stressors just as do non-high achieving students. One possible target for helping adolescents facing stressors inherent to these curricular programs is through the use of strengths-based interventions and helping students understand their strengths. This can help students act in accordance with their strengths which might lead to many positive outcomes including greater well-being, classroom cohesiveness, greater self-esteem, and greater positive affect (Proctor, Maltby, & Linley, 2011; Quinlan, Swain, Cameron, & Vella-Brodrick, 2014; Wood, Linley, Maltby, Kashdan, & Hurling, 2011). There is a lack of research that addresses the main strengths of students in AP and IB classes and a lack of information on how these students define their strengths. This study added to the literature by examining the strengths of adolescents in AP and IB classes both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The researcher examined the rank order of character strengths of ninth-grade students in accelerated curricula who self-identified their character strengths during the Advanced Coping

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and Engagement (ACE) Program, a 12-week universal social-emotional learning program, that was integrated into their classes for a semester. This program contained twelve modules; each module tackled ways for students in accelerated curricula to deal with stress, engage at school, foster eustress, or address their personal goals. Character strengths were introduced and explained in Module 12. These character strengths were then compared across different groups defined by ethnicity, enrollment in AP and IB programs, and whether the student was struggling academically, emotionally, or in both areas.

Then, the researcher took a qualitative lens and analyzed how these students defined their character strengths and how they put them to use. These data were gathered from Motivation, Assessment, and Planning (MAP) meetings that were conducted by interventionists who met specifically with students who were struggling in their classes or who met certain cutoffs for having high stress or low engagement. Motivational Interviewing, as a therapeutic technique, is client-centered and goal-oriented in order to result in behavior change in the individual (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). This form of counseling has four main parts to it: Engage, Focus, Evoke, and Plan. Throughout these four steps, the coach worked alongside the student to think about long term goals, evoke change talk, and create an action plan to reach success in a specific area. Within the Engage and Evoke parts of the sessions, the students were asked about their strengths and values. The researcher examined the Engage part of the session to develop common themes across participants in regard to character strengths to attempt to increase the knowledge base about character strengths.

Definition of Key Terms

     Strength. Character strengths are those conceptualized by the Values in Action Project (VIA; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These are traits that are positive and are reflected in

thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. There are 24 character strengths classified into six virtues. According to researchers, using strengths should contribute to having more meaningful work and contribute to a plethora of positive outcomes according to the PERMA well-being framework (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Harzer & Ruch, 2012; Peterson, Park, & Seligman 2006).

This researcher considered a student's signature strengths to be the top 5 strengths he or she self-identified in the Module 12 strengths-spotting activity. See Appendix B for the specific worksheet student participants used to identify their strengths.

High-achieving. High-achieving refers to a student enrolled in either Advanced Placement (AP) courses or International Baccalaureate (IB) programs, which are types of accelerated curricula often conceptualized as involving college-level coursework. Typically, a student must meet certain requirements and keep a high-grade point average in order to enter and remain in the program, necessitating high achievement for entry and retention.

At-risk. At-risk refers to students enrolled in either AP or IB classes who do not meet pre-specified levels of stress, engagement, or academic performance. Specifically, students with signs of emotional risk (elevated stress) had Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen, Kamarack, & Mermelstein, 1983) scores > 3.6. For the PSS scale, the range was from 1-5 with a 3 being "sometimes" and a 4 being "fairly often". Students with signs of emotional risk (low school satisfaction [emotional engagement]) had Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS; Huebner, 1994) score of <3.4. For the MSLSS scale, the range was from 1 to 6, with 1 being *strongly disagree* to 3 being *mildly disagree* in terms of feeling positive about school, whereas a 4 reflected *mildly agree* and 6 *strongly agree* in terms of feeling positively about school.

Students with signs of academic risk (subpar academic performance) were identified

based on the first semester GPA and overall grade earned in their AP Human Geography class or their IB Biology class. Students were placed into two academic risk groups, being "at-risk academically," which was defined by an overall unweighted GPA from fall semester of <3.0 or a grade of a C, D, or F in the AP or IB course, or "not at-risk academically" which was a GPA ≥ 3.0 and grade of A or B in the AP or IB course. These cut points are based on expected levels of achievement for freshman in accelerated curricula.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this thesis:

1. What are the most frequent self-identified strengths of ninth-grade students in Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate programs?

2. To what extent, if any, do the most frequently endorsed strengths differ for subgroups of students in Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate programs including:

   a) Ethnic/ racial groups?

   b) Academic program (AP or IB)?

   c) Academic risk (vs. no academic risk?)

   d) Emotional risk (vs. no emotional risk?)

3. How do students in Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate classes who are at risk academically or emotionally describe their behaviors and actions in a way that illustrates their strengths?

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview of Literature Review

This chapter begins with an overview of students in accelerated curricula. After establishing the context, the level of academic and emotional well-being of students who partake in accelerated curricula is discussed. Despite research that shows that these students tend to perform well in school, the fact that these students have increased stress leads to the necessity of examining this unique population from different angles such as understanding their strengths. Subsequently, the field of positive psychology and the Values in Action (VIA) classification of Strengths and Virtues are examined, and research demonstrating the positive outcomes of using strengths is reviewed. The PERMA Well-Being Model (Seligman, 2011) is applied in order to examine how strengths usage can be the conduit for all five elements of PERMA: Positive Engagement, Emotions, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. Related research that looks at strengths of students, both normative and slightly higher achieving (but outside of the United States) is explored. This researcher asserts that understanding which strengths are more prevalent among students in accelerated curricula, seeing how these students describe their strengths, and understanding how students apply value to their strengths, is beneficial in expanding the knowledge base of positive education (an approach to education based on well-being). This knowledge can be integrated within a PERMA framework in order for all students, including those not at-risk and those at-risk, to achieve a state of "*flourishing.*"

High-Achieving Students. It is important to focus on all types of high school students, including high achieving students. There are more and more students enrolling in college-level

courses each year. The number of high school students who took an AP class increased by over 70% over the last ten years (College Board, 2017). Furthermore, the number of IB programs has increased by 39.3% over the last 5 years (IBO, 2019b). The following is an overview of two high school academic curricula (Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate) that allow high-achieving students access to accelerated curricula, often to achieve college credit or to prepare for college.

Advanced Placement (AP). According to the 2017 AP Program Summary report, over 170,000 9th grade students (over 2 million students overall) took an AP class in over 34 different subjects (College Board, 2017). Typically, students can choose which and how many AP classes to take, and then can be awarded college credit for achieving a certain score on the final test. The final test is a standardized test scored on a five-point scale. Typically, college credit is awarded for students who achieve a three or higher on the exam, but this can vary based on the university. One purpose of taking an AP class is to allow students to take more challenging coursework which would prepare them for tackling college level classes. In addition, taking AP classes leads to more favorable college admissions and also offers financial benefits (such as being more likely to complete a college degree on time; Hargrove, Godin, & Dodd, 2008). As well, students gain study skills that are vital for college and career success (College Board, 2014).

International Baccalaureate (IB). IB is a program that promotes intercultural understanding and attempts to further the inquiry, knowledge, and care in young people to help create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect (IBO, 2019d). The program focuses on teaching students how to think critically and go in depth across multiple subject areas. Within the IB program, many courses have an end of course exam. Students are oftentimes able to earn college credit by scoring a four or higher on the end of

course exam and completing the diploma (IBO, 2019a). The IB program is only offered for 11th and 12th graders, however many schools allow 9th and 10th grade students the ability to take part in a curriculum to prepare students for the IB program (Suldo et al., 2008). Since May 2017, there are over 6258 IB programs offered world-wide. Between 2012 and 2017, IB programs grew over 39.3% (IBO, 2019b).

AP and IB students' academic and emotional well-being. AP and IB programs are rigorous accelerated curricula. Suldo and colleagues (2008) found that high school students in the IB program had more stress than students in general curricula. Suldo and Shaunessy-Dedrick (2013) later confirmed that both AP and IB students also had increased stress levels. Another study found that students in IB programs reported more symptoms of psychopathology, when they experienced higher levels of perceived stress (Suldo, Shaunessy, Thalji, Michalowski, & Shaffer, 2009). That said, across the literature, there are contradictory findings in terms of the mental health functioning of these students. Suldo and Shaunessy-Dedrick (2013) found that in spite of the increased levels of stress, students in accelerated curricula had less psychopathology lower levels of anxiety, and greater academic functioning, when compared to students in general curricula. In fact, their overall psychological and academic functioning, respectively, was equal to or better than students not in AP or IB programs. Identifying protective factors could help explain the paradoxical findings of increased stress coupled with positive functioning of these students in accelerated curricula.

Protective factors. The variance in the differential mental health outcomes could be due to a number of different factors. Suldo et al. (2008) found that different coping styles attributed to nearly one third of the differences in students' life satisfaction. Certain coping strategies (such as having more anger) appeared to lead to higher levels of stress (Suldo et al., 2008). Suldo,

Shaunessy-Dedrick, Ferron, and Dedrick (2018) found that approach (problem-focused) coping styles were associated with more positive levels of mental health functioning. In addition, they found that among other factors, higher levels of affective engagement (feeling more positively at school) predicted positive mental health outcomes in these students. Given that students in accelerated curricula have the potential to do well academically, it is important to investigate more fully how certain factors could lead to some students in AP and IB programs experiencing higher or lower levels of academic or social-emotional functioning.

One factor that is believed to increase engagement is the use of character strengths (Wesson & Boniwell, 2007). Flow, which is a state of being intensely engaged in an activity, is believed to occur when one's skills are being used to the fullest extent and there is a high level of challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992). Identifying and using strengths is believed to help lead to a person experiencing more flow. This is hypothesized to be because using strengths leads to a person perceiving their skills at a higher level in regard to the challenge which may facilitate flow (Wesson & Boniwell, 2007). Therefore, looking at character strengths could have implications for understanding the optimal functioning of students in accelerated curricula. Endorsing particular character strengths and using character strengths leads to increased well-being (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006; Proctor, Maltby, & Linley, 2011). Certain character strengths classified under temperance (i.e., self-regulation, perseverance), transcendence (i.e., hope, zest, humor), and interpersonal (i.e., kindness, teamwork, bravery) are shown to negatively relate to psychiatric symptoms (Shoshani & Slone, 2016) and identifying character strengths led to greater positive affect among people with early psychosis (Sims, Barker, Price, & Fornells-Ambrojo, 2015).

As demonstrated by these studies with other populations, it is possible that the differential

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use of character strengths or having different patterns of character strengths could modify levels of positive mental health experienced by AP and IB students. Investigating character strengths of high-achieving students is valuable because there is a lack of information on whether there are any patterns in the character strengths displayed by these students. It is possible that students who seek out accelerated coursework are more likely to have certain character strengths (such as "love of learning" or "curiosity") as their top character strengths. It could also be valuable to see how these students conceptualize using their strengths in order to reach their goals. More research is needed in order to see which character strengths are more prevalent in students in accelerated curricula, as well as differences in character strengths across students enrolled in AP and IB who are doing well versus those who are more at risk academically or emotionally. Doing so may illuminate whether character strengths could be a factor associated with success among this population of students.

Character Strengths and Virtues

Traditionally, psychologists have focused on deficit-based approaches in order to understand mental health pathologies. This is evident in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD). However, at least since the early 2000s, psychologists have called for opening up the field to include positive psychology and to focus on positive individual traits, positive subjective experiences, and institutions that lend themselves to positive experiences (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology aims to help understand what causes certain humans to thrive and flourish and to use that knowledge to help others. It is an umbrella term for understanding what makes life worthwhile.

In 2004, Peterson and Seligman created a classification of positive individual traits by

exploring what creates good character, which was one of the original goals of the field of positive psychology. This three-year project involved studying character traits and resulted in establishing a common vocabulary that could be explored both empirically and also be used in clinical settings. This came to be known as the VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Criteria for strengths. Ten criteria were developed to explain what constituted a character strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The first criterion is that "a strength contributes to various fulfillments that constitute the good life, for oneself and for others. Although strengths and virtues determine how an individual copes with adversity, our focus is on how they fulfill an individual" (p. 17). An important note is that a strength <u>contributes to fulfillment but does not necessarily lead to fulfillment</u>, meaning that using a strength makes up one aspect of feeling fulfilled. The authors explained their beliefs that people have signature strengths, which are "strengths of character that a person owns, celebrates, and frequently exercises" (p. 18). Using signature strengths can lead to greater feelings of fulfillment and is linked to a person's identity.

The second criterion is that "although strengths can and do produce desirable outcomes, each strength is <u>morally valued in its own right</u>, even in the absence of obvious beneficial outcomes" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 19). This means that each strength is valued for what it is because it ultimately leads to good character, regardless of whether it leads to other outcomes. An important distinction is made between strengths, talents, and abilities because strengths are involved in the moral domain and talents seem to be more desired for their concrete consequences (such as leading to money or wealth) than are strengths. Subotnik et al. (2011) described talents as often having a specific trajectory in which they can begin, peak, and finish. This description helps exemplify how talents and strengths differ because character strengths can

be used throughout one's life and should not go through a developmental trajectory in the same way, in terms of reaching an endpoint or exhausting their potential for expression.

The third criterion is that "the display of a strength by one person <u>does not diminish other people</u> in the vicinity by its exercise" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 21). The use of strengths makes a non-zero-sum game (Wright, 1999) because it is possible for everyone to act in concordance with their strengths and virtues.

The fourth criterion states that "being able to phrase the "opposite" of a putative strength in a felicitous way counts against regarding it as a character strength" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 22). The idea behind this fourth criterion is that the <u>antonym for a given character strength should be negative</u>. For example, one possible antonym for honesty is tact, because tact involves knowing what to say in order to avoid giving offence (which does not fit well with being honest), however the opposite of tact is more likely rudeness than honesty. Therefore, honesty fits the criteria. It should be difficult to identify an antonym of a character strength in a more desirable manner.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) describe the fifth criterion as:

a strength needs to manifest in the range of an individual's behavior—thoughts feelings, and/or actions—in such a way that it can be assessed. It should be <u>trait-like</u> in the sense of having a degree of generality across situations and stability across time. (p. 23)

Strengths vary in terms of their ability to be tonic (always there, such as kindness) or phasic (occasionally present depending on the situation, such as bravery).

The sixth criterion is that "the strength is <u>distinct from other positive traits in the classification</u> and cannot be decomposed into them" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 24). What this means is that if a given strength appears to be missing from the classification, it is most

likely because it is a blend of other strengths already included. For instance, the authors explain that "tolerance" is not included because it is a blend of the strengths of open-mindedness and fairness.

The seventh criterion is that "a character strength is embodied in consensual paragons" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 23). In other words, for each strength, there must be <u>models that are real or mythical</u>. People should be able to immediately think of an example of a real or mythical person who embodies a certain strength, because recognition is given to people who display their main strengths.

The eighth criterion is that for some, but not all strengths, there exists "<u>prodigies with respect to the strength</u>" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 25). In other words, it is possible that there are children who display an exceptional amount of a certain strength, such as bravery or fairness. Unfortunately, there is only anecdotal evidence to support this at the moment.

The ninth criterion is "the existence of <u>people who show—selectively—the total absence of a given strength</u>" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 26). In other words, there are some individuals who can be completely lacking in a certain strength. This contributes to the idea of the plurality of character, meaning that within a given person, he or she can have certain character strengths and not have others.

The final criterion is based on Erikson's (1963) discussion of psychosocial stages and their accompanying virtues, in that "the <u>larger society provides institutions and associated rituals for cultivating strengths</u> and virtues and then for sustaining their practice" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 27). The idea is that certain settings can lead to the development of certain strengths (for instance, a student being on a high school student council leading to increases in that student's strength of leadership). This criterion also revisited tonic and phasic strengths, by explaining that

tonic strengths are those that are always displayed unless there is not a good reason to do so. Phasic strengths change depending on the specific demands of a certain situation. For instance, a student might only display open-mindedness during times of making a difficult decision.

The character strengths that were identified based on these 10 criteria are presented in Table 1. Park and Peterson (2006) created a self-report measure of strengths using this taxonomy. This measure is now available online in forms appropriate for adults and youth at viacharacter.org and authentichappiness.org.

Heart and mind strengths. The 24 character strengths can be grouped into six virtues: Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence. Peterson (2006) suggested that character strengths can also make up different dimensions where along the x-axis there are strengths directed toward oneself (which include strengths such as learning, curiosity, and social intelligence) and on the other side of the x-axis there are strengths that are more others-focused (such as forgiveness, fairness, teamwork). Along the y-axis there are strengths of the heart (which include strengths that make up emotional expression such as gratitude, love, humor) and strengths of the mind (which involve learning, prudence, and perseverance). This classification was further explored by Haridas, Bhullar, and Dunstan (2017) who investigated the different overlaps of the Peterson (2006) dimensions and whether any combinations were associated with superior mental health. A sample of 595 Australian adults completed measures assessing character strengths, subjective well-being, life functioning, and depressive symptomatology. The researchers used six classifications of strengths: heart, mind, heart/self-focused, heart/others-focused, mind/self-focused, and mind/others-focused. They found that adults either displayed one of four profiles: low on both mind and heart, high on mind but low on heart, high on heart but low on mind, or high on both heart and mind.

Table 1. *VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues*

Virtue	Strength	Description (Features of the Character Strength)
Wisdom and Knowledge	Creativity	Thinks of new ways to do things; has unique ideas or actions
	Curiosity	Interested in exploring and discovering things; asks a lot of questions
	Love of learning	Likes to become an expert in things; enjoys reading, school, and other chances to learn new information and skills
	Judgement/Open-mindedness	Thinks things through from all angles; looks for evidence; does not jump to conclusions
	Perspective	Sees both sides of a story; offers good advice to other people
Courage	Honesty/Authenticity	Tells the truth; a "real" person who is down to earth and genuine
	Bravery	Speaks up for what is right; faces challenges head-on
	Persistence/Perseverance	Completes tasks; focused and hard-working
	Zest	Energetic; committed; full of excitement for life
Humanity	Kindness	Generous; does favors and good deeds for other people
	Love	Cares and shares with other people; values close relationships
	Social Intelligence	Senses thoughts and feelings of self and other people; fits in with different groups while making others feel at ease
Justice	Fairness	Treats all people the same; gives everyone a chance without judging others harshly
	Leadership	Organizes group activities; encourages other people to make sure things get done and that everyone feels included
	Teamwork	Works well with other people; loyal to the group; does own share of work so the team succeeds
Temperance	Forgiveness	Gives people a second chance after they do something wrong; believes in mercy not revenge
	Humility/ Modesty	Lets achievements speak for themselves; does not seek attention, brag, or feel they are better than everyone else
	Prudence	Makes choices carefully; avoids doing things that they might later wish to take back
	Self-regulation	In control of their emotions, desires, and behaviors
Transcendence	Appreciation of beauty & excellence	Notices and is in awe of beautiful and special things in the world, such as in nature, art, science, and skilled performances
	Gratitude	Gives thanks for good things that happen; does not take things for granted
	Hope	Believes that good things will happen in the future; works hard to achieve those goals
	Humor	Likes to laugh, tease, and make other people smile
	Spirituality	Believes in a higher purpose and meaning of the universe; may be religious

Note. Data for classification system from Park and Peterson (2006). Table reprinted from *Promoting Student Happiness: Positive Psychology Interventions in Schools* by Shannon M. Suldo (2016) The Guilford Press.

This demonstrates that many combinations of character strengths can occur within people and that they are not restricted to a certain axis. With factor analysis, the researchers were able to

see that individuals tended to lean alongside either heart or mind strengths. However, between strengths of the self and other-focused strengths, this dimension appeared to be more fluid and may be more context dependent. In terms of mental health functioning, researchers found that heart strengths predicted better mental health than mind strengths alone. Those high on heart strengths but low on mind strengths and those high on both heart and mind strengths displayed similar levels of positive affect, life satisfaction, and lower levels of depressive symptoms when compared to those low on heart strengths. This indicates that for mental health functioning, having strengths of the heart could be as useful as having both strengths of the heart and mind.

Regarding youth, Park and Peterson (2006) had 736 students complete the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SLSS; Huebner, 1991) and the VIA-Youth online. Researchers found that strengths of the heart (e.g., hope, love, gratitude, zest) were consistently related to happiness, in direct contrast with strengths of the mind. Fostering heart strengths through the use of positive psychology interventions or strengths-based interventions could lead to greater resilience for both children and adults.

Other ways of conceptualizing strengths. As described above, character strengths can be classified according to virtues or can be seen as being heart or mind strengths, However, there are other ways to look at strengths. Friedlan, Littman-Ovadia, and Niemiec (2016) discussed an overuse and underuse view of character strengths. Researchers had 238 participants between the ages of 19-80 years of age complete a number of scales assessing life satisfaction, flourishing, depression, and social anxiety. Participants also completed a questionnaire that was designed specifically for the study that assessed strengths optimal use, underuse, and overuse. Results indicated that those who used their character strengths optimally tended to flourish and had greater subjective well-being. Interestingly, participants who over or underused their character

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strengths had more depressive symptoms, with underusing a strength having more relationships with negative outcomes than overuse. The specific underuse and overuse of the strength of social intelligence, the underuse of self-regulation, the overuse of humility, and the underuse of zest, were found to be related to social anxiety, indicating that certain strengths that were used more or less frequently could lead to negative outcomes. This study demonstrated that certain strengths usage could lead to psychopathology and could be classified in a way similar to the DSM.

Historically, instead of trying to increase a person's signature strengths (or their top five strengths), Aristotle vouched for people to try to find a mean of character strengths. Aristotle believed that finding a perfect balance of a strength was a virtue while having too much or too little of a strength was a vice, which was echoed in Friedlan and colleagues' (2016) description of underuse and overuse of a strength. Allan (2015) further expanded on this by stating that finding balance among character strengths could be a strong predictor of well-being. Working to perfect one single strength could lead to it being in excess, which could lead to decreased benefits of that strength. Allan (2015) attempted to see if agreement or 'balance' among certain character strengths could lead to more meaning in life. The researcher found that the pairs of strengths of honesty and kindness, love and social intelligence, and hope and gratitude, all led to greater meaning in life when in agreement and when less discrepant with each other. These findings support the idea that finding balance among character strengths might be more beneficial than developing only one's signature character strengths. An exception to these findings was found between the pair of bravery and fairness. For this pair, having more bravery than fairness was associated specifically with greater meaning in life, which further supports the idea that as how certain character strengths lead to greater life satisfaction (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), certain character strengths may specifically lead to greater meaning in life.

In addition to looking at the balance of certain strengths and looking at overuse and underuse, strengths can also be distinctly classified into different virtues. McGrath, Greenberg, and Hall-Simmonds (2017) examined a three-factor model of virtues, in which the 24 strengths could be classified into the virtues of inquisitiveness, self-control, and caring. This three-factor model has been supported by researchers in the field of character education where having good character is related to knowing, loving, and doing 'good' (Ryan & Bohlin, 2003). These factors have also been seen in the classification of the head, heart, and hand, which involves being intellectual, being interpersonal, or being intrapersonal in one's character (Lickona, 2009). McGrath et al. (2017) found support for the three-factor model across 12 distinct samples that used a measure from the VIA classification system. In addition, they found that all three virtues were highly correlated with each other but failed to achieve significance in regard to overlap with personality domains. The researchers justified this by suggesting that it is not enough to look at virtues as a character description because virtues are more than just skill or personality. They are abstract principles that lead to optimal functioning.

Finally, a four-dimensional model was proposed by Neto, Neto, and Furnham (2014). Researchers had 283 Portuguese students between the ages of 12 and 20 complete measures of character strengths as well as measures of well-being and personality, as measured by the Abbreviated Big Five (Furnham, McManus, & Scott, 2003). Instead of the six-factor virtue model that has been traditionally proposed, researchers found a four-dimensional model in which the strengths fell within the categories of interpersonal, leadership, temperance, or intellectual. Strengths that traditionally were conceptualized as associated with the virtue of courage fell within the leadership domain. Further, the virtues of justice and humanity combined into interpersonal strengths. This finding suggests the necessity of continuing to look at how best to

classify strengths. Females rated themselves higher than males in the virtues of Wisdom, love, Justice, and Transcendence. There appeared to be stability in terms of age and strengths, in that both young and old adolescents reported similar scores of their strengths. In addition, most of the strengths were found to be related to well-being. In regard to personality traits, the factors of neuroticism and extraversion were not correlated to any strengths or virtues. The findings of this study suggest the necessity of continuing to explore how to classify character strengths and to continue examining character strengths across different groups.

Importance of Strengths and PERMA

  Positive education and flourishing. Strengths are fundamental to the field of positive education. Positive education involves applying the field of positive psychology to different educational contexts, such as schools, in order to help individuals flourish (Oades, Robinson, & Green, 2011). Flourishing is a concept that has been defined a number of different ways. Keyes (2002) believes flourishing is made up of feeling positively about oneself, feeling connected to others in the community, and also psychological well-being. Seligman (2011) defines flourishing according to the PERMA model in which well-being is made up of **p**ositive emotions, **e**ngagement, **r**elationships, **m**eaning, and **a**ccomplishment. In each situation of defining flourishing, flourishing is seen to include both feeling and doing good (Huppert & So, 2013). Flourishing has a number of positive outcomes for young adults including stronger academic performance in undergraduate students in regard to having mastery-approach goals, higher self-control, and higher grades (Howell, 2009) and stronger relationships with peers and school staff among children and adolescents (Chu, Saucier, & Hafner, 2010), both of which lead to greater well-being.

PERMA Framework

Many positive education programs tend to adopt the PERMA framework (Morrish, Rickard, Chin, & Vella-Brodick, 2017). Positive emotions refer to feeling happy, engagement refers to being connected and engaged in life, positive relationships involves feeling cared for by others, meaning involves believing in something greater than oneself, and accomplishment refers to accomplishing goals (Seligman, 2011). The overall belief of PERMA is that each of these pillars leads to overall well-being. According to Seligman, using character strengths makes up the foundation for all five elements of the PERMA Model (**P**ositive Emotions, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, Purpose and **M**eaning, and **A**ccomplishments; Seligman, 2011).

Strengths researchers are interested in expanding the literature base by proving that strengths usage can lead to positive outcomes in different areas. This outcome based approach is of special interest to therapists, organizational psychologists, college counselors, high school counselors, and other coaches who might be interested in understanding what positive things can come from using strengths (Lyons & Linley, 2008).

Researchers have found that interventions designed to increase the use of strengths in youth and adults result in a number of positive outcomes. Mitchell and colleagues (2009) implemented an online positive psychology strengths-based intervention for adults between the ages of 18-62. Over three sessions, participants first identified their strengths from a list of 24 strengths and then prioritized them. They then selected three strengths to develop in their daily life and were provided examples of how to use their strengths during the week. Participants took pre and post measures in order for researchers to measure their happiness level and positive and negative affect. Researchers found an increase in participants' personal well-being, as measured by the Personal Well-Being Index-Adult (PW-A) Scale (IWG, 2006).

Quinlan and colleagues (2014) examined how a strengths-based intervention would affect a classroom of primary school students. One hundred ninety-three students aged 9-12 participated in a six-session intervention designed to help students develop their strengths. Several strategies were used, including recognizing strengths in oneself, using strengths in relationships, noticing and finding strengths in each other, and learning how to use strengths to reach goals. Researchers found that the intervention led to greater overall class cohesion and less class friction (as measured by the My Class Inventory [MCI]; Fraser, 1982) in comparison to a control group. In addition, participants had greater positive affect, engagement in the classroom, and intrinsic need satisfaction, as measured by the International Positive and Negative Affect Schedule-Short Form (I-PANAS-SF; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), the Engagement Versus Disaffection with Learning measure (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009), and the Children's Intrinsic Needs Satisfaction Scale (CINSS; Koestner & Véronneau, 2001) respectively.

Govindji and Linley (2008) taught children about character strengths through the use of stories and school festivals. Character strengths were introduced to the children through the use of cards that had pictures and cartoons on them representing the strengths. The researchers conducted a qualitative evaluation of this project and found that students' self-confidence, motivation to achieve, teacher relationships, and school climate increased.

Proctor et al. (2011) evaluated an intervention provided to 319 high school students who were taught how to identify their strengths, how to use them in new and varied ways, and how to recognize strengths in others. To introduce the students to the strengths, each student picked five strengths from a list of the 24 VIA character strengths that they felt best described them. Each lesson following that included strengths builder and strengths challenge exercises. The intervention lasted the entire academic year and found that students who participated in the

intervention had significant increases in their life satisfaction compared to students who did not participate in the intervention. Life satisfaction was measured with the SLSS. In summary, there have been several strengths-based interventions that have led to positive outcomes in students, providing support for the usefulness of targeting student strengths in school-based supports intended to enhance outcomes.

Correlational studies indicate that strengths use is associated with a number of desirable psychological and behavioral outcomes including greater subjective well-being (Govindji & Linley, 2007), less stress, greater self-esteem, and positive affect (Wood et al., 2011), and greater positive experiences at work (Harzer & Ruch, 2012). In addition, there is an association between strengths and recovery from illness (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2006), and increases in certain character strengths after a traumatic event (Peterson & Seligman, 2003). Possessing certain character strengths, such as zest, can lead to work feeling more like a calling as well as greater job satisfaction (Peterson, Park, Hall, & Seligman, 2009). Therefore, it is not surprising that strengths use is viewed as essential in order to achieve a state of flourishing according to the PERMA framework. Through PERMA, well-being is defined by all five elements. Each pillar is important to make up well-being. In addition, strengths contribute to each of the five pillars, which are described in detail next.

Positive emotion. Positive emotion is the first pillar of the PERMA framework. This pillar involves experiencing and building positive emotions. Research has found that experiencing positive emotions is beneficial for a number of positive outcomes, both for mental and physical health. A meta-analysis that included over 275,000 people found that having positive emotions was beneficial for social interactions, health and, and work life (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005a). For work, experiencing happier emotions was related to graduating

from college (Frisch et al., 2005) and success in a job by receiving better supervisor evaluations (Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). In terms of social relationships, researchers have found a relationship between happiness and having more reliable friends (Baldassare, Rosenfield, & Rook, 1984). In terms of health, happier people had fewer symptoms of psychopathology (Diener & Seligman, 2002), including being less likely to suffer from depression (Lyubormirsky et al., 2005a). In addition, happier people tend to self-report better health overall (Kehn, 1995). Overall, having positive emotions leads to a number of positive outcomes in all areas of life.

Approaching the pillar of positive emotions through the lens of strengths is beneficial because strengths use is related to subjective well-being, a scientific term for "happiness" that involves high level of life satisfaction and positive affect, and less frequent affect. This is illustrated through a study by Proctor et al. (2011) who used a cross-sectional measurement design in order to see relationships among strengths and other constructs in 135 undergraduate psychology students. Participants completed: the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985), which measures life satisfaction; the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988), which measures positive and negative affect; the Strengths Use Scale (SUS; Govindji & Linley, 2007) which measures individual strengths use, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE; Rosenberg, 1965); the New General Self-Efficacy Scale (NGSES; Chen et al., 2001), and were asked to endorse their top five strengths. Results indicated that using strengths was related to the positive emotions of subjective well-being, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. A number of other studies have demonstrated the relationship between strengths and subjective well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Govindji & Linley, 2007; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Therefore, strengths use is believed to serve as a mechanism through which

students can achieve this specific pillar of positive emotions in the PERMA well-being framework.

Positive engagement. The second pillar of PERMA is positive engagement. Engagement is oftentimes compared with flow, which is a state of peak engagement of being fully immersed, focused, and energized (Bakker, 2005). Being in a state of "flow" is oftentimes compared to being in the zone. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), flow involves being completely concentrated, having specific goals, feeling as though the experience is by itself rewarding, having a strong feeling of control, and having a balance between the challenge and one's own skills. Within the field of positive education, Wesson and Boniwell (2007) believed that using strengths could lead to further engagement. The researchers hypothesized that having an individual understand their strengths can lead to increased awareness and greater belief in their skills, which can lead to a stronger match between the challenge and their skill (which is an important component of flow). Therefore, Wesson and Boniwell's (2007) hypothesis is that using strengths could potentially lead to greater flow, and this mechanism could lead to greater engagement. Ianni (2012) found support for this hypothesis by investigating the relationship between strengths use and academic well-being among 292 university students. These students completed a StrengthsQuest program (SQ; Clifton, Anderson, & Schreiner, 2006) which taught them about their strengths, how to build their strengths, and how to use their strengths throughout their life. Before and after the program the students filled out measures assessing their strengths, as measured by the Clifton StrengthsFinder scale, the Strengths Use Questionnaire, and the Academic Flow Scale (AFS) which was inspired by the Flow State Scale-2 (FSS-2; Jackson and Eklund, 2002). The researcher found that students who used their strengths frequently tended to have higher levels of flow and happiness in their academic life. It

is important to note that the strengths assessed in this study are different than the ones identified through the VIA, however the findings in this study offer promising support that the relationship between the VIA strengths and engagement would be similar.

Positive relationships. The third pillar of PERMA is positive relationships. Having positive emotions typically is due to being around other people (Seligman, 2011). Having positive relationships is related to a number of positive outcomes related to well-being and mental health. Diener, Oishi, and Lucas (2003) found that having strong social relationships predicted subjective well-being. Stewart, Sun, Patterson, Lemerle, and Hardie (2004) sought to see the relationship between different aspects of the school environment and students' resilience. Resilience is defined as the ability of an individual to come back from adversity (Rutter, 1987). Stewart et al. (2004) utilized a cross-sectional design to study 3,146 students (ages 8-12), their parents, and school staff across 20 different school communities. Students completed the California Healthy Kids Questionnaire (the Student Resilience Survey). Parents completed a number of different subscales assessing school and family climate. Staff answered questions on organizational factors. Results of this study indicated that students' feelings of resilience were related to peer relationships and feeling connected to parents and caregivers. These protective factors are important to understand what factors may increase student resilience, which would be a beneficial outcome for students.

Strengths can be used within the PERMA framework in order to develop positive relationships. Students have to form relationships with peers, teachers, and family members. Seligman (2011) described using the strength of kindness to conduct an unexpectedly kind act for other people, and how this exercise led to a large increase in well-being. Forming positive relationships also relates specifically to the heart and mind strengths that are more others-focused

as well as the strengths of the heart (which includes gratitude). These strengths are related to greater mental health functioning (Haridas et al., 2017). The importance of these other-focused and heart strengths is visible in a study by Veldorale-Brogan, Bradford, and Vail (2010). These researchers examined 422 individuals in committed relationships and had each partner complete surveys on well-being, distress, communication, marital virtues, and relationship adjustment. Marital virtues represented character strengths specifically through strengths of other-centeredness and generosity. Results indicated that marital virtues (in which the researchers indicated that relational character strengths provided the basis for marital virtues) and negative communication mediated the overall relationship between well-being and relationship adjustment. Marital virtues were a direct predictor of overall relationship adjustment. Overall, the researchers suggested that marital virtues could strengthen a marriage. These results have implications for the PERMA framework in that using character strengths can strengthen the significant relationships in one's life, although a limitation of this study is that it focused on adults and not youth.

When looking directly at adolescents, Gillham et al. (2011) investigated 149 adolescents (72 boys, 77 girls) in 9th grade in a high school in the United States. The adolescents completed the VIA Youth, the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale-2nd Edition (RADS-2; Reynolds, 2002), the Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire (FEQ; Fordyce, 1988) to measure happiness, the SLSS, and the Perceived Social Support Scale (Procidano & Heller, 1983). Researchers conducted a principal component analysis on the character strengths and separated them into different categories: *transcendence*, which involved strengths related to connecting with others, *temperance*, which involved strengths related to working toward goals, *intellectual*, which involved strengths related to learning, and *other-directed*, which involved strengths related to

cooperating with other people. Data analysis included mixed models ANCOVAs to see which strengths predicted well-being, and then used logistic regressions to see if strengths predicted depressive symptoms. Mediation analyses were conducted to see the relationship between social support and strengths. Researchers found that character strengths that were more 'other-directed' (forgiveness, kindness, teamwork) and 'temperance' (self-regulation, perseverance) predicted decreased depression symptoms and that strengths that were more transcendent (hope, gratitude, meaning), other directed, temperance, and more intellectual predicted greater life satisfaction. Interestingly, leadership related strengths did not predict well-being, which suggests that some character strengths could not necessarily have positive effects. In addition, social support mediated the relationship between other-directed strengths and having fewer symptoms of depression (about 40%). Students who, at the beginning of 9th grade, did not score as high on other-directed strengths were more likely to have more symptoms of depression by the end of the 10th grade. On the other hand, social support did not impact the relationship between students who scored high on transcendence strengths and life satisfaction. Having transcendence strengths predicted life satisfaction, regardless of other types of strengths. This research suggests that having strong social support and being able to form relationships with other people, such as with those students who have strengths categorized as being "transcendent" is important to potentially counter-act possible depressive symptoms, as well as to have greater well-being.

A study by Wagner (2019) had 356 5th-9th grade students indicate who their friends were, which classmates they liked, their overall friendship satisfaction (through the McGill Friendship Questionnaire (MFQ; Mendelson & Aboud, 1999)), and the qualities they desired in their friends. Students also completed the VIA-Youth Survey. Results indicated that honesty, humor, kindness, and fairness were important strengths to have in a friend. In addition, the strengths of

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perspective, love, kindness, social intelligence, teamwork, leadership, and humor were associated with higher peer acceptance. These results demonstrate that certain strengths are especially important in peer relationships and in friendships.

Within the PERMA framework, having stakeholders work with students to help them cultivate and use their "transcendent" strengths as well as the other strengths found in the Wager (2019) study (perspective, love, kindness, social intelligence, teamwork, leadership, and humor) could be beneficial for strengthening this 3rd pillar of "positive relationships". Strengths-based interventions in this area might help students attain a state of flourishing and overall well-being.

Positive purpose and meaning. The fourth pillar of PERMA is positive purpose or meaning. A desired outcome for all students is the ability for them to find what they are doing as meaningful. Meaning is a desired outcome because it is correlated to well-being (Steger, Oishi, & Kashdan, 2009). Meaning is defined as "the sense made of, and significance felt regarding, the nature of one's being an existence" (Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006, p. 81). It refers to any type of personal meaningfulness.

One way to go about increasing meaning is through the use of strengths. Several studies have found a relationship between character strengths and having a greater sense of meaning in life. Littman-Ovadia and Steger (2011) found a relationship between not only how using strengths at work was related to well-being, but also how endorsing strengths was related to meaning among volunteers and working adults. Peterson and colleagues (2007) found that among a sample of United States and Swiss adults, the character strengths that were most related to subjective well-being were associated with meaning and engagement. It is important for students to be able to conceptualize how to use their strengths in their everyday life, such as in understanding how to use to use their strengths in concordance with their goals, in order for

stakeholders to be able to target these areas. Once students finish high school and move onto their next phase of life, being able to understand how to use their strengths can be valuable, such as seen with the relationship between strengths use and having meaningful work (Harzer & Ruch, 2012).

Harzer and Ruch (2012) found that using signature strengths at work predicted more meaningful work. Participants included 111 German adults (60 men, 51 women), with a mean age of 47.21 years (*SD*=8.70, range from 25-64 years) who were self-raters. Peer raters consisted of 111 co-workers of the self-raters (51 men, 60 women), mean age of 42.82 years (*SD*=10.64, range 19-71 years). Self-raters completed the VIA assessing the 24 character strengths, the Job Satisfaction Questionnaire (JSQ; Andrews & Withey, 1976), The Work Context Questionnaire (WCQ; Ruch, Furrer, & Huwlyer, 2004) which measures the extent to which a job allows one to experience pleasure, and the Work-Life Questionnaire (WLQ; Wrzesniewski et al., 1997) which measures whether the person considers work a job, career, or calling. The peer raters completed a survey indicating how well they knew the person in question, which allowed the researchers to determine if the peer rater was able to judge the self-rater's behavior at work. Then the peer rater completed the Applicability of Character Strengths Rating Scales (ACS-RS; Harzer & Ruch, 2012). This rating scale measured how much each character strength was able to be used at work. Researchers determined if a character strength was used at work by examining if the peer-rater gave the strength a high enough score indicating that the strength was applicable at work and used often, and if the individual rated that they possessed the strength at least slightly. Results from ANCOVAs indicated a significant effect of the number of strengths a person used at work in relationship to the person's positive experiences at work: $F_{(7,110)}=2.36$, $p=.029$. In addition, results indicated that people who used between four and seven strengths in their work were more

likely to see their job as a calling (*M*=3.05; 95% confidence interval from 2.76 to 3.34). The researchers considered a "calling" in the work sense to be the positive experiences at work including engagement, meaning, and job satisfaction. This study demonstrates that using character strengths matters within the work setting for increasing positive experiences at work including meaning.

In sum, it is important to see how students attribute value to their strengths in their everyday life, such as for goal attainment potentially in the school context, in order to aid these students in achieving more meaningful work in the future.

Positive accomplishment. The fifth element of the PERMA framework is positive accomplishment, which involves working toward valued goals and achieving meaningful outcomes. Accordingly, one area of importance to examine is the relationship between strengths and goals in order to provide an empirical base for practitioners who want to use strengths-based approaches in their work to guide adolescents in reaching their aspirations.

Sheldon and Elliot (1999) demonstrated that goals that were self-concordant (i.e. goals that were connected to personal values and related to growth and autonomy), were related to greater well-being in adults. Sheldon and Elliot (1999) created the *Self-Concordance Model*, which expanded on the idea of goal inception, pursuit, and goal attainment. In this model, adults who pursued goals that were consistent with the person's interests and values ended up putting forth more effort into achieving their goals and were more likely to attain them. In addition, they found that attaining self-concordant goals led to greater well-being than attaining goals that were not self-concordant. Accordingly, it follows that using strengths (which would fall under acting self-concordantly) could lead to greater goal progress and overall well-being.

Linley, Nielsen, Gillett, and Biswas-Diener (2010) expanded on this idea by examining

the relationship between signature strengths and goal progress and its impacts on well-being. Participants included 240 second year college students in England, 49 males and 191 females with a mean age of 19.95 (*SD*=2.54 years). Participants were 78.8% white, 8.8% Indian, and 91.7% single/never married. Participants completed the VIA inventory of strengths, the PANAS, the SWLS, and Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction Scales (BPNSS; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Participants reported their top three goals for the semester, how much they had used their signature strengths in their life that semester, how much they had used each of their signature strengths in working toward the goals they had identified, the progress they were making in their lives in general, and the progress they were making specifically in regard to their self-concordant goals. Using hierarchical linear modeling, results demonstrated that using strengths was related to more goal progress, which was related to greater need satisfaction, and was ultimately related to greater well-being at both 6 months and 10 weeks post-baseline. This study demonstrated that self-concordant goal progress was related to strengths use. In addition, progress towards goals that were personally relevant, led to more positive affect and greater life satisfaction, as demonstrated with how the psychological need fulfillment (from the BPNSS scale) correlated with self-concordant goal progress. These results suggest that the usage of strengths alongside a self-concordant approach to goals can ultimately lead to greater goal attainment and well-being.

The following research by Linley et al. (2010) that demonstrates that the usage of strengths alongside a self-concordant approach to goals can ultimately lead to greater goal attainment and accomplishment, and Harzer and Ruch's (2012) research that strengths use is related to having more meaningful work, looking through a PERMA framework can be valuable in order to explore students' strengths and examine how students' attribute value to their

strengths in their everyday life for positive accomplishment. Figure 1 lays out the overall

implications for attaining this knowledge.
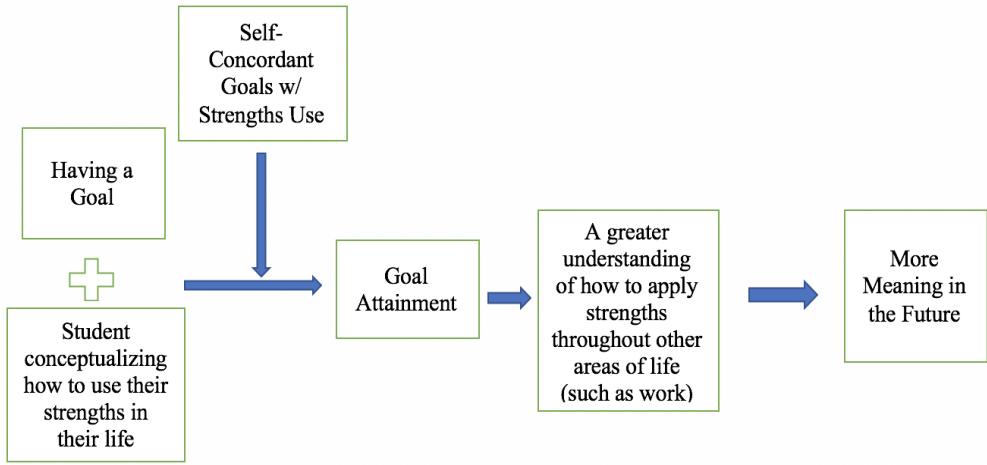
Figure 1. *Implications of Understanding Students' Strengths*

Prevalence of Strengths

Although some strengths may be more valued by cultures or individuals, theoretically all

strengths may be considered equally desirable in Peterson and Seligman's (2004) model.

Because no strength is considered better than any other strengths, desirability of a certain

strength should not confound comparisons or act as a limitation when looking across a group of

peoples' character strengths. Character strengths are typically assessed through a Values in

Action Inventory of Strengths, which are free online tools that allow people to assess their

character strengths. Each survey uses a forced choice scale so that comparisons can be made (or

rank-ordered) within an individual for all the strengths and then the strengths can be ordered

within a place, state, or overall nation. The VIA-IS, which is the original VIA assessment tool

consisting of 240 questions, has been found to have support for reliability and validity

(LaFollete, 2010) and has been translated into over twenty languages (Niemiec, 2013). The main

adult survey is the VIA-120 which was created by taking the VIA-IS and extracting the top 5

items for each scale that had the highest corrected item-total correlations. It has been found to have very good reliability and acceptable validity. There is also a main youth survey which only takes the top 4 items per scale with the highest corrected item-total correlations. Its overall correlation with the VIA-IS is found to be .84 (Park & Peterson, 2006). Park et al. (2006) examined which strengths were more or less prevalent in the United States and in other nations. The participants included all adults who completed the VIA-IS between September 2002 and December 2003. Over 83,000 participants were from the United States, and at least 54 other nations in which there were at least 20 respondents from that country (which resulted in over 117,000 participants from other countries). The typical age of participants was 40 years old but ranged from 18 to 65 years old. Within the United States, the researchers found that the most common strengths were kindness, fairness, honesty, gratitude, judgement, love, and humor and the least common were (beginning with the lowest) prudence, modesty, and self-regulation. Compared to other nations, states, and geographic regions, the same rank order of strengths was found. The researchers expressed that this makes sense because of a belief that there are universal values necessary to have a society thrive (Bok, 1995). This helps explain why the prevalence should be roughly the same across nations. Within demographic groups, African Americans and Asian Americans scored higher on religiousness than European Americans. One limitation of this study is that it only examines strengths across adults. It would be important to see whether the same pattern of strengths can be found among youth, especially among different ethnic groups and countries which could indicate the generalizability of these findings across youth from different states and countries.

Park and Peterson (2006) addressed that need by looking at character strengths in youth using the VIA-Youth Survey. The VIA-Youth survey was created for use of students between

the ages of 10 and 17. It uses age-appropriate language and examples for each of the 24 strengths. The inventory contains around 198 items with youth answering questions with options ranging from 1 (*not like me at all*) to 5 (*very much like me*). In a sample of 119 fifth graders and 131 eighth graders, researchers found that the most common strengths for children were gratitude, humor, and love and the least common were strengths that required more cognitive maturity such as prudence, forgiveness, spirituality, and self-regulation. In addition, researchers found a four factor structure of the VIA-Youth scale, classifying strengths into four categories, temperance (e.g., prudence, self-regulation), intellectual (e.g., love of learning, curiosity), theological (e.g., hope, religiousness, love), and other-directed (e.g., hope, love). Compared to the sample of adults in the Park et al. (2006) study, convergence was found with a spearman rho correlation of .53 (*p* < .008). Notable exceptions included that hope, teamwork, and zest were more common among youth than adults.

A follow up study to Park et al. (2006) was conducted by McGrath (2015), who examined a sample of over a million adults who completed the VIA survey online between 2002 and 2012. Each nation this time around had at least 150 participants (as opposed to twenty per country in the previous study). Results indicated that fairness was present in the top five strengths for all 75 countries. The other most prevalent strengths were honesty/authenticity, kindness, judgement/open-mindedness, and curiosity. The least prevalent strengths were modesty, self-regulation, prudence, and spirituality. McGrath (2015) replicated Park et al.'s (2006) finding of cross-cultural consistency of character strengths across nations. One limitation of this study is that the people who participated in the online survey may not have been normative or representative of their country because participation required internet access and a desire to learn about one's strengths. However, this study supports the idea that the strengths are

relatively universal across different cultures and countries.

Another limitation of the McGrath (2015) study was that the sample of the African countries was very small. Abasimi, Gai, and Wang (2017) addressed that gap by looking at the distribution of character strengths in 210 high school students from two schools in Ghana. The researchers assessed character strengths using the Character Strengths Rating form, which is a rating scale based on the VIA-IS. This scale consisted of 24 items assessing the 24 character strengths, in which students had to indicate the extent to which each statement applied to them. The researchers had previously pilot tested this rating scale and had found it suitable to use because it had good convergence with the VIA-IS. The researchers computed the distribution of the character strengths by finding the means and standard deviations of all the strengths. These strengths were then rank ordered, and they found that the top seven character strengths across this sample were forgiveness, self-regulation, kindness, leadership, hope, love of learning, and fairness. They found that the least common strengths were creativity, bravery, persistence/perseverance, curiosity, and appreciation of beauty. Although this distribution varies from the one described by McGrath (2015), kindness is found in both lists of most frequently chosen strengths, which indicates that this strength is highly endorsed across cultures.

Steen, Kachorek, and Peterson (2003) studied 459 students (grades 9 – 12) from 15 different high schools in Michigan who participated in focus groups about character strengths. Twenty teachers across the high schools agreed to permit the students in their class to participate in focus groups. The researchers conducted one focus group (45-90 minute in duration) in each of the twenty classes. Participants in a focus group were instructed to discuss 4-6 specific character strengths that were chosen by the group leaders. These character strengths were chosen non-systemically from the VIA Classification of Character Strengths, however the

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majority of the character strengths were ultimately discussed by at least 3 classes. In a few situations, the researchers used the virtue label for the character strength to avoid confusing the students. For instance, perspective was assigned to the category of wisdom. Each focus group was different, but most groups ended up being guided by talking about the basic ideas of each character strength, how students define those strengths, and how students view the development of these strengths in different people. The strengths that appeared most highly valued in terms of receiving the most positive comments by the students were leadership, practical intelligence (which characterized creativity), wisdom (which included curiosity, perspective, and judgement/open-mindedness), social intelligence, love of learning, spirituality, and love. Students saw these traits as worthy of strong discussion and were traits that students tended to desire for themselves. Students voiced their belief that strengths could be acquired as opposed to something that they were born with, and that these traits could be further developed based on experiences they had throughout their life. In addition, students were mostly *unable* to identify role models or examples of people who exemplified each strength. This is interesting because one of the definitions of a strength is that there exist people who are "prodigies with respect to the strength" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 25), and yet students in this study did not seem to be able to find these people. The rich qualitative data gleaned from this data has implications for further strengths-based interventions, including helping students learn to see how members of their community use their strengths, as well as continuing to see that they can always keep developing their own strengths.

Strengths of High-Achieving Students

There is limited research examining character strengths within the population of high achieving students, especially within the United States. However, in Korea, Kim, Seo, and Cho

(2012) looked at the character strengths of gifted students (defined by students who were in the top 5% of their middle school) in relationship to their career development. They also examined whether parents' educational level, gender, and family income had any influence on these areas. The sample included 172 students (73 females, 76 males) between the ages of 16 and 19. Participants completed several surveys assessing career decision self-efficacy and character strengths (as measured through the VIA-Youth). For data analysis, researchers found the most and least endorsed character strengths and then reduced the variables into the six virtues. These virtues were then compared alongside demographic variables with a MANOVA and Pearson correlation coefficient alphas were conducted among the career aspect surveys and the character strengths. Overall, the most endorsed character strength was gratitude, followed by hope, optimism, social intelligence, and judgement. The least-frequently selected character strengths were self-control and self-regulation, bravery, spirituality, and leadership. The researchers hypothesized that these results could be due to the fact that high achieving students most likely already had a good amount of self-control, and therefore their standard could be higher in comparison to other students. This study found no gender differences in character strengths. In regard to career decision making self-efficacy, students who scored higher on the virtues of courage and transcendence had higher self-efficacy in this domain. This could be because courage virtues are mostly related to having a strong sense of control which can relate to self-efficacy, and in transcendence, the researchers hypothesize that having "hope" (which is one of the transcendence strengths) is related to having persistent behavior which is important for career decision making. These findings demonstrate that examining variations in character strengths can be beneficial for understanding students' career decision making ability and styles which could be useful when thinking about meaningful work from the PERMA well-being framework. Given

that this study examined only Korean students in Korea, these findings may not generalize to high achieving American high school students who may or may not be gifted.

There is also limited research that examines strengths from a qualitative perspective, which may be helpful to better understand how youth understand a character strength to be experienced. One study used a qualitative approach within a population of high achieving students, specifically with high achieving students in Finland (Salmela & Uusiautti, 2015). This study used a narrative approach to see which strengths appeared in the students' narratives, as well as how they appeared to use their strengths. The researchers recruited fourteen high achieving students, as defined by being a straight-A graduate of general upper secondary education within the last two years of the study. Participants were told to write freely about people, events, and experiences that were important to them during their school years. The reports ranged from two to fifteen pages in length. Then, seven of the participants were interviewed utilizing a style similar to an episodic interview; where the participants were asked to discuss how he or she became a straight-A graduate. The researchers used a narrative approach to analyze the interviews and essays in order to see similarities within the narratives. Overall, three common themes emerged throughout the narratives: thirst for knowledge and learning (which is made up of the character strengths of love of learning, curiosity, and appreciation of beauty and excellence), fortitude and authenticity (made up of strengths that involve self-regulation and courage to be true to oneself), and love (which involves strengths that involve close relationships and fairness). Within the descriptions of students' thirst for knowledge, the interviews demonstrated that these students received more excitement, enjoyment, and curiosity from doing academic tasks, which directly relates to Csikszentmihalyi (1990)'s research on flow. In terms of "fortitude and authenticity", the students' appeared to

utilize several strengths including persistence/perseverance, bravery, and self-regulation in order to reach their goals. This was in line with the aforementioned research by Sheldon and Elliot (1998) in that students' who are able to understand their desires and values (by being able to know what they want) are more likely to accomplish their goals. Finally, within the dimension of "love", students' described finding fulfillment in surpassing their goals, but not in trying to compete with other students. These students tended to describe the importance of social relationships in their school trajectories.

Overall, this study was beneficial in that it expanded the literature base by examining how high achieving Finnish students see their strengths and describe them in their school trajectories. However, there is still a clear need to both listen to students' voices while also having data that can be compared across a greater number of students so that this information can be more generalizable. This study was limited by a small sample size; therefore, it is possible that the strengths that these students most frequently mentioned may not be characteristic of all high achieving students. In addition, given that these were Finnish students, there are possible cultural differences between Finnish and North American students given that the educational trajectories are different. Methodologically, using a narrative approach was beneficial because this structure provided a personal dimension as to how students describe their strengths, which is frequently missing in questionnaires. However, there are benefits to using structured questionnaires or having easily quantifiable data (as through the use of the VIA-Youth survey inventory) because researchers would be more easily able to compare strengths across different groups of students.

Gaps in the Literature

While there is a plethora of research on strengths in adults, there is a lack of information

on youths' strengths, especially in regard to students in accelerated curricula. To date, no study has examined which strengths are more salient to students who are in accelerated curricula in the United States. In addition, there is no research which attempts to differentiate strengths among high achieving students who are in different curricular programs (Advanced Placement vs. International Baccalaureate), across ethnicities, and whether they are "at risk" academically or socio-emotionally. There may be differences in the most prevalent strengths between these different groups. This might be useful in order to compare the results to those found in other countries such as in the research by Salmela and Uusiautti (2015) and Kim et al. (2012). In addition, examining how students describe their strengths might be beneficial to explore in order to develop a better understanding of how strengths should be defined for adolescents. Having concrete examples of how students describe their behaviors as being connected to their strengths has broad implications for usage in future strengths-based interventions. Similarly, putting into words how students see their strengths as personally useful to their lives might be beneficial for expanding the strengths-based research geared toward adolescents. Having both quantitative and qualitative data on strengths might be valuable because this type of triangulation might provide a broader picture of strengths than those found in other studies. Finally, exploring strengths among this population might be worthwhile for examining strengths within the PERMA framework and subsequently having stakeholders being able to aid students achieve a state of flourishing.

Purpose of this Thesis

The following research questions were addressed in this thesis:

1. What are the most frequent self-identified strengths of ninth-grade students in Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate programs?

2. To what extent, if any, do the most frequently endorsed strengths differ for subgroups of

students in Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate programs

including:

    e) Ethnic/ racial groups?

    f) Academic program (AP or IB)?

    g) Academic risk (vs. no academic risk?)

    h) Emotional risk (vs. no emotional risk?)

3. How do students in Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate classes who are at risk academically or emotionally describe their behaviors and actions in a way that illustrates their strengths?

CHAPTER III: METHOD

This study examined the character strengths of ninth-grade high school students in accelerated curricula through an analysis of archival data from surveys and interviews. Accelerated curricula refers to AP classes or pre-IB programs. Quantitatively, this researcher examined the frequency of students' identified character strengths across various demographic variables. Qualitatively, this researcher examined data on how students described their character strengths. This chapter describes the design of the study, the setting and participants, and the interview protocol. In addition, procedures used during recruitment, data collection, the theoretical orientation of the researcher, and data analyses are described. Finally, the quality of the study and important ethical considerations are discussed.

Setting

This study was a mixed methods design that analyzed archival data collected as part of an ongoing study funded by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES project number R305A150543), awarded to Drs. Shannon Suldo and Elizabeth Shaunessy-Dedrick from the University of South Florida. Prior to beginning and throughout implementation of the project, the PIs received approval from the USF IRB (Pro00022787) as well as approval from the school districts. The grant goal was to iteratively develop and test a new preventive intervention for AP and IB students. The intervention has three sequential components: (a) the Advancing Coping and Engagement (ACE) Program, a 12-week universal social-emotional leaning program unique to the academic demands faced by students in AP or IB, (b) a mid-year screening of students' academic and psychological outcomes, and (c) Motivation, Assessment, and Planning (MAP)

meeting, an individualized selective intervention for students with signs of emotional and academic risk. The intent of the universal curriculum—the ACE Program—was to teach the students: coping strategies (such as time and task management, positive thinking, and seeking support from others) in order to manage academic stressors inherent to AP and IB coursework, skills for increasing student engagement (such as increasing pride in the school and AP/IB program, forming relationships with teachers, peers, and others, and investing in extracurricular activities), ways to experience eustress, and how to consider one's values and strengths in setting and reaching goals. Table 2 lists the topics covered in the ACE program. Appendix H includes the goals for each of the topics covered throughout the modules. (Further information about the mid-year screening and MAP meetings are provided in the sections "Participant and Procedures" and "Description of the Motivation, Assessment, and Planning (MAP) Meetings".)

Table 2. *The Topics Covered in the ACE Program*

Module 1: Adjusting to AP/IB
Module 2: Factors Related to AP/IB Student Success
Module 3: Increasing Pride at Your School and AP/IB Program
Module 4: Relationships with People at School
Module 5: Investing in Extracurricular Activities
Module 6: Time and Task Management (Organize, List, Prioritize)
Module 7: Time and Task Management (Limiting Procrastination)
Module 8: Seeking Support
Module 9: Relaxation and Positive Thinking
Module 10: Limiting Use of Ineffective Coping Styles
Module 11: Promoting Eustress
Module 12: Strengths, Values, and Goals

The quantitative and qualitative datasets analyzed in this thesis were from research activities that took place during Year 3 of the project (2017-2018 school year). In Year 3, 15 total AP or IB programs from 14 high schools participated in the project; seven programs (from seven schools) were randomly assigned to the wait-list control condition, and eight programs

(from seven schools) were in the intervention condition. The eight experimental/intervention programs included three IB and five AP programs; the seven control programs included two IB and five AP programs. The schools were from three districts. Prior to random assignment, pairs of schools were matched based on school district and program (AP or IB). In the AP program sites, AP students were not also enrolled in a pre-IB/IB program. Within one district, the AP pass rate was taken into account as an additional matching variable. Within the seven experimental schools (which included eight programs, as one school offered separate IB and AP program), the research team delivered the 10 to 12-week ACE universal component curriculum to all students in two sections of AP Human Geography or IB Inquiry Skills.

Participants and Procedures

During the Fall of 2017, 416 students from eight high school AP or IB programs participated in the ACE Program. This researcher examined data from students who participated in this prevention program during the 2017-2018 school year. There were 352 students (85% participation rate from the target population) who had parental consent to participate in the data collection procedures involved with evaluation of the intervention (ACE + MAP). The students participated in the universal program (ACE) for 10 weeks ($n = 1$ program) or 12 weeks ($n = 7$ programs).

This researcher examined the self-identified top five strengths from an activity in Module 12, for the 253 students (72% of sample) who had parental consent for study participation and who had the opportunity to complete Module 12 in which students learned about their strengths and self-identified their strengths in a strengths-spotting activity using the VIA Classification of Strengths. The sizeable number of participants with missing data from the Module 12 strengths identification activity was due to a number of factors including: student absence on the day

Module 12 was delivered in class (*n*=16), student attended the one school program that elected to

not complete Modules 11 or 12 (*n*=31), student withdrew from the study (i.e., left AP/IB classes)

before Module 12 (*n*=15), and student was absent from class or may have been present for

Module 12 but did not complete the strengths identification worksheet or put his or her name on

the worksheet (*n*=36). In the quantitative portion of the study, this researcher analyzed the 253

participants' strengths in relation to demographic features (ethnicity, program) and risk status

(level of emotional and academic well-being) in order to test for differences in types of strengths

across different categories, which will be described more in detail in the "Quantitative Data

Analysis" Section.

After completing all modules of the ACE Program, students took part in a mid-year

screening to assess their level of academic and emotional wellness. Students were placed into

distinct groups of whether they were at risk or not within the areas of emotional status

(comprising stress and engagement) and academic performance. Students at risk because of

emotional status had Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) scores > 3.6, or Multidimensional Students'

Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS) school satisfaction scale scores of < 3.4. Thresholds for risk

were established in Year 2 of the larger project, as described by Suldo et al. (2019). For the PSS

scale, the range was from 1-5 with a 3 being (*sometimes*) and a 4 being (*fairly often*). Therefore,

a score of 3.6 corresponded to a student experiencing stress more frequently than not. In terms of

the MSLSS, response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*mildly disagree*) in terms

of feeling negative about school, whereas response options 4 (*mildly agree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*)

indicate positive feelings about school. Thus, students who scored an overall mean score of <3.4

were more likely to be dissatisfied with school as opposed to satisfied. Additional information

about the measures is provided in the section "Student Self Report Measures".

Students were identified as being at risk due to academic performance based on the first semester GPA, and specific semester grade earned in their AP Human Geography class or their IB Biology class. There was a high correlation between these two variables (r=.76; Suldo et al., 2018), which led the research team to create an academic risk status variable. With regard to academic risk groups, being "at-risk academically" was defined by an overall unweighted GPA from fall semester of <3.0 or a grade of a C, D, or F in the AP or IB course. The group "not at-risk academically" included students with a GPA ≥ 3.0 and grade of A or B in the aforementioned AP/IB course.

Students who were identified as being at risk in either stress, school satisfaction, or academic performance were invited to participate in the selective intervention (MAP) meetings with a school mental health staff member of the USF research team. In brief, the intervention consisted of two individual meetings with a school mental health provider using motivational interviewing techniques to assist students in creating an action plan for a chosen target goal. Further information is provided later in this chapter in the "Description of the Motivation, Assessment, and Planning (MAP) Meetings" section.

In one district, only students who had additional signed parent consent forms to receive selective supports could participate in the MAP sessions. In the other two districts, separate consent was not required for participation in MAP. In total, 141 students were invited to participate in MAP and 121 completed at least one MAP meeting (85.8% of targeted sample). The sample of 121 MAP participants included six students who did not meet risk criteria but were invited to participate in part to reduce stigma potentially attached to MAP if participation only consisted of students with academic or emotional risk. In other words, the research team felt that if some "peer leaders" (i.e., students without risk nominated by teachers as particularly well-

adjusted) were involved, not just students with identified risk factors, recruited students might be more inclined to participate. This researcher took a qualitative lens in order to analyze how these 121 students described and attributed value to their strengths by listening to de-identified audio files of MAP Meeting One. The researcher used a generic but interpretivist approach to analyze the qualitative data by examining the salient phrases in the data and compiling them to form themes in order to answer the qualitative research question from this study. Further information about the researcher's analysis approach is provided later in this chapter in "Qualitative Data Analysis". A visual of the study design is provided in Figure 2.
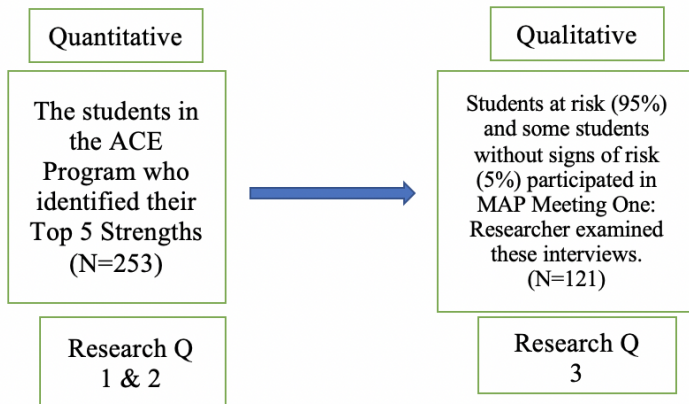
Figure 2. *Flowchart that Demonstrates the Current Study Design*

Table 3 displays the demographic information for the participants in the sample total who completed Module 12 of the ACE program, and the qualitative subsample The six students without risk were kept in this study because this researcher's review of their responses from MAP Meeting One did not suggest noticeable differences between how they described their strengths in comparison with the larger sample of students who met criterion for emotional or academic risk.

Table 3. *Participants in the Sample Total who Completed Module 12 of the ACE Program, and*

the Qualitative Subgroups

	Characteristic	Sample Total (*N*=253)	Qualitative Subgroup (*N*=121)
Program	AP	148 (58.5%)	97 (80.2%)
	IB	105 (41.5%)	24 (19.8%)
Academic Status	Academic Risk	58 (22.9%)	66 (54.5%)
	No Academic Risk	195 (77.1%)	55 (45.5%)
Emotional Status	Emotional Risk	63 (25.4%)	80 (66.7%)
	No Emotional Risk	185 (74.6%)	40 (33.3%)
Both Academic and Emotional Risk		28 (11.3%)	32 (26.7%)
No Risk in Either Area		155 (62.5%)	6 (5.0%)
Ethnicity	White/Non-Hispanic	112 (44.3%)	44 (36.4%)
	Black	22 (8.7%)	18 (14.9%)
	Hispanic	50 (19.8%)	33 (27.3%)
	Asian	28 (11.1%)	7 (5.8%)
	multiracial	40 (15.8%)	19 (15.7%)

Student Self-Report Measures

Demographics form. Prior to the start of the ACE program, students completed a

demographics form (see Appendix A) where they identified their race (Hispanic or not Hispanic)

and ethnicity (response options [check all that apply] included White, Black or African

American, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or

Other). Relatively few students identified in the latter three categories. For the purposes of

research questions 1 and 2, students were subsequently classified into one of five ethnic groups:

Non-Hispanic White, Hispanic, Black, Asian, and multiracial. The demographics form also included questions about student gender, age, race, ethnicity, family (parent marital status), and parent educational status.

Character strengths. Within Module 12 of the ACE Program, students completed a "You at Your Best" story, in which they wrote about a time when they were at their best (See Appendix C, prompt described in Figure 3).

Take a few minutes to think back to a specific time when you felt like you were at your best. This could be a time when you did something well, went above and beyond for someone else, displayed a talent or personal strengths, created something, etc. This might be a small moment in your life, a memorable interaction with someone close to you, a particular accomplishment, or an ongoing experience that made you feel alive, authentic, full of pride, or useful. Describe that situation below.

Figure 3. *Module 12 Instructions for the You at Your Best Activity*

Then, the interventionist led a didactic discussion of character strengths. Students received a list of the *VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues* that was reviewed during the module. Students participated in a strengthspotting activity in which they self-identified their top five character strengths, in part by reflecting on strengths identified in the "You at Your Best Story." This strengthspotting method was described by Linley (2008) as a method to identify character strengths. During the model, students recorded their self-identified top strengths in a handout (see Appendix B; prompt described in Figure 4).

On the bottom of your paper, write down the character strengths demonstrated in your story. Considering the strengths that you have noticed in yourself, or that others have recognized in you, please circle your Top 5 strengths from those listed on the "VIA Classification of Character Strengths" and write them down on Handout S12.3. Please write your name on the top of this handout, as we will be collecting it and returning it to you in the near future.

Figure 4. *Module 12 Instructions for Students to Record Their Strengths*

Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (MSLSS; Huebner, 1994). When administered in its entirety, the MSLSS scale provides a general life satisfaction score and also satisfaction in five domain scores; friends, family, self, school, and living environment. The MSLSS consists of 40 items, each rated on a six-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree)* to 6 (*strongly agree*) in order to measure students' satisfaction with the different domains. It is designed to be used with children in grades 3-12 and has established reliability and validity for those developmental levels (Huebner, 1994). For this study, students completed only the 8 items that comprised the school satisfaction scale. The school satisfaction scale has high internal reliability (α =.84; Gini, Marino, Pozzoli, & Holt, 2018). In addition, there is a strong relationship (α =.68) between school satisfaction scores and the Quality of School Life Scale (Epstein & McPartland, 1976), as reported in Huebner (1994).

In this study, students were identified as at risk if they had a score < 3.4 (Suldo et al., 2019). This cut point is below the average school satisfaction scores reported by prior samples of AP or IB high school students and general education students (Suldo & Shaunessy-Dedrick, 2013; Suldo et al., 2019). In addition, a score < 3.4 was closer to being dissatisfied with school than satisfied, which matches the signs of a gifted youth who is underachieving (Hamilton et al., 2018). Approximately 15-16% of the AP and IB participants in the Suldo et al. (2019) sample

were identified as at-risk with this cut-score, which is considered one standard deviation above the mean (Suldo et al., 2019).

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen et al., 1983). This scale was originally a 14-item questionnaire designed to measure perceived stress. It assesses the degree to which situations are viewed as stressful. Each question probes about feelings and thoughts during the last month. Participants answer questions on a 5-point Likert scale from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*very often*), how much they found their lives "unpredictable, uncontrollable and overloading" (Cohen et al., 1983, p. 387). PSS scores are obtained by reversing responses to positively stated items (4 of the 14) and then creating a mean PSS score. The PSS has previously been used in studies with adolescents in order to predict different outcomes including anxiety, depression, antisocial behaviors, less coping strategies, and underachievement (Martin, Kazarian, & Breiter, 1995; Schmeelk-Cone & Zimmerman, 2003). The PSS has a two-factor solution including perceived distress and perceived coping ability. For the current study, students completed only the 6 items that measure perceived distress. These negatively phrased items reflect stress that is not necessarily tied to stress resulting from a specific event. The 6-item version of the PSS scale has been used in prior studies with adolescent samples and yielded internal reliability (α = .91; Suldo et al., 2008). Regarding support for construct validity, in AP/IB students, higher PSS scores co-occurred with more frequent experiences of academic stressors (stress related to having more academic requirements; *r*=.53; Suldo et al., 2015).

In this study, students were identified as at risk if they had a PSS cut point of > 3.6, as identified in prior research (Suldo et al., 2019). That value exceeds the average scores reported by prior samples of AP and IB students, such as participants in Suldo and Shaunessy-Dedrick (2013). In addition, this score was closer to a student experiencing stress more frequently than

not. Approximately 15-16% of the AP and IB participants in the Suldo et al. (2019) sample were considered at-risk on this indicator, which is about one SD above the sample mean. See Appendix D for the items within the screening measures used in this study, including the School Satisfaction scale of the MSLSS and the PSS.

Description of the Motivation, Assessment, and Planning (MAP) Meetings

The selective intervention was developed for use with students who showed signs of academic or emotional risk the aforementioned mid-year screening. It includes a series of one to two individual counseling sessions (MAP Meetings One and Two) with a trained school mental health provider ($N = 7$ in this study, each interventionist referred to as a "coach" during interactions with students within the MAP Meetings). The MAP Meetings were designed to help youth reflect on and develop healthier coping and engagement practices that had been linked to both emotional and academic success for students in AP and IB accelerated curricula. In addition to MAP Meeting One and Two, there are two additional contacts. The first contact involves an initial meeting for the student to provide assent and complete a questionnaire. This questionnaire consisted of items designed to align with constructs demonstrated to predict academic or mental health outcomes among AP and IB students. The students' responses to the questionnaire are used to create an individualized score report for each student. The second contact occurs between MAP Meeting One and Two. Students who elected to participate in MAP Meeting Two receive a reminder letter from their coach a few weeks after MAP Meeting One. This one-page letter summarizes their goal, action steps, and solutions to barriers, as voiced by the student during MAP Meeting One. This current study only examined data from MAP Meeting One.

In MAP Meeting One, students met with a MAP coach for a 50-minute counseling session that had four stages and goals, as described below in Table 4. Within the "Engage"

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portion of MAP Meeting One, students were asked to reflect on their strengths, with the coach

giving them a prompt that was similar to "Tell me more about one of the strengths that the

people closest to you would describe as best capturing what makes you special". Appendix E

provides a more detailed outline of the beginning of the MAP session, as well as the outline of

the types of questions about character strengths that were asked to students during the Engage

portion in the MAP meeting.

Table 4. *MAP Meeting One Outline*

Motivational Interviewing Procedure	Procedures and Goals for Stage
Engage	Establish a positive alliance between therapist and student, review goals and objectives, explore the student's strengths, values, and goals, and think about reasons for change.
Focus	Discuss the student's strengths and weaknesses, use motivational interviewing techniques to affirm strengths and alignment with hopes for the future, help the student see the discrepancy between current status on behaviors that would lead to success and student's long term goals, values, and academic and emotional health while in AP/IB.
Evoke	Pose questions that led to change talk, so that the student voiced the reason for positive change on the areas the student wanted to address further. There were 4 possible questions and the interventionist's goal was to ask two of the four questions. One of the questions was specifically related to the student's strength use.
Plan	The goal was to help the student develop an action plan to work on specific areas aligned with the student's values and hopes for the future, as well as to increase the student's confidence in their ability to meet their goals.

Note. Information retrieved from Suldo et al. (2019).

MAP Meeting Two followed the same procedure as MAP Meeting One, with a focus on

examining the student's progress toward the goal they created in MAP Meeting One. Students

were offered the choice to pick a new target and create a new action plan, keep the same target

and revise the plan, or end the session.

Overview of Analyses

Data entry. For the quantitative portion, this researcher examined data collected from Module 12 within the ACE program, using Handout 12.3 (See Appendix B). During January 2018, USF researchers scanned the handout from Module 12 into a secure database. In Summer 2018, this researcher entered the strengths into a secure database and matched student data to participant ID numbers from the larger study. For the qualitative portion, this researcher examined the qualitative data from students who participated in MAP Meeting One. During Spring 2018, MAP sessions were audiotaped with each students' permission. During Fall 2018, this researcher listened to each audiotape and transcribed the portion of the tape where the student spoke about their strengths (from the Engage portion of MAP Meeting One). The 121 interviews were first transcribed into Excel by this researcher. This was organized by participant and separated by character strength. For instance, if the participant spoke about three character strengths, each separate description was separated into its according character strength (the Excel file contained one column for each strength).

Missing data. Rates of missing data points were low. For variables of interest, the researcher explored the percentage of missing data within the sample of 253 students. For data pertaining to students' race, data were missing from one (.04%) student who did not complete the race questions. Emotional data were missing from five students who did not complete the MSLSS or PSS measures (1.9%).

Quantitative Analysis

Research question 1. What are the most frequent self-identified strengths of ninth-grade adolescents in Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate programs?

For this research question, the researcher used a quantitative approach by conducting chi-square analyses. The researcher coded the student responses from ACE Module 12 in which the

students engaged in a strengths-spotting activity and identified their top five strengths from the Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Character Strengths. There were 253 students (a) present during the day Module 12 was taught, and who (b) successfully completed a handout on which they listed their self-perceived top strengths. The character strengths were entered into excel in the following way: All twenty-four-character strengths were listed in the first row and then in each column, there was a participant ID. For each participant, the value "1" was entered under each strength the participant chose. If a student chose fewer than five strengths, their strengths were still entered unless they did not choose any character strengths. After all this data were aggregated, the researcher collaborated with a methodologist from the larger research team to merge this file into the larger project dataset. Other variables within this larger dataset included ethnicity, program (AP or IB), academic risk level, and emotional risk levels (from scores on the MSLSS and PSS measures). The researcher examined these variables alongside character strengths for Research Question 2. For Research Question 1, this researcher ran frequency counts using SPSS to examine the rank order of the strengths chosen from this sample of AP and IB students.

Research question 2. To what extent, if any, do strengths differ for subgroups of students in Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate programs including:

- Ethnic groups

- Program (AP vs. IB)

- Academic risk (vs. no academic risk)

- Emotional risk (vs. no emotional risk)

Continuing the quantitative approach, the frequency counts of each strength were then examined across different subgroups including ethnicity, program, and whether or not the student

was identified as at-risk emotionally or academically according to scores on the screening measures described previously. Frequency counts were conducted through SPSS for each of the subgroups mentioned above and across participants. Then the proportion of each subgroup in comparison to the overall group was also calculated in SPSS.

When observing if different ethnic groups chose different character strengths at a unique frequency, the researcher examined the data provided from the demographic sheet (Appendix A) that had previously been entered into an electronic database by research assistants on the grant. There were two questions about race and ethnicity on the demographic sheet. The first question (ethnicity) asked students if they were of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. The second question asked students their race or ethnic identity(s), with the options being: White, Black or African American, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, or Other (See Appendix A for the exact question). Due to small sample sizes for the latter three response options and for ease of analysis these race/ethnic identity options were recoded into five groups: 1) White/Non-Hispanic, 2) Hispanic, 3) Black, 4) Asian, and 5) multiracial. There are multiple ways to group students based on ethnicity and racial identifications, and none are ideal. The research team decided to create five groups using the decision groups described as follows: A student who indicated Pacific Islander for race was placed into the larger group of Asian. Students who indicated Other race and wrote they were from India, Middle East, or were Arab were placed into the larger group of Asian, as well. A student who indicated American Indian race was placed into the larger group of White/Non-Hispanic. The student who indicated Other race and wrote Egyptian was placed into the larger group of multiracial. Students who indicated they were of Hispanic origin for the first question and then marked that they were Black or Asian for the race/ethnic identity question were placed

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into the larger group of multiracial. A student who indicated Other race and wrote a country in Latin America (Honduras, Columbia, Brazilian, Peru, Venezuela, Dominican Republic was retained in the Hispanic group, as were students who indicated Other and wrote "Hispanic." A student who identified as Hispanic for ethnicity and then White or American Indian race was retained in the Hispanic group. Students who checked multiple race groups in the second question (e.g., Black and White; Asian and Black) were placed in the multiracial group.

When determining the differences between programs, the researcher coded all the AP programs with a 0 and the students in a pre-IB program with a 1. Then, the researcher ran frequency counts and chi squares across program (AP or IB) for each character strength.

To examine the prevalence of strengths across groups of students with or without types of risk, the MSLSS and PSS variables from the larger dataset were examined. Students "at-risk emotionally" had PSS scores > 3.6, and/or a score on the MSLSS in the school engagement scale of <3.4. Students "not at-risk emotionally" had PSS scores < 3.6, and a score on the MSLSS > 3.4. Students "at risk academically" had an unweighted fall semester GPA of <3.0 and/or a grade of a C, D, or F in AP Human Geography or IB Biology. The group "not at-risk academically" had a GPA ≥ 3.0 and a grade of A or B in the aforementioned AP/IB course (Suldo et al., 2019). The researcher ran frequency counts and chi square analyses across academic and emotional risk status for each character strength.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Theoretical orientation. The researcher's theoretical approach to the qualitative portion of this study was primarily through the use of an interpretivist paradigm, in that the researcher approached the analysis with some preconceived ideas of how students' might describe their strengths based on previous research as well as the researcher's personal work with students on

their strengths. However, the researcher believes that there is no such thing as an ultimate truth or an ultimate definition of a character strength. Subsequently, the researcher believes that truth can and would constantly be changed as new students shared their identity and experiences. In addition, the researcher believes in relativism. What this means is that what is real for the researcher is different from what was real for the student because the student may have interpreted reality in a different way. This may have resulted in different understandings of the character strengths. While there may be universal definitions of each character strength, the truth of what a character strength meant to each person was not necessarily what it meant to the researcher. The researcher's role was to understand the students' interpretations and then to create meaning from them, through a co-constructed reality. Given the researcher's view on epistemology and reality, the researcher used a generic approach (Kahlke, 2014) in order to find themes, relying on the participants' own perspectives to discover themes amidst different contexts. The discovered themes should be added to the knowledge base for how high achieving students describe their strengths.

Researcher reflexivity. Having grown up in a bilingual household with a mother who was an educator herself, the researcher believes in the importance of education. These assumptions may have influenced the researcher's perspective in understanding how participants used their strengths in order to accomplish their educational goals. These assumptions could impact the way the researcher understood the participants' responses. Nevertheless, the researcher is aware of these potential biases and viewed each participants' response in its entirety within the persons' context while attempting to be aware of her own potential biases. The researcher believes that it is impossible to fully erase bias in qualitative research because it is not possible to separate oneself from what she knows. The researcher worked alongside a research

assistant who has prior expertise in qualitative research methods to develop initial themes in order to be aware of as much bias as possible and to enhance the trustworthiness of the results.

Research question 3. How do students in Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate at risk academically or emotionally discuss their behaviors and actions in a way that illustrates their strengths?

The researcher used the analysis of the most frequent strengths across different subgroups from Research Question 2 in order to guide the overall presentation of the findings in Chapter IV.

The researcher used an interpretivist paradigm alongside a generic approach to analyze the students' voices. The researcher began data analysis with some preconceived ideas on how students' might describe their strengths, based on her previous research of the VIA Classification of Strengths. The researcher utilized a constant-comparative method from grounded theory in order to identify ideas through an iterative approach. The codebook and codes were developed together during the transcription process and the codebook went through iterations. The researcher went through written transcripts multiple times in order to find commonalities across the data to identify overall themes. Data were coded through the use of open coding and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 1998). Open coding involved separating data by concepts into its main categories (each character strength). Then, the categories were grouped around a main idea or theme through the use of axial coding (Creswell, 2013).

The researcher also considered Ryan and Bernard's (2003) strategies in order to influence how themes were created. Once all of the data were separated into the corresponding character strength, the researcher scanned for repetition and examined how often a concept occurred. Unique words and ideas were compared using the constant-comparative method until all

statements could be reduced to specific themes. Then the researcher examined metaphors or underlying themes that could explain those metaphors. Next, it was important to identify naturally occurring shifts which could indicate a new theme. The researcher considered the similarities and differences across all the character strengths in order to make comparisons across all of the interviews (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Once the important themes were identified, each specific character strength's transcripts were coded according to the descriptions for each theme. Several codes were then congregated together to form secondary themes, and in some cases, tertiary themes. This was an iterative process in which the codes and themes were constantly refined and recoded.

After developing a list of initial themes and codes from the qualitative data, this researcher provided a second researcher (i.e., research assistant) with these initial themes. The research assistant is a fourth-year graduate student in the School Psychology Program, who completed coursework in qualitative methods. This researcher trained the research assistant on the initial codes and themes in order for this researcher and the research assistant to discuss if there were other potential codes and themes that arose from the data. All inconsistencies were discussed and resolved. However, because this researcher ascribes to the interpretivist paradigm and believes that there is no ultimate truth, the codebooks were ultimately those of the primary researcher's.

Theoretical sampling was conducted in which new ideas were constantly sorted into categories until saturation occurred, meaning that the data produced little or no change to the codebook in regard to the most important concepts in the study. The sampling of cases, collection of data, and analysis of data was considered simultaneously.

Table 5 demonstrates a sample coding scheme that the researcher used to illustrate

students' descriptions of their strengths. A "Main Theme" refers to an overarching theme or topic in which secondary themes might fall within them. A "Secondary Theme" refers to a smaller theme that expresses a smaller component of the main theme. A "Tertiary Theme" refers to a smaller theme within a secondary theme. This only occurred for one secondary theme. A "Quote" refers to a direct quote spoken by the participant.

Table 5. *Sample Coding Scheme for How Students Describe Their Strengths*

Character Strength	Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Strength Example
Creativity	Importance	Makes me unique	"I have to have creativity in mind and think of things that most people wouldn't think of to do in an art project or just make an art piece that most people wouldn't think of"
Judgement/Open-Mindedness	Importance	Making up for Deficits	"I am not judgmental mostly because things in my life have also been bad so I don't judge other people's lives"
Hope	Manifestation	Application	"Well, hope is believing that good things will happen in the future. I always try to tell myself that things will work out, everything will be okay, don't worry about it."

When deciding how to organize the results section, the researcher wanted to choose a way that would best describe each individual character strength. As a result, each character strength was represented in the results section. Within each character strength, each main theme that was coded was included in that character strength's results. When deciding which quotes to include in the results section, the researcher chose quotes that she felt best represented each main theme across a variety of secondary themes, if they were available. Not every character strength had every theme or secondary theme represented. Given that there were hundreds of descriptions of the character strengths, it was not possible to include every single secondary theme for each character strength, however the researcher ensured that every single main theme that was coded

was encapsulated for each character strength in this section. Illustrative quotes were provided in order to illustrate each main theme.

Ethical Considerations

The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the participating districts' granted approval for the study prior to any data collection. Because this study involved a secondary data analysis, consent and assent were provided as part of the larger study. These forms are included in the Appendix. Participants were labeled with a code number prior to data collection. All data were stored in electronic files within USF's secure storage area, where all data for the larger IES grant project were also stored. This storage area was only accessible by approved team members on the research project, including the author of this thesis. All interviews were also uploaded to a secure data drive, but no names were retained on these files. Instead, the participant code was placed on the files. The researcher analyzed this de-identified data.

Limitations/Delimitations

Regarding limitations to this study, the participants included only 9th grade students who were in either an AP or IB program (with a "pre-IB" curriculum). This limits the generalizability of the results of this study to only students in that grade and within those programs, although an argument could be made that the results may be applicable to other students in these programs outside of 9th grade. Since this study sought to increase the knowledge and understanding of students' strengths, the verbalization of the strengths during the qualitative portion of the interview may be applicable across many different types of high school students.

Another limitation of this study was that the students self-assessed their strengths based on a list using a strengthspotting exercise, as opposed to using the VIA Online Character Inventory. The majority of studies described previously in Chapters I and II involved participants

using the free VIA-Youth Survey. It is therefore possible that students chose strengths that they were more familiar with as opposed to less familiar. This self-report of strengths may have impacted the results and may be different than the strengths they actually use the most, as determined by a more commonly used method such as completion of the VIA-Youth survey.

A final limitation was the restriction to secondary data analysis. Therefore, the researcher did not have the ability to clarify any inconsistencies found in the data, nor follow up with the students if any questions arose. The researcher was also not able to determine how teachers, peers, and other informants may have perceived the strengths in the student because that information was not collected. Finally, the qualitative data came from questions asked within MAP Meeting One. The original purpose of the MAP meeting was not to examine students' strengths. Rather, the questions asked about the students' strengths were designed to learn more about the student and to increase rapport between the coach and the student. It is possible that in a different type of setting, the student would have given different information about their strengths. Because the MAP meetings were conducted by seven different coaches, it is possible that there may have been differences in style that may have impacted the quality of responses available for analysis.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter includes a description of the results from the quantitative and qualitative analyses in order to answer the three research questions in this study. First, this chapter presents the results of the first two quantitative research questions. Then, this chapter describes the results of the qualitative analyses in order to demonstrate how students describe each of the character strengths. Results are organized by research question.

Quantitative Results

Research question 1. What are the most frequent self-identified strengths of ninth-grade adolescents in Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate programs?

Analysis of the strengths reported by the sample of 253 participants revealed that humor was the most frequently chosen strength, selected by 115 students (45.5%) as among their top character strengths. There was a marked drop in prevalence after humor, to a group of strengths that approximately one-quarter of students identified with; this group included: love (28.5%), creativity (28.1%), kindness (28.1%), curiosity (26.9%), persistence/perseverance (26.1%), honesty/authenticity (24.5%), and zest (24.1%). Spirituality was the least selected strength, selected by only 17 participants (6.7%), followed by humility/modesty, selected by 18 participants (7.1%), and then prudence, selected by 20 participants (7.9%). The full order of the endorsed strengths is listed in Table 6.

Table 6. *Prevalence of Strengths Identified by AP and IB Students who Completed Module 12 of the ACE Program*

	Strength Frequency	
Strength	*N*	Percentage
1. Humor	115	45.5%
2. Love	72	28.5%
3. Creativity	71	28.1%
4. Kindness	68	26.9%
4. Curiosity	68	26.9%
6. Persistence/Perseverance	66	26.1%
7. Honesty/Authenticity	62	24.5%
8. Zest	61	24.1%
9. Love of Learning	59	23.3%
10. Hope	52	20.6%
11. Perspective	51	20.2%
12. Fairness	44	17.4%
12. Judgement/Open Mindedness	44	17.4%
14. Bravery	40	15.8%
14. Forgiveness	40	15.7%
16. Teamwork	40	15.8%
17. Leadership	39	15.4%
18. Social Intelligence	37	14.6%
19. Gratitude	30	11.9%
20. Self-Regulation	29	11.5%
20. Appreciation of Beauty	29	11.5%
22. Prudence	20	7.9%
23. Humility/Modesty	18	7.1%
24. Spirituality	17	6.7%

Note. *N* = 253

Research question 2. To what extent, if any, do the most frequently endorsed strengths differ for subgroups of students in Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate programs including:

    a. Ethnic groups

    b. Program (AP versus IB)

c. Academic risk (vs. no academic risk)

d. Emotional risk (vs. no emotional risk)

Table 7 presents the descriptors of race based on each character strength for all participants. A series of chi-square tests of independence was performed to examine the relation between character strengths and race. Results of chi square tests indicated that the percentage of participants who chose love of Learning differed by race, χ^2 (4, $N = 252$) $= .05$, $p < .05$. A higher percentage of Asian students (42.9%) chose this strength, in comparison to students who were White (25.9%), multiracial (17.5%), Hispanic (16.0%), and Black (13.6%). In addition, the percentage of participants who chose social intelligence differed by race as well, χ^2 (4, $N = 252$) $= .02$, $p < .05$. A higher percentage of White students (21.4%) chose this strength, in comparison to students who were Hispanic (16.0%), Black (13.6%), Asian (7.1%), and multiracial (0.0%).

Results for the differences between AP and IB students' chosen character strengths are displayed in Table 8. A series of chi-square tests of independence was performed to examine the relation between character strengths and program (either AP or IB). The relation between the following variables was significant: creativity, χ^2 (1, $N = 253$) $= .02$, $p < .05$ and fairness, χ^2 (1, $N = 253$) $= .01$, $p < .05$, differed by program, with more AP students choosing these strengths as compared to IB students. In addition, the relation between the following variables was also significant: self-regulation, χ^2 (1, $N = 253$) $= .05$, $p < .05$ and kindness, χ^2 (1, $N = 253$) $= .01$, $p < .01$ also differed by program, with this time more IB students choosing these strengths as compared to AP students.

Table 7. *Prevalence of Each Character Strength Across Ethnic Group by Those Who Completed Module 12 of the ACE Program*

Strength	Overall Strength Prevalence	Ethnic Group				
		White (N =112)	Black (N =22)	Hispanic (N =50)	Asian (N =28)	multiracial (N =40)
Creativity	71 (28.1%)	29 (25.9%)	5 (22.7%)	15 (30.0%)	7 (25.0%)	14 (35.0%)
Curiosity	68 (26.9%)	36 (32.1%)	5 (22.7%)	10 (20.0%)	4 (14.3%)	13 (32.5%)
Love of Learning	59 (23.3%)	29* (25.9%)	3* (13.6%)	8* (16.0%)	12* (42.9%)	7* (17.5%)
Judgement/OM	44 (17.4%)	19 (17.0%)	3 (13.6%)	9 (18.0%)	8 (28.6%)	5 (12.5%)
Perspective	51 (20.2%)	25 (22.3%)	2 (9.1%)	8 (16.0%)	6 (21.4%)	9 (22.5%)
Honesty/Auth.	62 (24.5%)	24 (21.4%)	5 (22.7%)	8 (16.0%)	10 (35.7%)	15 (37.5%)
Bravery	40 (15.8%)	19 (17.0%)	4 (18.2%)	7 (14.0%)	2 (7.1%)	8 (20.0%)
Persistence/Pers.	66 (26.1%)	30 (26.8%)	5 (22.7%)	13 (26.0%)	10 (35.7%)	8 (20.0%)
Zest	61 (24.1%)	24 (21.4%)	7 (31.8%)	9 (18.0%)	9 (32.1%)	12 (30.0%)
Kindness	68 (26.9%)	30 (26.8%)	5 (22.7%)	16 (32.0%)	6 (21.4%)	10 (25.0%)
Love	72 (28.5%)	24 (21.4%)	8 (36.4%)	21 (42.0%)	7 (25.0%)	12 (30.0%)
Social Intelligence	37 (14.6%)	24* (21.4%)	3* (13.6%)	8* (16.0%)	2* (7.1%)	0* (0.0%)
Fairness	44 (17.4%)	23 (20.5%)	3 (13.6%)	11 (22.0%)	3 (10.7%)	4 (10.0%)
Leadership	39 (15.4%)	18 (16.1%)	5 (22.7%)	8 (16.0%)	3 (10.7%)	5 (12.5%)
Teamwork	40 (15.8%)	19 (17.0%)	4 (18.2%)	4 (8.0%)	4 (14.3%)	9 (22.5%)
Forgiveness	40 (15.7%)	17 (15.2%)	7 (31.8%)	7 (14.0%)	2 (7.1%)	7 (15.9%)
Humility/Mod.	18 (7.1%)	9 (8.0%)	2 (9.1%)	3 (6.0%)	3 (10.7%)	1 (2.5%)
Prudence	20 (7.9%)	7 (6.3%)	1 (4.5%)	3 (6.0%)	4 (14.3%)	5 (12.5%)
Self Regulation	29 (11.5%)	15 (13.4%)	3 (13.6%)	4 (8.0%)	4 (14.3%)	3 (7.5%)
Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence	29 (11.5%)	11 (9.8%)	1 (4.5%)	8 (16.0%)	3 (10.7%)	5 (12.5%)
Gratitude	30 (11.9%)	16 (14.3%)	1 (4.5%)	7 (14.0%)	4 (14.3%)	2 (5.0%)
Hope	52 (20.6%)	22 (19.6%)	5 (22.7%)	12 (24.0%)	4 (14.3%)	9 (22.5%)
Humor	115 (45.5%)	50 (44.6%)	14 (63.6%)	20 (40.0%)	11 (39.3%)	19 (47.5%)
Spirituality	17 (6.7%)	3 (2.7%)	2 (9.1%)	7 (14.0%)	3 (10.7%)	2 (5.0%)

*Note.: *p < .05. **p < .01.*

Results for the differences between students' chosen character strength across Academic and Emotional risk status are displayed in Table 9. A series of chi-square tests of independence was performed to examine the relation between character strengths and risk status (either academic or emotional). One of the 24 character strengths differed significantly between the students of different academic risk status. The percentage of participants who chose the character strength of persistence/perseverance differed by academic status, χ^2 (1, $N = 253$) = .04, $p < .05$; a higher percentage of students without academic risk identified this as a top character strength as compared to prevalence among students with academic risk.

Table 8. *Prevalence of Each Character Strength Across Academic Program by Those Who Completed Module 12 of the ACE Program*

Strength	Program	
	AP **(N=148)**	**IB** **(N=105)**
Creativity	50 (33.8%)*	21 (20.0%)*
Curiosity	37 (25.9%)	31 (29.5%)
Love of Learning	39 (26.4%)	20 (19.0%)
Judgement/OM	23 (15.5%)	21 (20.0%)
Perspective	30 (20.3%)	21 (20.0%)
Honesty/Authenticity	37 (25.0%)	25 (23.8%)
Bravery	26 (17.6%)	14 (13.3%)
Persistence/Perseverance	34 (23.0%)	32 (30.5%)
Zest	32 (21.6%)	29 (27.6%)
Kindness	30 (20.3%)**	38 (36.2%)**
Love	38 (25.7%)	34 (32.4%)
Social Intelligence	23 (15.5%)	14 (13.3%)
Fairness	34 (23.0%)**	10 (9.5%)**
Leadership	24 (16.2%)	15 (14.3%)
Teamwork	22 (14.9%)	18 (17.1%)
Forgiveness	24 (16.2%)	16 (15.2%)
Humility/Modesty	9 (6.1%)	9 (8.6%)
Prudence	13 (8.8%)	7 (6.7%)
Self Regulation	12 (8.1%)*	17 (16.2%)*
Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence	19 (12.8%)	10 (9.5%)
Gratitude	17 (11.5%)	13 (12.4%)
Hope	32 (21.6%)	20 (19.0%)
Humor	68 (45.9%)	47 (44.8%)
Spirituality	12 (8.1%)	5 (4.8%)

*Note.: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.*

When examining emotional status, the prevalence of seven strengths differed significantly based on emotional status (either no risk or risk). Specifically, a higher percentage of students *without* emotional risk identified the following as top character strengths: creativity, χ^2 (1, $N = 248$) = .02, $p < .05$; persistence/perseverance, χ^2 (1, $N = 248$) = .01, $p < .05$; leadership, χ^2 (1, $N = 248$) = .009, $p < .01$; and teamwork, χ^2 (1, $N = 4=248$) = .02, $p < .05$. A higher percentage of students *with* emotional risk identified the following as top character

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strengths: love, χ^2 (1, $N = 248$) = .02, $p < .05$; hope, χ^2 (1, $N = 248$) = .02, $p < .05$; and humor, χ^2 (1, $N = 248$) = .03, $p < .05$.

Table 9. *Prevalence of Each Character Strength by Academic or Emotional Risk Level Chosen*

by Those Who Completed Module 12 of the ACE Program

Strength	Academic or Emotional Status			
	Academic Status		**Emotional Status**	
	No Risk (*N=195*)	**Risk** (*N=58*)	**No Risk** (*N=185*)	**Risk** (*N=63*)
Creativity	53 (27.2%)	18 (31.0%)	45 (24.3%)*	25 (39.7%)*
Curiosity	51 (26.2%)	17 (29.3%)	48 (25.9%)	19 (30.2%)
Love of Learning	51 (26.2%)	8 (13.8%)	47 (25.4%)	11 (17.5%)
Judgement/OM	35 (17.9%)	9 (15.5%)	33 (17.8%)	11 (17.5%)
Perspective	42 (21.5%)	9 (15.5%)	40 (21.6%)	10 (15.9%)
Honesty/Authenticity	50 (25.6%)	12 (20.7%)	44 (23.9%)	17 (27.0%)
Bravery	29 (14.9%)	11 (19.0%)	32 (17.3%)	8 (12.7%)
Persistence/Perseverance	57 (29.2%)*	9 (15.5%)*	56 (30.3%)*	9 (14.3%)*
Zest	47 (24.1%)	14 (24.1%)	49 (26.5%)	10 (15.9%)
Kindness	56 (28.7%)	12 (20.7%)	52 (28.1%)	15 (23.8%)
Love	56 (29.2%)	15 (26.3%)	45 (24.3%)*	25 (39.7%)*
Social Intelligence	27 (13.8%)	10 (17.2%)	23 (12.4%)	13 (20.6%)
Fairness	31 (15.9%)	13 (22.4%)	34 (18.4%)	10 (15.9%)
Leadership	28 (14.4%)	11 (19.0%)	34 (18.4%)**	3 (4.8%)**
Teamwork	28 (14.4%)	12 (20.7%)	36 (19.5%)*	4 (6.3%)*
Forgiveness	31 (15.9%)	9 (15.5%)	26 (14.1%)	12 (19.0%)
Humility/Modesty	13 (6.7%)	5 (8.6%)	13 (7.0%)	5 (7.9%)
Prudence	14 (7.2%)	6 (10.3%)	13 (7.0%)	7 (11.1%)
Self Regulation	25 (12.8%)	4 (6.9%)	24 (13.0%)	5 (7.9%)
Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence	21 (10.8%)	8 (13.8%)	21 (11.4%)	8 (12.7%)
Gratitude	25 (12.8%)	5 (8.6%)	24 (13.0%)	6 (9.5%)
Hope	41 (21.0%)	11 (19.0%)	32 (17.3%)*	20 (31.7%)*
Humor	83 (42.6%)	32 (55.2%)	76 (41.1%)*	36 (57.1%)*
Spirituality	13 (6.7%)	4 (6.9%)	10 (5.4%)	7 (11.1%)

Note. *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

In sum, findings from the quantitative analyses indicated which strengths were most

prevalent overall, as well as amongst various subgroups of students (program, race, and risk

status). The six most identified strengths were humor, love, creativity, kindness, curiosity, and

persistence/perseverance. The least selected strengths were spirituality, humility/modesty, and

prudence. Amongst ethnic groups, love of learning and social intelligence differed by race. A

higher percentage of Asian students chose love of learning, and a higher percentage of White

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students identified with social intelligence. When looking at academic program, the strengths of creativity, fairness, self-regulation, and kindness varied between AP and IB students. More AP students identified with creativity and fairness, whereas more IB students identified with self-regulation and kindness. Finally, when looking across risk level, the strengths of persistence/perseverance, creativity, leadership, teamwork, hope, love, and humor differed between groups of students above and below a risk threshold. A higher percentage of students without academic risk identified with the strength of persistence/perseverance as compared to students with academic risk. In addition, a higher percentage of students without emotional risk identified with creativity, persistence/perseverance, leadership, and teamwork. A higher percentage of students with emotional risk identified with the character strengths of love, hope, and humor.

Qualitative Results

Research question 3. How do students in Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate at risk academically or emotionally describe their behaviors and actions in a way that illustrates their strengths?

Qualitative results are offered to provide an understanding of how students verbally described their self-identified character strengths. This study adopted a generic and interpretivist approach in order to analyze the qualitative data that resulted from MAP Meeting One. The researcher relied upon the constant-comparative method in order to create themes for each character strength that reflected the voices of the participants, as described more in depth in the section "Qualitative Methods" of Chapter III. Each character strength had at least one theme to represent how students described it. Each student was represented by a pseudonym that came from an online name generator.

Three main themes emerged throughout this process: *Manifestation*, *Importance*, and *Origination*. Table 10 displays the themes with a labeled descriptor so that the reader can differentiate between main, secondary, and tertiary themes.

Table 10. *Descriptions of Themes Used to Illustrate the Findings of Qualitative Analysis*

Main Theme	Secondary Theme	Tertiary Theme
Manifestation	Definition	
	Application	Class Assignments/Application
		Hobbies/Application
Importance	Aligns with Values/Strengths/Interests	
	Facilitates growth	
	Uniqueness	
	Making up for deficits	
	Contributes to relationships	
	Relation to future goals	
Origination	Innate	
	From a young age	
	Other's recognition of the strength	
	Family History	
	Over time	

Within the theme of *Manifestation*, there were two secondary themes: *Definition* and *Application*. *Definition* included quotes from students who defined a character strength in their own words. *Application* included quotes from student who provided real-life examples of using a given character strength. In a few situations, the researcher applied a tertiary level of specification within the secondary theme of *Application*. *Hobbies/Application* was applied to student quotes that verbalized examples of using a given character strength with a hobby, pastime, or other extracurricular activity. *Class assignments/Application* was applied to student quotes that described using a character strength in relation to class assignments or school work.

The second theme of *Importance* had six secondary themes: *Aligns with values/strengths/interests, facilitates growth, uniqueness, making up for deficits, contributes to*

relationships, and *relation to future goals*. The researcher coded *Aligns with values/strengths/interests* when a student tied a character strength to another strength, value, or interest. Values included situations where the participants verbalized an idea that appeared to be a lifelong belief or a life rule of the participant. *Facilitates growth* was applied to situations where the participant discussed the importance of the strength in relation to self-growth. This self-growth included self-learning, life strategies, and an increase in positive emotions. *Uniqueness* included any quotes where the participant described the character strength as important to his or her life because it set them apart from other people. *Making up for deficit*s was applied to quotes where the participant explained how the strength compensated for a perceived deficit. *Contributes to relationships* included any quotes where the participants described the strength and its positive impact on other people. For example, students described how using the strength brought comfort to other people or helped other people feel happier. *Relation to future goals* was applied to all quotes that talked about the strength in relationship to the future. This included achieving a goal, reaching a certain career, or going to college.

The third theme of *Origination* had five secondary themes within it: *Innate, From a young age, Other's recognition of the strength, Family history,* and *Over time. Innate* was applied if the student discussed always having the character strength within them. *Other's recognition of this strength* was applied if students mentioned that they identified with this character strength specifically because another person recognized it within them. The researcher applied *From a young age* to students' descriptions of memories of using the strength when they were young. *Family history* was applied if the participant described the origination of the strength as having family origins. For instance, the researcher applied this theme for a participant who discussed how every member of her family was creative, and that impacted her

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identification with creativity. *Over tim*e was applied to quotes that discussed changes in the

character strength over time, and/or perhaps made reference to a time when the person displayed

different levels of the character strength. Table 11 presents a legend for the reader to better be

able to understand the labels in Table 12. Table 12 displays each character strength and the

corresponding qualitative themes that were expressed by the 121 students.

Table 11. *Legend for Table 12*

Label in Table X	Corresponding Descriptor
% Q1	The percent of Students who chose the strength from Module 12
% Dis in MAP	The percent of Students who discussed the strength in the MAP session
# Dis. in MAP	The number of students who discussed the strength in the MAP session
Man	Manifestation
Def	Definition
App	Application
Impt	Importance
Aligns w. s/v/i	Aligns with Strengths/Values/Interests
Growth	Facilitates growth
Unique	Uniqueness
Deficits	Making up for deficits
Rel.	Contributes to relationships
Goals	Relation to future goals
Orig	Origination
Innate	Innate
From a y. a	From a Young Age
Other's rec	Other's recognition of the strength
Fam His	Family History
Over time	Over time

Table 12. *Overview of Each Strength and Corresponding Qualitative Themes*

	% Q1	% Dis. in MAP	# Dis. in MAP	Man.	Def	App	Impt.	Aligns w. s/v/I	Growth	Unique	Deficits	Rel.	Goals	Orig.	Innate	From a y. a	Other's rec.	Fam His	Over time
Humor	45.5	28.9	35	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X		X		X
Love	28.5	9.1	11	X	X	X	X	X	X										
Creativity	28.0	21.5	26	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kindness	26.9	17.3	21	X	X	X	X	X				X		X				X	
Curiosity	26.9	12.3	15	X	X	X	X	X	X					X	X	X			
Persistence Perseverance	26.1	6.6	8	X	X	X	X	X											
Zest	24.1	2.5	3	X	X	X								X			X		
Honesty Authenticity	24.5	11.5	14	X	X	X	X	X				X		X				X	X
Love of Learning	23.3	8.3	10	X	X	X	X		X										
Hope	20.6	8.3	10	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X						
Perspective	20.2	9.1	11	X	X	X	X	X		X		X		X				X	
Fairness	17.4	3.3	4				X	X											
Judgement Open Mindedness	17.4	7.4	9	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X			X		
Bravery	15.8	5.8	7	X	X	X								X			X		
Forgiveness	15.7	12.4	15	X		X	X	X	X			X		X				X	
Teamwork	15.8	5	6	X	X	X	X					X	X						
Leadership	15.4	11.6	14	X	X	X	X	X	X			X							
Social Intelligence	14.6	7.4	9	X	X	X													
Gratitude	11.9	3.3	4	X		X	X	X	X										
Self-Reg	11.5	2.5	3	X	X									X			X		
Appr. of Beauty	11.5	8.3	10	X	X	X								X					X
Prudence	7.9	1.7	2				X	X				X							
Humility Modesty	7.1	.8	1	X	X														
Spirituality	6.7	3.3	4	X		X	X	X	X										

Individual Character Strengths, Findings from Qualitative Data

Humor. As aforementioned, humor was the most identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 115 of 253 students (45.5% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, the highest proportion of students (28.9%; 35 of 121 students) chose to discuss humor with the coaches. A review of the transcribed descriptions of humor from these 35 students yielded all three main themes with regard to how youth described humor: *Manifestation, Origination, and Importance.*

In regard to the *origination* of humor, Cherry (IB) stated "I don't think it's an intrinsic thing. I think it's a practice trait. I like using it as a tool." This student viewed humor as something that he could use throughout his life as a tool, not as something that was innately a part of his personality. This student viewed the strength as developing over a certain amount of time. Bulah (AP) identified with humor because "My friends say I'm really funny." Several other students also voiced that they identified with this strength because of *other's recognition of the strength*.

Students also described humor's *Importance.* For instance, Theodore (AP) stated that "one of my goals is to make everyone laugh." For this student, his overall desire was to help other people also be able to experience this character strength. Another student, Laura (AP) stated that she found humor important "because you always have to look at the bright side of things to get through it and if you can find something funny about it then that will help you." This was viewed as something that *facilitates growth,* because for this student, exercising the strength of humor facilitated her ability to be successful. Cherry (IB) provided another example of humor when he said,

I think overall, aside from just being a nice and funny dude, I think it's real useful in a lot

of situations. When tensions are high or there is a problem we can't solve, a joke kind of defuses the situation.

This student verbalized how using humor could assist those nearest to him. Finally, several students described humor as important to them because they preferred to be around others who were also lighthearted. For instance, Larisa (AP) expressed, "I always try to be light and not serious because it's fun to hang around those types of people." Similarly, Lucrecia (IB) stated "I like people that laugh and have fun." Being around others who expressed this strength was one of this student's value.

Students also described humor's *Manifestation* in their life by providing concrete examples of the *Application* of humor throughout their life. Larisa (AP) described how she used humor in her life as "I'm always making jokes. I'm never serious. I'm always trying to make other people laugh and have a good time." Dorothea (AP) expressed, "I try to make things better by joking around." Cedric voiced, "Probably not the best thing but I'm good at turning everything into a joke, even if it's a terrible joke… It's sometimes a coping mechanism, turning awkward situations into a joke, and it's gotten me into trouble before." Many students who spoke about using humor in their life articulated how they joked around and made situations more lighthearted.

Overall, the students who identified with humor spoke about how they used this strength to impact the relationships around them mostly in a positive and prosocial manner. Humor appears to be a strength that could affect the self, both positively and negatively, whether through allowing a person to persevere in tough situations (e.g., during uncomfortable or hard conversations) or placing a student into a precarious situation (e.g., by trying to use humor to defuse a difficult situation and it not being received well by the other party).

Love. Love was the 2nd most identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 72 of 253 students (28.5% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, 9.1% of students (11 of 121) chose to discuss love. A review of the transcribed descriptions of love from these 11 students yielded two main themes with regard to how youth described love: *Manifestation* and *Importance*.

In regard to *Manifestation*, several students provided *Definitions* of the character strength of love. Trinity (IB) stated, "I'm very close to my friends. I like to support them, I like to be around them." Vinnie (AP) expressed a similar definition for love by stating, "I just love people like my family and friends." Stewart's (AP) definition was similar when he stated,

> I get really close to people really easily. It's so natural to ask someone if they are doing
>
> okay or for them to tell me how they are doing and so it's easy for me to say that I'm close
>
> to someone in a short amount of time.

In each of these definitions, it is clear that demonstrating the character strength of love has to do with caring for other people.

Some students also provided an *Application* of the character strength of love. Zona (AP) stated, "like, my mother, yeah she pisses me off a lot sometimes, but she's my mom and I owe her everything and I love my mom and my brother, and a lot of people." In this example, this student was able to express this character strength to another person in spite of a negative mood. Nery (AP) stated, "well I'm oldest and that's kind of saying a lot. So, I care about my siblings a lot and I'm always taking care of them, making sure they are doing things right like I would." Similar to Zona (AP), this student conveyed this character strength toward his family members.

In regard to *Importance*, Pauletta (AP) explained, "I feel like love is the most important thing in life. You have to love yourself, you have to love the people around you." This

demonstrated *Alignment with Values/Strengths/Interests.* For this student, love was viewed as a universal value by which she lived her life. Another student, Madonna (AP) expressed a similar train of thought, by stating "I'm a hopeless romantic, since I was young I always wanted to be in a relationship and things like that, you know it's just those things that I really value."

In sum, the strength of love was viewed as facilitative for a student to become closer to others. In addition, love was viewed as crucial for both loving outwardly as well as learning how to love oneself.

Creativity. Creativity was the 3rd most frequently identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 71 of 253 students (28.0% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, a relatively high proportion of students (21.5%; 26 of 121 students) chose to discuss creativity. A review of the transcribed descriptions of creativity from these 26 students yielded all three main themes with regard to how youth described creativity: *Manifestation, Origination, and Importance.*

Students described the strength of creativity's *Origination* through the themes of *Family History, Other's Recognition of the Strength, From a Young Age,* and *Over Time.* Stewart (AP) verbalized, "My family, we are really big on creativity. My dad, he draws, he sings, he plays guitar. My parents love dancing. All family members do something or all of them combined." This student identified with creativity because other important people in his life also expressed this strength, thus exemplifying *Family history.* Another student, Kathrine (IB), spoke about how she developed this strength *over time*. She said, "I don't think that always used to be a part of me. I think that really started in middle school. I just decided, hey, I think I'm going to write a book." This student spoke about how she did not view creativity as innate but instead as a choice to be used in her life. For other students, the strength of creativity had been present in their life since a

Young age. Sparkle (AP) stated,

> I am a really creative person, and with all my friends I would always draw them ever
>
> since I was little and I would make little arts and crafts, I used to when I was little I
>
> would make these little houses and the furniture for my pets and stuff because I had a
>
> hamster back then and I'm an art major.

This student vocalized a memory of using this strength from a young age.

Students also took the time to describe the *Importance* of this character strength. Sparkle (AP) stated, "I love painting. It's definitely one of the things that calms me down." This example of *Facilitates Growth* demonstrates how using this strength was a strategic way for her to manage distress. For Marian (AP), the character strength of creativity was important because it was *aligned with values/strengths/interests.* She expressed,

> I'm in performing arts so I feel that being creative just in general in really any art,
>
> performance or visual is very important and that is something that I have, that is
>
> something that I am looking to have, and something that I put into my performance.

For this student, it was important to live her life being creative, whether in performance of visual art. Aleisha (AP) found creativity important because of its *Relation to future goals.* She stated, "what I really want to do is engineering because I always like working with things, like since I have a creative mind, I always make wacky things when I'm drawing stuff." For this student, creativity was intricately tied to her future goal of being an engineer.

Several students also described creativity's *Manifestation.* Some students provided *Definitions* of this character strength. Kathrine (IB) defined creativity as "Thinking of new ways to do things." Aleisha (AP) resonated with this idea as well, stating, "It's like creativity because no one would think of it but me." Lucina (IB) defined creativity as "When I do a certain project,

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I immediately have a lot of ideas." Creativity was defined as playing a concrete role in these students' ways of thinking.

Other students provided *Applications* of this strength. Karren (AP) expressed, "I creatively find ways to do my work." Darron (AP) stated similar usage of this strength by declaring,

> I get very creative when I'm stuck in a pickle, like when I can't, like when I have a lot of dance, but I also have a lot of homework to do, I'll get creative with my schedule so that I'm able to do both.

In sum, creativity was described as impacting a person's thinking style by assisting in the generation of novel ideas. In addition, creativity was able to be used in all aspects of a person's life and often viewed as something that would be facilitative in their life in the future as well.

Kindness. Kindness was the 4th most identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 68 of 253 students (26.9% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, almost one fifth of students (17.3%; 21 of 121 students) chose to discuss kindness. A review of the transcribed descriptions of kindness from these 21 students yielded all three main themes with regard to how youth described kindness: *Origination, Manifestation,* and *Importance*.

In regard to *Origination,* some students identified with kindness because of *Other's recognition of the strength.* For instance, Catheryn (AP) stated, "In the past few schools that I've been to, people have always seen me as an overly kind and heartwarming person which is really nice for them to say." For this student, being viewed by others as a kind person was affirming and helped her to identify with this strength.

In regard to Manifestation, when students were asked what kindness meant to them, a few

provided a *definition.* Drusilla (AP) stated,

> I like to be nice to everyone. I don't like to be mean, unless I'm having a bad day but I try
>
> to stay away from people when I am, you know? I just try to be nice and I feel like
>
> sometimes that's not such a good thing, because it can come off like the wrong way or
>
> something, but I like being nice to people, and I expect them to be nice back.

Being nice to others was echoed by many other students. For instance, Antonia (IB) said "I'm always really nice to people." Dayle (IB) defined kindness as "I try to be there for everybody."

Some students also provided an *Application* of kindness. For instance, Marlene (IB) voiced,

> I like helping out people like if I'm in a store and I see an older person needs help I'll help
>
> them with their groceries, putting it in their cart and taking it to the car and stuff, and then
>
> I help with my parents and my grandparents also.

These examples demonstrate that one way to utilize kindness is by helping the people around them.

Other students spoke about the strength's *Importance.* Scot (AP) noted "that kind of goes along with open-mindedness. I think that I'm overall a pretty nice person to people. I try my best to help more than hurt." In this case, Scot saw kindness as important because it aligned with his other character strength of Open-Mindedness. Another student spoke about it in terms of how it *contributes to relationships.* Bryant (AP) voiced,

> Well everyone always says that I have a lot of kindness so when I think of situations, my
>
> first thing I do is how can I help others more than I can, to me, I value others more than I
>
> value myself. I feel like if people around me are happy, then I'll be happy too.

This desire to help others over oneself is very external. Even though he stated that helping others would ultimately facilitate his own happiness, Bryant made it clear that he valued his relationships with the people around him above himself.

Overall, the strength of kindness was viewed as facilitative for helping other people. Students verbalized a differentiation between helping versus hurting someone, a desire to always be there for others, a desire to be empathetic, and the happiness they gained from using this strength.

Curiosity. Curiosity was tied for the 4th most identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 68 of 253 students (26.9% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, 12.3% (15 of 121 students) discussed curiosity. A review of the transcribed descriptions of curiosity from these 15 students yielded three main themes with regard to how youth described curiosity: *Origination, Manifestation,* and *Importance.*

Within the theme of *origination,* one student described how this strength originated *From a young age.* Michaele (IB) stated, "I really like exploring things. I don't really know how, but I guess I've always been curious as a child." While Michaele was not sure where this strength emerged from, she was aware that it had been a part of her since she was very young.

Within *Manifestation,* several students verbalized how they would *Define* this character strength. Madeleine (IB) expressed, "I always liked asking a lot of questions but I do like asking a lot of questions knowing why stuff is happening." For her, understanding the 'why' was crucial. Another student, Dian (IB) stated,

> I've always been a curious person. Ever since I was young, I've always asked questions
> all the time. Sometimes I'm really pestering about them too, I just keep trying until I

understand something, I keep looking into it.

This example was viewed from a *Manifestation* standpoint because the student spoke broadly about the strength as opposed to providing a specific instance of asking questions. For Dian, curiosity meant asking questions until he fully understood a topic.

Providing *Applications* of this character strength, Georgine (AP) said, "I'm always the one asking questions in class and if someone has a question, I'm asking it." Students who identified with curiosity might be more likely to be the ones willing to ask questions in class. Valentina (AP) provided another example when she said,

> curiosity because I'm very curious about things. I like to learn something if it's just the basic idea, I like to learn more on my own…. Like sciences, I just learn something basic and then I'll do more research by myself.

This student went out of her way to learn more by conducting her own research in areas she wanted to understand more deeply.

Within *Importance,* one student discussed how curiosity *facilitated growth.* Shaina (AP) stated, "curiosity in trying to improve myself. Trying to find new ways to improve myself so I can be better." Shaina (AP) was able to use her strength of curiosity to help herself and facilitate her own growth. Larisa (AP) provided, "it's really interesting to see what people are doing all around the world and you get to learn more about things." This example demonstrated that this student valued learning from others.

In sum, curiosity was viewed as impacting the learning process. The students who identified with curiosity tended to be the ones asking questions and expressed an innate desire to learn about many different subjects.

Persistence/Perseverance. Persistence/Perseverance was the 6th identified strength

within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 66 of 253 students (26.1% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, relatively few of these individuals (6.6%; 8 of 121 students) chose to discuss persistence/perseverance. A review of the transcribed descriptions of persistence/perseverance from these eight students yielded two themes with regard to how youth described persistence/perseverance: *Manifestation* and *Importance*.

In regard to *Importance,* Elanor (IB) stated, "I don't like giving up because giving up is failure. So whatever I start, I finish." For Elanor, this strength was important because she valued persevering until the very end. This appeared to be a rule by which she lived her life.

In regard to *Manifestation,* Lucina (IB) described this strength with, "I try to focus on a lot of homework. I don't try to go off task especially when it has a big impact on my grade." The *Application* of this strength in her life assisted with her *Class assignments* and ultimately helped her succeed in school.

Two students provided a *Definition* of this strength. Marian (AP) stated, "Even if I'm not good at something, I really want to try to do my best, even if my best isn't good. So in the end, I'll try my best to at least finish it." Chery (AP) stated,

> Definitely not giving into things. I'm really, really disciplined. So if someone wants me to do something, I'm not going to do it out of the blue just because someone wants me to do it. I need to know the intent of doing it, why I'm doing it. They know that I don't make stupid decisions like just jumping head first into things.

In sum, persistence/perseverance was viewed as a character strength that allowed students to make decisions carefully, focus, and finish the tasks undertaken with a complete plan.

Honesty/Authenticity. Honesty/Authenticity was the 7th identified strength within the

VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 62 of 253 students (24.5% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, just under half of those students (11.5%; 14 of 121 students) chose to discuss honesty/authenticity. A review of the transcribed descriptions of honesty/authenticity from these 14 students yielded all three main themes with regard to how youth described honesty/authenticity: *Origination, Importance,* and *Manifestation.*

In regard to *Origination, Family history* emerged for one student. Brittani (AP) stated, "My mom, she's like always like don't lie about things that, like always keep it real." For Brittani, identification with this character strength emerged from a parent.

In regard to *Importance,* Elaina (IB) expressed, "I know that I want people to be honest with me just like I would be honest with them. And that comes along with prudence, because you have to make the decision to be honest with the people you're around." Here, this student stated the *Importance* of this character strength because it *Aligned with strengths/values/interests*, in particular with her other character strength of prudence. Sandy (AP) had a similar view, stating,

> I picked honesty because I don't like people who aren't honest and talk behind your back and stuff. I think it's, cheesy, but honesty is the best policy. You can't act one way towards someone and a different way toward someone else. I don't like that and I don't want friends like that. It brings it back to friendships; I value good people.

Sandy (AP) viewed honesty as a necessity to having good relationships with others, and this was a key piece of her value system. Jeffrey (IB) stated, "With my friends I am honest. I tell the truth every time. I can't lie..., now my friends, they talk first to me and then they talk to their parents." For Jeffrey, this strength's *importance* came from how it *Contributed to relationships* and facilitated trust between Jeffrey and his friends.

Regarding *Definitions* and *Applications* of honesty/authenticity's manifestation, Mariana

(AP) verbalized, "I've been known to be a blunt person. I have no filters and I will say whatever is on my mind and you will know that it is the truth." For this student, the *Definition* of Honesty/Authenticity involved always speaking the truth.

Ryan (AP) provided a specific *Application* example of using this character strength. He stated,

> I keep my circle very small when it comes to friends in general, and I'm not the friend that tells white lies or anything like that. 'Oh does this look good on me?' 'no' 'should we go here?' 'no'…. I'm also really honest with myself and if I'm not doing my best in anything, then I'll be like 'you're not doing your best'.

Ryan demonstrated how he used this strength socially, and also applied it personally if he knew he was not doing everything that he could be doing. He was honest with the people around him and himself.

In sum, honesty/authenticity was viewed as positively affecting a student's relationship with others and themselves. Honesty/Authenticity was viewed as facilitative for enabling others to trust their wisdom and perspective, as well as a tool for facilitative self-coaching.

Zest. Zest was the 8th identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 61 of 253 students (24.1% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, far fewer students (2.5%; 3 of 121 students) chose to discuss zest. A review of the transcribed descriptions of zest from these three students yielded two themes with regard to how youth described zest: *Manifestation* and *Origination*.

Within *origination,* Leon (AP) stated that "zest because [this person] said I was zest". This example helped exemplify how *Other's recognition of the strength* can result in a student adopting a particular character strength as part of their identity.

Within *Manifestation,* Madonna (AP) provided a *Hobbies/Application* example of using

this character strength in her life. She stated,

I'm an acting major here at this school so I'm very open to taking roles and everything

like that and I've always been a performer so I've always been someone who wants to be

in the center of attention and I enjoy what I do.

Madonna used zest throughout her life by taking on roles and being the center of

attention. Carmen (AP) stated, "I'm just an outgoing person and I'm very happy all the time,"

defining of this character strength in regard to her personality.

In sum, the students who spoke about zest spoke about how they enjoyed life by being

outgoing, happy, and enjoying the activities in which they partook.

Love of Learning. Love of Learning was the 9th identified strength within the VIA

strengths identification activity, selected by 59 of 253 students (23.3% of students completing

ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, 8.3% (10 of 121 students) chose to discuss

love of learning. A review of the transcribed descriptions of love of learning from these 10

students yielded two main themes with regard to how youth described love of learning:

Manifestation and *Importance*.

Illustrating *Facilitates growth*, Shaina (IB) stated,

I love to learn. It may not be academic all the time and it may not always be listening but

let's just say someone is giving me advice or they giving me some work, I listen because I

know in the long run it's going to help, all the knowledge you can get so yeah.

In this example, Shaina explained the importance of using the character strength of love

of learning because accumulating knowledge would help her growth.

Students provided *Applications* of how they used this character strength. Zona (AP)

stated,

I always want to look forward to something and I always want to look for something else

to think about. Like this year, I've been getting really into European art, like statues.

Greece is somewhere where I'm really into their art and architecture.

Within this example, Zona was able to provide a concrete example of how she used love

of learning in her life. In this case, she enjoyed learning more about art. Cordell (IB) provided a

simple *Definition* of what this character strength meant to him with, "I like to learn a lot." For the

students who identified with this strength, learning was simply something that they enjoyed.

Alfonzo (AP) echoed these thoughts by stating, "I love to learn anything. I mean I love learning

new stuff, I like watching documentaries, and sometimes it can be stressful to learn new things,

but I love learning new things."

Overall, the students who identified with love of learning had an intrinsic desire to gather

both academic and non-academic knowledge, and in some cases, accumulating this knowledge

was viewed as facilitative for self-growth.

Hope. Hope was the 10th identified strength within the VIA strengths identification

activity, selected by 52 of 253 students (20.6% of students completing ACE module 12). During

the first MAP interview, 8.3% (10 of 121 students) chose to discuss hope in their interviews. A

review of the transcribed descriptions of hope from these 10 students yielded two themes with

regard to how youth described hope: *Manifestation* and *Importance*.

Illustrating *Relation to future goals*, Lucina (IB) stated,

I hope that I can achieve all my goals. I don't think that I would do anything else in my

life… I really want to get into the medical field and become a pediatrician. I also want to

place a ranking in tennis. I just started playing this year.

The other student (Dian, IB) who spoke about hope in relation to her goals also mentioned achievement through going to college. Young (IB) expressed identifying with hope "because I just hope for the best. If I don't, what is there like, if I don't hope for the best, then there is no point and there is no motivation to do anything else, I'll fall apart." This student viewed hope as an enabler to maintaining his composure. Madonna (AP) spoke about the *Importance* of hope by stating,

> With hope, it's mostly you know I have these highs or I'm at these low points in my life where it feels like I don't know if anything is going to get better but there is always that tiny bit of it that I know that it'll be okay and that's the hope that I have and a lot of it comes through religion but also because of the people that I have in my life and I look through hope to make sure that I have the successful opportunities later in life and to make sure that I can get through it.

Madonna tied together the character strength of hope with her overarching value of religion, depicting *Alignment with strengths/values/interests.* Theodore (AP) spoke about hope being a *contributor to relationships*. He stated,

> I feel like I can make someone feel better, like give them hope if they are feeling down. Like if someone had a break up, well first off, I wouldn't know what to say because I've never been in a relationship like that, but I would try to make them feel better rather than letting them sulk all day because it's not right for people to be sad, it's not right.

This student viewed hope as important because of his ability to lift other people's moods by sharing this character strength with others who were having difficulties in life.

Within the theme of *Manifestation,* Deb (IB) provided a *Definition* of hope: "well, hope is believing that good things will happen in the future. I always try to tell myself that things will

work out, everything will be okay, don't worry about it." For her, hope involved believing that good things would arrive. Candida (IB) provided an *Application* of using the hope: "in middle school I was really good at having hope for things and thinking about how I can improve this, [telling myself] don't worry, I can improve this." This student applied hope through positive self-talk.

In sum, students who spoke about hope tended to speak about the belief that certain prospects would improve in the future. Other students mentioned how having hope provided them with coping strategies and motivation to reach future goals. Finally, one student expressed that he went out of his way to share this strength among those who lacked it. As a result, hope is viewed as being a contributor to relationships.

Perspective. Perspective was the 11th identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 51 of 253 students (20.2% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, about half that proportion (9.1%; 11 of 121 students) chose to discuss perspective. A review of the transcribed descriptions of perspective from these 11 students yielded three themes with regard to how youth described perspective: *Origination, Manifestation,* and *Importance*.

In regard to *Origination,* Coletta (AP) explained that "grew up with older kids so I don't really act my age. My brothers are six years older than me and my best friend is 19. So I don't really act my age." For this student, the origination of this strength came from *Family history.*

In regard to *Importance,* Ina (IB) said, "a lot of people come to me for advice. I don't really know why but I try to help everyone that I can, it's important to me that I fix a problem when there is one." In this example, *Contributing to relationships* emerged; perspective was important in that it allowed her to assist others with their problems.

With *Manifestation,* several students provided specific *Applications* of this strength. Coletta (AP) explained,

> You can't really judge someone the first time you meet them or if someone is doing bad in a class then I say 'well if you do this instead, then maybe that will work better' or like if they have family problems, you can talk to this person and if you don't trust them then talk to someone else or talk to your family about it.

This student provided a specific example of using perspective to advise a peer who was having problems in class. Glenna (AP) offered another example,

> So, let's say there's a situation where my friend is in the wrong, but they are ranting about it. I'm good at seeing both sides of the story and how they can see that they are right but I'm also good at saying how they're wrong. I'm good at seeing both sides of the story.

This student provided another specific example of how using perspective could help friends see both sides of a situation in order to provide closure to an argument.

Several students also provided a *Definition* of perspective. Valentina (AP) explained "I'm able to see other people's point of view for instance when arguing, I can see their point of view and their opinion on the fact." For this student, perspective involved acknowledging multiple opinions on a subject. Esmeralda (AP) defined perspective by stating,

> With these situations like I always say I feel first. If something was to happen before I react, I would see it from the other person's view. I am in their body, in their shoes before I react. I'm aggressive and assertive. I come to a situation calm so that I can see how they see it. I can be in between and cordial in the situation. I see both sides of every situation.

In sum, students discussed perspective as affecting their way of thinking and overall being, as well as helping their interpersonal relationships. Students used this strength to facilitate

their way through difficult situations and specifically mentioned trying to assist others by their own use of the strength.

Fairness. Fairness was the 12th identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 44 of 253 students (17.4% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, only four students (3.3% of 121 students) chose to discuss fairness. A review of the transcribed descriptions of fairness from these four students yielded one main theme with regard to how youth described fairness: *Importance*.

Among the main theme of *Importance,* the four students who described fairness spoke about it in relationship with how it *Aligned with values/strengths/interests.* Marlene (IB) stated, "I think everyone should be treated equal, it doesn't matter gender, race, ethnicity, or all that stuff, because we're all human and we all should be treated equal." Darron (AP) provided a similar thought,

> If you're not fair to everyone then it's kind of like an inequality to all your friends. You have to be fair on a general basis, it's not like, it's kind of like if there are ten people and there are 11 pieces of food, you're not going to give two pieces, give one person two pieces, you're going to divide it. So you have to be fair to everyone to generally treat them right.

This student used fairness as a general rule by which he lived his life, because he tried to be fair to everyone on a general basis. In other words, this strength aligned with his values.

In sum, the four students who described the strength of fairness believed strongly in equality and applied that even within their friendships. Fairness was tied directly to the students' values.

Judgement/Open Mindedness. Judgement/Open-Mindedness was tied for the 12th most

frequently identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 44 of 253 students (17.4% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, nine students (7.4% of 121 students) discussed judgement/open-mindedness. A review of the transcribed descriptions of judgement/open-mindedness from these nine students yielded three themes with regard to how youth described judgement/open-mindedness: *Origination*, *Importance*, and *Manifestation*.

Regarding *Origination*, Vinnie (AP) expressed that the origin of this strength was *Innate*, stating "I mean I've been doing it since I was little too, because I don't know why, it's just kind of natural."

With regard to *Importance,* Paulette (AP) stated,

I think it's very important that we are able to come together and talk about it and discuss why we feel this way and what we know, because if you don't have this open mindedness or if you're like, 'I don't like that person because they don't think like me', then the relationship isn't going to get anywhere and neither of you are going to grow from that point as a person or in that relationship as people.

The researcher noted this description emphasized growing relationships with other people.

With regard to *Definition,* Valentina (AP) said, "It's one of my strengths because I know most of the time, right from time in a moral sense." Valentina defined judgement/open-mindedness by always knowing right from wrong. Scot (AP) stated,

I try to accept people and I don't have any bias. I don't care if someone is black or white or whatever they are, I'm open to being friends with them. Like it's not anything that I really care about that. Also, with the judgement, if people have bad grades in school, I

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don't think that they are stupid because of it. I try to understand their situation and other things, because of learning disabilities and other things like that.

Scot viewed judgement/open-mindedness as crucial for accepting all people, regardless of their learning style or race.

The theme of *Application* also emerged with Vinnie (AP) who expressed,

My friends come to me for problems so I try to think of, when they ask me for like an answer or something, I look on both sides, like their side and the other possible reason why, I try not to be biased because telling them what they want to hear is not something that is always so good, so I tell them what they need to hear.

This student provided a concrete example of using this strength in order to visualize both sides in a friend dispute.

In sum, students viewed the strength of judgement/open-mindedness as helpful for interacting with other people, whether by helping them solve disputes, by being able to see beyond skin color or ability, or by being more open to having people who have different views in their life.

Bravery. Bravery was the 14th identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 40 of 253 students (15.8% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, seven students (5.8% of 121 students) chose to discuss bravery. A review of the transcribed descriptions of bravery from these seven students yielded two themes with regard to how youth described bravery: *Origination* and *Manifestation.*

Within *Origination,* Romana (AP) expressed that she chose bravery as a character strength "because people say to me that I'm not afraid to go out and do something spectacular with my art and do something different just for the sake of changing it." This is an example of

Other's recognition of the strength; she identified with bravery specifically because other people recognized her courage through her art.

Within *Manifestation,* several students provided *Definitions* of this strength. Keisha (IB) stated, "I'm never afraid to do things that could help me or others. Not bravery in jumping from high places because that's not me. But bravery in taking on challenges for myself or others." For Keisha, bravery meant doing things for herself and for other people that were challenging. Elanor (IB) stated, "I picked bravery because I usually don't keep quiet when things happen. I don't know, I just speak my mind. I'm not really afraid to let people judge me." In addition to expressing oneself, other students spoke about not being afraid to do what they wanted and acting out when they thought something was wrong.

In sum, students defined bravery as taking on challenges for oneself and for others, including helping others, speaking out, or taking a stance even in difficult situations.

Forgiveness. Forgiveness was tied for the 14th most frequently identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 40 of 253 students (15.7% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, nearly that same proportion of students (12.4%; 15 of 121) chose to discuss forgiveness. A review of the transcribed descriptions of forgiveness from these 15 students yielded the three main themes: *Origination, Importance,* and *Manifestation* with regard to how youth described forgiveness.

Within the theme of *Origination*, Jonathan (AP) expressed, "I'm just a very forgiving person. My mom always taught me that." Rickey (AP) echoed these thoughts by stating that they were always taught not to hold a grudge. For these students, forgiveness emerged as the result of *Family history*.

Within the main theme of *Importance,* Aleisha (AP) expressed, "I believe that everyone

deserves a second chance because nobody is perfect. So like everybody does wrong and such, but anytime you get a second chance, everybody [does] better than their first chance." Aleisha interacted with others operating under the belief that no one was perfect, a personal rule that allowed her to use forgiveness throughout her life.

Madeleine (IB) stated, "I feel like it would characterize me because I don't want people to not forgive me for things I've done, for everything I've done wrong. So, I want to forgive others more yeah. I don't like holding things against others." This student described how her own previous mistakes enabled her desire to use forgiveness in her life with others. She found importance in this strength in order to make up for her own perceived deficits.

Tom (AP) expressed,

A lot of people say that people don't change, but you can always learn from things and you can always give them that second chance to prove that they have learned something, so they can give back to you what you gave to them.

This example suggests that the *Importance* of forgiveness is that the other person will return that favor in the future. This represents *Facilitates growth* because this strength is viewed as beneficial for its ability to be reciprocal.

Within the theme of *Manifestation,* Tricia (AP) provided a vivid example of a time when she had to use forgiveness in her life in order to forgive a friend who had wronged her:

A few years ago, my friend…slept over at my house and stole 160 dollars from me and then went home and put the money on a gift card and used the gift card right away, and I found a way to forgive her and move on instead of holding a grudge and being petty toward her.

Other students not quoted here also spoke about learning how to use their strength of

forgiveness in order to move beyond a difficult situation and difficult family members. Candida (IB) stated,

> And also, I feel like I'm pretty good at forgiving people. I hate holding grudges. I've
> never been able to do it. I think the longest I've been able to do it is like two hours. I can't
> do it no matter how hard I try. So like I'm really good at forgiving people and getting
> over things.

Candida provided an overall explanation of what this strength meant to her but did not provide any specific examples of a time when she had to forgive someone (thus, this quote was coded within *Definition).* The other student who provided a quote within *Definition*, Mariana (AP) also spoke about an inability to hold a grudge and stated, "someone would need to do something really bad for me to not forgive you."

In sum, students who discussed forgiveness spoke about having a difficulty maintaining negative emotions toward others and having an ability to forgive those who had wronged them. forgiveness was often viewed as originating from one's family or loved ones, such as with friends.

Teamwork. Teamwork was the 16th identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 39 of 253 students (15.8% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, six (5.0% of 121 students) chose to discuss teamwork. A review of the transcribed descriptions of teamwork from these six students yielded two themes with regard to how youth described teamwork: *Importance* and *Manifestation*.

Within *Importance*, Tyron (AP) illustrated Making *up for deficits:* "It's helped me…I'm struggling or something, to see if other people can help or try to work with them so that I can do better." In this case, this student viewed teamwork as beneficial when he was in a difficult

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situation.

Bridgette (AP) illustrated how teamwork *Contributes to relationships:*

I work in a team. There is no I in firefighting. You don't do anything alone. If you do,

that's a way to get hurt and that's not something we need. Working together, working with

other people, and having other people have your back when you have theirs is really

important, and evenly distributing the work so that you get done faster and more

efficiently is the way to go, especially when lives and things like that are at stake.

In Bridgette's eyes, there was no individual aspect to firefighting, it was always a team.

Another student (not quoted here), Dannielle (AP) echoed these sentiments by describing the

Application of this strength in band as being important in order to create a harmonic and pleasant

sound. In sum, working as a team allowed everyone to distribute the work and to be more

efficient. As a result, teamwork *contributes to relationships* because of the external benefits that

other people gained when using this strength.

Within *Manifestation,* Brandi (AP) provided a *Definition* of teamwork by stating, "I

know how to be a leader but also communicate with others and work well with others." For this

student, having teamwork was linked to strong communication and working well with others.

Bulah (AP), communicated an example of using teamwork, by describing,

so I take theater, and in my theater class, we have to make a film and it's a group of four

of us, and I'm like the one that's like kind of like, you need to do that you need to do that,

and I'm the only group that's finished.

This student provided a concrete example of this student using teamwork to complete a

class assignment by distributing the work to get it done faster.

In sum, students who spoke about teamwork discussed the positive benefits that emerged

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from working in a team, whether related to ensuring safety, increasing efficiency, or helping the artistic process. Students provided a mixture of real-life examples, definitions, and reasons for importance in order to describe teamwork.

Leadership. Leadership was the 17th identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 39 of 253 students (15.4% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, 14 students (11.6% of 121) chose to discuss leadership. A review of the transcribed descriptions of leadership from these 14 students yielded two main themes with regard to how youth described leadership: *Importance* and *Manifestation*.

Within *Importance*, Arcelia (AP), expressed "I've always liked the leadership because I feel like I am great at talking to people and relating to them and I know a lot of people think to themselves I'm a very comforting person." This situation fell within *Contributes to relationships* because Arcelia described how leadership allowed her to bring positivity to others.

Within *Importance,* leadership as *Facilitating growth* was demonstrated by Alfonzo (AP): "I like to help people out and like things my way, I like working on projects myself because I can do it the way I want it." For Alfonzo, being a leader was important because he was able to gain a concrete benefit by being able to complete projects his own way.

Boris (AP) explained,

So if it's like someone is doing something and I don't want to do it, then I don't do that. It's not easy to peer pressure me or anything. It's one of those things where if I want to do something and it's something that's important to me, then I'm doing it.... I've lost a lot of friends over it but it's worth it definitely, keeping your own values intact.

For Boris, using leadership was important because it allowed him to act in accordance

with his values throughout his life, regardless of peer perceptions. Similarly to Boris, Raleigh (AP) also viewed her strength of leadership as paramount to how she wanted to live her life, stating, "I want to be the person who gets the feedback to change things instead of waiting on things to change".

Within the main theme of *Manifestation,* several students provided *Definitions* of what leadership meant to them. Trinity (IB) said, "I like to manage and be direct", verbally stating the traits that she believed were important for a leader to possess. Charleen (AP) stated, "I like to help people and show people the right way. Not to force it upon them but to give them or to be a role model to my friends and to people." For Charleen, leadership meant helping others and providing them alternative choices.

Several students also provided salient examples of leadership. For instance, Joselyn (AP) described,

> In softball for example, people will have an attitude because we're not doing good maybe, so like I tell them that we can do this. If we put our minds to it, it we can achieve greatness together if we just work as a team and listen to each other.

In this example Joselyn was able to use her leadership in a sport that she played to inspire her teammates. Houston (AP) provided a similar example of using leadership— "I'm a team captain for wrestling." Genaro (AP) also stated "I have to manage the team myself if the coach is like angry sometimes and teach people stuff" in regard to managing the football team.

In sum, many students spoke about leadership in regard to its *Manifestation* and *Importance*. Many students described being leaders in sports teams or other extracurricular activities. Other students explained how being a leader enabled them stay true to themselves and how doing that brought them closer to others.

Social Intelligence. Social Intelligence was the 18th identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 37 of 253 students (14.6% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, about half of that proportion (7.4%; 9 of 121 students) chose to discuss social intelligence. A review of the transcribed descriptions of social intelligence from these nine students yielded one theme with regard to how youth described social intelligence: *Manifestation.*

A few students provided a *Definition* of this strength. Janelle (IB) stated, "It means to me being compatible with people, being a friendly person. Being someone that people like because it will get you ahead in life if you are nice to people and people like you." For Janelle, the strength of social intelligence involved being kind and getting along with others. Young (IB) described this strength as a "combination of social and book smarts," also echoing other students who brought up that social aspect of this strength. Lucrecia (IB) explained, "I kind of learn how to adapt to different groups of people in school." For her, social intelligence meant getting along with different types of people.

Rolland (AP) provided an *Application* of this strength: "Like when we're walking in the halls, I say hey to a lot of people and people say that I know a lot of people." This specific example demonstrated how a student who identified with social intelligence was able to greet many types of people, which echoed Lucrecia's previous thoughts above. The other students who described this strength spoke about specific examples of being able to know how to comfort those who were upset, as well as being able to recognize that each person was different and had their own strengths.

In sum, the students who described social intelligence tended to discuss this strength in relationship to the other people around them and seemed to have an ease with communicating

with others.

Gratitude. Gratitude was the 19th identified strength within the VIA strengths

identification activity, selected by 30 of 253 students (11.9% of students completing ACE

module 12). During the first MAP interview, only four (3.3% of 121 students) chose to discuss

gratitude. A review of the transcribed descriptions of gratitude from these four students yielded

two themes with regard to how youth described gratitude: *Importance* and *Manifestation,* and

three secondary themes: *Alignment with strengths/values/interests, Facilitates growth,* and

Application.

> Within the theme of *Importance,* Allyson (AP) took the time to express,
>
> If I get a really good grade, I'm very thankful, I think like going toward my spirituality,
>
> I'm thankful that I've been able to earn that grade because it's not, in high school,
>
> everything is not going to be perfect and you can't always get the best grade or anything
>
> and you have to be thankful for when you're able to understand something and
>
> understand the concept.
>
> This student linked gratitude to her other strength of spirituality. The combination of

these two strengths allowed her to express gratitude for things that happened to her in school.

Shelton (AP) said,

> Having to be able to know that something is great or at least being able to say something
>
> positive about it is not only bringing the person joy or whatever it is joy, but also in
>
> return giving you joy. Cause it's like seeing yourself making someone happy about
>
> something it also in returns becomes a favor for you.
>
> This exemplifies *Facilitating growth*, as Shelton described how kindness to others

brought him joy. Gratitude was important to this student because it brought him greater

subjective well-being.

The third student, Dannielle (AP) expressed,

I'm really grateful for that my band director gives me so many opportunities to do so

many different things and to help everyone that I can.... I like helping other people. I

don't know, I've always liked helping other people.

This student's example of *Manifestation allowed her to* provide a specific example of a

time when she expressed this strength of gratitude (during band), whereby having the

opportunity to help others made her grateful for the opportunity.

In sum, students who chose gratitude discussed being thankful in general or for a specific

person or experience. Some students spoke about gratitude in an external manner by discussing

how they used it in regard to other people, while others spoke about the benefits it brought to

them personally.

Self-Regulation. Self-Regulation was the 20th most frequently identified strength within

the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 29 of 253 students (11.5% of students

completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, only three students (2.5% of 121

students) chose to discuss self-regulation. A review of the transcribed descriptions of self-

regulation from these three students yielded two themes with regard to how youth described self-

regulation: *Manifestation* and *Origination.*

With regard to *Manifestation,* Emerson (AP) said "At home, I basically do my own

things. I do my own laundry. I iron my own clothes. Like somedays, if no one is cooking

anything, I'll make my own food for me and my sister." This student provided a specific example

of how he demonstrated his self-regulation throughout his life at home.

Within the theme of *Origination,* Leon (AP) expressed "for self-regulation, my friends

and family they see me more I like I fix myself. I think I can say it like that? I fix myself, so I guess that's self-regulation." In this example, Leon chose to identify with this strength because his friends and family saw it within him.

In sum, students described self-regulation by explaining how they used it in their life and also how other people saw it within their personality. Students who identified with this strength tended to be self-motivated to take care of themselves.

Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence. Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence was tied for the 20th most frequently identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 29 of 253 students (11.5% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, an almost proportional number of students (8.3%; 10 of 121) chose to discuss appreciation of beauty and excellence. A review of the transcribed descriptions of appreciation of beauty and excellence from these 10 students yielded two themes with regard to how youth described appreciation of beauty and excellence: *Manifestation* and *Origination*.

Within the theme of *Origination,* Vinnie (AP) described this strength by saying,

I don't know. I don't like seeing the ugly and stuff. I like seeing the positive of people even if I don't really know them.… I don't like judging people because even when I was younger, I did like judge people but I came from Rhode Island and when I came here, I wanted to like change that and so I try not to judge someone from how they look or how they dress because that's really mean.

This student was able to describe this character strength by expressing the origination of the strength as being *Over time*. She used to judge other others when she was younger, but since a transition in her life, she tried to see the world more positively.

With regard to *Definition,* Marian (AP) explained, "I try to see the beauty in things and I

try to see the good in things." Stacee (AP) said, "The world is pretty. If you look outside, you look at the tree, the sky, the city, it's pretty. Enjoy it. Especially why you're listening to music it makes it even better." Overall, the students defined this by talking about seeing the beauty in the world through its nature, music, or people.

Within *Application,* Marian (AP) explained how she used this character strength with an academic purpose, by saying "Like I don't really enjoy math that much but I'm trying to appreciate it so." Another student, Ligia (AP) expressed,

> Some people might look, I don't know, at an old man and whatever and be like wow he's ugly, and I'll just be like, well you don't know his past and you don't know anything about him, so why would you assume that he's just like ugly because he's old but you don't know anything that he did. He might have fought for our country or whatever so why judge on something when you don't know anything about the person or the background or anything.

This student provided a specific example of using appreciation of beauty and excellence to imagine a person's backstory and see the beauty in one who might not otherwise be considered beautiful. Mikaela (AP) provided another concrete example of this strength with,

> I just slow down sometimes. I'm up on the third floor, when I'm up on the media center, I'll just get on my phone and take a picture of [my school] because I think it's really beautiful. We have a beautiful school and maybe people don't realize that. I get upset when people talk about [my school] in a denigrating manner because honestly I have not met someone or gotten to know someone where they haven't been truly nice to me, and I know there are people here who are not truly that nice, many of my friends have told me such stories, but I haven't personally met them, and honestly I love this school.

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In sum, students described the strength of appreciation of beauty and excellence by explaining how they could appreciate pieces of the world, such as people, places, and buildings in a way that set them apart from other people.

Prudence. Prudence was the 22nd most frequently identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 20 of 253 students (7.9% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, two students (1.7%; 2 of 121 students) chose to discuss prudence. A review of the transcribed descriptions of prudence from these two students yielded one theme with regard to how youth described prudence, *Importance*. Florencio (AP) explained that prudence was important because:

> you know, everything you do has consequences. You have to make the right choices. If I decide not to do my homework then my grades are going to go down and that could affect my achievement and you have to think things through.

For Florencio, this character strength was important because of its *Relation to future goals*.

Elaina (IB) said "I knew that I want people to be honest with me just like I would be honest with them. And that comes along with prudence, because you have to make the decision to be honest with the people you're around." For Elaina, the *Importance* of the character strength of prudence was *Aligned with another strength/value/interest*, in particular this student's use of honesty in her treatment of others.

In sum, students viewed prudence as important for making decisions that would lead to overall achievement and attainment of goals, as well as how they acted around others.

Humility/Modesty. Humility/Modesty was the 23rd most frequently identified strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 18 of 253 students (7.1% of students

completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, one student (0.80%; 1 of 121 students) chose to discuss humility/modesty. A review of the transcribed description of humility/modesty from this one student yielded one theme: *Manifestation.*

Juliane (AP), the only person who spoke about humility/modesty, expressed:

People don't like take me super seriously, I think I can joke around, and people don't take it like, they don't go like 'oh. why did you say that?' kind of like open minded about when I talk to them and stuff.

For this student, humility/modesty involved being light-hearted and being unlikely to offend others.

Spirituality. Spirituality was the least identified (24th of 24 in prevalence) strength within the VIA strengths identification activity, selected by 17 of 253 students (6.7% of students completing ACE module 12). During the first MAP interview, four students (3.3%; 4 of 121 students) chose to discuss spirituality. A review of the transcribed descriptions of spirituality from these four students yielded two themes, *Manifestation* and *Importance.*

The theme of *Manifestation* emerged through two students' voices. Flavia (AP) said,

I think that I rely on going to Church and praying to help me get through whatever I got to get through. If I feel like there's a lot, I ask for them to give me the strength and like to like calm me down so that I can get through it without stressing myself out.

Aleisha (AP) said,

because I believe in God and stuff, it changed how I act with people and stuff and how I get through with situations, like if somebody disrespects me, I won't just jump to conclusions and try to fight them, it's like you don't like me okay. I'm like more mature about everything and I realize life way better than I used to and stuff.

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The theme of *Importance* emerged as well. Amelia (AP), explained that,

In Africa, a lot of people are Christian and take it very seriously. One reason I keep

myself in check with that self-regulation thing is because of spirituality. Because not just

my parents but my relationship with God, I want to keep that good. Doing bad things isn't

going to work out.

In this case, Amelia explained that she used spirituality in tandem with the strength of

self-regulation in order to bring positivity in the world. Another student, Shaina (AP) explained

that "spirituality has to do with my happiness."

In sum, multiple students connected this strength to their religion. In addition, students

who spoke about spirituality expressed how it increased their well-being, allowed them to

persevere in difficult situations, and ultimately facilitated their growth.

Summary of Findings

With the qualitative analyses, the researcher approached the data through an interpretive

paradigm. The data from all 121 students was used in order to create and explore these themes.

The researcher explored several themes across each of the character strengths in order to allow

the reader to form a deeper understanding of the way that these students defined each character

strength in their own words. Students spoke about the strength's *Origination* and expressed

whether the strength was innate or something they were in the process of discovering. Other

students decided to focus on the strength's *Importance*. Through this latter theme, students

explored the strength's alignment with other parts of their life, its contribution to the

relationships around them, its facilitation of self-growth, its relation to future goals, its ability to

make the individual unique, and its ability to help the individual make up for deficits. Finally,

some students described the strength's *Manifestation*. These students alternated between defining

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the strength or providing an application (or concrete example) of the strength. A summary of the

takeaway strength definitions as yielded from the preceding qualitative analysis is contained in

Table 13.

Table 13. *Summary of Qualitative Findings for Each Character Strength*

Character Strength	Summary of Qualitative Findings
Humor	Students spoke about how they used Humor to impact the relationships around them mostly in a positive manner. Humor appears to be a strength that could affect the self, both positively and negatively, whether through allowing a person to persevere in tough situations (e.g., during uncomfortable or hard conversations) or placing a student into a precarious situation (e.g., by trying to use humor to defuse a difficult situation and it not being received well by the other party).
Love	Love was viewed as facilitative for a student to become closer to others. Love was viewed as crucial for both loving outwardly as well as learning how to love oneself.
Creativity	Creativity was described as impacting a person's thinking style by assisting in the generation of novel ideas. Creativity was able to be used in all aspects of a person's life and often viewed as something that would be facilitative to their life in the future as well.
Kindness	Kindness was viewed as facilitative for helping other people. Students verbalized a differentiation between helping versus hurting someone, a desire to always be there for others, a desire to be empathetic, and the happiness they gained from using this strength.
Curiosity	Curiosity was viewed as impacting the learning process. The students who identified with curiosity tended to be the ones asking questions and expressed an innate desire to learn about many different subjects.
Persistence/ Perseverance	Persistence/Perseverance was viewed as allowing students to make decisions carefully, focus, and finish the tasks undertaken with a complete plan.
Honesty/ Authenticity	Honesty/Authenticity was viewed as positively affecting a student's relationship with others and themselves. Honesty/Authenticity was viewed as facilitative for enabling others to trust their wisdom and perspective, as well as a tool for facilitative self-coaching.
Zest	The students who spoke about zest spoke about how they enjoyed life by being outgoing, happy, and enjoying the activities in which they partook.
Love of Learning	The students who identified with love of learning had an intrinsic desire to gather both academic and non-academic knowledge, and in some cases, accumulating this knowledge was viewed as facilitative for self-growth.
Hope	Students who spoke about Hope tended to speak about the belief that certain prospects would improve in the future. Other students mentioned how having hope provided them with coping strategies and motivation to reach future goals. When extended to others, hope is viewed as being a contributor to relationships.

Table 13. *(Continued)*

Perspective	Students discussed perspective as affecting their way of thinking and overall being, as well as helping their interpersonal relationships. Students used this strength to facilitate their way through difficult situations and specifically mentioned trying to assist others by their own use of the strength.
Fairness	Students who described the strength of fairness believed strongly in equality and applied that even within their friendships. Fairness was tied directly to the students' values.
Judgement/ Open Mindedness	Students viewed judgement/open-mindedness as helpful for interacting with other people, whether by helping them solve disputes, by being able to see beyond skin color or ability, or by being more open to having people who have different views in their life.
Bravery	Students defined bravery as taking on challenges for oneself and for others, including helping others, speaking out, or taking a stance even in difficult situations.
Forgiveness	Students spoke about having difficulty maintaining negative emotions toward others and having an ability to forgive those who had wronged them. Forgiveness was often viewed as originating from one's family or loved ones, such as with friends.
Teamwork	Students discussed the positive benefits that emerged from working in a team, whether related to ensuring safety, increasing efficiency, or helping the artistic process. Students provided a mixture of real-life examples, definitions, and reasons for importance in order to describe teamwork.
Leadership	Students described being leaders in sports teams or other extracurricular activities. Other students explained how being a leader enabled them stay true to themselves and how doing that brought them closer to others.
Social Intelligence	The students discussed social intelligence in relationship to the other people around them and seemed to have an ease with communicating with others.
Gratitude	Students discussed being thankful in general or for a specific person or experience. Some students spoke about gratitude in an external manner by discussing how they used it in regard to other people, while others spoke about the benefits it brought to them personally.
Self-Regulation	Students described self-regulation by explaining how they used it in their life and also how other people saw it within their personality. Students who identified with this strength tended to be self-motivated to take care of themselves.
Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence	Students described the strength of appreciation of beauty and excellence by explaining how they could appreciate pieces of the world, such as people, places, and buildings in a way that set them apart from other people.
Prudence	Prudence is important for making decisions that would lead to overall achievement and attainment of goals, as well as how students acted around others.
Humility/ Modesty	For the one student who chose this strength, humility/modesty involved being light-hearted and being unlikely to offend others.
Spirituality	Students most often connected spirituality to their religion. In addition, students spoke about how it increased their well-being, allowed them to persevere in difficult situations, and ultimately facilitated their growth.

Through a constant-comparative analysis and interpretivist lens, the author believes that she has appropriately represented each character strength in this chapter. The following chapter will explore the significance of the quantitative and qualitative findings.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the character strengths of ninth-grade high school students in accelerated curricula, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In essence, this study sought to answer the questions: a) what are the most frequently self-identified strengths of ninth-grade students in accelerated curricula, b) do the most frequently self-identified strengths differ amongst different subgroup of students, and c) how do students describe their behaviors and actions in a way that illustrates their strengths? Survey responses informed the first two questions, whereas qualitative data generated from the interviews provided rich information on the way students described their strengths. Through the examination of students who were considered at-risk, either academically or emotionally, this study also included a range of student voices. This chapter begins with a summary of key findings and how these findings fit into the current knowledge base on character strengths. After, implications for school professionals and other stakeholders are addressed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of limitations associated with this study and recommendations for future research.

Key Quantitative Findings

The initial goal of this study was to examine the frequency of each character strength amongst ninth-grade students in accelerated classes, and then to observe whether the frequency with which students perceived embodying these strengths differed amongst different subgroups of students, including ethnicity, academic program, and risk level.

Self-identified strengths. Quantitative results indicated that the most frequent self-identified strength was humor, with 45.5% of students identifying it as one of their signature

(i.e., Top 5) strengths. The next most identified strengths included love (28.5%), creativity (28.1%), kindness (28.1%), curiosity (26.9%), persistence/perseverance (26.1%), honesty/authenticity (24.5%), and zest (24.1%). Spirituality was the least selected strength (6.7%), followed by humility/modesty (7.1%), prudence, (7.9%), appreciation of beauty and excellence (11.5%), and self-regulation (11.5%).

These findings were somewhat in line with the study by Park and Peterson (2006), who surveyed 5th and 8th graders to identify their top character strengths. They found that the most common strengths were gratitude, humor, and love. These results lend support to humor and love being highly prevalent amongst youth. The finding of humor being a top-rated strength in this population comprised of many high-achieving and gifted youth is consistent with other research identifying a relationship between general intelligence and humor. For instance, one study of 185 college-age students found that students who had greater general intelligence, as measured by the Raven's Advanced Progressive Matrices, were rated as being funnier on tasks such as funny drawings and verbal tasks (Howrigan & Macdonald, 2008). On the other hand, in the current study, gratitude was the 19th most identified strength, with only 11.9% of students identifying with it. Further research is suggested to explore this discrepancy; however, it is possible that some strengths become more or less present as youth progress in their development. Regarding the least selected strengths, Park and Peterson (2006) identified that the strengths that were least prevalent, which included prudence, forgiveness, spirituality, and self-regulation, required more cognitive maturity that youth may not possess. Except for forgiveness (14th most prevalent in this sample), the other least prevalent strengths from the Park and Peterson (2006) study were in line with this study's least prevalent strengths, lending support for the idea that these strengths may require greater cognitive maturity beyond 9th grade.

Park and Peterson (2006) also examined the rank order of the students' strengths in comparison to a larger sample of adults (ages 18 to 65; $M = 40$) from the Park, Peterson, and Seligman (2006) study. They found that hope, teamwork, and zest were more common among youth than adults, whereas Appreciation of Beauty, honesty/authenticity, leadership, and Open-mindedness were more common among adults. In the current study, the strengths of appreciation of beauty and excellence and leadership were in the bottom half of self-identified strengths, indicating that students in accelerated curricula were less likely to identify with them. Zest and hope were in the top half of self-identified strengths, lending support to the idea that these strengths are more common among adolescents compared to adults. However, findings were dissimilar for the strengths of honesty/authenticity and teamwork. It is possible that students in accelerated curricula place more value upon honesty/authenticity compared to the average adolescent, and concurrently place less value on teamwork compared to the average adolescent not in accelerated curricula. Another study by McGrath (2015) examined the strengths of over a million adults (M age = 35.69) across 75 nations who completed the VIA survey. The least prevalent strengths in that study were modesty, self-regulation, prudence, and spirituality. These least prevalent strengths are entirely in line with the least prevalent strengths identified in this study as well. The most prevalent strengths in the McGrath (2015) study were Honesty, fairness, kindness, judgement, and curiosity. The strengths of kindness and curiosity were also in this current study's most prevalent strengths, suggesting that these results are in line with current research.

Strengths across ethnic groups. The vast majority (22 of 24) of the character strengths did not differ in prevalence across ethnic groups. Character strengths are considered to have cross-cultural consistency across nations (McGrath, 2015) and previous research has found

character strength endorsement to be the same across ethnic group within college students (Karris & Craighead, 2012). However, quantitative results indicated that two strengths differed based on ethnicity. The percentage of participants who chose love of learning differed significantly by race, with 42.9% of Asian students choosing this strength, in comparison to students who were White (25.9%), multiracial (17.5%), Hispanic (16.0%), and Black (13.6%). In addition, there were significant differences among social intelligence as well, with a higher percentage of White students (21.4%) choosing this strength, in comparison to students who were Hispanic (16.0%), Black (13.6%), Asian (7.1%), and multiracial (0.0%).

There is limited research that examines the prevalence of different character strengths across race or ethnic group, and none that looks directly at high achieving students in the United States across ethnic groups. However, Park et al. (2006) found that African Americans and Asian Americans scored higher on spirituality than European Americans. This finding was not replicated in the current study, as there were no significant differences for the strength of spirituality.

The greater identification with social intelligence among White students was unanticipated and further research is recommended to examine why White students may identify with social intelligence at a higher rate compared with minority students.

Concerning the more frequent selection of love of learning by Asian students, it is hypothesized that these findings could be attributed to the cultural differences in regard to learning. Hsin and Xie (2014) utilized data from a national, longitudinal study of students who entered Kindergarten in 1998. They analyzed Asian American and White students in the same schools and looked at academic effort. The researchers relied on teachers' evaluations of students' classroom effort, work habits, and overall motivation, and teachers rated the students'

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overall attentiveness, task persistence, and eagerness to learn. The study concluded that Asian American students tended to view cognitive ability and achievement as being influenced more by effort instead of being an innate characteristic. In addition, Asian Americans outperformed White students in academic effort. One possible explanation that aligns these findings with this current study's findings relies upon the *Self Concordance Model*, which posits that those who pursue activities more in line with their interests and values end up putting forth more effort into achieving them (Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Therefore, it would make sense that there may be a greater intrinsic interest in academics among Asian American students. This hypothesis could help explain why more Asian students identified with the character strength of love of learning compared with students from other ethnic groups. Ultimately, however, it is important not to draw conclusions without recognizing that there is great variation among different subgroups of Asian American students, and that the values of learning may differ within and across different ethnic groups.

Strengths across academic program. In the current study, the research team knew whether participants were enrolled in AP or an IB program when they self-identified their top character strengths. The current study is the first known one to look at character strengths between high school students enrolled in different accelerated curricula, therefore, direct comparisons to the literature cannot be drawn.

The current study found that more IB students, compared to AP students, self-identified with self-regulation. The increased prevalence of self-regulation as a signature strength among IB students is hypothesized to be due to the high demands that the IB program places upon its students. While students can take AP classes in isolation, and may only have a few within their schedule, the IB program is rigorous and involves an entire curriculum that encompasses

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completing a large research project, expanding critical thinking skills, participating in activities in a number of areas such as arts and community service, and completing required courses within specified subject areas (IBO, 2019d). These heavy requirements may result in students with greater self-regulation participating in the IB program. Similarly, the current study also found that more IB students self-identified with kindness. It is hypothesized that this could be a result of the IB program's mission statement which attempts to assist young people to build intercultural understanding and respect for all humans (IBO, 2019c). In addition, the IB program has identified ten attributes to represent the IB learner. One of those attributes, entitled caring, involves showing empathy and respect for other people, as well as working to create positive differences in other people and the world (IBO, 2017). It is possible that either a) the IB program's core values of respect and being caring to others fosters an increase in kindness in its student or b) that students who already identify with kindness are more likely to be drawn to the values and mission of the IB program and seek out that particular accelerated academic program.

There were more AP students, compared to IB students, who self-identified with creativity and fairness. Given the rigorous nature of the IB program, it is hypothesized that AP students may have more time to devote to creative endeavors compared to those in the IB program, which could lead to greater self-identification with creativity. In regard to the greater selection of fairness among AP students, the researcher hypothesized that this could be related to the overwhelming accessibility of the AP program compared to the IB program. Any student can take AP classes if they can fit it in their schedule. On the other hand, participating in the IB program requires passing certain admissions requirements set by the school, which may even include having a specific GPA (IBO, 2019a). Therefore, it is possible that students who are attracted to the accessibility of the AP program compared to the stringent requirements of the IB

program may identify with the character strength of fairness.

      Strengths across risk level. In the current study, the researcher examined whether students were at risk or not academically or emotionally, based on course grades and scores on surveys of stress and school satisfaction. There was a significant difference for the character strength of persistence/perseverance, with a higher percentage of students without academic risk identifying this as a top character strength as compared to students with academic risk. Within the literature, grit has been defined as perseverance and passion for long term goals, as well as continuing effort in spite of adversity (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). Therefore, the strength of persistence/perseverance is arguably very similar to grit. Having more grit has been previously linked to greater academic achievement through a higher GPA in college students (Duckworth et al., 2007). Subsequently, it appears that in the current study, students who self-identified with persistence/perseverance were less likely to have academic risk, indicating that they had at least a 3.0 GPA or an A or B in their AP or IB coursework. It would be interesting to further examine whether the strength of persistence/perseverance appeared prior to the higher achievement, or whether the higher achievement influenced the identification with this strength.

When examining emotional status, the prevalence of several strengths differed significantly based on emotional status (either no risk or at risk). Specifically, a higher percentage of students *without* emotional risk identified the following as top character strengths: creativity, persistence/perseverance, leadership, and teamwork. Because the current study is the first known one to look at character strengths across different risk levels (academically and emotionally), direct comparisons to the literature cannot be drawn. However, the researcher is able to draw some hypotheses. For instance, leadership and teamwork are strengths that are

typically expressed in groups of people where collaboration is required, whether in teams, group assignments, or other extracurricular activities. Given that the emotional risk level in this current study is based on surveys of school engagement and perceived stress, it is possible that there is a connection between having greater collaboration with others and subsequently having greater school engagement. For instance, Zhao and Kuh (2004) looked at the relationship between participating in a learning community (which requires active collaboration) and student engagement amongst college students. They found a positive association between participating in the learning community and overall engagement, as well as increased college satisfaction. Gillham et al.'s (2011) study, which looked at the character strengths in 149 adolescents, found that the character strengths that were more other-directed (which includes teamwork) and temperance-related (which includes persistence/perseverance) predicted decreased depression symptoms. These findings help illustrate how students without emotional risk may be more likely to identify with the character strengths of leadership, teamwork, and persistence/perseverance.

Referring to the relationship between the character strength of persistence/perseverance with the construct of grit (Duckworth et al., 2007), there is a direct relationship between having more grit (which is similar to persistence/perseverance) and overall engagement (Hodge, Wright, & Bennett, 2018). Therefore, the finding that more students without emotional risk identified with persistence/perseverance also makes logical sense, given that one factor of a students' emotional risk status was assessed by looking at affective engagement (school satisfaction).

There were more students *with* emotional risk who identified with the strengths of love, hope, and humor. These findings conflict with the research by Peterson and colleagues (2007) where over twelve thousand US adults' completed surveys measuring character strengths,

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orientations to happiness, and life satisfaction. They found that hope and love were among the character strengths most highly linked to life satisfaction. They also found that the strength of humor was most highly linked to pleasure, which is considered a key factor of Hedonism (which involves maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain; Watson, 1895). Other conflicting research includes Gillham et al. (2011)'s study which found that strengths that were more transcendent (which includes hope) predicted greater life satisfaction, and the finding that strengths of the heart (e.g., hope and love) are consistently related to happiness (Park & Peterson, 2006). These discrepancies may be related to differences between students in accelerated curricula and those who do not participate in these rigorous academic programs. For instance, one possible explanation is that students who value strong relationships with other people (as shown through love or humor) may have less time to devote to their close relationships due to the heavy demands of the AP and IB program, which could contribute to lower emotional well-being. Similarly, those who identify with hope, which is a strength that is traditionally viewed as believing that one will achieve their goals, may experience decreased emotional well-being when they do not reach the goals or desires they may have hoped for previously.

Key Qualitative Findings

Qualitative findings provided additional insight into how students described and applied meaning to their strengths. During the MAP sessions, participants were asked to describe one or more of the strengths that the people closest to them would describe as best capturing what made them special. The strength that students most chose to discuss was humor, with over 35 students describing it in their MAP session. This was followed by creativity (26), kindness (21), curiosity (15), and forgiveness (15). Four of the five most-discussed strengths were also within the most self-identified strengths as indicated by the strengths spotting activity. The one exception was

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that more students chose to discuss forgiveness, which was the 14th most selected strength, compared to the character strength of love, which only 11 students chose to discuss. It is possible that forgiveness is a strength that is easier for adolescents to describe in comparison to a strength that is more abstract, such as love. In the MAP meetings, students did not have access to the definitions of the strengths that had been presented to them when they first identified their strengths from the VIA classification system, which may have influenced which strengths students chose to discuss.

Participants described their character strengths either by explaining how it manifested itself in their life, its importance, or its origination. These new themes, which are explored in this section, expand upon the current literature's understanding of the character strengths.

Manifestation. Many participants described how the strength manifested itself in their lives. Some participants provided a definition of the strength, while others provided a concrete application of the strength in their lives. Every single strength had at least one student verbalize a description of a strength that fits into the theme of manifestation. It appears that students are easily able to define a strength in their own words or provide examples of it in their life. This researcher assumes that the strengths that students were able to define in their own words and provide specific examples of are part of the students' main strengths. Research demonstrates that students who use their strengths frequently have greater flow and happiness in their academic life (Ianni, 2012). In addition, using strengths at work predicted viewing the work as more meaningful (Harzer & Ruch, 2012). As well, using strengths alongside goals that are considered more meaningful can lead to greater goal attainment and well-being (Linley at al., 2010). The researcher hypothesizes that if a student is able to define a strength and/or provide an example of it, that is the first step towards them being able to use it more frequently in their life, be more

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cognitively aware of it, and ultimately be the benefactors of the many benefits that result from different strengths.

Importance. Many participants described the importance of a strength in their lives. Participants either described how it aligned with their values/strengths/interests, facilitated their growth, related to their uniqueness, made up for deficits, contributed to relationships, or was related to future goals. The majority of strengths had at least one theme of Importance. The exceptions were Zest, bravery, social intelligence, appreciation of beauty and excellence, and humility/modesty. It is possible that students in accelerated curricula may not be at a place of fully being able to tie the importance of these specific strengths to their lives. It may also be harder for students to fully understand these strengths because their definitions may be harder to explain and may not as be as visibly present in everyday life. For instance, in the Steen et al. (2003) study which conducted focus groups on character strengths with high school students, some students conflated humility with humiliation, instead of its actual definition. Overall, when comparing this theme to Manifestation, it appears that it is more difficult for students to describe these strengths more abstractly (i.e., not providing a specific definition or example). It may be beneficial to help students view these strengths as important to their lives in order to increase their motivation for using them. Several of these strengths would be especially advantageous for students, including the strength of zest and social intelligence. For instance, zest is associated with a lower level of internalizing problems (Park & Peterson, 2006). Social Intelligence has been found to buffer against stress and trauma (Park & Peterson, 2009). Both of these strengths might be beneficial for students to use more often in their life.

Origination. The third theme was Origination, and students described either how the strength was innate, appeared from a young age, was related to other's recognition of the

strength, was due to family history, or resulted over time. A major theme that emerged in the Steen et al. (2003) study was the students' belief that strengths were acquired as opposed to something that they were born with, and that they could be further developed based on their experiences. In contrast, it would be interesting to further examine why a few students in this current study voiced the belief that humor, creativity, and curiosity were innate for them. Ultimately, students chose to describe the origination of about half of the strengths. However, students did not describe the origination of the following strengths: love, persistence/perseverance, love of learning, hope, fairness, teamwork, leadership, social intelligence, gratitude, humility/modesty, or spirituality. It appears that it is even less likely for students to spontaneously consider where the strength originated from, and more likely to be able to verbalize the strengths' importance or provide a definition or example of the strength. However, the researcher hypothesizes that it would be useful for students to be able to fully conceptualize their character strengths, which includes being able to identify where the strength originated from. Students who are able to do so with their character strengths are more likely to be able to internalize the strength as part of their identity and to use it in their day to day life. There have been many benefits found for many of these strengths. For instance, as mentioned previously, social intelligence can be a beneficial strength to foster in students who experienced trauma (Park & Peterson, 2009). The strength of gratitude has been linked to improved well-being and optimal functioning (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Finally, after controlling for IQ, the strengths of persistence/perseverance, fairness, gratitude, and hope predicted GPA (Park & Peterson, 2008).

Character strength descriptions. It is important to examine the qualitative findings from this study (see Table 13), with the more typical definitions (such as those from Park and

Peterson (2006), see Table 1). There were several strengths with an almost one to one correspondence between the more typical definition and this study's description of the strength: curiosity, persistence/perseverance, zest, judgement/open-mindedness, teamwork, social intelligence, self-regulation, prudence, and appreciation of beauty and excellence. It appears that students describe these strengths with about the same precision as those in typical definitions.

On the other hand, the majority (16) of the strengths were described with more precision in the current study than in typical definitions (such as those described by Park and Peterson, 2006). Within the descriptions of the strengths of humor, gratitude, kindness, love of learning, spirituality, and creativity, students expanded upon the typical definition by describing the internal benefits they experienced by utilizing the strength. For instance, the more typical definition of humor does not focus on the internal benefits of the strength. However, in this study, students viewed humor as being important not only for the relationships around them, but also for helping one persevere in difficult situations. With kindness and gratitude, the current study expanded upon these definitions by adding how being kind or grateful to others led to increases in one's happiness. Similarly, the new description of love of learning included information on how it could be facilitative for self-growth. While most students who spoke about spirituality tied religion into their definition, which was also seen in the typical definition, students also took the time to voice how this strength increased their well-being and helped their overall growth. Finally, while there was significant overlap between creativity's typical definition and this study's definition, students expanded upon how creativity was facilitative to their life for the future.

Students also expanded upon the typical definitions of the strengths of honesty/authenticity, hope, perspective, and leadership by describing the strengths' role in

impacting relationships with others. For instance, in the more typical definition, honesty/authenticity was defined as telling the truth. However, in this study, honesty/authenticity was described as being a tool for facilitative self-coaching and also that it impacted the students' relationships with others. The descriptions of hope and perspective both included information on how they contributed to other relationships, which was also lacking from more typical definitions. Finally, an addition to the typical definition of the strength of leadership was that it helped students stay true to themselves, and in doing so, allowed the student to become closer to others.

The remaining strengths of bravery, humility/modesty, love, fairness, and forgiveness expanded upon their typical definitions in other ways. For instance, in the more typical definition, bravery was defined as facing challenges head-on (Park & Peterson, 2006). Students who spoke about bravery here took this one step further and specified how they tackled challenges both for themselves and for others. While only one student spoke about humility/modesty, that student's definition differed greatly from the original definition (which was related to not seeking attention or bragging). Instead, this student spoke about joking around and not needing to be taken seriously. Regarding love, the more typical definition only focused on external love. However, in this study, students expressed that love needed to include loving oneself. Additionally, it is important to note that the description of fairness appeared very tied to students' internal values. Finally, while the description of forgiveness remained similar to the typical definition, students expanded upon the origin of forgiveness by speaking about how it originated from one's family or loved ones, including friends.

Implications for Educators

The quantitative analyses of this study provide further insight into which strengths are

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more or less likely to be identified among different groups of AP or IB high school students as a function of student academic program, ethnic identity, and risk level. Research has supported the idea that there is an increase in subjective well-being in those who use their strengths more frequently, but that happiness levels remain unchanged when students increase in their knowledge of different strengths (Duan, Bu, Zhao, & Guo, 2018). Therefore, educators should consider being strategic by targeting the more frequently occurring strengths of students in different accelerated curricula, in order to attempt to draw attention to strengths that may already be present within most students' signature strengths.

The results of the qualitative analyses of this study can assist educators in understanding how high-achieving students describe and view their character strengths as meaningful. The value of the findings of this study is that the majority of it comes directly from student voices. As students are the direct recipients of the education system, it is a necessity that they have a voice in shaping their education. The rich descriptions of each character strength can be useful for educators, which includes support staff such as school psychologists and counselors, in understanding character strengths in students and creating strengths-based interventions to increase students' happiness and overall flourishing, according to the PERMA framework.

For instance, educators can provide students the definitions of the character strengths aggregated in this study and have students consider whether those definitions mimic ways they have used their own strengths in their life. Additionally, students can read the quotes of AP and IB students and see how other students think and use their character strengths in their day to day life. Potentially, reading how AP and IB students found some strengths important could encourage students to also value using those strengths in ways that they might not have previously considered.

Educators can also consider holding focus groups with groups of students (or with an individual student) and having them come up with their own summaries of each character strength. Then, educators can provide students with the character strength summaries from this study and have students compare and contrast these with their own summaries. This process will encourage critical thinking and can lend itself well to any educator hoping to cultivate deep thinking and critical analysis skills in their students.

Educators can also consider utilizing strengths-based interventions with AP or IB students, such as those described in Suldo, Mariano, and Gilfix (in press). For instance, students can learn how to use their strengths in new ways. After identifying their signature strengths such as through the completion of the VIA Survey online, students can pick a strength they want to work on and brainstorm different ways that they can explicitly use their strengths (Seligman et al., 2005). For instance, to increase kindness, students can choose one day a week to perform five different acts of kindness (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005b). To increase gratitude, educators can provide students with a journal and instruct them to keep track of things they are grateful for in their life (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). To increase hope, students can be instructed to complete a goal mapping and hope visualization activity (Feldman & Dreher, 2012), in which students will identify a goal, consider steps they can take to achieve their goal, and consider obstacles and possible ways to circumvent these obstacles. Then, students can imagine themselves accomplishing their goal. In summary, each of these interventions is just a few of many different ways that stakeholders can foster different strengths in youth.

Overall, stakeholders can play an important role in facilitating students' understanding of how their strengths can be used in concordance with their goals and also how their strengths can be used in new ways. This has implications both for the student's psychological well-being and

also for the student's overall engagement in their future aspirations. In conclusion, the results of this study are helpful for educators and stakeholders who wish to promote the use of different character strengths in students, in order to help these students flourish. Because high achieving students have the potential to make a particularly substantive impact in society, helping these students achieve a state of flourishing can allow them to reach their goals which can be beneficial to all of society.

Contribution to the Literature

As interest grows in helping all students succeed, there remains plenty of room for growth in the research for how to help students in accelerated curricula cope with the increased stress of these programs. There is little research on students in accelerated curricula in general, and even less on how to help these students offset the increased stress levels that they experience compared to students in the general curricula. Most of the research on coping skills is limited to students in the mainstream curriculum. One possible protective factor could be targeting character strengths, which is related to a number of positive outcomes, including overall flourishing. It is believed that using character strengths makes up each of the facets of the PERMA Model, which includes Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Purpose and Meaning, and Accomplishments (Seligman, 2011). The findings from the current study shed light on the prevalence of different character strengths among students in accelerated curricula and convey the voices of these students when it comes to explaining their strengths. This study addressed a major gap in the literature by focusing on an area that could be targeted as a protective factor for students in accelerated curricula. The qualitative and quantitative methods of this study allowed this researcher to delve deeper into the chosen character strengths of students in accelerated curricula. Exploring the prevalence of different strengths across different

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subgroups as well as examining how students defined their strengths provided this study with rich and meaningful data to supplement the current literature and will ultimately be beneficial for stakeholders wishing to assist these students to reach their fullest potential.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that it only involved ninth-grade students in accelerated curricula. As this study took place at the beginning of these students' high school careers, it is possible that their identified character strengths may change as they continue to mature and participate in their accelerated curricula across their four years of school. Readers should be careful when transferring some of these findings to students who do not participate in accelerated curricula, as well as those beyond the freshman year.

In addition, it is also important to recognize that this study was part of a larger intervention where participants learned about character strengths within a class-wide lesson first and had the opportunity to discuss their strengths with their peers. Thus, overall understandings and conceptualizations of character strengths in general by the participants in this study may have been inspired by this experience. Studies of strengths prevalence that identify students' top strengths more objectively- such as through the completion of the VIA Youth Survey- may yield different findings than this study which identified strengths through a relatively brief strengths spotting activity.

The fact that the MAP interviews were all conducted by different interventionists and that the sole purpose of the interview was not to delve deeply into the students' character strengths may have impacted the willingness of students to share in-depth information about their character strengths. There were times when an interventionist did not ask any follow-up questions to statements made by the students about their strengths, which may have influenced

the students' ability to express everything they wanted to about their character strength. In spite of these limitations, this study presents rich information about students' character strengths.

Summary and Future Directions

This study was a mixed-methods study that aimed to explore the prevalence of character strengths of students in accelerated curricula across different subgroups, as well as to explore how students attributed value to their character strengths in their own voices. First, all students participated in the ACE Program and within one module, learned about character strengths. Then, they self-identified their top five character strengths. Following that, a subgroup of 121 students, most of whom were identified as being at-risk (either emotionally or academically) and a handful who were considered peer leaders, were invited to participate in a selective intervention (MAP Meetings) utilizing motivational interviewing. These MAP Meetings asked students to further describe the character strengths selected by the student previously.

With the self-identification of the top five strengths, the researcher analyzed the prevalence of these strengths across academic program, ethnicity, and risk status by conducting a series of chi-square tests of independence. The most prevalent strength in the entire sample was humor, followed by love, creativity, kindness, and curiosity. Examinations of potential differences between ethnic groups revealed more Asian students identified with love of learning compared to other ethnic groups, and more White students identified with social intelligence. Between accelerated programs, more AP students identified with creativity and fairness, and more IB students identified with self-regulation and kindness. Finally, in regard to risk status, persistence/perseverance was more commonly a feature of students without academic risk. More students without emotional risk identified with creativity, persistence/perseverance, leadership, and teamwork, whereas students with emotional risk were particularly likely to identify love,

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hope, and humor as among their top strengths.

With the MAP interventions, the researcher transcribed the portion of the interview related to strengths. Using an interpretivist paradigm, the researcher analyzed the transcribed segments and uncovered three main themes. The first theme focused on *manifestation*. Participants described either a direct application of a strength or provided a definition. The second theme was *importance*, and participants either described how it aligned with their values/strengths/interests, facilitated their growth, related to their uniqueness, made up for deficits, contributed to relationships, or was related to future goals. Finally, the third theme was *origination*, and students described either how the strength was innate, appeared from a young age, was related to other's recognition of the strength, was due to family history, or resulted over time. The fact that more students were able to describe the strength with a definition or example but were less likely to be able to voice the strength's importance or origination suggests that more work needs to be done to help students fully unpack each aspect of their identified character strengths in order to link them to benefits and roots.

This study adds to the existing literature on character strengths, especially among youth in accelerated academic programs. Findings should be viewed as preliminary pending replication, as the prevalence of the character strengths among students with emotional risk was intriguing, given that past literature linked these specific strengths to well-being. Future studies should continue investigating whether findings from this study may be unique to students in accelerated curricula. As well, further research should examine whether certain strengths (such as those that were more identified by students without emotional risk, or those that were more prevalent among different ethnic groups) may more commonly act as protective factors amongst students in accelerated curricula. Further research should be conducted on why strengths differ

between AP and IB students, as those findings may have implications for those who participate and ultimately succeed in these rigorous programs. In addition, researchers should explore how students attribute value to their character strengths across different contexts. This is the only study that listens directly to the voices of students in accelerated curricula and asks them specifically about their character strengths. Having these students answer a greater variety of questions that encourages more critical thinking and reflection of their character strengths could be exceedingly valuable in increasing the literature on students' character strengths. Finally, it would be useful to assess strengths-use, as there may be differences in the strengths that students identify with versus the strengths that they use in their day to day life.

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APPENDIX A: DEMOGRAPHIC FORMS

Fall 2017   School: _____   Version: ▣ ▣ ▣ ▣   Code #:_____

1. Birthdate: _____ - _____ - _____
                  (month)   (day)   (year)

2. My age is: # $ %   ^   3. My gender is: _ Male   □ Female

4. <u>In middle school</u>, were you:
   a. in an IB school (MYP)?   _ No   □ Yes   Which school?_____
   b. in a magnet program?   _ No   □ Yes Which program?_____
   c. in Honors/advanced classes? _ No   □ Yes

5. Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

   ✔ No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

   ▣ Yes, Puerto Rican   ▣ Yes, Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano
   ▣ Yes, Cuban   ▣ Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin (*specify*):_____

6. My race/ethnic identity is: (*circle all that apply*)

   ▣ White   ▣ American Indian/Alaska Native
   ▣ Black or African American   ▣ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   ▣ Asian   ▣ Other (*specify*):_____

7. My parents are:

   ▣ Married   ▣ Never married
   ▣ Divorced   ▣ Never married but living together
   ▣ Separated   ▣ Widowed

8. Which adult(s) do you live with most of the time?

   ▣ Mother and Father   ▣ Father and Step-mother (or partner)
   ▣ Mother only   ▣ Grandparent(s)
   ▣ Father only   ▣ Other relative (*please specify*): _____
   ▣ Mother and Step-father (or partner)   ▣ Other (*please specify*): _____

9. My father's highest education level is:

   ▣ 8th grade or less   ▣ College/university degree
   ▣ Some high school, did not complete   ▣ Master's degree
   ▣ High school diploma/GED   ▣ Doctoral level degree (Ph.D, M.D.) or other degree
   ▣ Some college, did not complete   beyond Master's level

10. My mother's highest education level is:

   ▣ 8th grade or less   ▣ College/university degree
   ▣ Some high school, did not complete   ▣ Master's degree
   ▣ High school diploma/GED   ▣ Doctoral level degree (Ph.D, M.D.) or other degree
   ▣ Some college, did not complete   beyond Master's level

APPENDIX B: HANDOUT FOR STRENGTHS IDENTIFICATION

Student's Strengths, Values, and Goals (Handout S12.3)

Name:_____   **Date:**_____

Character Strengths from VIA classification:	
1.	4.
2.	5.
3.	

Values from card sort:	
1.	4.
2.	5.
3.	

Goals Later high school or post-high school plans:
1.
2.
3.

Given what I learned in the ACE Program, my largest areas of strength and growth are:

	STRENGTH	NEUTRAL	WORK ON
How often do you use the following **effective coping** *behaviors?*	Often/ Always	Sometimes	Rarely/ Never
Time and Task Management			
Positive Thinking			
Turn to Family			
Seek Academic Support			
Relaxation			
Turn to Spirituality			
How often do you **feel connected** *to your school and AP/IB program through…*	Often/ Always	Sometimes	Rarely/ Never
Positive Relations with AP/IB Teachers			
Satisfied with AP/IB Courses/Program			
Pride in School			
How involved are you in **Extracurricular Activities**?	Often/ Always	Sometimes	Rarely/ Never
Take Part in Multiple Types of Extra-curricular activities			
# of Weekly Hours in All Extracurricular activities			
	STRENGTH	NEUTRAL	WORK ON
How often to you use the following **ineffective coping** *strategies?*	Rarely/ Never	Sometimes	Often/ Always
Withdraw and Rely on Self			
Sleep More to Avoid Stressors			
Reduce Effort on Schoolwork			
Take Short Cuts at School			
Skip School			
Turn to Substances			

APPENDIX C: STRENGTHS SPOTTING ACTIVITY
You at Your Best

Directions: Take a few minutes to think back to a specific time when you felt like you were at your best. This could be a time when you did something well, went above and beyond for someone else, displayed a talent or personal strengths, created something, etc. This might be a small moment in your life, a memorable interaction with someone close to you, a particular accomplishment, *or* an ongoing experience that makes you feel alive, authentic, full of pride, or useful. Describe that situation below.

_____
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APPENDIX D: MSLSS & PSS SCALES

ACE Program Check-In

Name: _____   Code # _____   School: _____

Teacher: _____   Period: _____   Date: _____

We would like to know what thoughts about life you've had <u>during the past several weeks</u>. Think about how you spend each day and night, and then think about how your life has been during most of this time. The statements below are about your <u>satisfaction with life at school</u> in particular. For each statement, circle a number from (**1**) to (**6**) where (**1**) indicates you **strongly <u>disagree</u>** with the statement and (**6**) indicates you **strongly agree** with the statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Mildly Disagree	Moderately Agree	Mostly Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I feel bad at school	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. I learn a lot at school	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. There are many things about school I don't like	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. I wish I didn't have to go to school	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. I look forward to going to school	1	2	3	4	5	6
6. I like being in school	1	2	3	4	5	6
7. School is interesting	1	2	3	4	5	6
8. I enjoy school activities	1	2	3	4	5	6

The next questions ask you about your feelings and thoughts during <u>the last month</u>. In each case, you will be asked to indicate *how often* you felt or thought a certain way.

In the last month, how often have you...	Never	Almost never	Some-times	Fairly often	Very often
9. ...been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	1	2	3	4	5
10. ...felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	1	2	3	4	5
11. ...felt nervous and "stressed"?	1	2	3	4	5
12. ...found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	1	2	3	4	5
13. ...been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?	1	2	3	4	5
14. ...felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	1	2	3	4	5

The next questions ask you about the grades you earned during the <u>first semester of 9th grade</u>.

15. What was your unweighted GPA from fall 2017 (e.g., 3.25)?   ___._____
16. What grade did you earn in AP Human Geography? _____

--Make sure that you have provided only one response per line. Do not skip any of the 16 items.
Give your completed survey to a USF ACE facilitator. Thank you for your time!!!--

APPENDIX E: MAP MEETING EXTTRACT THAT PERTAINS TO RESEARCH QUESTION

Part 2: Review values, hopes, and aspirations for the future
- Be transparent about direction of session.
    - *I want to thank you for coming by earlier to complete that packet of questionnaires that* [USF research team member] *gave you. I've looked it over, and I'll have some questions to ask you later.*
- Transition to strengths, values and goals by asking about things of importance.
    - *Right now I'd like to get to know your values, goals for the future, and personal strengths. What are the most important things in your life right now?*
- Review previously identified values and strengths [Student Success Planning Guide p. 2]. Use **simple and complex reflections** to follow-up the student's responses, and link current and future goals to values and strengths.
    - *I have here the results of the character strengths identification and personal values discovery activities that you completed earlier. I wonder if you might review these with me.*
    - *You identified* [insert values here] *as the most important to you.*
        - If links between opening question (things of importance) and sorted values not clear: *Tell me more about the value that might be the most important to you, in other words the guiding principle/belief that matters most to you. How would others say you exemplify this value?*
    - *You identified your character strengths as* [insert strengths here]. *Tell me more about one of these strengths that the people closest to you would describe as best capturing what makes you special.*
    - Jot down additional strength(s) and value(s) that emerge during the conversation.

APPENDIX F: CITI CERTIFICATE

Completion Date 31-Jan-2018
Expiration Date 30-Jan-2021
Record ID 24795863

This is to certify that:

Hannah Gilfix

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Human Research (Curriculum Group)
IRB Members (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of South Florida

APPENDIX G: CONSENT FORMS

Dear Parent or Guardian:

This Letter Tells You…
About a research study that will be done at your child's school by researchers from the University of South Florida (USF). We are doing this study to evaluate the Advancing Coping and Engagement (ACE) program. The ACE program is a classroom curriculum to teach 9th grade students ways to manage stress from their International Baccalaureate (IB) or Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The ACE program seeks to improve academic and emotional well-being among AP and IB students.

Who We Are
The ACE program was developed by USF Professors Shannon Suldo and Elizabeth Shaunessy-Dedrick. Our research team includes graduate students and school psychologists in the USF College of Education. We are doing the study in cooperation with the district and school administrators to ensure the study provides information that will be helpful to students, teachers, and families.

Why We are Requesting Your Child's Participation
This study is part of a federally-funded project: "Supporting High School Students in College-Level Classes." Your child is being asked to participate because he or she is a 9th grade student taking AP or IB classes. Your decision to allow your child to participate in this research study is voluntary. Refusal to participate in the research will involve no academic penalty or loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled. You are free to withdraw your student from this research study at any time. Any decision to participate, not to participate, or to withdraw participation at any point during the study will in no way affect your child's student status, his or her grades, or your relationship with your high school, school district, USF, or any other party. Neither you nor your child will be paid for your child's participation in the study.

  ➢ *Potential Benefits of Your Child's Participation in This Study*: The goal of the ACE program is to improve 9th grade AP and IB students' coping skills and strong connections to their school, and help them stay happy, experience less burnout and be academically successful. Students who participate in the ACE program will also be offered brief, extra supports in the second half of the school year if they have challenges managing their academic demands. We are interested to see how well the ACE program impacts students' emotional and academic well-being. This information will help inform the development of the ACE program and improve it for future AP and IB students. Your child will receive no direct benefits by participating in this study that will evaluate the ACE program.
  ➢ *Possible Risks If Your Child Participates in This Study*: This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what your child faces every day. Your child will be asked personal questions about their feelings that can make some people upset. They can refuse to answer any questions that make them uncomfortable, and choose to stop their participation at any time. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

What Will Happen During This Study
There are four main parts to this research study: (1) program evaluation, (2) ACE program feedback (3) mid-year screening, and (4) extra support for some students.
  ➢ *Program Evaluation:* Schools will be randomly assigned to one of two groups: *intervention* or *control*. Students in both groups will be asked to complete a survey packet asking about how they cope with academic stress, feelings about school, and emotional well-being. Emotional well-being includes questions about students' happiness and current symptoms of mental and psychological problems. Students will also be asked to share their demographic information, including two questions about parents' educational attainment. Survey packets will be given near the beginning and end of the school year, and will take approximately 45 minutes to complete on each occasion. All activities will be during regular school hours and scheduled to be minimally disruptive to your child's academic day. You or your child have the right to inspect the evaluation surveys before they are administered, if a request is made within a reasonable period of time. The surveys and directions for administering the surveys will be available at your school within a reasonable period of time prior to the evaluation administration. Participation in this study also involves a review of your child's educational records. This includes demographics such as, race/ethnicity, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, identification as an English Language Learner or a student with an

exceptionality; district student ID numbers; achievement (grades and end-of-course exam scores), attendance records, and discipline history during 2017-18. Consenting for your child to participate in this project indicates your consent for a release of your child's information (limited to the aforementioned educational records for the 2017-18 school year) to the USF team for research purposes.

➢ **Weekly ACE Program Feedback:** Schools assigned to the *intervention* group will receive support through USF during the 2017-18 school year. During the fall semester, USF ACE team members along with one of your child's teachers, will work together to deliver the ACE program to select classes of 9th grade AP/IB students. Students in schools in the intervention group will be asked to provide feedback on the content of the ACE program at the end of each weekly presentation through brief rating scales. Completion of these questions will take about 5 minutes on each occasion. Schools placed into the *control* group will receive the ACE program training and intervention materials for use during the 2018-19 school year. In total, participation will take no more than 2 hours for students in control group schools or 2-3 hours for students in intervention group schools during the 2017-18 school year.

➢ **Mid-Year Screening:** In the *intervention* group schools, the USF team will examine students' emotional and academic status through a screening done mid-way through the year. During this screening, students will complete a short 5-minute survey with questions about their current level of stress and feelings about school. You or your child have the right to inspect the screening instruments to be used before the brief survey is administered. The surveys and directions for administering the surveys will be available at your school within a reasonable period of time prior to the screening administration. Taking part in the screening will enable your child to be considered for extra support in the spring.

➢ **Extra Support:** Extra support will be offered to students whose screening data indicate signs of challenges with managing academic demands. That support involves 1-2 meetings with an ACE coach from the USF research team. Within each 30-60 minute meeting, students describe their values, strengths, and goals, and plan strategies to achieve their future goals. At the end of each meeting, students will be asked to provide feedback on the meeting content and usefulness, through completing brief rating scales. Completion of these questions will take about 5 minutes on each occasion. Additional consent forms for this part of the project will be given out to select students at a later date and only to students who have already received parent permission to participate in the screening.

Confidentiality of Your Child's Responses

Your child's privacy and research records will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. Authorized research personnel, employees of the Department of Health and Human Services, the USF Institutional Review Board and its staff, and other individuals acting on behalf of USF may inspect the records from this research project, but your child's specific responses will not be shared with school staff or anyone other than our research team. However, if your child indicates on surveys or in comments during meetings with an ACE coach that he or she intends to harm him or herself or someone else, or that he or she is in extreme emotional distress, then we will contact district mental health counselors to keep your child and others safe.

Your child's responses during some program activities will be digitally audio recorded, and then assigned a code number to protect the confidentiality of his or her statements. Consenting for your child to participate in this project also indicates your consent for your child to be audio recorded. Only we will have access to the locked file cabinet stored at USF that will contain all records linking code numbers to participants' names.

We plan to use information from this study to evaluate and improve ACE program materials that are intended to support AP and IB students. Results from data collected during this study may be published. However, the data from your child will be combined with data from other people in the publication. The published results will not include your child's name or any other information that would in any way personally identify your child. All records from the study will be destroyed in five years.

Questions?

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact us at (813) 974-2223 (Dr. Suldo) or (813) 974-7007 (Dr. Shaunessy-Dedrick). If you have questions about your child's rights as a person who is taking part in a research study, you may contact a member of The Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at the University of South Florida at 813-974-5638, and refer to eIRB # 22787.

USF

Your Child's Participation in This Study

To permit your child to participate, complete the consent form by signing your name at the bottom of this page for the portion(s) of the project you agree your child can take part in. You can consent for your child to take part in only one, or both, of the two portions of the project summarized below. Your child does not have to participate in any part of this research.

(1) The evaluation of the ACE program ("Consent for Child to Take Part in the Evaluation"). Students whose parents permit their child to participate in the evaluation will complete the pre- and post-assessment survey packet, and have their school records examined by the USF team. Also, students enrolled in intervention schools will complete brief rating scales after each weekly presentation of the ACE program to give their feedback on program content. Students whose parents do not permit their child to participate in the evaluation will still receive information about coping and engagement through their class if their school is in the intervention group, but students will not provide weekly feedback on program materials. Students whose parents do not permit their child to participate in the evaluation will not complete the survey packet nor have their school records examined by USF.

(2) The mid-year screening within the ACE program ("Consent for Child to Take Part in the Screening"). In the schools in the intervention group: students whose parents permit their child to participate in the mid-year screening will complete a short survey about their stress and feelings about school, and have their first semester grades and attendance examined by the USF team. Students identified through the screening will receive separate forms later in the school year requesting parent and student permission to receive extra support from an ACE coach. Students whose parents do not permit their child to participate in the screening will not be considered for extra support.

Please have your child return the green paper with the completed form below to his or her designated teacher.
Keep the other copy of this letter (printed on gold paper) for your records.

Sincerely,
Shannon Suldo, Ph.D.   Elizabeth Shaunessy-Dedrick, Ph.D.
Professor, School Psychology Program   Professor, Gifted Education Program
Department of Educational and Psychological Studies   Department of Teaching and Learning

---

CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY
(Form for Parent or Guardian to Complete)

Information about My Child:

_____   _____   _____
Printed name of child taking part in the study   Grade level of child   High school

(1) Consent for Child to Take Part in the EVALUATION
I freely give my permission to let my child take part in the study to evaluate the ACE program. I understand that this is research. I have received a copy of this letter and consent form for my records.

_____   _____   _____
Signature of parent of child taking part in the study   Printed name of parent   Date

(2) Consent for Child to Take Part in the MID-YEAR SCREENING
If my child's school is randomly assigned to the *intervention* group, I freely give my permission to let my child take part in the mid-year screening. I understand that this is research. I have received a copy of this letter and consent form for my records.

_____   _____   _____
Signature of parent of child taking part in the study   Printed name of parent   Date

(Portion for USF to Complete)
Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I certify that participants have been provided with an informed consent form that has been approved by the University of South Florida's Institutional Review Board and that explains the nature, demands, risks, and benefits involved in participating in this study. I further certify that a phone number has been provided in the event of additional questions.

_____   _____   _____
Signature of person obtaining consent   Printed name of person obtaining consent   Date

USF
UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH FLORIDA
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Dear Student:

This Letter Tells You…
About a study being done at your school by researchers from the University of South Florida (USF). You are being asked to take part in this study. We are doing this study to evaluate the Advancing Coping and Engagement (ACE) program. The ACE program is a classroom curriculum. It was designed to teach students ways to manage stress tied to their International Baccalaureate (IB) or Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The ACE program seeks to improve academic and emotional well-being among AP and IB students.

Who We Are
We are Shannon Suldo and Elizabeth Shaunessy-Dedrick, Professors in the USF College of Education. Our research team includes graduate students and school psychologists who are also in the USF College of Education. We created the ACE program to help 9th grade students in AP or IB classes feel good and achieve well at school.

Why We are Requesting Your Participation
This study is part of a project called "Supporting High School Students in College-Level Classes." We are doing this study to figure out how well the classwide and extra supports for students in AP and IB classes work to improve student success. Also, we are trying to improve the materials in the ACE program. Your decision to assent (agree) to take part in the research study, including the extra support meetings, is voluntary. If you refuse to take part, you will not get in trouble or lose access to the supports that are always available in your class or at your school. You are free to stop taking part in this study at any time. Deciding to participate, not to participate, or to stop participating at any point during the study, will in no way affect your student status, grades, or your relationship with your high school, school district, USF, or anyone else. You will not be paid for taking part in the study.

➢ *Potential Benefits of Participation in This Study*: The goal of the ACE program is to improve 9th grade AP and IB students' coping skills and strong connections to their school, and help them stay happy, experience less burnout and be academically successful. We also created brief, extra supports for students who may have challenges managing their academic demands. We are interested to see how well the ACE program impacts students' emotional and academic well-being. The information that we collect from students will be used to improve our classwide and extra support materials, for better use with future AP and IB students. You will receive no direct benefits by participating in this study that will evaluate the ACE program.

➢ *Possible Risks If You Participate in This Study*: This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. You will be asked personal questions about your feelings that can make some people upset. You can refuse to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable, and choose to stop taking part at any time. There are no known additional risks to students who take part in this study.

What Will Happen During This Study
There are four main parts to this research study: (1) program evaluation, (2) ACE program feedback (3) mid-year screening, and (4) extra support for some students.

➢ *Program Evaluation:* Schools will be randomly assigned to one of two groups: *intervention* or *control*. Students in both groups will be asked to complete a survey packet asking about how they cope with academic stress, feelings about school, and emotional well-being. Emotional well-being includes questions about students' happiness and current symptoms of mental and psychological problems. Students will also be asked to share their demographic information. Survey packets will be given near the beginning and end of the school year, and will take approximately 45 minutes to complete on each occasion. All activities will be during regular school hours and scheduled to be minimally disruptive to your academic day. You have the right to inspect the evaluation surveys before they are administered, if a request is made within a reasonable period of time. The surveys and directions for administering the surveys will be available at your school within a

reasonable period of time prior to the evaluation administration. Participation in this study also involves a review of your educational records. This includes demographics such as, race/ethnicity, eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch, identification as an English Language Learner or a student with an exceptionality; district student ID numbers; achievement (grades and end-of-course exam scores), attendance records, and discipline history during 2017-18.

➢ *Weekly ACE Program Feedback:* Schools assigned to the *intervention* group will receive support through USF during the 2017-18 school year. During the fall semester, USF ACE team members along with one of your teachers, will work together to deliver the ACE program to select classes of 9th grade AP/IB students. Students in schools in the intervention group will be asked to provide feedback on the content of the ACE program at the end of each weekly presentation through brief rating scales. Completion of these questions will take about 5 minutes on each occasion. Schools placed into the *control* group will receive the ACE program training and intervention materials for use during the 2018-19 school year. In total, participation will take no more than 2 hours (*control* group) to 2 to 3 hours (*intervention* group) of your time during the 2017-18 year.

➢ *Mid-Year Screening:* In the *intervention* group schools, the USF team will examine students' emotional and academic status through a screening done mid-way through the year. Students with parent permission to participate in the screening will complete a short 5-minute survey with questions about their current level of stress and feelings about school. You have the right to inspect the screening instruments to be used before the brief survey is administered. The surveys and directions for administering the surveys will be available at your school within a reasonable period of time prior to the screening administration.

➢ *Extra Support:* Extra support will be offered to students whose screening data indicate signs of challenges with managing academic demands. That support involves 1-2 meetings with an ACE coach from the USF research team. Within each 30-60 minute meeting, students describe their values, strengths, and goals, and plan strategies to achieve their future goals. At the end of each meeting, students will be asked to provide feedback on the meeting content and usefulness, through completing brief rating scales. Completion of these questions will take about 5 minutes on each occasion. Additional consent and assent forms for this part of the project will be given out to select students at a later date, only to students who previously received parent permission to participate in the screening.

Confidentiality of Your Responses

Your privacy and research records will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. Authorized research personnel, employees of the Department of Health and Human Services, the USF Institutional Review Board and its staff, and other individuals acting on behalf of USF may inspect the records from this research project, but your specific responses will not be shared with school staff or anyone other than our research team. Although this information is not explicitly discussed, any evidence of child abuse or neglect disclosed during completion of surveys or through comments made to a research staff must be reported to authorities. Also if you write or say that you plan to harm someone or yourself, or if your responses on surveys or comments during meetings indicate extreme emotional distress, research staff (ACE coaches) must tell people at the school to help you.

Your responses during some program activities will be digitally audio recorded, then assigned a code number to protect the confidentiality of your statements. Only we will have access to the locked file cabinet stored at USF that will contain all records linking code numbers to participants' names.

We plan to use information from this study to evaluate and improve ACE program materials that are intended to support AP and IB students. Results from data collected during this study may be published. However, the data from you will be combined with data from other people in the publication. The published results will not include your name or any other information that would in any way personally identify you. All records from the study will be destroyed in five years.

Questions?

If you have any questions about this research study, please raise your hand now or ask us at any time. You may contact us later at (813) 974-2223 (Dr. Suldo) or (813) 974-7007 (Dr. Shaunessy-Dedrick). If you have questions

about your rights as a person who is taking part in a research study, you may contact a member of the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance at USF at 813-974-5638. Refer to eIRB # 22787.

Your Participation in This Study

If you would like to take part in the evaluation of the ACE program, complete the assent form below by signing and printing your name (titled "Assent to Participate in Evaluation"). Keep the other copy of this letter for your records. As a reminder, student who take part in the evaluation will complete the pre- and post-assessment survey packet, and have their school records examined by the USF team. Also, students enrolled in intervention schools will complete brief rating scales after each weekly presentation of the ACE program to give their feedback on program content. You do not have to participate in any part of this research. Students who do not agree to participate in the evaluation will still receive information about coping and engagement through their class if their school is in the intervention group, but will not complete the weekly feedback forms. Students who do not agree to participate in the evaluation will not complete the packet of surveys nor have their school records examined by USF.

Sincerely,

Shannon Suldo, Ph.D. Elizabeth Shaunessy-Dedrick, Ph.D.
Professor of School Psychology Professor of Gifted Education
Department of Educational and Psychological Studies Department of Teaching and Learning

---

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN EVALUATION
(Form for Student to Complete)

I freely give my permission to take part in this evaluation study. I understand that this is research. I have received a copy of this letter and assent form for my records.

_____   _____   _____
Signature of child   Printed name of child   Date

(Portion for USF to Complete):
Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Assent

I certify that participants have been provided with an informed assent form that has been approved by the University of South Florida's Institutional Review Board and that explains the nature, demands, risks, and benefits involved in participating in this study. I further certify that a phone number has been provided in the event of additional questions.

_____   _____   _____
Signature of person obtaining assent   Printed name of person obtaining assent   Date

APPENDIX H: ACE PROGRAM STUDENT MODULES

Module	Objectives
Module 1: Adjusting to AP/IB	• Identify sources of stress, and learn how it affects the body and mind. • Learn advantages of AP/IB from former AP/IB students.
Module 2: Factors Related to AP/IB Students' Success, Spotlight on Coping and Engagement	• Identify the factors that affect a student's path towards success. • Define academic coping in terms of behaviors, styles, and usefulness.
Module 3: School Engagement - Increasing Pride in your School and AP/IB Program	• Increase school pride by identifying the positive aspects of their school. • Identify the connection between their personal goals and AP/IB classes.
Module 4: School Engagement - Relationships with Teachers, Peers, and Others at School	• Understand the benefits of forming affective connections at school. • Initiate and maintain relationships with their teachers and peers.
Module 5: Investing in Extracurricular Activities	• Understand the benefits of participating in extracurricular activities • Identify extracurricular activities students can become involved in
Module 6: Coping with Stress through Time and Task Management (Organizing Your Task List)	• Understand the importance of using time and task management strategies. • Learn and practice using the 5 core time and task management strategies.
Module 7: Coping with Stress by Focusing on the Work and Limiting Procrastination	• Learn how to stay focused on academic tasks and limit procrastination. • Develop a time and task management action plan.
Module 8: Coping with Stress by Seeking Support from People at Home, School, and Spiritual Community	• Understand importance of turning to others when feeling stressed. • Develop strategies for seeking support from multiple sources.
Module 9: Coping with Stress through Relaxation and Positive Thinking	• Understand multiple relaxation techniques useful in regulating emotions • Use positive thinking strategies when faced with academic stressors
Module 10: Limiting Use of Ineffective Coping Styles	• Understand negative consequences associated with ineffective coping. • Develop strategies for changing inneffective coping behaviors.
Module 11: Promoting Eustress & Review of Coping and Engagement Tools	• Apply the problem-solving process to common stress situations • Learn strategies for savoring successes
Module 12: Strengths, Values, & Goals	• Identify signatures strengths and values • Generate a plan for attaining their future goals