

# VIA institute

## Character Strength Summaries

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### Comment:

The following list of brief summaries are selected from an ever-expanding body of knowledge on VIA character strengths (research and practice), and with a few exceptions, excludes general research on other strengths (e.g., talents, interests, resources). The intention is to help practitioners, educators, and researchers navigate the science of character and further contribute to the use of character strengths to benefit oneself, others, and society.

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### **Signature Strengths**

- Using one's signature strengths in a new way increased happiness and decreased depression for 6 months (Gander, Proyer, Ruch, & Wyss, 2012).
- The use of signature strengths elevates individuals' harmonious passion (i.e., doing activities that are freely chosen without constraints, are highly important, and part of the individual's identity). This then leads to higher well-being (Forest et al., 2012).
- Using one's signature strengths in a new way increased happiness for 6 months and decreased depression for 3 months (Mongrain & Anselmo-Matthews, 2012).
- Among youth, the use of signature strengths in novel ways along with personally meaningful goal-setting led to increases in student engagement and hope (Madden, Green, & Grant, 2011).
- A qualitative study examined the use of VIA strengths by women in the workplace and found that in all cases, strengths led to a "virtuous circle" in which the strengths use helped them overcome

obstacles that had impeded strengths use. All subjects derived unique value from using character strengths at work (Elson & Boniwell, 2011).

- In a longitudinal study, strengths use was found to be an important predictor of well-being and led to less stress and increased positive affect, vitality, and self-esteem at 3-month and 6-month follow-up (Wood et al., 2011).
- There is a strong connection between well-being and the use of signature strengths because strengths helps us make progress on our goals and meet our basic needs for independence, relationship, and competence (Linley et al., 2010).
- Random assignment to a group instructed to use 2 signature strengths or use 1 signature strength and 1 bottom strength revealed significant gains in satisfaction with life compared with a control group but no differences between the 2 treatment groups (Rust, Diessner, & Reade, 2009).
- The identification of signature strengths followed by discussion with a friend about strengths and use of three signature strengths in daily life boost cognitive (but not affective) well-being at three months follow-up (Mitchell, Stanimirovic, Klein, & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).
- The use of one's top strengths leads to a decreased likelihood of depression and stress and an increase in satisfaction in law students (Peterson & Peterson, 2008).
- Using one's signature strengths in a new and unique way is an effective intervention: it increased happiness and decreased depression for 6 months (Seligman, Steen, Park, Peterson, 2005).

### **VIA Character Strengths in the Workplace**

- Employees who used four or more of their signature strengths had more positive work experiences and work-as-a-calling than those who expressed less than four (Harzer & Ruch, 2012a).
- Regardless of which character strengths are used, the congruent use of strengths in the situational circumstances at work is important for fostering job satisfaction, pleasure, engagement, and meaning in one's job (i.e., the alignment of one's signature strengths with work activities is what matters; Harzer & Ruch, 2012b).
- In a qualitative case study of a management development program, a key finding was to help managers develop new "tools" and behaviors and core to these tools was signature strengths use (Berg & Karlsen, 2012).
- Across occupations, curiosity, zest, hope, gratitude, and spirituality are the Big 5 strengths associated with work satisfaction (Peterson et al., 2010).
- Among volunteer and paid workers, endorsing strengths is related to meaning, but both endorsing AND deploying strengths is connected to well-being (Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010).
- Character strengths use was connected with personal well-being and job satisfaction (Littman-Ovadia & Davidovitch, 2010).
- Character strengths – especially zest, perseverance, hope, and curiosity – play a key role in health and ambitious work behavior (Gander, Proyer, Ruch, & Wyss, 2012).
- In a three-year thematic analysis of drivers of employee engagement, focusing on character strengths was among the three most crucial drivers (along with managing emotions and aligning purpose; Crabb, 2011). Specifically, employees are encouraged to identify, use, and alert others of their signature strengths as well as converse with managers about strengths use opportunities in the organization.

- In a unique study of top-level executive leaders of for-profit companies (studying only the strengths of honesty/integrity, bravery, perspective, social intelligence), each of these strengths were important for performance but honesty/integrity had the most contribution in explaining variance in executive performance (Sosik et al., 2012).
- A study of strengths under the virtue of wisdom (creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, and perspective) found them to be related to higher performance on a creative task and negatively related to stress (Avey et al., 2012).
- Among 226 employees, the strengths under the virtue of transcendence – hope, humor, gratitude, and spirituality (not appreciation of beauty/excellence) – had a direct positive relationship with a calling work orientation (Gorjian, 2006).
- Life satisfaction strengths, spiritual strengths, and community-building strengths do not appear to be overtly encouraged in the workplace; instead it is the temperance and hardworking strengths that are emphasized (Money et al., 2008).
  - Top 10 (rank order) strengths expressed at work: honesty, judgment, perspective, fairness, perseverance, love of learning, leadership, zest, curiosity, social intelligence.
  - Bottom 5 (starting with lowest) strengths expressed at work: religiousness/spirituality, appreciation of beauty/excellence, love, bravery, modesty/humility.
  - Strengths of which were determined to be a “high match” with work demands: only honesty, judgment, perspective, fairness, and zest.
  - Appreciation of beauty/excellence was the only strength determined to be a “low match” with work demands; the rest of the strengths were a “medium match.”
  - Work demands required the individual to use *more* of the following strengths than what is natural for them: perseverance, love of learning, leadership, curiosity, self-control, and prudence.
  - Work demands required *less* of these strengths than what is natural for the individual: social intelligence, gratitude, teamwork, hope, humor, creativity, kindness, forgiveness, modesty/humility, bravery, love, appreciation of beauty/excellence, spirituality.

### **VIA Character Strengths in Positive Education (and Children/Youth)**

- In a longitudinal study of adolescent' transition to middle school, intellectual and temperance strengths predicted school performance and achievement, interpersonal strengths related to school social functioning, and temperance and transcendence strengths predicted well-being (Shoshani & Slone, 2012).
- In a study of children's adjustment to first grade, parents' intellectual, interpersonal, and temperance strengths related to their child's school adjustment, while the children's intellectual, interpersonal, temperance, and transcendence strengths related to first-grade adjustment (Shoshani & Ilanit Aviv, 2012).
- In a study of adolescents' character strengths and career/vocational interests, intellectual strengths were related to investigative and artistic career interests, transcendence and other-oriented strengths were related to social career interests, and leadership strengths were associated with enterprising career interests (Proyer, Sidler, Weber, & Ruch, 2012).
- In a study of adolescent romantic relationships, honesty, humor, and love were the most preferred character strengths in an ideal partner (Weber & Ruch, 2012a).

- Character strengths of the mind (e.g., self-regulation, perseverance, love of learning) were predictive of school success (Weber & Ruch, 2012b).
- In a study of the VIA Youth Survey, five strengths factors emerged and were independently associated with well-being and happiness (Toner, Haslam, Robinson, & Williams, 2012).
- A study of 319 adolescent students between the ages of 12–14 were divided into two groups in which 2/3 received character strengths-builder activities and strengths challenges within the school curriculum (called Strengths Gym), and 1/3 did not; those who participated in strengths experienced increased in life satisfaction compared to the controls (Proctor et al., 2011).
- Among high school students, other-oriented strengths (e.g., kindness, teamwork) predicted fewer depression symptoms while transcendence strengths (e.g., spirituality) predicted greater life satisfaction (Gillham et al., 2011).
- Positive education programming which heavily involves character strengths assessment and intervention led to improved student school skills and greater student enjoyment and engagement in school (e.g., improved curiosity, love of learning, and creativity; Seligman et al., 2009).
- The most prevalent character strengths in very young children are love, kindness, creativity, curiosity, and humor (Park & Peterson, 2006a).
- When compared with U.S. adults, youth from the U.S. are higher on the character strengths of hope, teamwork, and zest and adults are higher on appreciation of beauty & excellence, honesty, leadership, open-mindedness (Park & Peterson, 2006b).
- Convergence of strengths between parents and child are modest except for spirituality where it is substantial (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)
- Character strengths with a developmental trajectory (least common in youth and increase over time through cognitive maturation) are appreciation of beauty & excellence, forgiveness, modesty, open-mindedness (Park & Peterson, 2006a; 2006b).
- Focus groups with 459 high school students from 20 high schools found that students largely believe the 24 VIA strengths are acquired and that the strengths develop through ongoing experience, the students cited minimal character strength role models, and they particularly valued the strengths of love of learning, perspective, love, social intelligence, leadership, and spirituality (Steen, Kachorek, & Peterson, 2003).

### **Specific Populations**

- Homeless: social intelligence, kindness, perseverance, honesty, and humor were most endorsed, whereas curiosity, humility, appreciation of beauty/excellence, forgiveness, teamwork, and gratitude were infrequently or never mentioned (Tweed, Biswas-Diener, & Lehman, 2012).
- Graduate students: Curiosity, love, kindness, social intelligence, and honesty were most endorsed; the virtues of humanity, wisdom, and justice were the highest endorsed. A qualitative analysis revealed several core themes: the power of strengths; the value of a strengths-based approach; the complexity of strengths-based work; and strengths born from challenge and adversity (Fialkov & Haddad, 2012).
- College students: humor, love, kindness, honesty, and social intelligence were most endorsed (Karris & Craighead, 2012).

- Abuse survivors: When comparing college students with and without history of childhood abuse, forgiveness, appreciation of beauty/excellence, and gratitude were significantly lower among those with an abuse history (Moore, 2011).
- Teachers: The highest strengths among teachers in Slovenia were fairness, kindness, honesty, and love while the lowest strengths were creativity, humor, and love of learning (Gradisek, 2012).
- Art therapists and students of art: curiosity, appreciation of beauty/excellence (Riddle & Riddle, 2007).
- Military: Military students (in Argentina) reported higher character strengths scores than civilians; in addition, cadets with high academic or military performance in their final year had higher levels of perseverance than low-performing cadets in their final year (Cosentino & Castro Solano, 2012).
- Military: honesty, hope, bravery, perseverance, and teamwork in a sample of U.S. and Norwegian military samples (Matthews et al., 2006).

### **Universality, Prevalence, and General Findings**

- Character strengths are universal (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006). High rates of agreement, desirability, and development of VIA character strengths were found in remote cultures (Kenyan Maasai & Inughuit in Northern Greenland) and the U.S. (U. of Illinois students; Biswas-Diener, 2006). VIA character strengths are remarkably similar across 54 nations and across the United States (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006).
- There are 24 strengths of character that meet 8, 9, or all 10 of the following criteria: fulfilling, morally valued, do not diminish others; nonfelicitous opposites; traitlike; distinctiveness; paragons; prodigies; selective absence; institutions/rituals (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).
- Character may occupy the most central role in the field of positive psychology. Pleasure, flow, and other positive experiences are enabled by good character (Park & Peterson, 2009a; Peterson, Ruch, Beerman, Park, & Seligman, 2007).
- Character strengths are moderately heritable (Steger, Hicks, Kashdan, Krueger, & Bouchard, 2007).
- Twin studies show that love, humor, modesty, and teamwork are most influenced by environmental factors (Steger et al., 2007).
- The most prevalent character strengths in human beings in descending order are kindness, fairness, honesty, gratitude, judgment (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006).
- The least prevalent character strengths in human beings are prudence, modesty, and self-regulation (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006).
- The most prevalent character strengths in a UK sample were open-mindedness, fairness, curiosity, love of learning, and kindness (Linley et al., 2007).
- Young adults (ages 18–24) from the US and Japan showed similar distributions of VIA strengths – higher strengths of kindness, humor, and love and lower strengths in prudence, modesty, and self-regulation; in addition females reported more kindness and love while males reported more bravery and creativity (Shimai, Otake, Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006).
- A number of factor analyses have been conducted on the VIA Survey. Most studies find four or five factors to emerge. By far, the largest study using over 650,000 subjects (McGrath, in press) found four factors. For more information, see Brdar and Kashdan (2010); Littman-Ovadia & Lavy (2012);

Macdonald, Bore, and Munro (2008); McGrath (in press); Peterson et al. (2008); Ruch et al. (2010); Shryack, Steger, Krueger, and Kallie (2010); Singh and Choubisa (2010).

- In a theoretical paper, the argument is made that the VIA character strengths should not be treated independently from one another, should be cautioned from overuse, and that a “master” strength of practical wisdom is needed in order to effectively deploy strengths (Schwartz & Sharpe, 2006).
- In a sample of over 83,000 people taking the VIA–Survey, researchers did not find evidence for a distinct state of superior functioning (e.g., enlightenment or wisdom) indicating that character strengths are *dimensional* (not categorical like *DSM* mental disorders; McGrath, Rashid, Park, & Peterson, 2010).
- In a study of gender differences and character strengths, women scored highest on the strengths of honesty, kindness, love, gratitude, and fairness, while men scored highest on honesty, hope, humor, gratitude, and curiosity. Life satisfaction was predicted by zest, gratitude, hope, appreciation of beauty/excellence, and love for women, while life satisfaction was predicted by creativity, perspective, fairness, and humor for men (Brdar, Anic, & Rijavec, 2011).
- In a study of attachment orientations among 394 individuals, most character strengths were negatively associated with both avoidant and attachment orientations, and the strength of hope was a mediator for both orientations (Lavy & Littman–Ovadia, 2011).
- Too much (overuse) and too little (underuse) of character strengths use can have a negative impact on well–being and other important factors (for a review, see Grant and Schwartz, 2011).
- Strengths can be cultivated through enhanced awareness, accessibility, and effort and are highly contextualized phenomena that emerge in patterns and alongside goals, interests, and values (Biswas–Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2011).
- In examining participants’ preferences for positive psychology exercises, those who benefited most from using signature strengths in new ways had a strong preference for the gratitude visit intervention (Schueller, 2010).
- The connection between character strengths and positive emotions was explored and the strengths most strongly loading as emotional strengths were zest, hope, bravery, humor, love, and social intelligence (Gusewell & Ruch, 2012).
- A review of character strength interventions found small to moderate effect sizes while hypothesizing reasons why strength interventions work, such as factors relating to strengths use, need satisfaction, goal–setting, and goal–striving (Quinlan, Swain, & Vella–Brodrick, 2012).
- In a randomized controlled study of interventions involving “strengths development” and “talent identification,” only the latter group was linked with a fixed mindset in which individuals believe their personal attributes are not amenable to change efforts (Louis, 2011).
- The process of working with character strengths involves three main steps, the Aware–Explore–Apply model, which involves strengths–spotting, combating strengths blindness and cultivating strengths awareness (aware); exploring strengths overuse, underuse, use across contexts, past use with problems and successes (explore); and taking action with goal–setting, deploying and aligning strengths, and valuing strengths in others (apply; Niemiec, 2013).

### **Character Strengths and Life Satisfaction**

- In a sample of 334 Swiss adults and 634 peer (informant) ratings, the results converged suggesting that hope, zest, and curiosity (and gratitude and love) have key roles in the connection between character strengths and life satisfaction. Informant reports also related positively to the endorsement of pleasure, engagement, and meaning (Buschor, Proyer, & Ruch, 2013).

- In a study examining strength factors, the transcendence strengths were the strongest predictor of life satisfaction and positive affect, while all the strength factors related to self-efficacy in which the leadership factor was the strongest predictor. This research highlights how different strengths are relevant for different positive outcomes (Weber et al., 2013).
- In addition to replication of the connection between hope, gratitude, love, zest, and curiosity with life satisfaction, the strengths that were the best predictors of future life satisfaction were hope and spirituality (Proyer et al., 2011).
- Three groups emerged in a study of 27 nations and routes to happiness: nations high in pleasure & engagement; those high in engagement & meaning; and those low in pleasure, engagement, & meaning. Nations highest in each route were: South Africa (pleasure), Switzerland (engagement), and South Korea (meaning). All pathways predicted life satisfaction, wherein meaning & engagement are most robust (replication; Park, Peterson, & Ruch, 2009).
- Pleasure, engagement, and meaning predicted life satisfaction in both Australian and US samples, and replicated the finding that there are stronger relationships with the latter two (Vella-Brodrick, Park, & Peterson, 2009).
- Viewing one's work as a "calling" in which one's work is viewed as a source of fulfillment that is socially useful and personal meaningful, rather than as financial reward or career advancement, is predicted by the character strength of zest (Peterson et al., 2009).
- Among youth, the character strengths most related to life satisfaction are love, gratitude, hope, and zest; very young children (ages 3–9) described by their parents as happy are also noted as showing love, hope, and zest (Park & Peterson, 2009b).
- In a survey of the VIA classification with 839 Croatians, only curiosity and zest were consistently part of the top 5 strengths linked to attaining pleasure, engagement, and meaning (Kashdan, 2009).
- Replication study finding similarly strong (e.g., hope, zest) and weak (e.g., modesty, appreciation of beauty & excellence) correlations with life satisfaction in a sample of Swiss, Germans, and Austrians; life satisfaction was highest among the Swiss (Ruch et al., 2007).
- Total score on the VIA-IS (all 24 character strengths) correlated positively with life satisfaction (.44) indicating that strong character is associated with happiness and the good life (Ruch et al., 2007).
- Life satisfaction increased with degree of virtuousness (development of character strengths) but was more apparent of an increase for the less virtuous (Ruch et al., 2007).
- The character strengths most associated with the *meaning* route to happiness are religiousness, gratitude, hope, zest, and curiosity (Peterson et al., 2007).
- The character strengths most associated with the *engagement* route to happiness are zest, curiosity, hope, perseverance, and perspective (Peterson et al., 2007).
- The character strengths most associated with the *pleasure* route to happiness are humor, zest, hope, social intelligence, and love (Peterson et al., 2007).
- Among young adults from the US and Japan, happiness was associated with zest, hope, curiosity, and gratitude (Shimai et al., 2006).
- Parent's strength of self-regulation was strongly associated with his or her child's life satisfaction, but not their own (Park & Peterson, 2006a).

- The pursuit of meaning and engagement are much more predictive of life satisfaction than the pursuit of pleasure (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005).
- The 5 character strengths most highly related to life satisfaction are hope ( $r = .53$ ), zest ( $r = .52$ ), gratitude ( $r = .43$ ), curiosity ( $r = .39$ ), and love ( $r = .35$ ). These strengths consistently and repeatedly show a robust, consistent relationship with life satisfaction (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). The correlations given were from a sample of 3907 individuals; see article for data on two additional samples.
- The character strengths least related to life satisfaction (weak association) are modesty/humility, creativity, appreciation of beauty & excellence, judgment/open-mindedness, and love of learning (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004).

### Character Strengths and Health and Wellness

- Greater endorsement of character strengths is associated with a number of health behaviors, such as feeling healthy, leading an active way of life (e.g., zest), the pursuit of enjoyable activities, healthy eating, watching one's food, and physical fitness. All character strengths (except humility and spirituality) were associated with multiple health behaviors. While self-regulation had the highest associations overall, curiosity, appreciation of beauty/excellence, gratitude, hope, and humor also displayed strong connections with health behaviors (Proyer, Gander, Wellenzohn, & Ruch, 2013).
- Character strengths were highly correlated with well-being subscales of self-acceptance, purpose, and environmental mastery, as well as good physical and mental health (Leontopoulou & Triliva, 2012).
- Individuals who use their character strengths experienced greater well-being, which was related to both physical and mental health. Strengths use was a unique predictor of subjective well-being after self-esteem and self-efficacy were controlled for (Proctor, Maltby, & Linley, 2009).
- Character strengths were associated with lower levels of sexual behaviors and sex-related beliefs among African-American adolescents. Specifically on the VIA, higher love of learning was related to boys' self-reported abstinence from sexual intercourse and boys' & girls' self-reported abstinence from drug use; higher curiosity was related to boys' & girls' belief in no premarital sex (love of learning was also significant for boys); prudence was related to reported abstinence from sexual intimacy; judgment was related to sexual initiation efficacy for girls & boys (leadership was also significant for girls; Ma et al., 2008).
- Adolescent students who counted blessings reported higher levels of optimism and life satisfaction, less negative affect, and fewer physical symptoms (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008).
- Hope was a significant predictor of medication adherence among asthma patients between 8 and 12 (Berg, Rapoff, Snyder, & Belmont, 2007).
- When an individual has a physical disorder, there is less of a toll on life satisfaction if they are high on the character strengths of bravery, kindness, and humor (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2006).
- When an individual has a psychological disorder, there is less of a toll on life satisfaction if they are high on the character strengths of appreciation of beauty & excellence and love of learning (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2006).
- The strengths of the "heart" (e.g., love, gratitude) are more strongly associated with well-being than are strengths of the "head" (e.g., creativity, open-mindedness/judgment, appreciation of beauty and excellence; Park & Peterson, 2008b; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004).
- The practice of gratitude (counting blessings) is linked to fewer physical symptoms, more optimistic life appraisals, and more time exercising and improved well-being and optimal functioning (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).



- The practice of gratitude is linked to increases in well-being among those with neuromuscular disease (Emmons & McCullough, 2003).
- Grateful individuals report higher positive mood, optimism, life satisfaction, vitality, religiousness and spirituality, and less depression and envy than less grateful individuals (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).
- Grateful people tend to be more helpful, supportive, forgiving, empathic, and agreeable (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

### **Character Strengths and Achievement**

- The character strengths – perseverance, love, gratitude, and hope – predict academic achievement in middle school students and college students (reported in Park & Peterson, 2009a).
- Effective teachers (judged by the gains of their students on standardized tests) are those who are high in social intelligence, zest, and humor in a longitudinal study (reported in Park & Peterson, 2009a).
- Popular students, as identified by teacher ratings, are more likely to score highly on civic strengths such as leadership and fairness, and temperance strengths of self-regulation, prudence, and forgiveness. Interestingly, none of the humanity strengths such as love and kindness were related to popularity (Park & Peterson, 2009b).
- Academic achievement among school children is predicted by perseverance and temperance strengths (Peterson & Park, 2009).
- Military performance among West Point cadets was predicted by the character strength of love (Peterson & Park, 2009).
- Military leaders' character strength of humor predicted their followers' trust while followers' character strength of perspective earned their leaders' trust (Sweeney et al., 2009).
- Strengths that predicted GPA in college students were perseverance, love of learning, humor, fairness, and kindness (Lounsbury et al., 2009).
- Predictors of college satisfaction were hope, social intelligence, self-regulation, and fairness (Lounsbury et al., 2009).
- After controlling for IQ, strengths of perseverance, fairness, gratitude, honesty, hope, and perspective predicted GPA (Park & Peterson, 2008a)
- **Character strengths** are related to achievement, life satisfaction, and well-being in children and youth (Park & Peterson, 2008a).
- The combined use of the VIA Survey and The Teacher Behaviors Checklist offers a new approach in faculty development that assists faculty in becoming more reflective and deliberate about their teaching and learning strategies (McGovern & Miller, 2008).
- In a study of nearly 1200 kids who wore a beeping watch leading them to write about their thoughts, feelings, and actions eight times per day, the most curious kids were compared with the bored kids (the top 207 and the bottom 207). The curious were more optimistic, hopeful, confident, and had a higher sense of self-determination and self-efficacy believing they were in

control of their actions and decisions, than the bored kids who felt like pawns with no control of their destiny (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003).

- Higher hope levels are related to greater scholastic and social competence and to creativity levels (Onwuegbuzie, 1999).

### **Character Strengths and Mental Illness, Problems, and Trauma Recovery**

- Character strengths buffer people from vulnerabilities that can lead to depression and anxiety, such as the need for approval and perfectionism (Huta & Hawley, 2010).
- Hope, kindness, social intelligence, self-regulation, and perspective buffer against the negative effects of stress and trauma (Park & Peterson, 2006c; Park & Peterson, 2009a).
- Character strengths encompass 60–70% of the programming and interventions that make up positive psychotherapy which has been found in trials to be beneficial for adults and children suffering from depression and anxiety (Rashid & Anjum, 2007; Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006).
- Persistence, honesty, prudence, and love were substantially related to fewer externalizing problems such as aggression (Park & Peterson, 2008a).
- Hope, zest, and leadership were substantially related to fewer problems with anxiety and depression (Park & Peterson, 2008a).
- Posttraumatic growth in various dimensions corresponds with particular character strengths: improved relationships with others (kindness, love), openness to new possibilities (curiosity, creativity, love of learning), greater appreciation of life (appreciation of beauty, gratitude, zest), enhanced personal strength (bravery, honesty, perseverance), and spiritual development (religiousness; Peterson et al., 2008; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995).
- The more traumatic events an individual reports, the higher the character strength scores (with the exception of gratitude, hope, and love; Peterson et al., 2008).
- Hope is negatively related to indicators of psychological distress and school maladjustment (internalizing and externalizing behaviors; Gilman, Dooley, & Florell, 2006).
- Gratitude, hope, kindness, leadership, love, spirituality, and teamwork all increased in a U.S. sample (but not a European sample) two months after the September 11<sup>th</sup> (2001) attack on the World Trade Center in New York City; ten months after September 11<sup>th</sup>, these character strengths were still elevated but to a lesser degree (Peterson & Seligman, 2003).

### **Character Strengths and Mindfulness**

- Initial pilot data and qualitative reviews of Mindfulness-Based Strengths Practice (MBSP), an 8-week program that integrates and builds character strengths and mindfulness, is beneficial in boosting well-being, signature strengths, engagement, purpose, and positive relationships (Niemi, 2014).
- Mindfulness helps to overcome blind spots in self-knowledge, such as the quality and quantity of information individuals have about themselves and how people process information about themselves (Carlson, 2013).

- Increased amount of time spent using strengths has been found to correlate significantly with mindfulness (Jarden et al., 2012).
- The integration of mindfulness and character strengths creates a synergy of mutual benefit that can foster *avirtuous circle* in which mindful awareness boosts strengths use which, in turn, enlivens mindfulness (Niemiec, Rashid, & Spinella, 2012).
- In examining principles of mindful living, 16 character strengths interventions are suggested to enhance and support healthy, mindful living (Niemiec, 2012).
- Researchers have proposed the possibility that if everyone has signature strengths and if mindfulness can enhance their use then it's possible mindfulness could be beneficial for most people (Baer & Lykins, 2011).
- Mindfulness and curiosity each help to align individuals' actual self (people's beliefs about who they think they are) and their ideal self (the image people would like to be; Ivtzan, Gardner, & Smailova, 2011). This relates to the character strengths work of knowing one's core self or identity.
- Mindfulness provides exposure or a new perspective of one's internal and external environments (Brown, Ryan, & Creswell, 2007).
- Mindfulness may facilitate successful self-regulation and self-regulation may facilitate greater mindfulness (Masicampo & Baumeister, 2007).
- The two-part, operational definition for mindfulness by 11 leading scientists embodies two character strengths – mindfulness is the *self-regulation* of attention with an attitude of *curiosity*, openness, and acceptance (Bishop et al., 2004).

### Specific Character Strengths

(for space limitations, only a *very* small selection of studies are referenced here)

- Most creativity training programs work, especially when divergent thinking – the capacity to generate multiple alternative solutions as opposed to the one correct solution – is fostered (Scott et al., 2004).
- Many interventions help to increase creativity in older adults, such as cultural/art programs (e.g., music, dance, drawing), poetry, journaling, problem-solving activities, reminiscence, and psycho-educational groups (Flood & Phillips, 2007).
- In an experiment in which participants were instructed to pay attention to three novel features with something disliked (i.e., use their curiosity), the participants changed the way they viewed the activity, and weeks later they were more likely to have done the task again on their own (Langer, 2005).
- Individuals are more likely to engage in active, open-mindedness of multiple views when asked to make decisions around values/goals that are both strong and conflicting (Tetlock, 1986).
- Students are more likely to value and enjoy learning if they're achieving their grade goal, the subject matter is of personal interest, or the reasons for learning are task-oriented (e.g., markers for how they can improve; Covington, 1999).

- There are three major paths for developing wisdom: Learning from mentors and reading philosophical literature, teaching students skills and wise patterns of thinking and decision-making, and the use of direct, short-term interventions, such as imagined conversation and imagined travel (Gluck & Baltes, 2006).
- Labeling one's actions in retrospect as courageous can lead to or promote courage, or at least positive states and values that lead to courageous behaviors (Finfgeld, 1999; Hannah et al., 2007).
- Outcome-focused strategies – thinking of the person being helped, reminding oneself of the righteousness of the act, or reflecting on the obligation to act – are the most common ways individuals attempt to increase bravery/courage (Pury, 2008).
- Reinforcement of high effort on tasks results in transfer of effort to other tasks (greater persistence; Eisenberger, 1992; Hickman et al., 1998).
- Honesty, empathy, and courage – conceptualized as academic heroism – predicted academic honesty and noted as three potential routes for developing heroism and virtues (Staats et al., 2008).
- Potential pathways for increasing zest, particularly in the workplace, may be to cultivate optimism, gratitude, or savoring, emphasize good social relationships outside work, and focus on physical health and fitness (Peterson et al., 2009).
- The focus on cultivating love toward oneself and/or others was found to increase feelings of social connection and positivity toward others (Hutcherson et al., 2008), as well as positive emotions, sense of purpose, and mindfulness in general (Fredrickson et al., 2008).
- Kindness and gratitude increased among happy Japanese women who counted their kind acts (Otake et al., 2006).
- Potential pathways to build teamwork and develop successful teams comes from correlational research finding team optimism predicts outcomes for teams that are newly formed and team resiliency and team efficacy predict outcomes for established teams (West et al., 2009).
- Instructors are more likely to be perceived as fair if they present information clearly, give regular feedback, stick to the course syllabus, and give many opportunities to earn a good grade in the course (Chory, 2007).
- Moral reasoning development (fairness) is developed through stimulating and interactive peer discussions that involve moral issues, heterogeneous reasoning, and orient toward consensus or resolution of disagreement (transactive discussions; Berkowitz & Gibbs, 1983).
- The development of 2 or 3 different leadership styles (e.g., directive, participative, coaching) relates to higher leader behavioral flexibility which is an important characteristic of effective leaders (Sumner-Armstrong et al., 2008).
- Writing about the personal benefits of forgiving a transgressor lead to greater forgiveness than writing about the traumatic features of a transgression suffered or an unrelated control topic (McCullough et al., 2006).
- Viewing and working with forgiveness as a process, whether this is done individually or in groups, is crucial for building this strength (Baskin & Enright, 2004).
- A meta-analysis of 65 group intervention conditions found that the amount of time spent empathizing with transgressors, committing to forgive, and practical strategies (e.g., anger

management and relaxation) was significantly related to forgiveness outcome (Wade, Worthington, & Meyer, 2005).

- Daily self-control exercises increase a general core capacity for self-control (i.e., our self-regulation “muscle”), such as food monitoring, improving mood, improving posture, physical exercise programs, financial monitoring exercises, and the use of a non-preferred hand to do routine activities (Baumeister et al., 2006).
- Keeping a “beauty log” of writing briefly about the beauty the individual appreciates in nature, art, or morality during the week lead to a higher engagement with moral beauty and trait hope (Diessner et al., 2006).
- A combination of cognitive strategies (e.g., evaluating beliefs) and social problem-solving strategies (e.g., assertiveness training) lead to greater optimism (Gillham, Reivich, Jaycox, & Seligman, 1995).
- Visualizing and writing about one’s best possible self at a time in the future leads to increases in optimism/hope and well-being (King, 2001; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006).
- Three good things (writing down three positive things that happened during the day) is an effective intervention: it increased happiness and decreased depression for 6 months (Seligman, Steen, Park, Peterson, 2005).
- Three interventions delivered online were not found to have lasting effects: The gratitude visit (benefits for 1 month), simply identifying signature strengths and using them more over the week, and writing about “you at your best.” Nevertheless, if someone is looking for a quick boost of happiness, the gratitude visit is a good option. These three ineffective interventions were delivered in isolation; there might be benefits if these were combined in a multi-exercise program (Seligman, Steen, Park, Peterson, 2005).
- Four studies taken together found that prayer has a causal effect in increasing the strength of gratitude (Lambert et al., 2009).
- Learning from spiritual models or exemplars reduced negative religious coping and images of God as controlling and provides an avenue for learning about spirituality (Oman & Thoresen, 2003; Oman et al., 2007).

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