Virtues and Character Strengths in Emerging Adults - What’s the Impact?
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Introduction
Christian higher education often strives for learning and growth that go beyond utilitarian skills. These include a focus on formation of virtuous dispositions, character strengths and holistic spiritual formation. Need for assessment of educational outcomes places pressure on the measurable, creating a challenge for those foci that are not easily countable. Our project aims to understand the outcomes of virtues and character strengths for emerging adults as measured through a meta-analysis of existing empirical studies. The results will inform future work on how Calvin College can best incorporate a virtues framework as detailed in the Core Curriculum.

Important Definitions

**Positive Psychology**: a new field of psychology that studies how strengths and virtues can be cultivated in individuals in order to promote their thriving

**Emerging Adulthood**: the stage of life between the ages 18-25, and involves identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and lots of possibilities.

**Virtue**: a habit of thinking, feeling, and acting, that comprises an aspect of the thriving of an individual, within a flourishing community

**Meta-analysis**: quantitative “survey” approach in which individual study findings investigating a common problem are statistically integrated and analyzed

Research Questions
1. How do you teach virtues/character strengths?
2. How do you measure successful learning?
3. What are the impacts of these?

Framework

Our research was based on the Values in Action (VIA) framework developed by Peterson and Seligman’s study of virtues and character strengths. They proposed a universal definition of honorable character that includes six major virtues.

- Wisdom - cognitive
- Courage - emotional
- Humanity - interpersonal
- Justice - civic
- Temperance - measure
- Transcendence - purpose

Under each major virtue, various character strengths were categorized, which came to a grand total of 24 character strengths. For example, fairness, leadership, and teamwork all fall under the category of justice.

Our research team used this framework to structure our search process and guide our coding process.

Methods

The present study used meta-analytic techniques to examine the association between virtues, character strengths, and young adults.

Electronic databases were utilized to find 269 studies (to date), of which 50 were kept for further analysis (to date). These studies encompass 26,391 participants, and there are currently 221 variables that have been coded.

The search terms that were used involved several combinations of words and phrases such as “emerging adults,” “young adults,” “character strengths,” “virtues,” and “soft skills.” This is but a sampling of the many other terms used in order to capture the breadth of research done on this topic.

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Methods (continued)

In the coming months, we plan to continue the searching and coding process utilizing the VIA framework to guide us. We will be coding the studies, and once our searching and coding is complete, we will run the meta-analytic statistics to get our results.

References


www.viacharacter.org

Next Steps

In the coming months, we plan to continue the searching and coding process utilizing the VIA framework to guide us. We will be coding the studies, and once our searching and coding is complete, we will run the meta-analytic statistics to get our results.

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