

**EFFECTIVENESS OF A CHARACTER STRENGTHS
INTERVENTION ON EMERGING ADULTS' IDENTITY
FORMATION, SELF-DOUBT, AND SELF-EFFICACY**

By

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ABSTRACT

EFFECTIVENESS OF A CHARACTER STRENGTHS INTERVENTION ON EMERGING ADULTS' IDENTITY FORMATION, SELF-DOUBT, AND SELF-EFFICACY

Wong Wen Pin

This study explored the impact of a single-session character strengths intervention (CSI) on improving identity formation and self-efficacy, as well as reducing self-doubt among Malaysian emerging adults attending tertiary education. A randomized active-controlled trial including pretest, posttest, and a 2-week follow-up was administered. A total of 133 undergraduate students, aged 18 to 25, were randomly allocated to either the CSI or a control group that attended a gatekeeper training for suicide prevention. Data from emerging adults and perceived adults were examined separately using a mixed-design analysis of variance (ANOVA). The results revealed that CSI did not have a unique effect on improving emerging adults' identity formation, self-efficacy, and self-doubt when compared to the control group. However, the study revealed incidental findings that highlighted the developmental differences between emerging adults and perceived adults. At pretest, emerging adults demonstrated significantly lower identity formation and self-efficacy and significantly higher self-doubt compared to perceived adults. These findings suggest that emerging adults might require more tailored, purpose-driven interventions to address their specific developmental needs. Despite the current results not being significant, this study revealed the developmental challenges

faced by emerging adults, and highlighted the need for more support strategies to facilitate their identity development.

Keywords: emerging adulthood, character strengths, identity formation, self-doubt, self-efficacy, quasi-experiment

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CSI	Character Strengths Intervention
EPSI	Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory
GSE	General Self Efficacy Scale
SOS	Subjective Overachievement Scale

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Emerging adulthood is a developmental period between adolescence and young adulthood, lasting roughly from ages 18 to 25 (Arnett, 2000). During this period, emerging adults tend to experience more independence from their parents. Yet, most of them have yet to adopt conventional adult roles such as marriage, parenthood, and having a stable career. Thus, emerging adulthood presents a unique opportunity for individuals to explore various possibilities in love, work, and worldviews (Hochberg & Konner, 2020). In this developmental phase, individuals are free to determine who they want to be as they take on new freedoms, responsibilities, and identities. Yet, a sense of instability and uncertainty also comes with the newfound freedom characterized by this developmental period (Reifman et al., 2007). With the freedom to make decisions, individuals may feel overwhelmed by the sheer number of responsibilities that are placed on them during this period. Moreover, as emerging adults move into new environments, they often struggle with anxiety and self-doubt when adapting to this period's rapid changes (Lanctot & Poulin, 2018; Peer & McAuslan, 2016).

1.1.1 Mental health and developmental challenges of emerging adults

According to Schulenberg et al., (2004), emerging adulthood is a critical period when positive and negative mental health trajectories tend to diverge, with identity development being a deciding factor. Those who flourish may experience a sense of well-being as they internalize positive values and engage in prosocial activities (Layland et al., 2018). In contrast,

those who are unsure of their sense of identity may experience identity-related distress (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2013), self-doubt (Peer & McAuslan, 2016), and lowered self-efficacy (Stomff & Vasiliu, 2017). A systematic review by Dessauvage et al. (2022) found that the prevalence rates of mental health issues among university students in six ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries were 29.4% for depression, 42.4% for anxiety, and 16.4% for stress, with suicidality present in 7% to 8% of students. In Malaysia, adults between ages 25 to 29 had the highest prevalence of depression for adults, and this was followed by ages 20 to 24 (Institute for Public Health, 2020). In line with this, recent research has revealed that specific features of emerging adulthood are linked to mental health outcomes. A study by Othman and Jaafar (2022) found that two out of five features of emerging adulthood—instability and self-focused orientation—were significant predictors of depressive symptoms among Malaysian emerging adults. This suggests that individuals who experience greater instability in their relationships, work, and other areas of life, as well as those who are more self-focused, are at a higher risk of developing depression. This increased vulnerability to depression among emerging adults is further exacerbated by evidence indicating that this age group is also at a heightened risk of developing lifetime mental health disorders and substance use disorders (Reavley & Jorm, 2011; Vaingankar et al., 2013). These mental health risk factors signal a need for more mental health preventions and interventions to be conducted to support emerging adults through this critical developmental period.

In a study by Abdul Kadir and Mohd (2021) on emerging adults in Malaysia, the researchers investigated the significance of developmental assets, creativity, and thriving as protective factors for mental health. As positive identity significantly boosts mental health, they suggested that interventions fostering positive identity could enhance mental health. This is also supported by Shek (2024), which suggested that building up developmental assets such as coping skills against adversity, positive mindset, and emotional management skills in students is an important prevention strategy against mental health issues in the post pandemic era.

Recognizing the vulnerability of emerging adults and acknowledging the potential role of positive identity development in mental health promotion, it is crucial to investigate the effects of positive identity interventions within this population. Character Strengths Intervention (CSI) shows promise as an approach that could help emerging adults in this regard.

1.1.2 Character Strengths Interventions

Character strengths are universal positive traits that are central to our identity and behavior (Niemiec, 2018). The VIA Institute on Character proposed a classification of universal human strengths and virtues that defines the components of a “good character”. Based on a three-year project, the institute identified 24 universal character strengths categorized under six groups: Wisdom & Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Two assessments were also developed to measure the character strengths present in an individual, namely the *VIA Inventory of Strengths* for adults and the *VIA Youth Survey* for adolescents between ages 10 to 17. The assessments aim to reveal an

individual's signature strengths, which are the top five character strengths that feel most authentic to a person and are more natural and energizing to express compared to other strengths in the person's profile (Littman-Ovadia et al., 2016).

Using the Aware-Explore-Apply model (AEA), Niemiec (2018) suggested that practitioners can boost strengths use in their clients by first (1) helping individuals to become aware of their signature strengths that they had been blind to, and next (2) exploring individuals' strengths in terms of their past successes, relationships, or personal challenges, and finally (3) forming concrete goals around strengths based on the insights learned from earlier phases. According to a controlled study conducted by Dubreuil et al. (2016), the AEA model was shown to increase strength use and well-being among working adults. Consequently, this study explored the effects of an adapted version of the intervention program the identity formation, self-doubt, and self-efficacy of on emerging adults.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the recognition that discovering signature strengths is a powerful tool for enhancing well-being, Malaysian positive psychology literature primarily focuses on interventions that build specific character strengths, such as gratitude (Koay et al., 2020; Noor et al., 2018) and self-regulation (Roy et al., 2016). While these interventions are valuable, they may lack the personalized touch needed to address individual differences in character strengths. Interventions that promote awareness and use of one's unique signature strengths may be more effective in improving general well-being (Ng & Ortega, 2022). This is because building signature strengths can

allow individuals to pursue goals that suit their intrinsic interests and values (Duan et al., 2013). By helping individuals identify and utilize their signature strengths, such interventions can facilitate goal-setting and personal growth that aligns with their intrinsic values and motivations. Yet, a gap remains in Malaysia, where signature strengths-based interventions have rarely been explored. A literature search conducted on the MEDLINE and PUBMED databases in October 2024 revealed that only one study in Malaysia had examined the use of interventions aimed at promoting awareness and use of one's signature strengths (Senf & Liao, 2013). This underlines a crucial need for research that prioritizes signature strengths, which could pave the way for more tailored and impactful mental health interventions for Malaysian emerging adults.

Next, emerging adulthood is a critical period for identity formation, where individuals deal with questions about who they are and where they want to go in life. This process is filled with challenges, including identity confusion, self-doubt, and lowered self-efficacy (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2013; Peer & McAuslan, 2016; Stomff & Vasiliu, 2017). In Malaysia, this developmental stage is further complicated by societal expectations where emerging adults may feel pressured to meet traditional benchmarks of adulthood such as securing a stable career or starting a family (Wider et al., 2021). While several self-discovery workshops are available in the market, an empirically informed program that helps in identity formation, self-efficacy, and reduction of self-doubt among this demographic is lacking. Based on a literature search of MEDLINE and PUBMED databases conducted in October

2024, no experimental study had been conducted on workshops that support emerging adults through identity-related challenges in Malaysia.

Finally, studies examining the effects of positive psychology interventions such as the CSI are predominantly conducted in Western countries (Hendriks et al., 2018). Only 21.8% of studies are conducted in non-western countries. This has led to a limited understanding of how these interventions translate to non-Western cultures, where values, beliefs, and societal expectations can significantly differ. As Ng and Ortega (2022) pointed out, the theory, research, and practice of positive psychology in Southeast Asia are still in their formative stages, and there remain much to be learned about how positive psychology can be adapted and applied to local contexts. Hence, Hence, more studies are needed to explore the effects of positive psychology interventions among the non-western population.

1.3 Significance of Study

In terms of theoretical significance, this study may fill the empirical gap in Character Strengths Interventions among Malaysian emerging adults. This study offers both researchers and practitioners in positive psychology to refine and enhance interventions aimed at addressing identity-related challenges within this demographic. As mentioned above, the current Malaysian character strengths intervention literature leans towards interventions that develop specific strengths rather than building individuals' unique signature strengths. Thus, the investigation on the effects of an intervention program that aims to increase emerging adults' awareness and utilization of their unique character strengths may bridge the gap in the

Malaysian positive psychology literature and provide an alternative intervention program for Malaysian emerging adults.

Next, this study aims to contribute to the collective effort of validating the use of positive psychology interventions in non-Western countries. Hence, this study can identify whether findings of positive psychology obtained from western samples can be replicated among the non-western sample.

Moreover, this study offers an evaluation of the applicability of character strengths activities outlined by Niemiec (2018) within the Malaysian context. As the activities provided by Niemiec (2018) were empirically informed, this study may shed light on the effects of combining these intervention activities into an intervention package. Accordingly, past studies have supported combining standalone exercises in positive psychology into an intervention package (Schueller, 2011; Schueller & Parks, 2012). Yet, no published study has validated an intervention package that is developed by combining character strengths activities to serve the needs of emerging adults in Malaysia.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To investigate the effects of CSI on identity formation among Malaysian emerging adults
2. To investigate the effects of CSI on self-doubt among Malaysian emerging adults.
3. To investigate the effects of CSI on self-efficacy among Malaysian emerging adults.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What is the effect of CSI on identity formation among Malaysian emerging adults?
2. What is the effect of CSI on self-doubt among Malaysian emerging adults?
3. What is the effect of CSI on self-efficacy among Malaysian emerging adults?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

H1: The CSI would lead to a significant increase in identity formation as compared the active control group at posttest and follow-up.

H2: The CSI would lead to a significant decrease in self-doubt as compared the active control group at posttest and follow-up.

H3: The CSI would lead to a significant increase in self-efficacy as compared the active control group at posttest and follow-up.

1.7 Definitions

1.7.1 Identity Formation

Identity formation is a term derived from Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (Schachter & Galliher, 2018). It is defined as having a coherent and consistent sense of self to base one's judgements and decisions on. This is in contrast with identity confusion, which is having a fragmented sense of self or being uncertain of one's own identity (Meca et al., 2014). Identity formation is operationally defined using the total score of the identity resolution subscale of the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI; Rosenthal et al., 1981). The total score for the subscale ranges from 12 to 60. Higher scores indicate a more coherent sense of identity.

1.7.2 Self-Doubt

Self-doubt refers to a sense of uncertainty towards one's competence in achieving desired goals (Oleson et al., 2000). Individuals with high levels of self-doubt may focus too much on their imperfections to the extent that it induces fear of failure. Self-doubt is operationally defined using the total score of the self-doubt subscale of the Subjective Overachievement Scale (SOS; Oleson et al., 2000). The total score ranges from 8 to 48. A higher total score indicates a greater sense of self-doubt.

1.7.3 Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy is defined as the belief in one's capability to take actions required to attain desired goals (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). This study conceptualizes self-efficacy as being trait-like and general rather than being task-specific or state-like. Self-efficacy is operationally defined using the total score of the General Self Efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The total score ranges between 10 to 40. A higher total score signifies a higher level of self-efficacy.

1.8 The current study

Although the effects of Character Strengths Interventions (CSI) in improving well-being among undergraduates are well-established, their potential to guide emerging adults through identity-related challenges remains underexplored. Identity formation is a crucial aspect of flourishing in emerging adults; however, emerging adulthood often presents challenges such as identity-related distress (Samuolis & Griffin, 2014), lowered self-efficacy (Stomff & Vasiliu, 2017), and increased self-doubt (Peer & McAuslan, 2016). Emerging adults who are confused about their sense of identity may struggle

with insecurities and loneliness (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2013), which can lead to depression (Nelson & Barry, 2005).

Additionally, identity formation plays an important role in emerging adults' psychosocial well-being. According to Baggio et al. (2017), those who faced the instability of this developmental period without knowing how to define themselves experienced a decreased sense of well-being. Next, Stomff and Vasiliu (2017) suggested that emerging adults aged 18-26 years old experience a decrease in perceived general self-efficacy due to becoming aware of their responsibilities and separating from childhood and adolescent comforts. Low self-efficacy is linked then to problematic video gaming (Cudo et al., 2019), anxiety (Germani et al., 2020), lower subjective well-being (Olenik-Shemesh et al., 2018), and even depression (Orth et al., 2008). Lastly, emerging adulthood is an age of instability, which can lead to self-doubt among emerging adults. Peer and McAuslan (2016) reported that higher levels of instability are related to higher levels of self-doubt, which can hinder emerging adults' development by making them uncertain about their ability to overcome normative developmental challenges.

Given these challenges, this study aimed to investigate the effects of an empirically informed CSI on Malaysian emerging adults to bridge the gap in the Malaysian positive psychology literature. Character Strengths Interventions show promise in helping emerging adults through their developmental challenges for several reasons. Firstly, CSI helps participants discover and apply their signature strengths that are central to their identity, which in turn allows emerging adults to achieve a more coherent sense of identity. For example, a qualitative study conducted by Layland et al. (2018)

highlighted that emerging adults consider discovering their strengths and weaknesses as part of the process of identity exploration. As such, participating in CSI and being aware of one's signature strengths can potentially guide emerging adults develop a more coherent sense of self that is aligned with their values and aspirations. Next, Arnett (2000) suggested that emerging adults' sense of attaining adulthood largely depends on their character qualities. The three main criteria that signify the attainment of adulthood are taking responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and achieving financial independence. CSI can help emerging adults in this role transition by leveraging their signature strengths to set goals that relate to taking responsibility for the domains in their lives. By having self-knowledge of their signature strengths, emerging adults can make informed decisions based on their strengths in various aspects of their lives.

Chapter II

Literature Review

The literature review focuses on Character Strengths, Character Strengths Intervention (CSI), and how CSI can support emerging adults through their developmental period that is filled with instability and transition.

2.1 Character Strengths

The emerging field of positive psychology aims to act as a counterbalance against the focus on pathology, which has generally received central attention in psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology focuses on exploring what makes life worth living, with the goal of understanding and promoting factors that lead to human flourishing. Central to this movement is the concept of character strengths, which provide a framework for understanding the positive traits that enable individuals to thrive in different aspects of their lives (Park et al., 2009).

To achieve balanced attention to the positive aspects of psychological health, a three-year project led by Peterson and Seligman (2004) had resulted in a classification of character strengths. This classification project involved a substantial literature search of texts discussing human virtues from cultures such as China, South Asia, and the West. Based on the analysis of philosophy, ethics, morality, psychology, and theology from these cultures, six virtues (wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence) were found to be universally valued in human beings across races, cultures, and nations (Niemi, 2018). From these six virtues, 24 character strengths that met various strengths criteria were identified (see Appendix A).

According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), individuals possess each strength in varying degrees. The VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) is an assessment tool that ranks each individual's strengths based on the degree to which they possess a particular strength. Based on the result, an individual's top five strengths can be identified, and they are labelled as one's signature strengths.

According to Niemiec (2018), signature strengths are character strengths that are most central to an individual's identity and play a significant role in how we interact with the world. These strengths are often described as essential, effortless, and energizing—commonly referred to as the "3 E's." A signature strength feels essential to who we are as a person; it is an intrinsic part of one's character that defines your actions and choices. It is effortless to express, bringing a natural sense of flow when you use it, and it also energizes you, leaving you feeling uplifted and motivated. As signature strengths are identified by comparing strengths within an individual, each individual's signature strengths can be identified regardless of the degree to which they actually possess or use such strengths (Toback et al., 2016).

2.2 Character Strengths Intervention

Generally, the exploration and use of one's signature strengths bring lasting benefits and allow individuals to be at their best because signature strengths are manifestations of an individual's potential (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). According to a placebo-controlled study conducted by Seligman et al. (2005), identifying and applying signature strengths in new ways each day led to an increase in adults' happiness and a decrease their depressive symptoms for six months. Similarly, one study found that strengths use among adults

during the Covid-19 pandemic predicted resilience, which the authors defined as a stable increase in mental health, positive affect, and life satisfaction despite the adverse situation (Martínez-Martí et al., 2020). A meta-analysis conducted by Schutte and Malouff (2019) also revealed the promising effects of CSI. The meta-analysis found CSI significantly increased signature strengths use, and this in turn significantly increased positive affect and life satisfaction and significantly decreased depression.

Previous studies have established the effectiveness of CSI in improving well-being among the undergraduates students. Firstly, an experimental study conducted by Duan et al. (2013) examined the use of CSI in increasing satisfaction with life among Chinese undergraduates. In the study, the treatment group completed the VIA-IS and wrote essays describing when, where, and how they used their top personal strengths. In contrast, the control group wrote essays that described their daily activities in a detailed and organized manner. The researchers found a significant increase in satisfaction with life in the treatment group compared to the control group, even after ten weeks.

Similarly, another study conducted by Duan and Bu (2019) investigated the use of a single-session CSI to boost thriving and decrease anxiety, stress, and depression among first-year undergraduates. In this study, participants in the treatment group identified their signature strengths and applied them to set goals and structure their daily activities. Compared to the wait-list control group, participants who attended the CSI session displayed significantly higher levels of thriving and lower levels of depression and

anxiety, at posttest and at a one-week follow-up. This highlights the potential of brief CSIs in fostering students' well-being.

In addition, a Malaysian study conducted by Senf and Liao (2012) further supports the effectiveness of strengths-based interventions in enhancing well-being. Their study investigated the impact of a CSI in Malaysia by having participants identify their top five character strengths using the VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) and encouraging them to use these strengths in new ways daily. The results from this study indicated that the intervention significantly increased happiness and decreased depressive symptoms compared to a control group. Notably, the positive effects were still present even at the one-month follow-up, indicating the potential for sustained well-being improvements.

More recently, studies by researchers like Green (2022) and Yu et al. (2022) have also shed light on the broad benefits of character strengths training for university students. Green's (2022) findings showed that engaging in character strengths exercises led to significant boosts in students' psychological capital—things like self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience—indicating its lasting impact on their well-being. In the same vein, Yu et al. (2022), using the Aware-Explore-Apply (AEA) model, found that students who engaged in strengths-based interventions reported increased well-being and post-traumatic growth, reinforcing the effectiveness of these interventions in enhancing students' mental and emotional health through a structured approach.

While the effectiveness of CSI in enhancing well-being among undergraduates has been well-studied, there is much less information available

regarding the effectiveness of CSI in supporting identity formation and self-efficacy, as well as reducing self-doubt among emerging adults. Most of the research to date has focused primarily on well-being indicators like happiness, life satisfaction, anxiety and depression (Duan et al., 2013; Duan & Bu, 2019; Senf & Liao, 2013). Unlike well-being, which can often be influenced through immediate interventions, identity development is a more gradual complex process that requires emerging adults to achieve independence, navigate cultural expectations and balance individual autonomy with societal roles (Nelson & Luster, 2015). Therefore, there is a need to examine whether CSI can significantly influence identity development among emerging adults. This gap is especially important to address because identity formation is a key developmental task for emerging adults, and interventions that can strengthen identity and reduce self-doubt have the potential to shape long-term personal growth.

Additionally, compared to some of the studies listed above, this study offers a more structured approach to CSI by guiding participants through the awareness, exploration, and application phases of the intervention. In contrast, past studies often provided only basic instructions for participants to complete the VIA-IS and use their strengths in a new way each day (Seligman et al., 2005; Senf & Liao, 2013). The structure of this intervention is designed to address emerging adults' unique developmental needs. A list of similar previous studies that helped participants recognize their signature strengths can be found below (refer to Table 2.1)

Table 2.1*Main characteristics of the previous CSI studies*

Studies (Country)	Research Design	Population	Intervention (Components)	Control	Outcome Measures	Main Findings
Duan et al. (2013) (China)	RCT with pretest, posttest, & 9-week follow-up assessments	Undergraduates (N = 285)	6-week CSI (Identifying signature strengths, noticing signature strengths in daily life)	Active	SWLS	The intervention led to a significant increase in life satisfaction at posttest, followed by a slight decline at follow-up
Duan and Bu (2019) (China)	RCT with pretest, posttest, & 1-week follow-up assessments	Undergraduate freshman (N = 52)	Single-session CSI (Identifying character strengths, character strengths 360°, signature character strengths, and nominate goals)	Waitlist	DASS-21, BIT, SKS, SUS	The intervention significantly increased well-being and reduced depression and anxiety during both post and follow-up assessments. The intervention significantly reduced stress levels only during follow-up assessment.
Proctor et al. (2011) (England)	Quasi-experimental treatment-control condition design	Secondary school students aged 12 to 14 (N = 319)	CSI implemented as the school curriculum (Building strengths, learning new strengths, recognizing strengths in others)	Class as usual	SLSS, PANAS, RSE	The intervention significantly increased life satisfaction. The intervention also marginally increased positive affect.
Seligman et al. (2005) (United States)	Randomized placebo-controlled trial with pretest, posttest & up to 6-months follow-up	General adult population (N = 577)	Three different CSI conditions (identifying signature strengths, using signature strengths in a new way, & you at your best)	Active	SHI, CES-D	Identifying and using signature strengths in new ways each day led to increased happiness and decreased depressive symptoms at the 6-months follow-up.

Senf and Liao (2013) (Malaysia)	RCT with pretest, 1-week posttest, & 1-month follow-up	Undergraduates (N = 122)	1-week CSI (Identifying signature strengths, using signature strengths in a new way)	Waitlist	SHI, CES-D	The intervention resulted in a significant increase in happiness and decrease in depressive symptoms at the 1-month follow-up.
Green, (2022) (Pakistan)	RCT with pretest, posttest, & 6-months follow-up	Undergraduate and graduate students (N = 182)	4-weeks CSI focusing on all 24 strengths, observing strengths in others, and developing lesser strengths	Waitlist	The PERMA Profiler	The intervention significantly increased PERMA-oriented well-being at 6-months follow-up.
Yu et al., (2022) (China)	RCT with pretest, posttest, & 1-month follow-up	Undergraduates (N = 124)	1-week CSI based on the aware-explore-apply” model (AEA)	Group Counseling	PTGI, WHO-5, CES-D-SF	The intervention significantly improved post-traumatic growth and well-being. The effects of CSI were non-inferior compared to those of group counselling.

Note. RCT = randomized controlled trial, CSI = character strengths intervention, SWLS = Satisfaction with Life Scale, DASS-21 = Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale 21, BIT = The Brief Inventory of Thriving, SKS = Strengths Knowledge Scale, SUS = Strengths Use Scale, SLSS = Student's Life Satisfaction Scale, PANAS = Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, RSE = Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale, SHI = Steen Happiness Index, CES-D = Centre For Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, PTGI = Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, WHO-5 = World Health Organisation Five Well-Being Index, CES-D-SF = Centre for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale-Short Form

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this research is Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood. It describes the developmental period of emerging adulthood typically observed in individuals aged between 18 to 25. Moreover, emerging adulthood generally exists only in industrialized or post-industrial countries as these cultures allow individuals to postpone the roles and responsibilities of adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

2.3.1 Arnett's Theory of Emerging Adulthood

Generally, emerging adulthood is a period that is characterized by frequent change as individuals explore various possibilities in domains such as career, relationships, and worldviews. As summarized by Reifman et al. (2007), Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood described five key characteristics of the developmental period, namely:

- The age of identity explorations
- The age of instability
- The self-focused age
- The age of feeling in-between
- The age of possibilities

This section will explore the various features of emerging adulthood while describing how Character Strengths Intervention may support emerging adults throughout this developmental period.

2.3.1.1 Exploration. Identity exploration involves individuals deciding who they are and whom they want to be in terms of their career, academic studies, relationships, and worldviews. Before making stable adult commitments such as career or marriage, emerging adults must first undergo

the psychological task of developing their identities to have a stable and authentic identity to guide and sustain those commitments. Yet, not all emerging adults can take up this developmental task. As noted by Nelson and Padilla-Walker (2013), emerging adults either “flourish” when they develop a sense of identity through exploration and commitment; or “flounder” when they are confused about their sense of identity. Thus, for those who are floundering, emerging adulthood can be a period filled with struggles related to insecurities and loneliness, which can ultimately lead to depression (Nelson & Barry, 2005). Moreover, it is worth noting that as historically prescribed social commitments are slowly diminishing, the current alternatives available for emerging adults to explore their identities has been expanded (e.g. more career choices, fewer limitations in partner selection; Côté & Levine, 2002). Yet, this also means that the collective support for identity exploration and formation has been reduced as normative structures (e.g. religion) that guide decision-making deteriorate. As described by Côté and Levine (2002), “People were “liberated” from traditional statuses, but also lost many collective supports.” (p.58). Thus, the current society gives more freedom to emerging adults while simultaneously places more responsibilities on them to develop their identities.

A study conducted by Wider et al. (2015) in Malaysia presented two relevant findings regarding emerging adulthood and identity exploration. Firstly, the authors found that most young people aged between 18 and 25 years old who attended university identify as emerging adults (72.3%). These emerging adults do not perceive themselves to have reached adulthood. Conversely, 27.8% of university students perceived that they had already achieved adulthood. Secondly, students who perceived themselves as emerging

adults engaged in identity exploration more as compared to the self-perceived adult group. In sum, this study suggested that emerging adulthood does exist among Malaysian university students, and that identity exploration is a critical development task that all emerging adults engage in.

Here, Character Strengths Intervention shows promise in supporting emerging adults in identity development. This is mainly because CSI helps participants discover and apply their signature strengths that are considered to be central to one's identity. Thus, it is inferred here that discovering strengths that reflect emerging adults' personal identity will help them achieve a more coherent sense of identity (i.e., improve identity formation). For instance, a qualitative study conducted by Layland et al. (2018) highlighted that emerging adult consider discovering their strengths and weaknesses as part of the process of identity exploration. Thus, CSI presents a unique opportunity to support emerging adults in this domain.

2.3.1.2 Instability. The age of instability describes the challenges faced by individuals during this period. As emerging adults are going through identity development, a general sense of anxiety and confusion can arise as they lack the self-confidence to guide them through the choices and responsibilities of an adult's life (Luyckx et al., 2011). Similarly, this newfound freedom can also induce self-doubt in emerging adults, which can in turn lead to increased negative emotions, impaired well-being, and low self-esteem (Oleson et al., 2000; Peer & McAuslan, 2016). In fact, research suggested that emerging adults who face more instability displayed more depressive symptoms (Othman & Jaafar, 2022). This demonstrated a need to

support emerging adults develop a strong sense of self-understanding to buffer against these challenges.

Developing a clear self-concept and a coherent identity can provide emerging adults with a stable foundation to navigate the uncertainties they face during this phase. According to Luyckx et al. (2011), achieving a sense of adult identity and finding one's place in a community acted as buffers against the negative impacts of the instability in emerging adulthood such as job burnout. Similarly, self-understanding in terms of personal values, career choices and relationship preferences can lead to a sense of stability and self-confidence (Schwartz et al., 2005). Based on the AEA model offered by Niemiec (2018), Character Strengths Intervention can provide support to emerging adults against instability. Becoming aware of one's signature strengths, connecting those strengths with past successes, and setting concrete goals can increase emerging adults' sense of self-awareness. This self-awareness of strengths can then be used to make more informed decisions that are aligned with their true selves, thereby reducing the feelings of uncertainty and confusion associated with this developmental period. As they gain clarity in their self-identity, emerging adults are better equipped to manage the stressors and demands of adulthood.

2.3.1.3 Self-focused. Emerging adulthood is the self-focused age as individuals gain more independence and self-development. According to Reifman et al. (2007), emerging adults are gradually more responsible towards themselves as compared to when they were younger. For instance, as they are more free from the routines directed by their parents, they have more time and energy to focus on developing themselves (Olenik-Shemesh et al., 2018).

While focusing on the self can lead to greater self-discovery and personal growth, it can also have negative effects. A recent study suggested self-focused orientation was found to predict depressive symptoms among Malaysian emerging adults (Othman & Jaafar, 2022). This is because being self-focused contributed to having low social support, especially when emerging adults struggle to balance their individual pursuits with forming meaningful social connections (Arnett, 2004). On the same note, being self-focused also means that emerging adults are more prone to emotional-behavioural difficulties relating to their self-perception. As reported by Stomff and Vasiliu (2017), a decrease in perceived general self-efficacy was found among emerging adults aged between 18 to 26 years old. The authors suggested that this is due to emerging adults slowly becoming aware of their responsibilities while simultaneously separating themselves from childhood and adolescents' comforts. Consequently, studies have suggested that emerging adults who are low in self-efficacy are more prone to issues such as problematic video gaming (Cudo et al., 2019), anxiety (Germani et al., 2020), lower subjective well-being (Olenik-Shemesh et al., 2018), and even depression (Orth et al., 2008). This suggests the need to provide intervention programs to improve self-efficacy (Germani et al., 2020).

Character Strengths Intervention can act as a tool for emerging adults in boosting their self-perceptions. For instance, a systematic review conducted by Yan et al. (2020) on the use of Character Strengths Interventions on individuals with chronic illnesses reported that character strengths-based intervention effectively improved the self-esteem and self-efficacy of patients. Specifically, one of the three studies in the review indicated that guiding adolescents to

identify their signature strengths and using them as coping skills improved self-esteem and self-efficacy, with effects lasting up to 3 months (Toback et al., 2016).

2.3.1.4 In-between. Feeling in-between describes the transitional state in which emerging adults feel that they are no longer adolescents, yet they are also not fully adults (Reifman et al., 2007). This in-between feeling involves the ambiguity and uncertainty that defines this developmental stage, as individuals deal with both the freedoms and the responsibilities of adulthood. According to Arnett (2000), emerging adults' subjective sense of attaining adulthood is not solely based on chronological age or external milestones, but largely depends on their character qualities. Accordingly, for emerging adults, the top three criteria that mark the attainment for adulthood are:

1. Accepting responsibility for oneself
2. Making independent decisions
3. Financial independence

These criteria emphasize the importance of self-sufficiency, autonomy, and the ability to navigate life's complexities with maturity and confidence. As the first two criteria relate directly to character qualities and the development of personal agency, CSI has the potential to play a significant role in facilitating this role transition. Although research on whether CSI can directly impact the first two aspects of the transition into adulthood is still lacking

Firstly, CSI can empower emerging adults by helping them leverage their signature strengths to set and achieve meaningful goals in various areas of their lives. By recognizing their unique character strengths, such as perseverance, creativity, or leadership, emerging adults can use these traits to

take greater responsibility for their personal and professional growth. This goal-setting process not only aligns with their values but also encourages a sense of ownership over their decisions and actions.

Secondly, having a deep self-awareness of their signature strengths allows emerging adults to make more informed decisions. When individuals understand their strengths, they are better equipped to align their life choices with their personal values, leading to decisions that feel more authentic and fulfilling. This self-knowledge can act as a compass, guiding emerging adults through the uncertainties of their transitional phase and helping them navigate the complexities of relationships, career paths, and other life domains.

Moreover, feeling in-between can often lead to doubts and anxiety as emerging adults question their readiness to embrace adult roles and responsibilities (Peer & McAuslan, 2016). Here, CSI could serve as a stabilizing influence by reinforcing emerging adults' belief in their capabilities. For example, by regularly practicing and applying their character strengths in real-life scenarios, individuals can gradually build their self-efficacy, making them more confident in overcoming the challenges of the in-between phase.

2.3.1.5 Possibilities. The age of possibilities describes the period in which emerging adults leave their family of origin, and so more opportunities are now available to them in various domains of life. According to Arnett (2004), this is especially important for those that grew up under challenging conditions, as this period allows them to break free from the dysfunctional patterns at home and to chart a new course toward a more fulfilling life. Even for those from healthy families, this period still serves as an opportunity for

them to change and grow into the kind of person they wish to be, not merely following their parents' footsteps blindly.

This sense of possibility is often accompanied by optimism and hope, which are key motivational factors that propel emerging adults to envision their potential and take proactive steps towards realizing their goals (Dwivedi & Rastogi, 2016). Emerging adulthood is often described as a time of boundless possibilities because individuals believe they have the capacity to create a different future for themselves, regardless of their past circumstances (Baggio et al., 2017). For many, this period is experienced positively as they begin to see how their unique contributions and skills can be applied to various areas of life, leading to a greater sense of purpose and direction.

Research supports the notion that emerging adults' identification with this "possibilities" feature is closely linked to their level of self-efficacy. For example, a study by Peñaflor et al. (2020) reported that emerging adults' identification with emerging adulthood's "possibilities" feature was significantly and positively correlated with self-efficacy. This relationship suggests that as emerging adults become more confident in their abilities, they are more willing to experiment, take risks, and engage with new opportunities that could enhance their personal and professional growth. With higher level of self-efficacy, emerging adults may adopt a positive attitude toward life and thus are more likely to encounter positive experiences (Shulman et al., 2009).

As stated above, past study showed evidence of CSI's effectiveness in increasing self-efficacy (Toback et al., 2016). Yet, whether or not the same effect applies to emerging adults remains unanswered. Accordingly, CSI shows promise in boosting self-efficacy and allowing emerging adults to recognize

and seize the various possibilities around them. This is because intervention activity such as goal setting with character strengths allows emerging adults to align their life goals with their signature strengths, thereby enhancing their ability to envision and pursue meaningful opportunities (Niemiec, 2018).

Moreover, it is possible that when individuals become aware of their strengths, they may begin to see new possibilities in areas where they once felt limited or unsure. This awareness can shift their mindset, making them more open to exploring opportunities that they might have previously dismissed or overlooked. It can also foster a growth-oriented mindset, where emerging adults view challenges as opportunities for development.

2.4 Identity Formation

Identity formation is a concept first defined by Erik Erikson in his psychosocial model of development, in which he conceptualized identity formation as a developmental task faced by adolescents (Berzoff, 2021). Yet, Erikson also proposed the concept of psychosocial moratorium, which is a developmental period in which individuals can explore and redefine their identities before making adult commitments. On a similar note, Arnett (2000) stated that for most individuals in industrialized societies, responsibilities such as career, marriage and parenthood are delayed until the mid or late-twenties. Thus, for industrialized societies, Erikson's psychosocial moratorium does extend into emerging adulthood, and the developmental task of identity formation continues and intensifies. As for Malaysia, a study conducted by Wider et al. (2015) supported the existence of identity exploration and development among emerging adults in this newly industrialized country. during emerging adulthood.

Also, Erikson viewed each developmental task as a crisis and an opportunity for development. As such, every developmental task has the potential for either a positive or a negative outcome (e.g., Identity vs Confusion; Berzoff, 2021). Indeed, studies have reported that identity formation can be challenging, and some might even experience identity-related distress (Samuolis & Griffin, 2014; Berman et al., 2004).

In this study, identity formation is relevant towards two features of emerging adulthood, namely: the age of identity exploration and the age of feeling in-between. As discussed above, identity exploration involves experimentation with different ways of living as emerging adults build a coherent sense of identity (Reifman et al., 2007). Next, feeling in-between juggles with the process of individuals not being identified as adolescents but also not being identified with being an independent adult (Arnett, 2007). By gradually accepting responsibility for oneself and having the capability to make independent decisions, emerging adults can eventually progress along with their development and become full-fledged adults.

Hence, this study conceptualizes identity formation as a central component of the two features of emerging adulthood stated above. As such, measuring emerging adults' level of identity formation pre- and post-intervention will provide insight into the effectiveness of the intervention.

2.5 Self-Doubt

As discussed above, the freedom gained in emerging adulthood can create a sense of instability. Self-doubt is prominent as emerging adults can be unsure of identity choices and future planning when moving through various changes in life (Reifman et al., 2007). Specifically, Peer and McAuslan (2016)

reported that experiencing higher levels of instability is related to higher levels of self-doubt during this emerging adulthood. High levels of self-doubt can hinder emerging adults' development. This is because emerging adults who experience high levels of self-doubt may feel uncertain about their ability to overcome normative developmental challenges (Peer & McAuslan, 2016). According to Carroll et al. (2011), self-doubt stems from a lack of a strong desired self. This means that when individuals do not have a concrete image of whom they want to be in the future, they will lack confidence and will be more prone to questioning their abilities. Although past studies on CSI had examined the effects of CSI on self-esteem and self-efficacy (e.g., Toback et al., 2016; Waters & Sun, 2016), little attention has been paid to the impact of CSI on self-doubt. According to Hermann et al. (2002), self-esteem and self-doubt are interrelated but distinct concepts. Self-esteem relates to the global evaluation of oneself, whereas self-doubt refers to whether one feels certain or uncertain about specific or global competence. Thus, the impact of CSI on self-doubt is an important area of inquiry as CSI can mitigate the effect of self-doubt by allowing emerging adults to set goals that are aligned with their strengths and their desired selves.

Additionally, it is important to differentiate self-doubt from identity formation and self-efficacy. Firstly, self-doubt and identity formation are different as the former relates to feeling uncertain about one's competence and an intense preoccupation over prospective failure while the latter concerns about having a consistent self-concept. Thus, people who are high in identity formation (e.g., I know what kind of person I am) are still prone to having high self-doubt (e.g., but I feel uncertain of my abilities). Next, self-efficacy

measures whether individuals believe that they can achieve a desirable outcome when performing a task (e.g., I can usually manage whatever comes my way). Meanwhile, self-doubt is less related to the outcome of a task as it measures the feeling of uncertainty about competence when individuals are performing a task (e.g., When working on an important task, I tend to focus more on the bad things that might happen (e.g., failure) rather than the good ones). According to Zhao and Wichman (2015), an individual can have a high self-efficacy (e.g., I believe I can complete a task) but still feel a great sense of self-doubt (e.g., but I am not sure about my ability. My performance may just be due to high effort).

2.6 Self-Efficacy

Emerging adulthood is a developmental period in which individuals are especially prone to a decrease in self-efficacy (Stomff & Vasiliu, 2017). Evidence of CSI's effect on self-efficacy was found in a study conducted by Toback et al. (2016), in which a significant increase in self-efficacy was found two weeks post-intervention among psychiatrically hospitalized adolescents. According to Peñaflor et al. (2020), self-efficacy was significantly and positively correlated with two features of emerging adulthood: age of being self-focused and age of possibilities. This means that the more individuals identify with features of self-focused (e.g., being more responsible towards themselves) and possibilities (e.g., engaging in experimentation), the higher their self-efficacy. Next, studies suggested self-efficacy as a protective factor for emerging adults as it is associated with hope (Oztekin & Bayraktar, 2019), resilience (Hernández et al., 2019), and it served as a mediator in the relationship between strengths use and mental health. (Berger, 2020). With

this, the current study measures self-efficacy to determine whether CSI can improve emerging adults' functioning in the age of self-focus and possibilities.

Chapter III

Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A randomized controlled trial with pretest, posttest, and 2-week follow-up was conducted to evaluate the effects of the character strengths intervention. An active control group was included in which participants assigned to the control group attended a gatekeeper training for suicide prevention. Participants were randomly allocated to the intervention or the control group using simple randomization technique. A single blind approach was employed in which participants were informed that they would be enrolled in either the Character Strengths Intervention (CSI) or a suicide prevention training program, but they were not explicitly told which program was the intervention or the control condition. There were three dependent variables, identity formation, self-efficacy, and self-doubt, which were measured based on scores obtained in questionnaires addressing these constructs.

3.2 Sample Size Calculation

The required sample size was estimated based on the effect sizes gathered from past studies. As no previous research has investigated the effects of CSI on identity formation and self-doubt, the sample size was estimated based on the effect size of past studies that examined CSI and self-efficacy (Park, 2020; Waters & Sun, 2016). Cohen's f from past studies (Toback et al., 2016; Waters & Sun, 2016) falls into medium effect size based on the conventions for the effect size suggested by Borenstein et al. (1990). Hence, the required sample size of the current study was estimated using a statistical

power level of 0.80, error probability level of 0.05, and effect size $f = 0.25$.

Based on the calculation, a total sample size of 158 participants was required.

However, the actual number of participants recruited was 133, slightly lower than the calculated sample size due to practical recruitment constraints.

While the reduced sample size may have slightly affected the statistical power of the study, it still provided valuable insights into the effects of CSI on identity formation, self-efficacy, and self-doubt in the target population.

3.3 Participants

A total of 133 undergraduate students in a psychology course were recruited. The inclusion criteria include full-time undergraduate students aged 18 to 25, while individuals outside of this age range were excluded. As part of a course assignment, undergraduate students can earn up to 4.5% of coursework marks from participating in various research studies, including this study.

The final analysis included data from 129 participants (65 in the control group and 64 in the intervention group) after excluding participants due to age exceeding 25 years ($n = 2$) and the presence of multivariate outliers ($n = 2$). Participants' age ranged from 19 to 25, with a mean age of 21.46 ($SD = .80$). Most of them were female (72.9%) and only 27.1% were male. The participants were mainly Malaysian Chinese (84.5%), followed by Malaysian Indian (14.7%), and Punjabi (0.8%).

3.4 Intervention

3.4.1 Character Strengths Intervention

The intervention program was constructed and adapted from Niemiec (2018)'s guidelines and activities to suit the understanding of Malaysian

emerging adults. Table 3.1 shows the intervention outline used in this study, including the descriptions of activities and the expected outcome of each activity. Generally, the intervention program can be divided into three phases: aware, explore, and apply. Each phase consists of two intervention activities.

Table 3.1

Character Strengths Intervention Outline

Activity	Description / Steps	Target Outcome
Introduction (± 30 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why do strengths matter in participants' contexts? (Connecting character strengths with the goals and values, e.g. academic, career, interests). 2. What are character strengths? (Definition of character strengths, the science of character, signature strengths, examples of strengths in the VIA classification). 3. How will the program help develop /work with character strengths? (Overview of activities to be done). 	-
Taking the VIA Adult survey (± 20 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants take the VIA Adult survey (internet and laptop/smartphone needed). 2. Check if the strengths provided by the survey feels authentic to participants. Descriptions of each strength are given to each participant based on their signature strengths. 	IF
Exploring signature strengths	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants reflect on three questions regarding their signature strengths: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. How does this character strength describe the real me? In what ways does it accurately reflect who I am ? ii. How is this strength valuable to me? Why is it significant in my life? iii. What are the drawbacks of this strength for me? In what ways does it work against me? 	IF
Strengths Spotting (± 20 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants think of a specific time when they were at their best – when they were thriving 2. Develop the story's beginning, middle, and end. 3. Write out the story. 4. Review the story and notice the character strengths that they used throughout the story. 	IF + SD

Signature Strengths Across Domain	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants choose three domains of their lives in which they want to improve. 2. Participants brainstorm ways to use their signature strengths more in those domains of life 	
Goal-Setting with Character Strengths (± 20 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Participants envision goals that they would like to attain in the various domains of their lives. 4. Participants frame their goals using the SMART acronym (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound). 5. Participants consider how their signature strengths will help them reach their goals and how other character strengths might also support them on their pathways to goals. 6. Participants are encouraged to take action towards goals. 	IF + SD + SE
Conclusion (± 15 minutes)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants receive a signature strengths card that reminds them about their signature strengths. 	-

Note. IF = Identity Formation, SD = Self-Doubt, SE = Self-Efficacy

The awareness phase aims to increase participants' knowledge and awareness about their character strengths. Firstly, participants were introduced to character strengths through a presentation. Topics that were covered include: what are character strengths, why are character strengths important for emerging adults, and how will the program help develop character strengths. The presentation was designed to create a foundational understanding by emphasizing the role of character strengths in achieving personal growth, enhancing well-being, and navigating life challenges. Afterwards, participants were instructed to take the VIA-120 (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). At the completion of the survey, a signature strengths profile that displays one's top 5 strengths was generated for each participant.

Next, the explore phase included activities to help participants understand the value and importance of their strengths. A "*Signature Strengths Exploration*" activity was conducted in which participants were guided to

reflect on how their signature strengths described their true selves, and the values of their signature strengths. This activity was crucial in helping participants see their signature strengths as central aspects of their identity. Next, the participants engaged in a “*Strengths Spotting*” activity, which aimed to help them recognize and appreciate their own strengths. The activity consisted of two steps: Firstly, the participants wrote about a past experience when they were at their best (i.e., when they felt especially excited, inspired, or passionate about something). They were asked to describe the situation, their thoughts, feelings, and actions in detail. Secondly, the participants identified the signature strengths they were using in their story, such as creativity, curiosity, or perseverance. This activity not only helped participants to recognize their strengths but also allowed them to appreciate practical application of character strengths in real-life scenarios.

Finally, the apply phase of the intervention was focused on guiding participants in aligning their lives with their signature strengths by setting strengths-based goals. For the “*Signature Strengths Across Domains*” activity, participants brainstormed how they could use their signature strengths in different areas of their lives, such as academic, career, or family. This brainstorming exercise aimed to expand their perspective on how strengths could be utilized in different contexts to achieve their life goals. Building on this, the “*Goal-setting With Character Strengths*” activity required participants to set specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals that were related to their signature strengths, and brainstormed about how their strengths would help them achieve their goals. The Character Strengths Intervention PowerPoint slides used during the program are included in

Appendix D, while the worksheets that participants used to document their reflections and goal-setting exercises are included in Appendix E.

At the end of the intervention, the participants chose a signature strengths reminder card to take home. The card displayed one of their top signature strengths on the front, serving as a visual cue to remind them of their core strength. On the back of the card, there was a dedicated space where participants could write down their remaining four signature strengths using a marker (see Appendix F). This reminder was designed to help participants consistently recall and utilize their strengths in their daily lives.

A single-session CSI was conducted in which participants were only required to participate in a three-hour workshop once. As this is one of the first studies that explored the relationship between CSI, identity formation and self-doubt, conducting a single-session CSI is more feasible and cost-effective to implement. The use of single-session CSI was supported by Duan and Bu (2019), as they found that a 90-minute intervention was effective in increasing well-being and reducing depression and anxiety of undergraduate freshmen.

3.4.1.1 VIA-120. The VIA-120 was used as part of the intervention. It is a shortened version of the original VIA-IS, and it consisted of 120 self-report items, with five items measuring each of the 24-character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Participants' scores were ranked, and their signature strengths were displayed to them.

3.4.2 Control Group

Participants who were assigned to the control group participated in a three-hour gatekeeper training for suicide prevention in which they learned suicide prevention skills. During this training, they acquired essential skills

such as identifying the warning signs of suicide, empathetically acknowledging emotional distress in others, conducting suicide risk assessments, and learning how to access professional help and resources. The suicide prevention gatekeeper training was chosen as an active control condition because it was similar to the CSI in terms of duration and method of delivery, but it did not aim to influence the same outcomes of interest (identity formation, self-doubt, and self-efficacy). Additionally, by providing an active control condition, we controlled for the potential placebo effect that could have influenced the participants' response. CSI aimed to enhance participants' identity formation, self-efficacy, and self-doubt, which are closely linked to identity. In contrast, the suicide prevention training was a skill-based program designed to enhance participants' knowledge and abilities related to suicide prevention. Therefore, we expected that the CSI would have a greater impact on emerging adults' identity formation, self-efficacy, and self-doubt compared to the suicide prevention training.

3.5 Outcome Measures

3.5.1 Perceived Adult Status

A question, “*Do you think that you have reached adulthood?*” was asked to determine participants' perceived adult status. Participants who answered “yes” were considered as perceived adults. In contrast, participants who answered “no” and “*in some respect yes, in some respect no*” were considered as emerging adults, and combined into a single group for analyses. This method of differentiating between emerging adults and adults is adopted from past emerging adults' studies (Arnett, 2003; Wider et al., 2015; Wider et al., 2021; Nelson & Barry, 2005).

3.5.2 Identity Formation

The identity resolution subscale of the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (EPSI; Rosenthal et al., 1981) was used to measure identity formation. This scale consisted of 12 self-report items, with six items measuring identity formation (e.g., “I know what kind of person I am.”) and six items measuring identity confusion (e.g., “I can't decide what I want to do with my life”). The items were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*hardly ever true*) to 5 (*almost always true*). The scale is scored by summing up all items to create a total score or by summing up each subscale separately. Six items that measure identity confusion are reversed scored when calculating a total identity formation score. This scale has demonstrated good internal consistency reliability in the current sample (Cronbach's alpha = .826 to .865)

3.5.3 Self-Doubt

Self-doubt was measured by the self-doubt subscale of the Subjective Overachievement Scale (SOS; Oleson et al., 2000). This subscale consists of 8 self-report items scored on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*disagree very much*) to 6 (*agree very much*). The scale is scored by summing up all items. The total score ranges from 8 to 48. A higher total score indicates a greater sense of self-doubt. The SOS has shown satisfactory internal consistency in the current study ($\alpha = .835$ to $.861$)

3.5.4 Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy was measured by the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). This scale consisted of 10 self-report items (e.g., “I can usually handle whatever comes my way.”). The items were scored on a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 4 (*exactly true*),

with a total score that ranges from 10 to 40. A higher total score indicates a greater degree of self-efficacy. The GSE has shown satisfactory internal consistency in our current study ($\alpha = .869$ to $.885$). According to Lazić et al. (2018), GSE shows good convergent validity as it correlates significantly and positively with convergent measures such as the Adult Hope Scale ($r = .71$; Snyder et al., 1991) and the Satisfaction with life scale ($r = .37$; Diener et al., 1985).

3.6 Procedure

This study was approved by UTAR Scientific Research Ethical Committee (U/SERC/103/2022). As part of a course assignment, undergraduate students can earn up to 4.5% of coursework marks from participating in various research studies, including this study.

Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, and all data collected were kept confidential. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Three outcome measurements that are based on the characteristics of emerging adulthood were used, namely: identity formation, self-doubt, and self-efficacy. Outcome measurements were given to participants at pretest, posttest, and 2-weeks follow-up through online survey platform Qualtrics. Participants were randomly allocated to the treatment group which participated in the CSI or the active control group using simple randomization technique. Both conditions lasted for three hours. Figure 3.1 shows the CONSORT 2010 Flow Diagram for the current study.

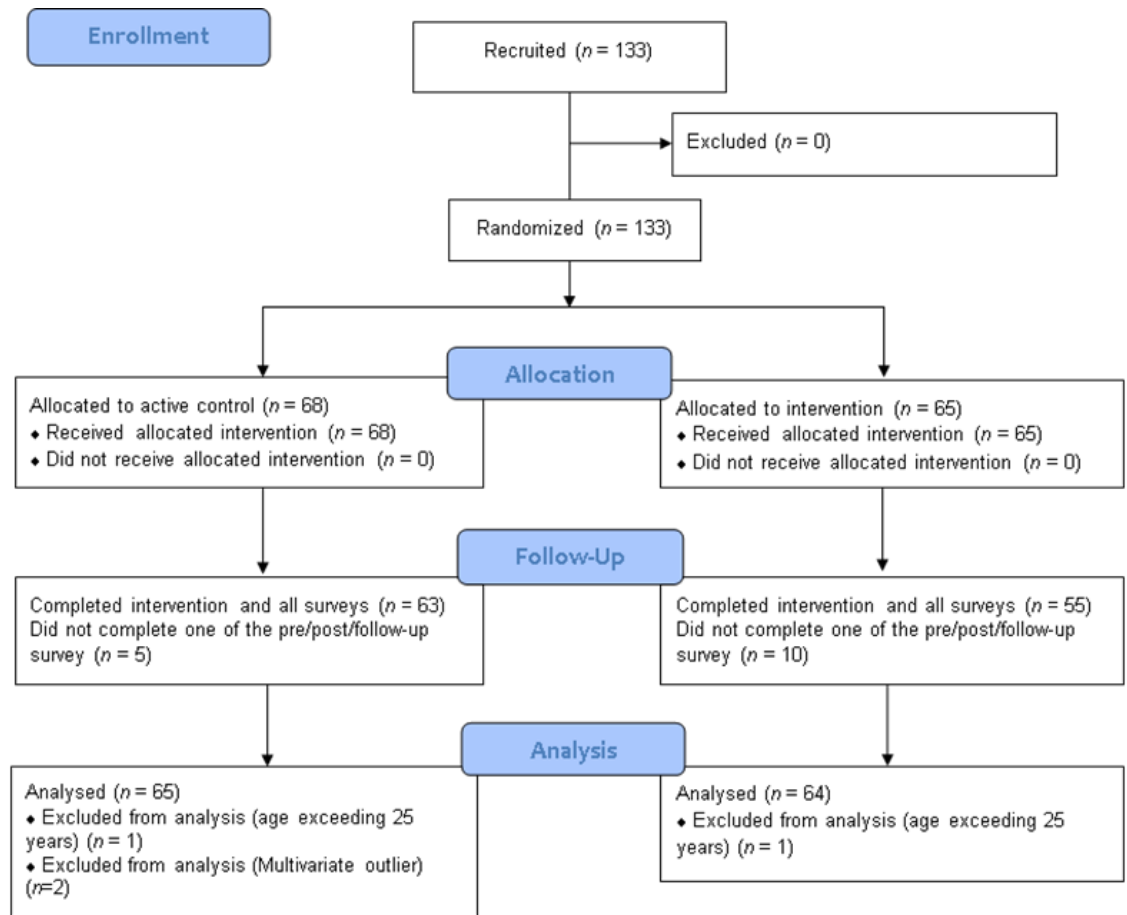


Figure 3.1: CONSORT 2010 Flow Diagram

3.7 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using SPSS version 26. The data for emerging adults and perceived adults were examined separately. The primary analyses were conducted with an intent-to-treat approach. Missing data of the outcome variables were imputed using multiple imputation. Next, mixed-design analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the effects of CSI in improving emerging adults' identity formation and self-efficacy, and reducing their self-doubt. The within-subject factor was time (pretest, posttest, and 2-week follow-up), and the between-subject factor was group (character strengths intervention or active control). The significance level was set at 0.05 level, and the measure

of effect size was partial eta squared. Huynh-Feldt Correction was applied when Mauchly's test of sphericity was violated.

Chapter IV

Results

4.1 Demographic Background

The data of 129 participants were analyzed. The participants' age ranged from 19 to 25, with a mean age of 21.46. As for gender, 72.9% of the participants were female, while 27.1% were male. The participants were mainly Chinese (84.5%), followed by Indian (14.7%), and Others (0.8%). The demographic background of the participants is shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Demographic Background of Participants

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
Mean (<i>SD</i>)	21.46 (.80)	-
Minimum-maximum	19-25	-
Gender		
Male	35	27.1
Female	94	72.9
Ethnicity		
Chinese	109	84.5
Indian	19	14.7
Others	1	.8
Perceived Adult Status		
Emerging Adult	83	34.1
Perceived Adult	46	64.3

4.1.1 Identification of Perceived Adult Status

The participants' perception of their adult status was assessed with an item asking them if they considered themselves adults, with three possible responses: (1) "yes", (2) "no", or (3) "*in some respects yes, in some respects no*". The majority of the participants (64.3%) chose "*in some respects yes, in some respects no*", indicating that they were in a transitional phase of development. Only 1.6% of the participants reported that they had not achieved adulthood, while 34.1% of the participants reported that they had. The participants were categorized into two groups: emerging adults ($n = 83$), who either answered "no" or "*in some respects yes, in some respects no*"; and perceived adults ($n = 46$), who answered "yes" (see Table 4.1).

4.2 Baseline Between Group Comparison for Emerging Adults

The results for ANOVA showed that the pretest scores of the two groups (i.e., CSI and control) of emerging adults were not significantly different (See Table 4.2). The lack of significant differences between the CSI and control groups at pretest indicates that the groups were comparable at baseline, reducing the likelihood that any posttest differences can be attributed to initial group disparities.

Table 4.2*Analysis of Variance for Outcome Variables at Pretest (Emerging Adults)*

Variable (Emerging adults pretest)	<i>M (SD)</i>	Type III Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2	Statistical Power
Identity Formation								
Control	3.24 (.51)	.46	1	.46	1.60	.21	.02	.24
Intervention	3.08 (.56)							
Self-Doubt								
Control	30.91 (6.45)	33.48	1	33.48	.86	.36	.01	.15
Intervention	32.09 (5.97)							
Self-Efficacy								
Control	26.58 (4.82)	.27	1	.27	.01	.91	.00	.05
Intervention	27.11 (4.76)							

Note. N = 85**4.3 Effects of CSI on Emerging Adults**

Means and standard deviations for all outcome variables are listed in Table 4.3 as well as the effect size (Cohen's *d*). Mixed-design analysis of variance was conducted to examine the effects of the intervention in enhancing emerging adults' identity formation and self-efficacy, and reducing their self-doubt (see Table 4.4). The within-subject factor was time (pretest, posttest, and 2-week follow-up), and the between-subject factor was group (character strengths intervention or active control). The significance level was set at 0.05 level, and the measure of effect size was partial eta squared. Huynh-Feldt Correction was applied when Mauchly's test of sphericity was violated.

Table 4.3*Descriptive Statistics of the Variables and Effect Size for Emerging Adults*

Variable (Emerging adults)	Pretest		Posttest		Follow-up	
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>d</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>d</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>d</i>
Identity Formation						
Control group	3.23 (.51)	.274	3.39 (.49)	.202	3.28 (.56)	.351
Intervention group	3.08 (.56)		3.33 (.49)		3.09 (.52)	
Self-Doubt						
Control group	30.84 (6.48)	-.201	28.36 (6.26)	-.135	29.36 (6.06)	-.079
Intervention group	32.09 (5.97)		29.13 (4.98)		29.85 (6.16)	
Self-Efficacy						
Control group	27.00 (4.44)	-.011	27.50 (3.44)	-.088	27.43 (3.92)	-.015
Intervention group	27.11 (4.76)		28.24 (3.84)		27.49 (4.58)	

Note. N = 85**Table 4.4***Mixed-Design Analyses of Outcome Variables for Emerging Adults*

Variable (Emerging Adults)	Type III Sum of Squares	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2	Statistical Power
Identity Formation							
Time	1.68	2	.84	13.62	<.001	.14	.998
Group	1.34	1	1.34	1.93	.17	.02	.28
Time X Group	.09	2	.04	.72	.49	.01	.17
Self-Doubt							
Time	328.16	1.84	178.51	16.70	<.001	.17	.999
Group	44.39	1	44.39	.50	.48	.01	.11
Time X Group	6.48	1.84	3.53	.33	.70	.00	.09
Self-Efficacy							
Time	28.42	2	14.21	2.96	.06	.03	.57
Group	5.92	1	5.92	.14	.71	.00	.07
Time X Group	6.06	2	3.03	.63	.53	.01	.15

4.3.1 Effects of CSI on Identity Formation

For identity formation, the main effect of time was statistically significant, $F(2, 166) = 13.62, p = <.001, \eta_p^2 = .14$. However, no significant effect was observed for group, $F(1, 83) = 1.93, p = .17, \eta_p^2 = .023$, and the interaction between time and group, $F(2, 166) = .72, p = .49, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Post-

hoc comparisons using Bonferroni correction indicated that the identity formation of the intervention group at posttest ($M = 3.29$, $SD = .49$) was significantly higher than the pretest ($M = 3.08$, $SD = .56$; $p = .001$) and follow-up ($M = 3.09$, $SD = .52$; $p = .003$). No significant difference was found from pretest to 2-week follow-up ($p = 1.00$). Similarly, identity formation of the control group at posttest ($M = 3.39$, $SD = .49$) was significantly higher than the pretest ($M = 3.23$, $SD = .51$; $p = .01$) and follow-up ($M = 3.28$, $SD = .56$; $p = .18$). No significant difference was found from pretest to 2-week follow-up ($p = .85$).

4.3.2 Effects of CSI on Self-doubt

For self-doubt, the main effect for time was significant, $F(1.84, 152.58) = 16.70$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .17$, but the main effect for group, $F(1,83) = .50$, $p = .48$, $\eta^2_p = .01$ and the interaction between time and group $F(1.84, 152.58) = .33$, $p = .70$, $\eta^2_p = .00$ were not significant. Post-hoc comparisons using Bonferroni correction indicated that the self-doubt of the intervention group at posttest ($M = 29.13$, $SD = 4.98$) was significantly lower than pretest ($M = 32.09$, $SD = 5.97$; $p = .001$), while the self-doubt at follow-up ($M = 29.36$, $SD = 6.06$) was only slightly higher than posttest ($p = .936$). There is a significant difference between pretest and follow-up ($p = .000$). Similarly, the self-doubt score of the control group at posttest ($M = 28.36$, $SD = 6.26$) was also significantly lower than pretest ($M = 30.84$, $SD = 6.48$; $p = .005$), while the self-doubt at follow-up was slightly higher at follow-up ($M = 29.36$, $SD = 6.06$; $p = .439$). There is a significant difference between pretest and follow-up ($p = .026$).

4.3.3 Effects of CSI on Self-efficacy

For self-efficacy, a marginally significant effect was found for time, $F(2,166) = .63, p = .06, \eta^2_p = .034$, but no significant effect was observed for group, $F(1,83) = .14, p = .71, \eta^2_p = .002$, and the interaction between time and group, $F(2, 166) = .63, p = .53, \eta^2_p = .01$. The score of the intervention group at posttest ($M = 28.24, SD = 3.84$) was higher than pretest ($M = 27.11, SD = 4.76$) and follow-up ($M = 27.49, SD = 4.58$), but these differences were not statistically significant ($p > .40$). Meanwhile, the self-efficacy score of the control group remained roughly the same throughout pretest, posttest, and follow-up ($M > 27.00$). Figure 4.1 shows the trends in identity formation, self-efficacy, and self-doubt across the pretest, posttest, and follow-up for emerging adults.

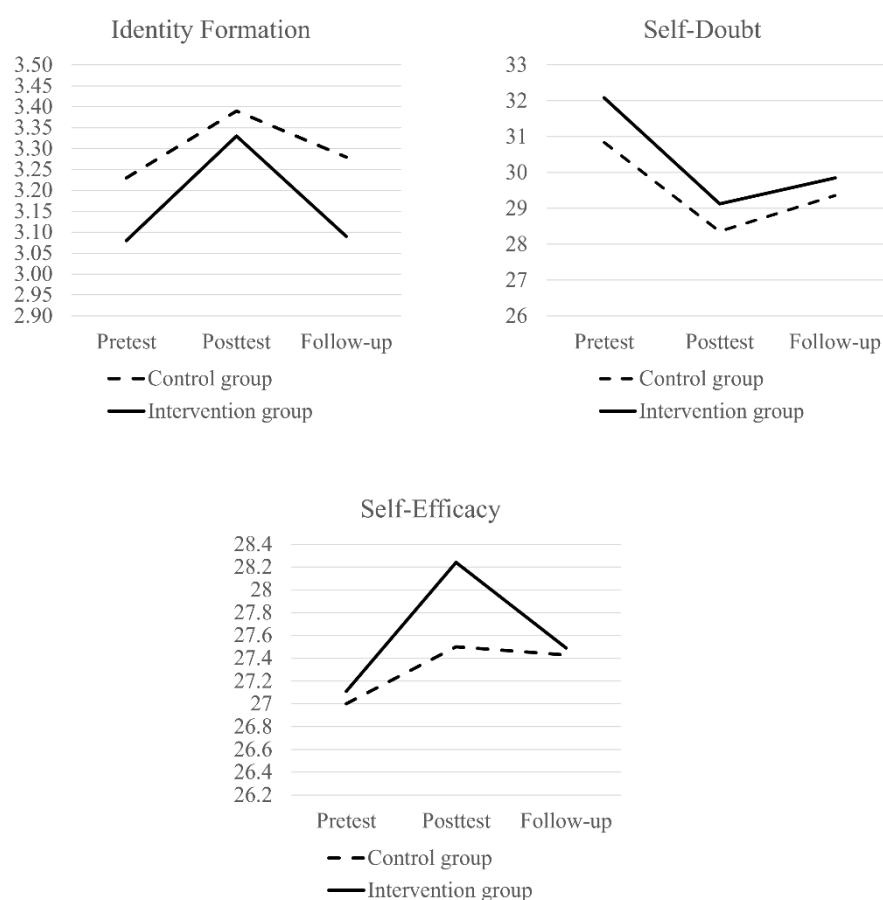


Figure 4.1: Effects of CSI on Emerging Adults

Chapter V

Discussion

This study examined the effects of an evidence-informed CSI to improve identity formation and self-efficacy, and reduce self-doubt among emerging adults. Additionally, it also explored several incidental findings, including effects of CSI on perceived adults and the pretest differences between emerging adults and perceived adults.

5.1 Perceived Adulthood Status

The results indicated that a majority of the participants (65.9%) identified themselves as emerging adults. This finding is in line with existing literature that found a majority of individuals between ages 18 to 25 enrolled in tertiary education in Malaysia do not feel like they have reached adulthood, while a minority of them perceived that they had already achieved adulthood earlier than their same aged peers (Wider et al., 2021; Halik et al., 2019). These findings suggest that the concept of emerging adulthood as a developmental stage is not only relevant in Western contexts but is also applicable in the Malaysian context, in which young adults may face similar pressures and uncertainties about their roles and responsibilities.

5.2 Effects of CSI on Emerging Adults

The results indicated that CSI showed no unique effects in improving emerging adults' identity formation, self-doubt, and self-efficacy. Emerging adults in both the CSI and the active control group reported significantly higher identity formation score at posttest and lower self-doubt score at posttest as compared to pretest. The results suggested that emerging adults in the CSI and the active control group both showed improvements in identity formation and

self-doubt from pretest to posttest. However, no significant differences were observed between the CSI and the active control group, suggesting that CSI, in its current form, did not have a unique impact on these developmental outcomes.

Since this is the first study that investigated the effects of CSI on identity formation and self-doubt, the null findings suggests that emerging adults require more than just awareness and use of their signature strengths to develop a coherent sense of identity, enhance self-efficacy, and manage their self-doubt. CSI may serve more as an indirect support for emerging adults by boosting their life satisfaction and well-being (Duan et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2021), but do not necessarily guide them through the process of identity formation.

5.2.1 The Role of Purpose in Identity Development

The concept of purpose appears to be the crucial missing link in this context. Purpose is defined as a long-term intention directed towards goals that are personally meaningful to the self and contribute to the broader world (Bronk et al., 2018). In Arnett's theory of Emerging Adulthood, identity exploration is a central process in which individuals actively navigate their career paths, relationships, and life choices (Arnett, 2004). In line with this, Bundick et al. (2011) proposed that emerging adulthood is not only a phase of identity exploration but also a critical period for developing a sense of purpose. This is because having a clear sense of purpose guides emerging adults in making significant life decisions, providing a foundation for a more coherent and directed sense of self.

As suggested by Mendonça et al. (2024), purpose acts as a guiding force that helps emerging adults channel their character strengths towards goals that are personally meaningful. This insight suggests that while CSI is valuable in helping emerging adults recognize their strengths, they do not foster the development of a purpose that integrates these strengths into a meaningful life trajectory. Without developing one's purpose, the benefits of CSI in helping emerging adults with identity development may be limited.

In this context, it is important to consider that the control group in this study who participated in a gatekeeper training for suicide prevention, where they learned skills to help prevent suicide. This factor may help explain why both the CSI and the control groups showed improvements in all outcome variables. Like the CSI, the suicide prevention program likely equipped participants with practical skills and strategies that can be aligned with their emerging sense of purpose, especially given that they are psychology undergraduates. These skills not only helped them learn how to support others in distress but also reinforced their broader goal of contributing to mental health and well-being—an area that may already resonate with their academic and career aspirations. However, while both the CSI and suicide prevention program built skills that could be directed towards their purpose, neither intervention specifically guided participants in defining or deepening that purpose for themselves. As a result, although both groups developed valuable tools that could indirectly support their identity growth, the absence of explicit purpose development might explain why the interventions did not lead to significant improvements in identity formation or self-doubt.

Hence, rather than a standalone intervention, CSI could be used in conjunction with a purpose-centered intervention to help emerging adults translate their sense of purpose into concrete actions. A study conducted by Mendonça et al. (2024) examined the effects of a semester-long purpose-centered intervention designed to develop emerging adults' purpose through three subdomains: (1) Personal Meaningfulness (i.e., having a goal or intention that is deeply significant and fulfilling to oneself), (2) Goal Orientation (i.e., planning and taking steps to achieve specific, future-oriented goals related to one's purpose), and (3) Beyond-the-Self (i.e., making a positive impact on others). The authors found that the intervention had significantly increased the Personal Meaningfulness and Beyond-the-Self subdomain of emerging adults' sense of purpose. Yet, the intervention did not have an impact on emerging adults' Goal Orientation. This indicated that although purpose-centered intervention helped develop emerging adults' purpose, they may fall short in guiding individuals on how to transform that purpose into concrete, actionable steps. Here, CSI may provide the necessary tools for emerging adults to effectively harness their character strengths in pursuit of their identified purpose. By participating in CSI following a purpose-centered intervention, individuals can learn how to align their strengths with their goals, and turn goals into actionable steps. In line with this, Mendonça et al. (2024) recommended future studies to target on building specific actions that help emerging adults in later years of college to pursue their purpose. In this way, CSI can support the translation of an individual's purpose into practical steps, reinforcing the idea that while strengths are tools, purpose is the compass that guides their use.

Overall, these findings highlighted the importance of integrating purpose-based elements into interventions targeting emerging adults. Developing a stable sense of purpose may be the key to unlocking the full potential of CSI, ensuring that emerging adults not only recognize their strengths but also apply them in ways that align with their long-term identity and life aspirations.

5.2.2 Cultural Considerations in CSI Effectiveness

Next, according to Halik et al. (2019), individualistic criteria such as being able to make decisions and take responsibility for oneself are two important criteria of adulthood for Malaysian emerging adults. CSI aimed to help emerging adults with these two criteria. By having self-knowledge of their signature strengths, emerging adults can make informed life decisions based on their strengths and leverage their signature strengths to set goals so that they can take more responsibility for themselves. Yet, the null finding of this study indicated that helping emerging adults make independent decisions and take responsibility alone may not be enough to improve their identity formation and self-efficacy, and reduce their self-doubt. This may be due to Malaysian emerging adults having other important criteria of adulthood, which were not targeted by CSI. For instance, studies have revealed that emerging adults in Malaysia also value role transitions (e.g., marriage, completing education, and parenting), as well as family capacities (e.g., taking responsibility and supporting one's family) as markers of adulthood (Halik et al., 2019; Wider et al., 2021). This is because Malaysia has a collectivistic culture, where community values, relationships, and interconnectedness are emphasized over individual achievements (Sumari et al., 2019). In this context, being able to

contribute to the collective well-being of the family and community is often emphasized during the transition to adulthood (Nelson, 2015). Thus, it is possible that CSI showed no effect on identity-related variables because its individual-centric approach may not resonate as effectively with the collective identity of Malaysian emerging adults. Alternatively, future studies could explore the potential benefits of CSI on the identity of emerging adults from individualistic cultures. Because CSI targets more individualistic outcomes such as personal strengths and self-efficacy, conducting CSI on emerging adults from individualistic cultures may lead to more pronounced effects on identity-related variables.

5.2.3 Duration and Depth of the Intervention

Next, the findings of this study highlighted the importance of considering the duration and depth of CSI when designing programs for emerging adults. As this is one of the first studies that explored the relationship between CSI, identity formation and self-doubt, conducting a single-session CSI is more feasible and cost-effective to implement. Despite the practical advantages of a single-session CSI, it appears that a multiple-session approach may be more effective in achieving lasting and robust outcomes. Specifically, having a multiple-session approach allows researchers to hold participants accountable for practicing their signature strengths in real life by having intervention activities that require them to report whether they have practiced their signature strengths. While it's important to have greater strengths awareness, Niemiec (2018) suggested that people who used their strengths in life displayed greater benefits than those who were only aware of them. Thus, future studies are suggested to adopt a multiple-session approach supplemented

by homework assignments and follow-up support to maximize their impact on emerging adults' personal development and well-being.

5.2.4 Comparison with Previous Studies

Additionally, the null finding of CSI on self-efficacy also contrasted with the result of Toback et al. (2016), which found that a single-session CSI had improved the self-efficacy (as measured using the GSE) of psychiatrically hospitalized adolescents. The authors found that helping American psychiatrically hospitalized adolescents discover their character strengths and incorporating them into coping skills improved self-efficacy that lasted up to 3 months. This discrepancy in results can be explained by two factors.

Firstly, the difference in study population might have contributed to the different outcomes. Psychiatrically hospitalized adolescents are individuals who need intensive mental health care as they face mental health issues such as psychological distress, suicidal ideation, and severe behavioral issues (Dobson et al., 2017). For these adolescents, they may have more immediate and tangible needs for coping skills due to their mental health conditions. Hence, the use of character strengths provided clear and structured ways to manage their symptoms and challenges, leading to noticeable improvements in self-efficacy. In contrast, emerging adults in university were exposed to a broader range of factors that can influence their self-efficacy. These influences include stressors related to the change in educational system, the strive for independence, and the challenge of financial difficulties (Stomff & Vasiliu, 2017). As such, CSI might not address all these multifaceted needs adequately to produce a significant improvement in emerging adults' self-efficacy.

Secondly, it is also possible that practicing character strengths specifically as coping skills had helped increase the effects of CSI. While the current study merely encouraged participants to brainstorm ways to utilize their signature strengths in their daily lives, Toback et al. (2016) specifically prompted participants to consider using these strengths as coping skills, especially during moments of emotional distress such as depression. This explicit focus on applying strengths to manage distressing situations might have been more effective in fostering sustained improvements in self-efficacy. This nuanced difference in intervention design likely contributed to the different outcomes observed in self-efficacy. By emphasizing the practical application of character strengths in challenging situations, Toback et al. (2016) demonstrated the lasting impact of a single session of CSI. Thus, future CSI studies could explore the use of character strengths as specific coping skills to address the challenges in different aspects of life. This can be done by prompting the participants to think of specific ways to use their character strengths to cope with challenges such as academic stress, interpersonal conflicts, or emotional distress. Such an approach could enhance the effectiveness of CSI in improving self-efficacy and other aspects of well-being among emerging adults.

Moreover, while a qualitative study by Layland et al. (2018) highlighted that emerging adults consider discovering their strengths and weaknesses as part of identity exploration, the results of this study indicated that merely identifying strengths might not translate into the formation of a stable identity. Purpose is a critical component that directs how these strengths are used towards meaningful goals, and without this guiding sense of purpose,

emerging adults may struggle to integrate their strengths into a cohesive sense of self. Thus, while CSI provides valuable tools for self-discovery, its limitations lie in its inability to facilitate the development of a stable purpose that is central to identity formation. This may explain the lack of significant effects observed in the present study regarding identity formation, self-doubt, and self-efficacy among emerging adults. Moving forward, incorporating purpose-based elements into interventions could be crucial for supporting emerging adults in their journey of identity development.

5.3 Incidental Findings

Although the main hypothesis of this study was not supported, this study found several important incidental findings by comparing the outcome variables between emerging adults and perceived adults at pretest, and examining the effects of CSI on perceived adults.

5.3.1 Differences in Pretest Scores between Emerging Adults and Perceived Adults

Using Independent samples T-Test, this study found that participants who considered themselves emerging adults performed significantly worse on all outcome variables as compared to perceived adults at pretest (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

Pretest Comparison of Outcome Variables between Emerging Adults and Perceived Adults

Variable (Emerging adults / Perceived adults)	Pretest				
	<i>M (SD)</i>	Statistic	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Identity Formation					
Emerging Adults	3.16 (.54)	2.58	127	0.01	0.48
Perceived Adults	3.44 (.70)				
Self-Doubt					
Emerging Adults	31.44 (6.24)	3.57	127	< .001	0.66
Perceived Adults	26.95 (7.74)				
Self-Efficacy					
Emerging Adults	27.05 (4.57)	2.21	127	0.03	0.41
Perceived Adults	29.06 (5.49)				

5.3.1.1 Conceptual Differences Between Emerging Adults and Perceived Adults. According to Wider et al. (2015), emerging adults and perceived adults are two distinct developmental stages as emerging adults engaged in more identity exploration compared to perceived adults, while perceived adults had a better understanding of who they are compared to their peers. This difference in developmental stage explains why perceived adults performed better on all outcome variables. The results in this study were consistent with evidence from past studies which indicated that emerging adults had lower identity formation (Nelson & Barry, 2005) and self-efficacy (Stomff & Vasiliu, 2017), and had higher self-doubt (Peer & McAuslan, 2016) as compared to perceived adults.

Emerging adults with lower identity formation may face more difficulties in making important life decisions in various domains such as career choices, relationships, and personal values (Lapsley & Hardy, 2017; Nelson & Barry, 2005). Consequently, their lowered self-efficacy and heightened self-doubt can further exacerbate these challenges. For instance, a longitudinal study conducted by Seiffge-Krenke and Luyckx (2014) revealed that emerging adults with lower self-efficacy in dealing with work and

partnership conflict demonstrated higher internalizing and externalizing symptoms, as well as lower satisfaction with life as compared to those with higher self-efficacy. On the same note, emerging adults with higher self-doubt may have lower self-esteem and higher negative affect (Oleson et al., 2000). Ultimately, the uncertainty around their identity may increase the risk of developing identity distress. While it is normal to experience a certain amount of distress (Wängqvist & Frisé, 2013), prolonged and unresolved identity distress can potentially lead emerging adults to adhere to a negative identity, (i.e., the conformity to a prescribed identity that may not align with their true selves), or to avoid exploring and committing to identity development altogether (Meca et al., 2014). As such, resolving questions related to identity had important implications, especially because identity resolution at emerging adulthood predicted high levels on subsequent psychosocial tasks of adulthood such as intimacy, generativity, and integrity (Mitchell et al., 2021), as well as improving subjective well-being (Kins & Beyers, 2010).

This finding highlighted the need for more research to be conducted on effective interventions to support emerging adults through their developmental challenges. As the effects of CSI from this study was inconclusive, future studies may focus on integrating purpose-centered intervention with CSI to encourage self-reflection, goal setting, and long-term planning. This is beneficial in helping emerging adults align their purpose with actionable steps to foster a stable identity, reduce self-doubt, and build self-efficacy.

5.3.2 Effects of CSI on Perceived Adults

Mixed-design analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that the main effects for time and group, as well as the interaction effects between time and group were not significant for all three variables (see Table 9).

Table 5.2

Mixed-Design Analyses of Outcome Variables for Perceived Adults

Variable (Perceived Adults)	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	η_p^2	Statistical Power
Identity Formation							
Time	.03	2	.01	.07	.94	.00	.06
Group	1.95	1	1.95	2.07	.16	.05	.29
Time X Group	.18	2	.10	.44	.64	.01	.12
Self-Doubt							
Time	.47	2	.23	.01	.99	.00	.05
Group	56.52	1	56.52	.49	.49	.01	.11
Time X Group	92.23	2	46.12	2.40	.10	.05	.47
Self-Efficacy							
Time	12.41	1.75	7.08	.46	.61	.01	.12
Group	140.28	1	140.28	2.89	.10	.06	.38
Time X Group	3.83	1.75	2.19	.14	.84	.00	.07

This finding indicates that neither the CSI nor the active control intervention produced significant changes in perceived adults' identity formation, self-efficacy, or self-doubt.

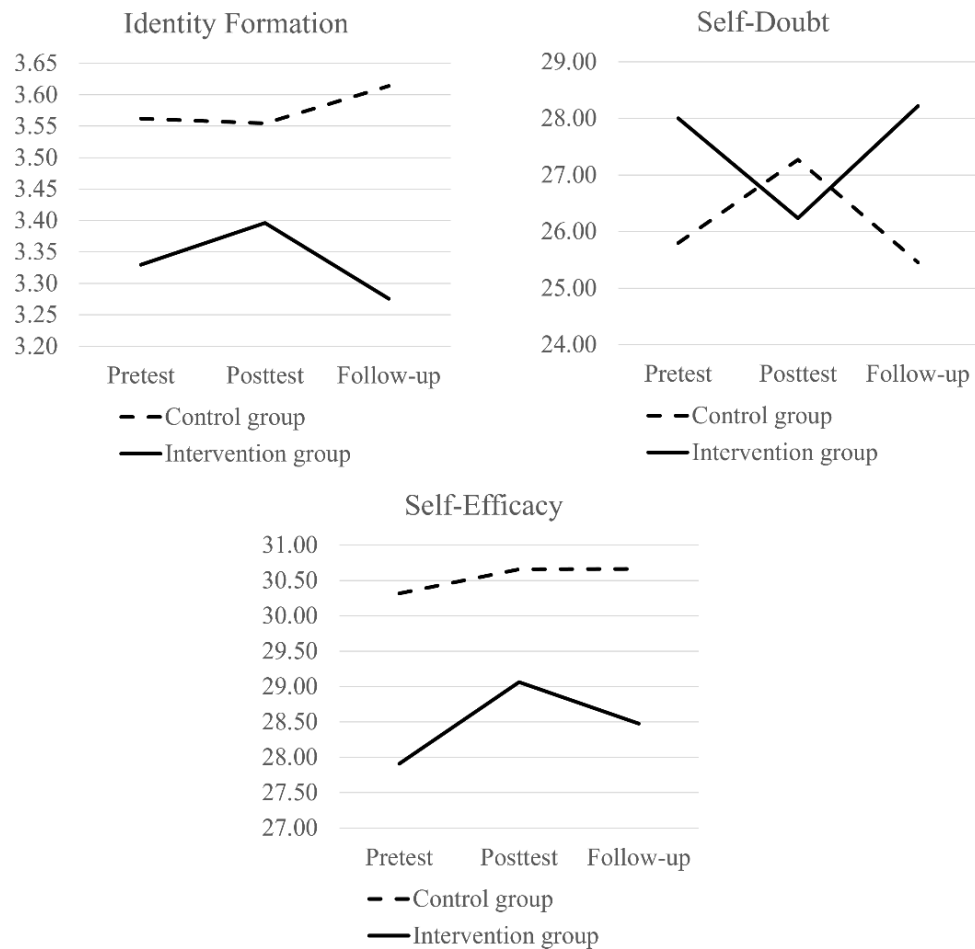


Figure 5.1: Effects of CSI on Perceived Adults

One possible explanation for this result is that perceived adults already had a more coherent sense of identity in which they displayed better understanding of their values, beliefs, career goals, romantic partner, and their overall sense of self (Nelson & Barry, 2005; Wider et al., 2015). According to Nelson and Barry (2005), although perceived adults and emerging adults both held the same criteria for adulthood, perceived adults rated themselves as having fulfilled those criteria to a greater extent as compared to emerging adults. Furthermore, the life experiences and maturity of perceived adults may have contributed to their more stable identity. According to Cusack and Merchant (2013), life experiences such as getting married, having children, or living outside of parents' home contributed to one's self-perception of adult

status. Hence, compared to emerging adults, perceived adults have accumulated a range of experiences that have helped shape their values and beliefs (Cusack & Merchant, 2013). This makes them more resistant to interventions designed to foster self-discovery as perceived adults' stable sense of self may reduce the relevance of character strengths-based interventions and limit the impact on identity formation and related outcomes.

Alternatively, the lack of effect could also be due to the limitations of the single-session CSI. As mentioned above, this study utilized a single-session CSI which does not require participants to report their strength use. Single-session interventions, especially those without follow-up activities or reinforcement, may lack the intensity or depth needed to influence identity formation, self-efficacy, and self-doubt among perceived adults. Thus, it is also possible that the CSI implemented in this study was not robust enough to produce any change.

Taken together, the results supported the notion that a majority of individuals aged 18 to 25 who are enrolled in tertiary education in Malaysia identified themselves as emerging adults. Furthermore, emerging adults exhibited lower identity formation and self-efficacy levels, along with higher self-doubt, in comparison to perceived adults. Lastly, emerging adults from both the CSI and the control group showed improvements in the three outcome variables, while neither the CSI nor the control group had any effect on perceived adults' identity formation, self-efficacy, and self-doubt.

5.4 Limitations and Recommendations

Firstly, the present study is prone to undercoverage bias, as the majority of participants were female (73.7%), and most were Chinese (85.6%). This

demographic skew may limit the generalizability of the findings to other gender or ethnic groups within the emerging adult population in Malaysia. To enhance the applicability of the results, future studies should aim to recruit a more balanced and diverse sample that includes greater representation from other ethnicities and genders. Furthermore, since the study was conducted with a specific group of undergraduate psychology students from a single university in Malaysia, it also limited the generalizability of the findings to other populations of emerging adults in various contexts or cultural backgrounds.

Next, one limitation of this study's choice of active control is that it may have acted as a confounding factor. As mentioned above, the gatekeeper training for suicide prevention may have influenced participants' vocational identity, this in turn may have affected their responses on the outcome measures. To mitigate this limitation, the researchers should consider using a more neutral or placebo-like active control condition that does not have an impact on the outcomes being measured. For example, a placebo intervention or a neutral training that does not specifically target the outcomes of interest could serve as a better control group. By employing a control condition that is less likely to impact the outcome variables, the study could attribute any observed effects to the Character Strengths Intervention rather than the influence of the active control.

Based on the findings of the study, there is no clear evidence that CSI intervention is effective in helping emerging adults with their identity formation, self-efficacy, and self-doubt. Thus, it is hoped that future studies can improve on this study's design and intervention content to improve the effects of intervention. Firstly, researchers could consider lengthening the

intervention by separating the awareness, exploration, and application phase of the CSI into three separate sessions rather than one. Given the complexity of identity development, there is a need for multiple-session and longitudinal studies to provide further investigations on this subject. A single-session intervention might lack the intensity or reinforcement needed to produce lasting changes in identity development. Therefore, future research should focus on implementing longer-term CSI programs with continuous follow-ups to track the sustained impact on participants' personal development and well-being. Next, homework assignments that include practicing signature strengths after the intervention can be provided at the end of each session to ensure participants practice using their signature strengths after intervention. Furthermore, measurements of strengths use and strengths knowledge can be included at follow-up to ensure the effectiveness of the manipulation.

5.5 Conclusion

This study examined the effects of Character Strengths Intervention (CSI) on identity formation, self-efficacy, and self-doubt among Malaysian emerging adults. The findings revealed that while both groups of emerging adults showed improvements in identity formation and self-doubt, no significant differences were observed between the CSI and control groups. For perceived adults, neither intervention produced significant changes, suggesting that their more stable sense of self may have made them less responsive to short-term interventions.

These results suggest that while CSI may enhance general well-being, its impact on identity development in emerging adults requires further exploration. The null findings highlight the need to integrate purpose-centered

approaches into CSI to provide clearer direction and greater relevance. In conclusion, while CSI shows promise for self-discovery, its current form requires refinement to more effectively guide emerging adults through their developmental challenges.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A - VIA classification of Virtues and Character Strengths

Virtues	Character Strengths	Description
Wisdom and Knowledge	Creativity	Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things
	Curiosity	Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience
	Open-mindedness	Thinking things through and examining them from all sides
	Love of learning	Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge
	Perspective	Being able to provide wise counsel to others
Courage	Honesty	Speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way
	Bravery	Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain
	Persistence	Finishing what one starts
	Zest	Approaching life with excitement and energy
Humanity	Kindness	Doing favors and good deeds for others
	Love	Valuing close relations with others
	Social intelligence	Being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others
Justice	Fairness	Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice
	Leadership	Organizing group activities and seeing that they happen
	Teamwork	Working well as a member of a group or team

Temperance	Forgiveness	Forgiving those who have done wrong
	Modesty	Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves
	Prudence	Being careful about one's choices
	Self-regulation	Regulating what one feels and does
Transcendence	Appreciation of beauty and excellence	Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life
	Gratitude	Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen
	Hope	Expecting the best and working to achieve it
	Humor	Liking to laugh and joke; bringing smiles to other people
	Spirituality	Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life

Note. Adapted from Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Oxford University Press.

Appendix B – Ethical Clearance



UNIVERSITI TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN DU012(A)
Wholly owned by UTAR Education Foundation Co. No. 578227-M

Re: U/SERC/103/2022

13 May 2022

Mr Pheh Kai Shuen
Department of Psychology and Counselling
Faculty of Arts and Social Science
Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman
Jalan Universiti, Bandar Baru Barat
31900 Kampar, Perak

Dear Mr Pheh,

Ethical Approval For Research Project/Protocol

We refer to your application for ethical approval for your research project (Master student's project) and are pleased to inform you that your application has been approved under Expedited Review.

The details of your research project are as follows:

Research Title	Effects of a Character Strengths Intervention on Emerging Adults' Identity Formation, Self-Doubt and Self-Efficacy
Investigator(s)	Mr Pheh Kai Shuen Dr Tan Chee Seng Wong Wen Pin (UTAR Postgraduate Student)
Research Area	Social Sciences
Research Location	UTAR, Kampar Campus
No of Participants	220 participants (Age: 18 - 25)
Research Costs	Self-funded
Approval Validity	13 May 2022 - 12 May 2023

The conduct of this research is subject to the following:

- (1) The participants' informed consent be obtained prior to the commencement of the research,
- (2) Confidentiality of participants' personal data must be maintained,
- (3) Compliance with procedures set out in related policies of UTAR such as the UTAR Research Ethics and Code of Conduct, Code of Practice for Research Involving Humans and other related policies/guidelines; and
- (4) Written consent be obtained from the institution(s)/company(ies) in which the physical or/and online survey will be carried out, prior to the commencement of the research.

Kampar Campus : Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, 31900 Kampar, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia
Tel: (605) 468 8888 Fax: (605) 466 1313
Sungai Long Campus : Jalan Sungai Long, Bandar Sungai Long, Cheras, 43000 Kajang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia
Tel: (603) 9086 0288 Fax: (603) 9019 8868
Website: www.utar.edu.my



Should you collect personal data of participants in your study, please have the participants sign the attached Personal Data Protection Statement for your records.

The University wishes you all the best in your research.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Ts Dr Faidz bin Abd Rahman

Chairman

UTAR Scientific and Ethical Review Committee

c.c Dean, Faculty of Arts and Social Science
 Director, Institute of Postgraduate Studies and Research

Kampar Campus : Jalan Universiti, Bandar Barat, 31900 Kampar, Perak Darul Ridzuan, Malaysia
Tel: (605) 468 8888 Fax: (605) 466 1313
Sungai Long Campus : Jalan Sungai Long, Bandar Sungai Long, Cheras, 43000 Kajang, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia
Tel: (603) 9086 0288 Fax: (603) 9019 8868
Website: www.utar.edu.my



Appendix C –Informed Consent and Questionnaire



Wholly owned by UTAR Education Foundation
(Co. No. 578227(M)
DU012(A))

Consent Form

Purpose of the Study

I am Wong Wen Pin, a Master of Philosophy (Social Science) student from UTAR Kampar. I am currently working on a research project titled **"Effects of a Character Strengths Intervention on Emerging Adults' Identity Formation, Self-Doubt, and Self-Efficacy "**.

Procedures

In this research project, you will be asked to go through several activities that will explore your character strengths. You are also required to complete several questionnaires.

Confidentiality

Your name and your personal details will be collected for the research purpose and it is not in an anonymous manner. However, your information and responses will be handled in a private manner. The results will be reported as group data, and only be used for academic purposes which only the researchers and supervisor have access to it.

Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary in nature. You have the right to withdraw from this research at any time with no penalty.

Risk and discomfort

During the process of research, we anticipate that the risk or discomfort that you experience will not be greater than what you will normally experience throughout your daily life.

Payment and Compensation

No payment is paid to you to participate in this study. Similarly, there will be no costs for your participation.

Contact information

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me at 012-2608727.

Thank you in advance.

Agreement to Participate

By choosing "I agree" button at below, it signifies that "I have agreed to the information given. I also understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study without any form of penalty. I am aware that there will be a certain risk involved in this study. The information that I have provided will also be kept confidential."

- ☐ I agree
☐ I do not agree

EPSI

Below are 12 items that may or may not apply to you. Select a score from 1 (Hardly ever true) to 5 (Almost always true) to indicate the extent to which you agree with the item.

	Hardly ever true	Usually Not True	Occasionally True	Usually True	Almost always true
I change my opinion of myself a lot.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I've got a clear idea of what I want to be.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Hardly ever true	Usually Not True	Occasionally True	Usually True	Almost always true
I feel mixed up.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The important things in life are clear to me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I've got it together.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know what kind of person I am.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can't decide what I want to do with my life.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a strong sense of what it means to be female/male.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like myself and am proud of what I stand for.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't really know what I'm on about.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I find I have to keep up a front when I'm with people.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't really feel involved.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SD

Below are 8 items that may or may not apply to you. Select a score from 1 (Disagree very much) to 6 (Agree very much) to indicate the extent to which you agree with the item.

	Disagree very much	Disagree Moderately	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree Moderately	Agree very much
When engaged in an important task, most of my thoughts turn to bad things that might happen (e.g., failing) than to good.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Disagree very much	Disagree Moderately	Disagree Slightly	Agree Slightly	Agree Moderately	Agree very much
For me, avoiding failure has a greater emotional impact (e.g., sense of relief) than the emotional impact of achieving success (e.g., joy, pride).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
More often than not I feel unsure of my abilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I sometimes find myself wondering if I have the ability to succeed at important activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I often wish that I felt more certain of my strengths and weaknesses.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As I begin an important activity, I usually feel confident in my ability.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sometimes I feel that I don't know why I have succeeded at something.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
As I begin an important activity, I usually feel confident in the likely outcome.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

GSE

Below are 10 items that may or may not apply to you. Select a score from 1 (Not at all true) to 4 (Exactly true) to indicate the extent to which you agree with the item.

	Not at all true	Hardly true	Moderately true	Exactly true
I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If someone opposes me, I can find the means and ways to get what I want.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not at all true	Hardly true	Moderately true	Exactly true
It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When I am confronted with a problem, I can usually find several solutions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can usually handle whatever comes my way.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

SKS

Below are 2 items that may or may not apply to you. Select a score from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree) to indicate the extent to which you agree with the item.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am aware of my strengths	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I know the things I do best	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Demographics

Full Name / Student ID:

Age:

Gender

- ☐ Male
☐ Female

Ethnicity

- ☐ Malay
☐ Chinese
☐ Indian

☐ Others

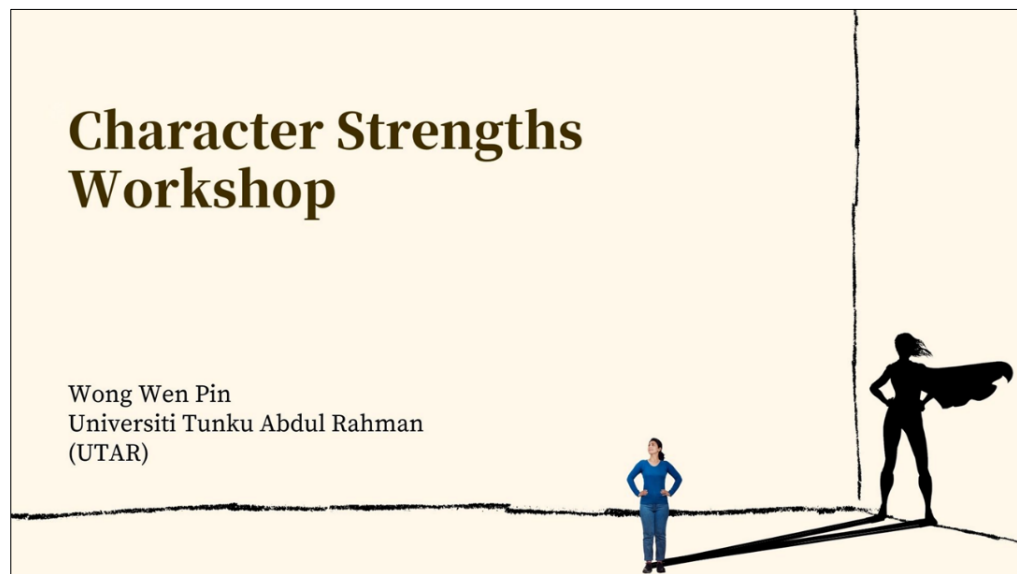
Do you think that you have reached adulthood?

- ☐ Yes
☐ In some respect yes, in some respect no
☐ No

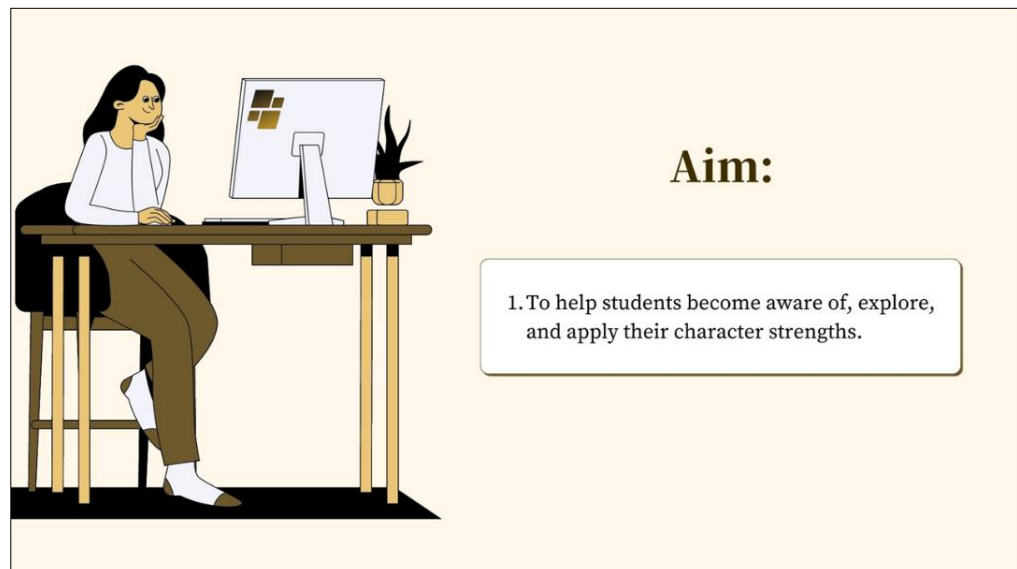
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- END OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE -

Appendix D – Character Strengths Intervention Presentation Slides



1



2

Informed Consent

Purpose of the Study

"Effects of a Character Strengths Intervention on Emerging Adults' Identity Formation, Self-Doubt, and Self-Efficacy".

Confidentiality

Your name and your personal details will be collected for the research purpose

Procedures

- Pretest, posttest, & follow-up survey
- VIA survey
- Activities and group discussions

Risk and discomfort

The risk or discomfort will not be greater than what you normally throughout your daily life.

3

Informed Consent

Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary in nature.

Payment and Compensation

No payment is paid to you to participate in this study.

4

How will the program develop character strengths?



Aware

- Introduction about Character strengths
- Taking the VIA Survey

Explore

- Exploring Strengths
- Strengths Spotting

Apply

- Signature Strengths across Domains
- Goal-Setting

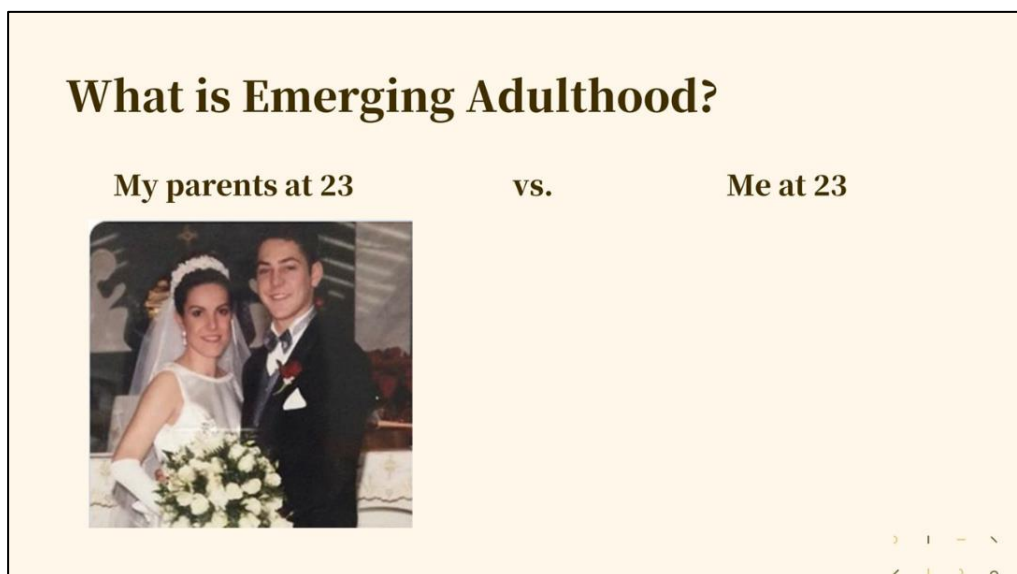
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6



7



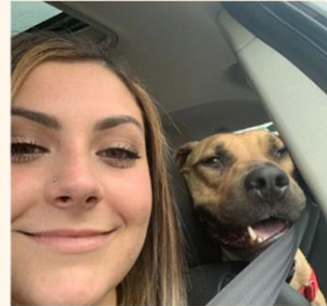
8

What is Emerging Adulthood?

My parents at 23

vs.

Me at 23



9

What is Emerging Adulthood?

My parents at 23

vs.

Me at 23



10

What is Emerging Adulthood?

My parents at 23

vs.

Me at 23



11

What is Emerging Adulthood?

My parents at 23

vs.

Me at 23



12

What is Emerging Adulthood?

My parents at 23

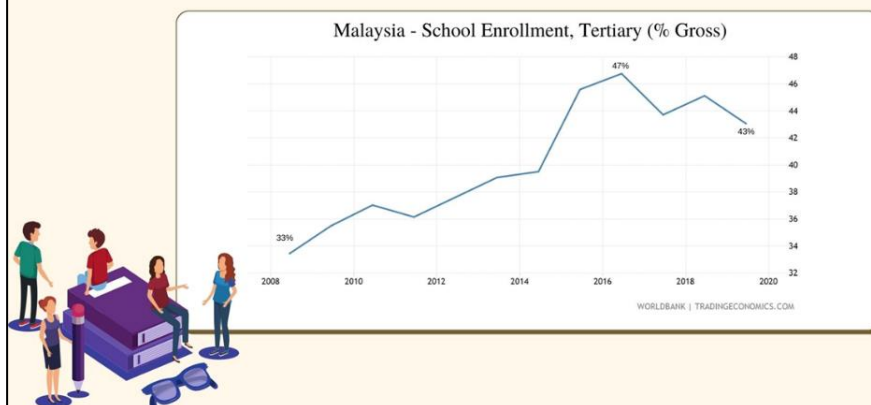
vs.

Me at 23



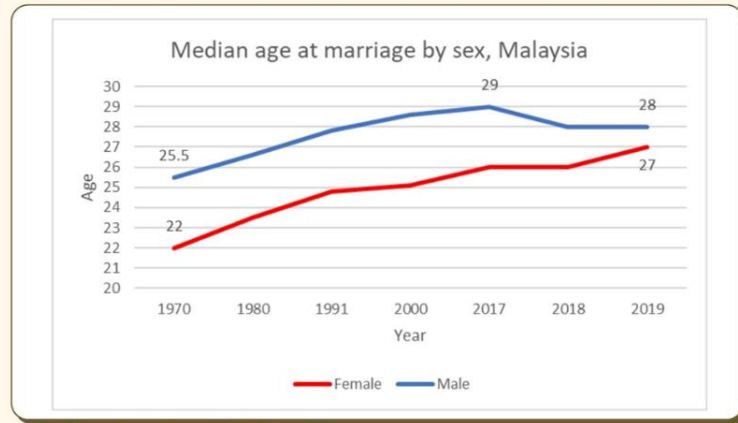
13

Emerging Adulthood



14

Emerging Adulthood



15

Emerging Adulthood

- "30 is the new 20"
- It takes longer for people to finish education, get a stable career, and get married.
- Emerging adults explore various domains in life before adopting conventional adult roles.



16

Challenges of Emerging Adulthood

Anxiety

Confusion

Not knowing how to use
new found freedom



17

Why do strengths matter for emerging adults?

18

VIA Classification of Strengths



19

List of Strengths



Wisdom

Creativity
Curiosity
Judgement
Love of Learning
Perspective

Courage

Bravery
Honesty
Perseverance
Zest

Humanity

Love
Kindness
Social Intelligence

Justice

Fairness
Teamwork
Leadership

Temperance

Forgiveness
Humility
Self-Regulation
Prudence

Transcendence

Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence
Gratitude
Hope
Humor
Spirituality

20

VIA Survey

- Discovers individuals' signature strengths (their top 5 strengths).
- The survey offers relative comparisons (comparison within oneself) rather than absolute comparisons (comparisons with others).
- <https://www.viacharacter.org>



21

Question:

Should we focus on increasing the use of signature strengths or lower strengths?

22

Wen Pin Wong

VIA Character Strengths Profile
05/20/2022



1. Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence

TRANSCENDENCE

Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience.



2. Spirituality

TRANSCENDENCE

Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and purpose.



3. Forgiveness

TEMPERANCE

Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting others' shortcomings; giving people the benefit of the doubt; not being vengeful.



4. Perspective

WISDOM

Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that are unique, wise, and informed.



5. Gratitude

TRANSCENDENCE

Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.

Wen Pin Wong

VIA Character Strengths Profile
05/20/2022



19. Curiosity

WISDOM

Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering.



20. Zest

COURAGE

Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated.



21. Perseverance

COURAGE

Finishing what one starts; persevering in a course of action in spite of obstacles; "getting it out of one's system"; taking pleasure in completing tasks.



22. Love of Learning

WISDOM

Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; relating to others in a way that is both systematic and creative.



23. Humor

TRANSCENDENCE

Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes.



24. Prudence

TEMPERANCE

Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might be regretted.

23

What Are Signature Strengths?

Essential



Effortless / Easy



Energizing



24

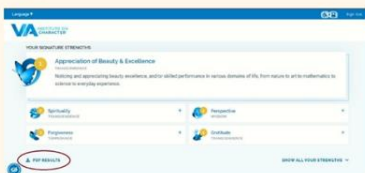
Discover your signature strengths



1 Register an account



2 Complete the survey



3 Download PDF results

Link to the survey:



<http://www.viacharacter.org/survey/pro/RSHHNJ/account/register>

25

List of Strengths



Courage

Bravery
Honesty
Perseverance
Zest

Humanity

Kindness
Love
Social Intelligence

Justice

Fairness
Leadership
Teamwork

Temperance

Forgiveness
Humility
Prudence
Self-Regulation

Transcendence

Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence
Gratitude
Hope
Humor
Spirituality

Wisdom & Knowledge

Creativity
Curiosity
Judgement
Love of Learning
Perspective

26

Wisdom

- The virtue of wisdom is about gaining knowledge and using that knowledge effectively to solve problems.
- It's related but different from intelligence.

Wisdom

Creativity

Curiosity

Judgement

Love of Learning

Perspective

x o + o o + o o
o . . x . . x .

27

Courage

- The virtue of courage refers to your will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, either external or internal.
- The courageous person accurately gauges the risks and is appropriately afraid of negative outcomes. Their courage comes from a deep will to act that is greater than their fear.

Courage

Bravery

Honesty

Perseverance

Zest

x o + o o + o o
o . . x . . x .

28

Humanity

- Humanity generally has to do with how you connect with people in one-on-one situations.
- People who are particularly humane are able to feel other people's pain or know their feelings. This is why they go out of their way to help others.

Humanity

Love

Kindness

Social Intelligence

x o + o o + o o
o . . x . . x .

29

Justice

- Justice has to do with how you connect with people in groups.
- The person who is high in justice can be humane, but also knows that the good of the group must sometimes take precedence over humanity.

Justice

Fairness

Teamwork

Leadership



30

Temperance

- Temperance has to do with keeping yourself from acting in ways that are bad or socially undesirable.
- Temperance is characterized by a restraint or protective quality against excess.
- When you act temperately, the emotions you are fighting are more likely to be anger, laziness, or arrogance.

Temperance

Forgiveness

Humility

Self-Regulation

Prudence



31

Transcendence

- The transcendent strengths relate to recognizing that there are things that we can never understand fully.
- Allows individuals to forge connections to the larger universe and thereby provide meaning to their lives.

Transcendence

Appreciation of
Beauty &
Excellence

Gratitude

Hope

Humor

Spirituality



33

#1 Signature Strengths - Accuracy Check

1. Gut check:
 - Is your list of strengths essential to who you are?
 - Do they feel right?
 - Does it confirm in some way what you already knew about yourself?
2. Look through the list of 24 strengths, and compare the other possibilities with what you get. If you find something that feels authentic, add them to the top 5 strengths.



34

#2 Ranking Signature Strengths

- Purpose: To create a ranked list of strengths

1. For each strength, rate from 1 to 10 according to how essential, easy, & energetic it is to who you are.
2. Fill in the ranked signature strengths list



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#2 Ranking Signature Strengths

For each strength, rate from 1 to 10 according to how essential it is to who you are. Next, fill in your ranked top 5 strengths according to the ratings.

Top strengths	Ratings (1 to 10)
1. Appreciation of beauty & excellence	10
2. Spirituality	7
3. Forgiveness	7
4. Perspective	8
5. Gratitude	9
6. (Optional)	

My ranked signature strengths are:

1. Appreciation of beauty & excellence	4. Spirituality
2. Gratitude	5. Forgiveness
3. Perspective	

36

List of Strengths



Wisdom

Creativity
Curiosity
Judgement
Love of Learning
Perspective

Courage

Bravery
Honesty
Perseverance
Zest

Humanity

Love
Kindness
Social Intelligence

Justice

Fairness
Teamwork
Leadership

Temperance

Forgiveness
Humility
Self-Regulation
Prudence

Transcendence

Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence
Gratitude
Hope
Humor
Spirituality

37

#3 Exploring Signature Strengths

Character strength #1:

Questions	Reflections
1. How does this character strength describe the real me? In what ways is it a true description of me?	This strength does not describe me well / describes me well. I enjoy doing... / I feel great when I'm...
2. How is this strength of value to me? Why is it important for me?	By using this strength, I...
3. What are the costs of this strength for me? In what ways does it not serve me well?	Sometimes when I overuse this strength, I...

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#3 Exploring Signature Strengths

Character strength #1:

Questions	Reflections
1. How does this character strength describe the real me? In what ways is it a true description of me?	This strength does not describe me well / describes me well. I enjoy doing... / I feel great when I'm...
2. How is this strength of value to me? Why is it important for me?	By using this strength, I...
3. What are the costs of this strength for me? In what ways does it not serve me well?	Sometimes when I overuse this strength, I...

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#3 Exploring Signature Strengths

Character strength #1:

Questions	Reflections
1. How does this character strength describe the real me? In what ways is it a true description of me?	This strength does not describe me well / describes me well. I enjoy doing... / I feel great when I'm...
2. How is this strength of value to me? Why is it important for me?	By using this strength, I...
3. What are the costs of this strength for me? In what ways does it not serve me well?	Sometimes when I overuse this strength, I...

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Exploring Signature Strengths

Character strength #1: Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence

Questions	Reflections
1. How does this character strength describe the real me? In what ways is it a true description of me?	It describes me very well. I'm a person that enjoys watching thought-provoking movies, shows, or music. I enjoy analyzing the themes of these media. I also enjoy the quiet moments of being in nature. As for the excellence side, I am touched by people who work hard on their expertise.
2. How is this strength of value to me? Why is it important for me?	I feel that the more I am inspired / touched by both beauty and excellence, the more I will pursue them. In a sense this has led me to pursue them in myself, (i.e. to improve myself in various domains in life).
3. What are the costs of this strength for me? In what ways does it not serve me well?	I can be perfectionistic sometimes, such as having a lot of ideas but not really implementing them because they don't feel good enough.

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Exploring Signature Strengths

Character strength #1: Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence

Questions	Reflections
1. How does this character strength describe the real me? In what ways is it a true description of me?	It describes me very well. I'm a person that enjoys watching thought-provoking movies, shows, or music. I enjoy analyzing the themes of these media. I also enjoy the quiet moments of being in nature. As for the excellence side, I am touched by people who work hard on their expertise.
2. How is this strength of value to me? Why is it important for me?	I feel that the more I am inspired / touched by both beauty and excellence, the more I will pursue them. In a sense this has led me to pursue them in myself, (i.e. to improve myself in various domains in life).
3. What are the costs of this strength for me? In what ways does it not serve me well?	I can be perfectionistic sometimes, such as having a lot of ideas but not really implementing them because they don't feel good enough.

42

Exploring Signature Strengths

Character strength #1: Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence

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1. How does this character strength describe the real me? In what ways is it a true description of me?	It describes me very well. I'm a person that enjoys watching thought-provoking movies, shows, or music. I enjoy analyzing the themes of these media. I also enjoy the quiet moments of being in nature. As for the excellence side, I am touched by people who work hard on their expertise.
2. How is this strength of value to me? Why is it important for me?	I feel that the more I am inspired / touched by both beauty and excellence, the more I will pursue them. In a sense this has led me to pursue them in myself, (i.e. to improve myself in various domains in life).
3. What are the costs of this strength for me? In what ways does it not serve me well?	I can be perfectionistic sometimes, such as having a lot of ideas but not really implementing them because they don't feel good enough.

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#4 Strengths Spotting

- **Purpose:** To spot strengths in yourself & in others.

1. Think of a specific time, recently or awhile back, when you were at your best – you were functioning strongly. This could be a time at work, school, home, or other place and you were behaving in a way that was true to who you are.
2. Write out the story.
3. Try spotting character strengths in your story
4. Tell the story to your groupmates and allow them to give feedback on which strength they notice you expressing.



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#4 Strengths Spotting

A time when I was at my best

Event

Physical action

Location

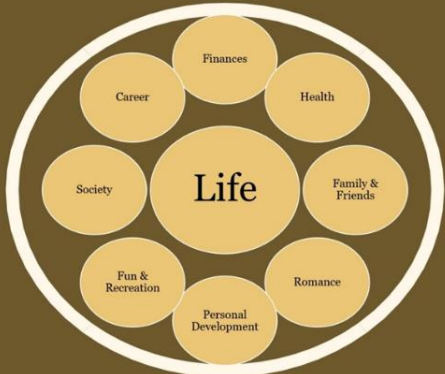
People

Emotions

Thoughts

45

#5 Signature Strengths Across Domains



- **Purpose:** Enhance awareness and use of signature strengths.
- Choose 3 domains in your life (e.g., academic, relationships/family, career planning)
- Think & write about how you can use this particular signature strength in the 3 domains (past use or new ways).

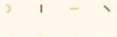

#6 Goal-Setting

-

Summary & Important takeaways

Summary & Important takeaways

Awareness about character strengths



111



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- END OF THE PRESENTATION SLIDES -

Appendix E – Character Strengths Intervention Worksheets

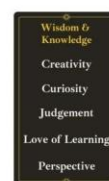
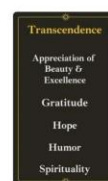
#1 Signature Strengths - Accuracy Check

My top 5 strengths are:

- | | |
|----|----|
| 1. | 4. |
| 2. | 5. |
| 3. | 6. |

Questions:

- Is your list of strengths essential to who you are?
- Do they feel right?
- Does it confirm in some way what you already knew about yourself?



1

#2 Ranking Signature Strengths

For each strength, rate from 1 to 10 according to how essential it is to who you are. Next, fill in your ranked top 5 strengths according to the ratings.

Top strengths	Ratings (1 to 10)
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	

My ranked signature strengths are:

1.	4.
2.	5.
3.	

2

#3 Exploring Signature Strengths

Character strength #1:

Questions	Reflections
1. How does this character strength describe the real me? In what ways is it a true description of me?	
2. How is this strength of value to me? Why is it important to me?	
3. What are the costs of this strength for me? In what ways does it not serve me well?	

3

#3 Exploring Signature Strengths

Character strength #2:

Questions	Reflections
2. How does this character strength describe the real me? In what ways is it a true description of me?	
3. How is this strength of value to me? Why is it important to me?	
4. What are the costs of this strength for me? In what ways does it not serve me well?	

4

#3 Exploring Signature Strengths

Character strength #3:

Questions	Reflections
3. How does this character strength describe the real me? In what ways is it a true description of me?	
4. How is this strength of value to me? Why is it important to me?	
5. What are the costs of this strength for me? In what ways does it not serve me well?	

5

#4 Strengths Spotting

Defining Moments Exercise

Event

Physical action

Emotions / Thoughts

Which character strengths did you bring forth? How did you express them?

How has this moment contributed to your identity? No matter how small, how has it affected your view of yourself today?

6

#5 Signature Strengths Across Domains

Domain	Strengths	Ways to use

7

#6 Goal-Setting

Goals	How will your signature strengths help you reach your goals?

8

- END OF THE INTERVENTION WORKSHEETS -

Appendix F – Character Strengths Intervention Reminder Cards





Perseverance

Definition

Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action despite obstacles; "getting it out the door"; taking pleasure completing tasks.

Essence

Keep going, overcome all obstacles.



Zest

Definition

Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or half-heartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated.

Essence

Enthusiasm for life.



Kindness

Definition

Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them.

Essence

Doing for others.





Love

Definition

Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people.

Essence

Genuine, reciprocal warmth.



Social Intelligence

Definition

Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick.

Essence

Tuned in, savvy.



Fairness

Definition

Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; not letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance.

Essence

Equal opportunity for all.





Leadership

Definition

Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintain good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.

Essence

Positively influencing others.



Teamwork

Definition

Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share.

Essence

Participative, contributing to a group effort.



Forgiveness

Definition

Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting the shortcomings of others; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful.

Essence

Letting go of hurt when wronged.





Humility

Definition

Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is.

Essence

Achievement does not elevate worth. I'm OK but let's keep the positive focus on you.



Prudence

Definition

Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted.

Essence

Wise caution.



Self-Regulation

Definition

Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions.

Essence

Self-management of vices. Appropriate control of impulses/emotions.





Gratitude

Definition

Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks.

Essence

An attitude of thankfulness.



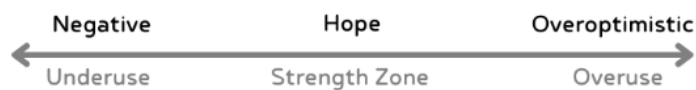
Hope

Definition

Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about.

Essence

Positive expectations.



Humor

Definition

Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes.

Essence

Offering pleasure/laughter to others





Spirituality

Definition

Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort.

Essence

Connecting with the sacred. Life is small amidst the grand design.



Creativity

Definition

Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it.

Essence

Uniqueness that is practical. Seeing and doing things in different ways.



Curiosity

Definition

Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating.

Essence

Exploration.





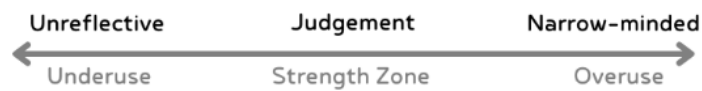
Judgement / Critical Thinking

Definition

Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly.

Essence

Analytical; seeing a 360-degree view of the details.



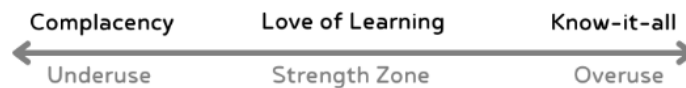
Love of Learning

Definition

Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows.

Essence

Going deep with knowledge.





Perspective

Definition

Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people.

Essence

The wider view.



My signature strengths:

-
-
-
-