The attitudes of bullies, victims, and averters: Understanding the relationship of bullying status and character strengths

Vikki Elizabeth Hennard

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The Attitudes of Bullies, Victims, and Averters: Understanding the Relationship of Bullying Status and Character Strengths

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Submitted to the Department of Leadership and Counseling
Eastern Michigan University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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Ypsilanti, Michigan

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DEDICATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Dedication

I dedicate this research project to the three most incredible individuals I know, my children, Jake, Elyssa, and Catherine. Words could never express how much I cherish you, and how deeply you inspire me. You encompass all the hope and love I could wish for, and I am proud of the model you represent for the future. I love you most. And to children everywhere, that they find hope and well-being, and are given the best support and teaching to do so.

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ABSTRACT

Bullying in schools has been a major concern of our society with prevention and intervention focusing on the external environment. Little has been done to understand the attitudes of individuals beyond evaluating pathologies such as depression and deviance. Programs have emphasized a system of social control whereby expectations are established, rules are made, and consequences are enforced.

Research shows that bullying continues to affect children in schools, and has increased with the use of electronic methods such as social media, texting, and the like. Delving deeper into internal characteristics of bullies and victims, positive psychology offers a framework to increase positive traits necessary in creating a sense of well-being in early adolescents where resilience outcomes can be achieved.

The current study examined character strengths in relation to an individual’s bully status. Utilizing pre-existing surveys, 685 7th and 8th grade students in the rural region of northwest Michigan were evaluated based on perceptions of bullying experiences, as well as on scenarios indicative of the 24 universal character strengths.

Results indicated that high self-regulation was significantly linked to averters, and was low in those unable to evade the experience. Hope was high in averters as well, and low in victims, who were also low in gratitude. And prudence and fairness were low in those that bully. These results suggest that these character strengths, particularly hope and self-regulation, are critical strengths that need to be developed in our youth. If we develop them, well-being in individuals will not only be increased, but a decrease in bullying behaviors and perceptions of being bullied will result. These character strengths can be taught and systematic instruction in methods to do so should be incorporated in our schools.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Bullying in schools has become a highly recognized topic of concern, both nationally and internationally (Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Thompson & Cohen, 2005). With the highly publicized school violence events of the recent decades - 71% reported to have been initiated in response to bullying behavior (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002) - there is a renewed focus on this topic.

U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan states, “Bullying can be extremely damaging to students, can disrupt an environment conducive to learning, and should not be tolerated in our schools.” (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The Juvenile Accountability Block Grant Reauthorization and the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Act of 2012 was modified to reflect the heightened sense of importance to this issue. Its focus, “establishing and maintaining accountability-based programs that are designed to enhance school safety, which programs may include research-based bullying prevention, cyberbullying prevention, and gang prevention programs, as well as intervention programs regarding bullying,” (U.S. Congress, 2012). This legislation increased appropriation of funds from $30 million in 2012 to $40 million for the following five years.

Researchers have flooded the field with evidence of the pervasiveness of this problem as well, some indicating that as much as 85% of the student body is affected (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Liepe-Levinson & Levinson, 2005; Nansel, et al., 2001; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). When surveyed, students echo concern for this problem indicating that severe violence is a secondary worry to bullying and sexual harassment (Galinsky & Salmond, 2002). Dinkes, Kemp, and Baum (2009) indicate that one-third of students surveyed had been bullied during a school year identifying that almost ten percent of those bullied were bullied every day.
In more recent years cyberbullying has confounded the problem. Bullying is school bullying not only when it occurs at school, but also when the event happens outside of school and affects the school experience. Bullying via the internet, instant messaging, and texting – cyberbullying – has this effect (Smith, et al., 2008). Cyberbullying has been gaining increased attention, but due to varying definitions, research results are inconsistent and average in the range of 50% of the student population impacted. This percentage has an increasing trajectory and continues to grow with the increasing reliance on technology for communication (Diamanduros, Downs, & Jenkins, 2008; Kowalski & Limber, 2007). It is clear that it is widespread, to a higher degree than one might imagine (Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson, 2012; Li, 2006). The researchers that have studied it in recent years have found similarities between those involved in traditional bullying and cyberbullying whether as a victim, a bully, or bully-victim, often citing that the same individuals participate in both forms (Kowalski, Morgan, & Limber, 2012; Monks, Robinson, & Worlidge, 2012; Skrzpiec, Slee, Murray-Harvey, & Pereira, 2011). Essentially, cyberbullying has merely added to the ways bullying can and does occur with today’s youth.

**Statement of Problem**

The government has invested over six billion dollars in creating safer schools, yet little evidence exists that these monies were well-spent (Sherman, 2000). Research shows the problem of bullying continues to vex our schools (Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum, 2009; Liepe-Levinson & Levinson, 2005; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).

This raises questions regarding currently utilized solutions. Because the topic has been around for almost as long as schools have been in existence, interventions have been implemented to combat this behavioral challenge. Several programs have emerged over the
recent decades in schools throughout the world. Yet, comprehensive meta-analyses of prevention and intervention programs show that few improvements have resulted from such efforts (Ferguson, San Miguel, Kilburn, & Sanchez, 2007; Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004). Although program researchers insist that their programs are successful, meta-analysis of these results show minimal improvement, and the improvement that does occur is short-term.

There is a wealth of literature that examines this phenomenon in an attempt to guide prevention and intervention. Currently, the research on prevention and intervention with bullying has focused on the external environment, with individual intervention focusing on fundamental social skill instruction. Programs address the importance of relationships, firm limits, and consistent consequences that are intended to develop positive school climates, where the hope is that students feel safe. When individual intervention is espoused, the focus trends toward teaching such social skills as assertiveness for victims, and anger management and empathy development for those who bully.

The intervention and prevention efforts with cyberbullying approach the problem in such similar external ways as teaching awareness, internet safety, and increasing security on computer use (Ang, Tan, & Talib Mansor, 2010; Parris, Varjas, Meyers, & Cutts, 2012). In addition, as with traditional bullying intervention approaches, recommendations emphasize social skill teaching including anger management and coping (Patchin & Hinduja, 2011; Tenenbaum, Varjas, Meyers, & Parris, 2011).

Even with the widespread use of programs that teach reporting incidents to adults and teaching skills of empathy and assertiveness, the most common strategies that youth still use against bullying have been fighting back (63%), ignoring the bullying (52%), telling an adult at
home (44%), and reporting the abuse to a peer (42%). According to reporting individuals, the most successful of these strategies have been counter-aggression (75%), making a safety plan (74%), and telling a peer (71%) or an adult at home (71%) (Black, Weinles, & Washington, 2010). These findings are disturbing, and most would agree that counter-aggression does not reduce hostile environments where bullying thrives.

**Purpose of Study**

In review of the literature, solutions for reducing the incidence of bullying have focused primarily on external supports. While it is not the intent of this researcher to minimize the importance of the provision of external supports, it is necessary to acknowledge that one would be remiss if notice is not given to developing the internal capacities of individuals as well (Payton, et al., 2008; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009).

Because, while many programs offer school wide approaches to responding to bullying, and stating explicit rules to prevent bullying, in a meta-analytical review of successful programs, the most effective intervention efforts focused on the individuals, and in particular, individuals who had the greatest difficulty with social challenges (Ferguson, San Miguel, Kilburn, & Sanchez, 2007; Joliffe & Farrington, 2006). This leads this researcher to wonder why, then, have recent attempts to study and address the problem emphasized a focus primarily on these external environmental supports and interventions? The purpose of this study is to identify important attitudinal traits (character strengths) youth possess who avoid becoming a victim or perpetrator of bullying, and identify those traits weakest in both the victims and perpetrators of bullying. The implications of this hypothesized association may inform prevention and intervention practices and lead to more effective efforts to address the issue.
Research Questions and Hypotheses

The following questions and hypotheses serve to guide this study:

1. Is being an averter related to any of the 24 character strengths?
2. Is being a bully related to any of the 24 character strengths?
3. Is being a victim related to any of the 24 character strengths?
4. Is being a bully-victim related to any of the 24 character strengths?
5. Is the student’s gender related to any of the 24 character strengths?
6. Is the student’s grade level related to any of the 24 character strengths?

The following hypotheses will guide this study:

1. Being an averter is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.
2. Being a bully is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.
3. Being a victim is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.
4. Being a bully-victim is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.
5. The student’s gender is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.
6. The student’s grade level is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.

Chapter three outlines a more detailed description of the methodological processes utilized to answer these questions.

The Conceptual Framework

Central to understanding bullying behavior is the need to understand the individual. How an individual makes sense of the challenges and stressors that are a natural part of the world we live in, influences the response that person has to the world. This personalized approach is crucial and requires understanding of strengths integrated into the knowledge we have with
regards to resilience (Ungar, 2011). Positive psychology and resilience theory form the framework for doing this.

There is a long history of emphasis in psychology, education, and other fields that look at human behavior, on disease or deficit (Doll & Swearer, 2006; Zins, Elias, & Maher, 2007). Very little has been done to understand the attitudes of individuals in bullying beyond evaluating such pathologies as depression and deviance (Juvonen, Graham, & Schuster, 2003). And little has been done to understand the qualities of individuals who avoid the bullying dynamic altogether.

Looking through the lens of positive psychology brings in the positive aspects that contribute to an individual’s perceived life experiences. Positive psychology is a study of what goes right in life, in the midst of adversity (Peterson, 2006, p.4). Similar to humanistic, or an existentialist focus on the thoughts and feelings of individuals, positive psychology adds an emphasis on the need to include the perspective of creating well-being as the goal of addressing the challenges and stressors that result in negative behavior (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In positive psychology, the focus is on developing positive emotions, positive traits, strengths, virtues, and abilities.

To do this, it is important to understand the individual’s core attitude, formed by strengths of character. Character strengths are the foundation of the study of positive psychology because positive experiences are enabled by character (Park & Peterson, 2009; Peterson, Ruch, Beerman, Park, & Seligman, 2007). There are 24 of these strengths categorized under six universally accepted virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The most current listing of these strengths categorizes them as follows: Strengths of wisdom and knowledge – creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, and perspective; strengths of courage – bravery, perseverance, honesty, and zest; strengths of humanity – love, kindness, and social intelligence;
strengths of justice – teamwork, fairness, and leadership; strengths of temperance – forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-regulation; and strengths of transcendence – appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality (Niemiec, 2014). Each will be described in detail in Chapter Two.

Grounded in resilience theory, the framework for delving deeper into character strengths that shape an individual’s attitude is understanding the critical strengths that relate to positive social adaptability and well-being and avoidance of the bullying dynamic. By examining the attitudes of early adolescent boys and girls, who experience a multitude of challenges and stressors at this critical stage of life, patterns may emerge representing particular characteristics that matter in creating well-being in the midst of such a tumultuous time in life. Studying individuals in this way relies on the belief that young people are driven to seek well-being, and to have their needs met (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & VanBockern, 2002; Dallape, 1996). No amount of external support such as showing care and concern and teaching skills will penetrate the attitude of an individual with poorly developed sense of well-being.

Goldstein and Brooks (2005) define resilience as “the capacity to deal effectively with stress and pressure, to cope with everyday challenges, to rebound from disappointment, mistakes, trauma, and adversity, to develop clear and realistic goals, to solve problems, to interact comfortably with others and to treat oneself and others with respect and dignity” (p.3). Searching for correlates to behavior, and specifically, bullying behavior, can clarify which character strengths provide what individuals need to develop in order to be resilient in environments where bullying exists.

Examining bullying behavior by looking at the attitudes of the individuals within the context of the school environment, a place where this phenomenon is known to occur, the
researcher will develop an understanding of important character strengths that enhance well-being in this environment. Because of the social nature of this environment, the stresses of early adolescence are highlighted. Peer acceptance, popularity, and status become a central focus at this age of development and require resilient capacities to avoid becoming involved in the bullying dynamic. This social stress is at the core of adolescent bullying.

Adler (1930) contends that to understand why an individual behaves in a particular way, it is important to understand the person’s goals and underlying thinking driving their actions. He further holds the view that understanding the individual must be done within the context of the interaction between the individual and his environment. This view has been espoused by several researchers studying behavior throughout this century and last (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garbarino, 2011; Garbarino & deLara, 2002; Newman, Horne, & Bartolomucci, 2000; Olweus, 1993; Swearer & Doll, 2001; Ungar, 2011). The peer social environment of school, extended by social media, creates an opportunity for understanding early adolescent individuals’ attitudes.

Central to this is understanding the important role of the individual’s interpretation of the outside world, something that has gained limited attention in efforts to address behavior. Rather, the fields that study and address behavior, place the problem behavior at the center, and therefore, focus on eliminating the problem through external control. This study, however, places the individual’s attitude at the core. In particular, this researcher seeks to understand an individual’s character strengths, within the context of a bullying environment such as school, at an age when these strengths are developing (Steen, Kachorek, & Peterson, 2003).

In conclusion, understanding bullying through the framework of resilience theory, positive psychology, and measurable strengths of character, guide the current study. These
theoretical perspectives combine to form a lens through which to understand early adolescent individuals in the school social environment and its relationship to bullying status.

**Study Design**

To answer the questions posed by this study, a quantitative approach was utilized. Quantitative research involves a scientific investigation of quantified measures, and emphasizes the development and testing of hypotheses and the creation of models that explain behavior (Proctor & Capaldi, 2006). In this study, the researcher utilized a descriptive design in order to provide the reader with a description of the relationships between the two variables – bullying status and character strengths – without providing conclusions about the cause of those relationships (Hoy, 2010, p.18). Done with a correlational analysis, the researcher will be able to contribute further understanding of the concept of bullying and individual attitudes by identification of the relationships between bully status and character strengths (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2000, p.360).

By utilizing two pre-established surveys, the researcher was able to benefit from field-tested instruments. According to Tweed and DeLongis (2009) one can increase validity of questionnaires utilizing ones which have previously been tested. Proctored by teaching staff with the guidance of the researcher, students were first administered the *Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument (APRI)* in hard copy, followed secondly by the *Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth)*, which was completed online. These surveys will be described in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Demographic information gathered included gender and grade, leaving anonymity of the respondent. This information was important in aggregating results that provided deeper analysis of gender and grade differences.
The APRI provides data to determine individuals who can be identified as bullies and victims by definition, as well as providing data reflecting degree of bullying as a behavior (Parada, Marsh, & Craven, 2005). This is important in that bullying behavior exists in degrees of use, and while bullying behavior may not define a person as a bully, that behavior still impacts the experience and perception of the victim.

In order to assess character strengths, the students were given survey questions that included situational questions to which they must provide a Likert-scaled response. Researchers studying youth resilience argue that by putting the voices of youth in the research, their unique way of interpreting situations, we can more deeply understand how they manage to successfully thrive in a complex, stressful world (Brendtro & DuToit, 2005; Luthar, 1999). Peterson & Seligman (2004) suggest that by surveying in this manner, one is able to determine the attitudinal approaches that are most likely to be shown by a particular individual.

The literature assessing the prevalence of bullying in schools utilizes self-assessment surveys to measure the bullying status of individuals, and have found them to be reliable, sensitive to all forms of aggression and victimization (Crick & Grotpeter, 1996; 1995), and to help to understand the private logic of those involved in the experience (Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002). This method has been shown to be a reliable indicator to identify bullies, victims, bully-victims, and those who are not involved in bullying, having a strong correlation with peer and teacher nomination (Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003).

**Participants**

Seventh and eighth grade students from five school districts located in the northwestern region of Michigan participated in this study. These schools ranged in size from 50 students to 220 students per grade level. Ages ranged from 12 years old to 15 years old. Demographics in
these schools were similar, comprised of predominately white, middle- to low-income individuals. Demographic variables are assumed to be uniform enough between participants and will not be aggregated in the current study.

Confidential student identification was utilized for a comparative analysis of bully status and character strengths by assigning participant code numbers to the respondents. Each individual was given a random code-numbered hard copy survey to identify themselves, and this number was utilized in place of name on the electronic survey.

**Definitions of Terms**

The following definitions provide a working knowledge of several concepts used in this study.

**Attitude** – a person’s habitual, reflexive way of thinking about, feeling toward, and reacting to something (Lazarus, 1982)

**Bullying** – The repeated, intentional, harmful, and aggressive behavior inflicted by a person or group with seemingly more power on a person or group with lesser power…where there is an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim (Nansel, et al, 2001)

**Character strengths** – “capacities for thinking, feeling, volition, and behaving”; the personality “ingredients for displaying virtue and human goodness” (Niemiec, 2014, p.25)

**Cyberbullying** – bullying that occurs “when someone repeatedly makes fun of another person online or repeatedly picks on another person through email or text messages or when someone posts something online about another person that they don’t like” (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009, p.48).
**Early Adolescent** – children in the age range of 11-15.

**Resilience** – The capacity to deal effectively with stress and pressure, to cope with everyday challenges, to rebound from disappointment, mistakes, trauma, and adversity, to develop clear and realistic goals, to solve problems, to interact comfortably with others and to treat oneself and others with dignity and respect (Goldstein & Brooks, 2005).

**Well-being (happiness)** – (1) positive emotions (emotional well-being) – contentment with the past, present and future; (2) engagement (psychological well-being) – using one’s strengths; and (3) meaning (social well-being) – serving a positive institution such as family or work (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005; Vella-Brodrick, Park, & Peterson, 2009).

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are the components of the study that bound it (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005).

For the purpose of this study the following are delimitations:

1. Students were from the middle school grades (7-8) in rural northwestern Michigan school districts with a median middle class and white demographic.

2. Data collection occurred during the winter of the 2014-2015 school year.

3. The survey questions were taken from previously utilized questionnaires. These questions may not be assumed to be all-inclusive in their scope.

4. Permission from parents and students was required limiting the inclusion of all candidates.

**Limitations**

This research study was restricted by several factors. The researcher cannot require participation; therefore participants were limited to willing individuals and/or their guardians.
Cultural interpretation and value of strengths is a limitation of the study. Additionally limiting is that the answers given by these respondents are assumed to be truthful. This can be potentially problematic because the participants were asked to report on socially desirable and undesirable aspects of selves (Peng, Nisbett, & Wong, 1997).

An additional limiting factor is that it was conducted during one point in time during one school year. Perceptions and perspectives may be represented differently on different days. If, for example, an individual is experiencing particular life stress, this may be reflected in the responses given.

**Significance of Study**

Bullying has been a prevalent area of concern for decades throughout countries of the world. Unfortunately, little of the existence of this phenomenon has changed in all that time. In fact it has grown in form and use with the addition of technological advances in social communication. The reasons for the importance of examining bullying from a different angle is supported by the cliché “if you do what you have always done, you’ll get what you’ve always gotten”.

Examples of currently recommended practices include the following. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, the most widely used, was designed to create school environments where positive adult relationships are encouraged, firm limits to unacceptable behavior are established, and the consequences for such behavior are addressed consistently and in non-coercive ways (Olweus, 1993; Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999). The No-Bullying Program (Britney & Title, 1996), Bully Busters (Newman, Horne, & Bartolomucci, 2000), the Second Step: Violence Prevention Program (Children, Committee for, 2003; Sprague, et al., 2001), and most recently, the Bully Prevention in Positive Behavior Supports curriculum (Ross, Horner, &
Stiller, 2009) are examples of similar programs. Each utilizes external control and tells individuals how to be without addressing the underlying view individuals have of self and others.

While the intent of such programs is to create positive, supportive, environments, in the frame of the current climate of education, they are often utilized to reinforce coercive practices of “zero tolerance”. Individuals identified as “bullies” are ridiculed by adults, punished in a very public fashion, and given extreme consequences in an effort to “set an example”. Essentially, the adults have modeled bullying behavior, rather than truly address the problem. All too often, fueled by community outcry, school environments become increasingly controlling in the name of “safety”. Compounding the make-up of these environments is the increased demand to “race to the top” with higher achievement scores, which has been linked to increased tactics of control that are over-dependent on external methods of reinforcement and punishment to motivate positive outcomes in individuals (Adelman & Taylor, 2005).

A recent report on school discipline practices reinforces the misguided use of punitive practices to create safer schools (The Council for State Governments Justice Center, 2014). This report indicates that while we use consequences such as suspension and expulsion in order to create safer environments in school, research shows that the higher a school is in rates of suspension and expulsion, the less safe students in those schools feel. This certainly raises questions regarding the effectiveness of clearly-defined, control-based, and consequential practices. Interestingly, bullying is the only domain that has seen little advocacy towards non-punitive methods of reacting. All too often, the reporting practices advocated in these programs lead to adults utilizing “get tough” practices towards those reported as bullying. It is little wonder that observers do not feel safer in these environments.
However, if we seek to create safe environments, and want youth in schools to utilize more positive responses to social stress, then we need to delve below surface efforts and assist students at the root. To determine what students need, we have to better understand the attitudinal characteristics of those who are involved in bullying situations, and of those who are not involved, and then teach those individuals to think in different ways. Because, while many programs offer school wide approaches to responding to bullying, and stating explicit rules to prevent bullying, in a meta-analytical review of successful programs, the most effective intervention efforts focused on individuals, and in particular, those who had the greatest difficulty with social challenges (Ferguson, San Miguel, Kilburn, & Sanchez, 2007; Joliffe & Farrington, 2006). Thus, the implications for intensifying efforts to address the emotional well-being, positive perceptual skills, and strengths of the individual seem to be warranted.

Yet, of the major programs identified by this researcher, these elements appear to be missing among the intervention strategies. Environment, however, is important, in that the interaction of the environment with the individual is necessary for understanding and addressing behavior (Adler, 1930; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Garbarino & deLara, 2002; Newman, Horne, & Bartolomucci, 2000; Olweus, 1993; Swearer & Doll, 2001; Ungar, 2011). A concern with the individual’s attitude does not preclude acknowledging the role played by the external environment in shaping the person. But for behavior change to occur, we need to understand what lies beneath the surface.

One way to do this is to identify the character strengths which shape the view an individual takes of the problems of the outside world, and the feelings associated with that view, to determine his sense of well-being in the world. The individual and the environment are part of
an integrated system whereby the individual is both affected by and affects external forces (Bitter, 2009).

Unfortunately, an overemphasis on external environment strategies has left a gap in developing the individual. An individual’s attitude cannot be changed by merely telling him the expectations, and directing him to change how he views the world. It is important that an individual learns to think in different ways (Lazarus, 1982; 1991). To do this, it is critical to understand how children make sense of the world around them, and then help positively frame their view to influence how they respond to stress in their environment (Adler, 1930; Brendtro, Brokenleg, & VanBockern, 2002; Grey, 1998). This researcher contends that one can build character strengths that positively influence an individual’s attitude, made up of perceptions and related emotions.

If particular character strengths are strongly represented in those that ward off the bullying experience, then one could conclude that to develop these strengths in all individuals would increase the likelihood that bullying behaviors and experiences would be reduced. This goes beyond surface strategies such as assertiveness training (for victims), and anger management (for bullies). Resilience research has long examined how individuals are able to thrive and have positive life outcomes despite being faced with difficult circumstances (Goldstein & Brooks, 2005; Masten, Cutili, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Peterson, 2006; Werner, 1995; Werner & Smith, 1992). Bullying can be considered an adverse circumstance that requires resilience, and the internal character strengths, that allow for the “ability to bounce back”.

Since attitude is made up of the unique ways of thinking and feeling an individual has, it is critical to first understand one’s private logic and emotions. Adler (1930) contends that to
understand why an individual behaves in a particular way, it is important to understand the person’s goals and underlying thinking driving their actions. Factoring in emotions, Goleman (1995) asserts that emotional intelligence, or rather, a person’s ability to know and manage emotions, recognize them in others, and respond effectively to other’s feelings, is more important than even their IQ (p.36).

This view of behavior has been strong in the field of psychology with the exception of behaviorism, the psychological perspective predominate in education. The literature on bullying has exemplified the need to challenge that perspective in this setting. Believing that most troubles with behavior are the result of mistaken, or negatively-focused attitudes, provides an opportunity to question the perceptions that individuals hold. Furthermore, the belief in the integrated nature of an individual’s attitude and the outside world indicates that attitudes are learned, and thus, can be unlearned (Grey, 1998).

Unfortunately, schools place higher importance on academic success and being obedient in lieu of understanding the whole child. For students who have positive supports and environments in their family and community ecologies, surviving this type of structure is realistic. For those who do not, this can create many challenges (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & VanBockern, 2002; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

**Summary**

Bullying in schools is arguably one of the most significant social challenges. This is particularly noted during the early adolescent years. Although this phenomenon has been studied for decades, minimal success in reducing its presence in school environments has occurred.

By examining this issue from a positive, strengths-based perspective, this researcher hopes to shed new light on factors that influence its existence. Understanding character strengths
of early adolescents will guide deeper knowledge on what it takes for bullying behavior to cease. Becoming informed on the character strengths of the early adolescents who are not involved in this experience is key to guiding future instruction.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This study examines the phenomenon of school bullying from a new perspective. By approaching it from a strengths-based, positive focus, this researcher will add a significant dimension to the study and practice of prevention and intervention in this area of need. The attitudes of individuals who bully, are victims of bullying, experience both roles (bully-victim), and neither role (non-bully status) was analyzed via an examination of character strengths.

The following literature review includes current research and trends in the study of bullying, and current approaches developed in response. The review begins with an overview of early adolescent development from a humanistic theoretical perspective in regard to social and emotional growth. This theoretical foundation guides the body of literature in positive psychology which is the critical framework through which this researcher approaches the study.

It is followed by a review of the literature on the phenomenon of bullying. Its prevalence, what is known about individuals in each role, and how it has been addressed up until the current time is presented. By examining the current trends and perspectives that represent the study of bullying, gaps in understanding will be revealed which support the necessity for this research.

To shape and support the hypothesized associations, the researcher presents the theoretical foundations of resilience and positive psychology, as well as the measurable aspect of character strengths associated with these perspectives. By understanding this approach to examining behavior, the reader is able to recognize compelling themes and linkages to the current study.
**Early Adolescent Development**

Early adolescence is defined in the present research as the time period from age 11 to 15. In review of the literature on the developmental aspect of early adolescent individuals, this researcher utilizes a humanistic theoretical perspective as the foundation for understanding this period of life. While developmental models from other theoretical perspectives emphasize development in stages, humanistic theorists place less emphasis on development happening in a specified chronological manner. However, there is alignment with development as growth along a trajectory (DeRobertis, 2006).

Humanistic theory emphasizes the examination of individuals from the inside. The person’s thoughts and feelings and their interpretation of the outside world are central to understanding human behavior and development (Maslow, 1968). In other words, an individual’s attitude shapes the life experience of that individual. The goal of development, therefore, is the development of that attitude with a central goal of seeking well-being and to have needs met.

These needs are best understood in terms of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1968). At the most basic level are the physiological needs for food and water. The need to feel safe in the world and with others follows. The next level of need is the need for belongingness and esteem for self and others. Finally, at the highest level, is the need for self-actualization, or accomplishing something that one believes in (Maslow, 1968). Later, a higher level was added to be more in alignment with Maslow’s beliefs as recorded in his personal papers. That is self-transcendence (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Koltko-Rivera (2006) suggests that self-transcendence “involves service to others, devotion to an ideal or a cause, and/or a desire to be united with what is perceived as transcendent or divine”.
Humanists, Bühler and Marschack (1968 in DeRobertis, 2006), created a developmental model that moves in phases, thus providing a framework that enhances our understanding of early adolescent development through this perspective. Called “basic tendencies of life”, there are four levels of development: need satisfaction, self-limiting adaptation, creative expansion, and upholding of internal order. Need satisfaction involves, like Maslow’s needs, the need for food and water, as well as the emotional needs for love and esteem. Self-limiting adaptation is the level where the needs to adjust, cope, fit in, and belong develop more deeply. In creative expansion there is the striving to be productive, self-expressive, and gain leadership. The final phase is upholding of internal order which is about the continuous development of organization and unity in one’s personality (Bühler & Marschack, 1968, in DeRobertis, 2006).

Although not examining adolescence in a chronological time model, the humanistic perspective does identify that time and experience lead individuals through these phases or in a direction of growth. Therefore, it is suggested that during early adolescence, although self-limiting adaptation is still an integral part of this time period, the predominant focus is on creative expansion. This is the first time when values, meaningful goals, and a sense of life’s purpose begin to crystallize. This development occurs within the individual’s personal relationships, supporting the interactive nature of the individual and those in the environment with whom one interacts. This means that although internal development is central to this perspective, it is not exclusive of the impact and influence of the environment on the creation of one’s attitude.

Therefore, in early adolescence one might expect increased level of stress as individuals seek to establish the beliefs and values that define them, and begin to determine goals and meaning for life. Part of determining this is for the youth to learn what strengths they possess, as well as limitations, and find ways to expand upon those abilities by overcoming difficulties.
The attitude one develops at this critical time in life can lead to a building up of positive relationships, hope and optimistic plans for the future. Or the converse can occur and relationships can be torn apart by attacking others and being hopeless for the future. It is small wonder then, that in early adolescence researchers have found the highest levels of bullying behaviors (Due, et al., 2005; Pelligrini & Long, 2002; Swearer & Cary, 2003).

**Bullying**

For this study, the researcher examines dynamics surrounding early adolescent individuals and the positive, or negative, relationships they experience. More specifically, this is the study of individuals at this age in relation to the inclusion and exclusion of bullying behaviors. Nansel et al. (2001) define bullying as “repeated, intentional, harmful, and aggressive behavior inflicted by a person or group with seemingly more power on a person or group with lesser power…where there is an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim.”

The difficulty with defining bullying in this manner is that these descriptors are subject to the interpretation of the individuals involved in the experience. Because of bullying’s very public nature, the term is used extensively to describe many interpersonal difficulties experienced by students in the school environment. Since the primary source of identifying bullies and victims is by self-assessment, this is important to acknowledge. Researchers in the last decade recognize this importance when studying this phenomenon (Espelage & Swearer, 2004).

The following review includes current findings in the literature regarding prevalence of both traditional and cyberbullying, the impact of bullying, risk factors of each bully status, and gender differences. This section concludes with the research surrounding prevention and intervention practices, and the effects of those practices on the bullying phenomenon.
Prevalence

For the purposes of this study, the literature on the prevalence of bullying encompasses research that has occurred in the past twenty years spanning the study across the world. The universality of this social issue supports its examination outside the social-cultural domain, and within the context of the individual and how the individual interacts within his or her environment.

One of the most cited studies on the prevalence of bullying comes from Nansel, et al. (2001) who, supported by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, surveyed a sampling of students from grades six through ten in all public, catholic, and other private schools across the country – almost 16,000 students – to determine level of involvement in the bullying experience. Almost eleven percent of them reported bullying others, while almost nine percent experienced bullying victimization. Another 30% expressed some type of involvement in the dynamic, many participating as bullies and victims (bully-victim).

The most recent reports on bullying indicate that approximately one in three adolescents has been a victim of bullying (Dinkes, Kemp, & Baum, 2009), and that number appears to be increasing as the manner in which individuals are involved in this experience has expanded (Kowalski, Morgan, & Limber, 2012).

Added to the participation in bullying as either a bully, victim, or bully-victim, early research from Craig and Pepler (1997) indicates that bullying situations affected peers as well with 85% of the students watching or joining in on bullying events.

In recent years, the study of bullying has intensified with efforts to examine cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is bullying that occurs “when someone repeatedly makes fun of another person online or repeatedly picks on another person through email or text messages or when someone posts something online about another person that they don’t like” (Hinduja &

One of the most recent studies that was inclusive of both forms was conducted by Kowalski et al. (2012). Of the over 4,500 students who were surveyed between the ages of 11 and 19, almost 38% were found to have been victims of traditional bullying, another 17% were victims of cyberbullying. Bullies in the traditional sense constituted almost 32% of reporting individuals, while 11% bullied via electronic methods. What was interesting about these findings was that of those that did cyberbully, 68% of them had also been bullies in the traditional manner. This was also true of victims of cyberbullying. 66% of them had experienced victimization in the traditional sense as well.

Monks et al. (2012), in a study of both forms of bullying, found that 49% of those surveyed reported being victims of traditional methods of bullying, while almost 21% were victims of cyberbullying. Students who bullied in a traditional manner constituted 18% of respondents with five percent reporting cyberbullying practices. They found that traditional bullies were seven times more likely to cyberbully than non-bullies, and that traditional victims were three times more likely to be cyber-victims.

Smith et al. (2008) found similar results. In their two studies of randomly selected individuals ages eleven to sixteen, the researchers found almost 32% and 58% respectively of the students had been bullied traditionally, while almost 16% and 17% respectively were cyberbullied. They, too, found a relationship between those who participated traditionally and cyber-wise.
Impact on the Individual

As with other studies on behavior, the literature on bullying has focused solely on the negative functioning of those involved in the bullying experience. Emphasis has been on the study of the psychological impact of each role, as well as potential negative effects on life functioning. For example, research suggests that those who bully are predictably more likely to be involved in delinquent behavior, acts of violence, and other anti-social behavior as adults (Bender & Lösel, 2011; Bollmer, Harris, & Milich, 2006; Farrington, Ttofi, & Lösel, 2011; Heydenberk, Heydenberk, & Tzenova, 2006; Sourander, et al., 2006).

Farrington, Ttofi, and Lösel (2011) conducted an extensive review of the literature in this area citing 28 studies that examined this relationship. The criteria were those studies that examined the correlation between bullying status and later anti-social behaviors, as well as controlling for family risk factors (e.g. broken home, low SES) and individual psychological risk factors (e.g. depression, anxiety). In these studies, the results were similar across several countries, and provided a confirmation that even when risk factors were controlled for, bullying behavior was a significant predictor of later anti-social behavior.

In one of these studies, 63 German boys, who were identified as either bullies or victims from a combination of self-reports, teacher ratings, observation and interview, were surveyed nine years later (Bender & Lösel, 2011). The researchers found that when measuring self-reported anti-social behaviors such as violence, aggression, substance use, and delinquency that these were highly correlated with earlier bullying behavior. This was highest with those who utilized physical bullying, but true as well for verbal forms. Even when controlling for risk factors, the findings held.

Victimization has had a negative psychological impact and affected life functioning as well. Victims have been found to have more negative perceptions of their school (Nansel, et al.,
These negative perceptions have been shown to result in behavior problems (Haynie, Nansel, & Eitel, 2001), trouble concentrating on schoolwork (Sharp & Smith, 1994), lower grades (DeVoe, Dean, Traube, & McKay, 2005), and an avoidance of many school activities (DeVoe, et al., 2005).

In looking at the psychological impact, researchers have found negative psychological consequences such as anxiety, depression, loneliness, unhappiness, and low self-esteem (Austin & Joseph, 1996; Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Marttunen, Rimpela, & Rantanen, 1999; Slee, 1995). And when the victimization is chronic, these psychological consequences can lead to suicide or even Columbine-esque behavior of counterattack with weapons or extreme violence (Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin, & Patton, 2001; Burgess, Garbarino, & Carson, 2006; Gladstone, Parker, & Mahli, 2006).

Despite Olweus’ popularly recognized claim to the contrary (Olweus, 1993), those who bully have been found to report lower levels of self-esteem and have lower self-concepts defined as self-evaluation about thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Parada, Marsh, Craven, & Papworth, 2005).

Bystanders, as well, are affected by these experiences. Increased use of substances, emotional distress stemming from fear of being the next target, as well as anxiety about peer relationships has been shown to be an effect for observers of bullying (Janson & Hazler, 2004; Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashhurst, 2009).

**Risk Factors**

Evidence also exists for risk factors, or predictors, of bullying and victim behaviors. For example, there is ample evidence for the likelihood of particular external traits increasing risk of victimization. These include a study of those who are overweight (Janssen, Craig, Boyce, &
Pickett, 2004), have learning disabilities (Mishna, 2003), or medical characteristics that affect appearance (Dawkins, 1996) as well as being physically weaker in the case of boys (Olweus, 1993). In addition, sexual minorities, or those perceived to be non-heterosexual (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012) are also identified as likely to be victims.

Those studies that examined internal risk factors of bullies have sought to understand the motivation of those that bully (Deci & Moller, 2005), personality styles, i.e. aggressive and dominant personality types (Olweus, 1993), and even character traits (Parada, Marsh, Craven, & Papworth, 2005).

Parada, Marsh, Craven, & Papworth (2005) found, not only that both bullies and victims had below average self-concepts both prior to and after the bullying experience, but that the higher the level of honesty and trustworthiness, the less likely they were to perform subsequent acts of bullying. Furthermore, victims who had higher reported levels of honesty and trustworthiness, were less likely to have further self-concept decline after the experience of being bullied.

Others who have looked at the characteristics of individuals who have bully status – whether victim, bully, or bully-victim – have found weaknesses in emotional well-being, and unhappiness (Callaghan & Joseph, 1995; Gladstone, Parker, & Mahli, 2006; O’Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagle, & Mickelson, 2001; Slee, 1995). Studies investigating bully-victims found them to be the weakest overall (Austin & Joseph, 1996; Haynie, Nansel, & Eitel, 2001).

There is, however, some research that recognizes individualized differences among bullies, victims, and bully-victims and attitude (Parada, Marsh, Craven, & Papworth, 2005). Attitude is a person’s habitual, reflexive way of thinking about, feeling toward, and reacting to
something (Lazarus, 1982). One example of the specific influence of perceptual attitude comes from researchers Barrett, Rapee, Dadds, & Ryan, (1996) who found that anxious youth were more likely to misinterpret the intentions of others, such as when a person pushes past them, it can be perceived as a threat resulting in an aggressive response. Over time, this type of individual can easily be defined as a bully, or more likely, bully-victim. Notable is the presence of compelling research that indicates that although those who bully are less anxious than the victims, they are more anxious than their non-bully status peers (Salmon, James, Cassidy, & Javaloyes, 2000).

In fact, those studies that examine psychological factors found many aspects of the bully and victim dynamic as being correlated. Some research suggests that bullying behavior and victimization are mutually reinforcing (Card & Hodges, 2008; Marsh, et al., 2011; Parada, 2006; Parada, Marsh, Craven, & Papworth, 2005). In other words, it is with increased likelihood that if one has bullied he or she has been a victim, and vice versa.

When Marsh et al. (2011) examined the psychological factors, they looked at the attitude of the bully towards the phenomenon of bullying as well. Not surprising, bullying behavior was positively related to attitudes supporting bullying, and unsupportive of victims. What is surprising, is that victims also had attitudes that supported bullying. When asked, victims, along with the bullies, reported that if presented with a bullying situation they would either engage, or passively reinforce the behavior in lieu of supporting the victim. This seems to shed light on an aspect of the interconnected relationship between bullying and victimization and future bully-victim status, as well as attitudinal dispositions. Some characteristics of both included using avoidance to cope, perceiving external locus of control, experiencing depression and lack of anger management, and low self-concepts (Marsh et al., 2011; Swearer & Cary, 2003).
Another area where this attitudinal difference clearly surfaces is with bullying that occurs with special populations of individuals. Overweight and obese children are more likely to be bullied than their normal-weight peers (Janssen, Craig, Boyce, and Pickett, 2004). Children with learning disabilities are more likely to be bullied (Mishna, 2003). Youth who suffer medical conditions that affect appearance or ability are more likely to be bullied (Dawkins, 1996). Sexual minority youths and those perceived to be sexual minorities are subjected to bullying and verbal bias at higher rates than their heterosexual peers (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). Each of these has a significant relationship in the literature with the attitudes of those that bully, as well as the attitudes (i.e. negative self-appraisals) of the victims.

Gender differences have been examined as well. Early research concluded that girls were more likely to engage in indirect forms, often cited as relational aggression, of bullying such as social exclusion or spreading rumors (Björkquist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukianen, 1992; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). More recently this view of relational aggression has been challenged (Archer, 2004; Marsh, et al., 2011; Ostrov & Godleski, 2010; Rivers, Chesney, & Coyne, 2011).

In the research by Marsh et al. (2011), boys were found to be associated with higher likelihood of bullying when it came to physical and even verbal forms in relation to girls. However, no gender differences were noted when it came to relational or social forms. Cyberbullying, which typically employs relational forms of aggression, might invoke the assumption that girls participated in this type of bullying more than boys. When aggregating out differences by gender, Kowalski, Morgan, & Limber (2012) found that boys, significantly more than girls, bullied in the traditional manner, but this was not reflected in cyberbullying. No significant differences were found. However, girls were found to be significantly more likely to be victims of cyberbullying than boys, while this was not the case with traditional victimization.
Prevention and Intervention Programs and Rates of Success

Whether because of the continued public focus on bullying, or as a result of government focus on the phenomenon, researchers have begun to examine more closely the success of prevention and intervention programs. Several meta-analytical reviews of these programs have provided findings supporting the lack of significant effect of these programs (Ferguson, San Miguel, Kilburn, & Sanchez, 2007; Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Smith, Schneider, Smith, & Ananiadou, 2004).

In review of 42 studies between 1995 and 2006, Ferguson et al. (2007) found unfortunate results for the impact of the prevention and intervention programs identified. Some studies showed as low as less than a percent of difference when examining low-risk youth and not much better for those who were high risk of being involved in the dynamic based on the above mentioned risk factors. Worse than this, Smith et al. (2004), found that in review of the 14 studies with post-intervention evaluation, there were actually negative results. Finally, Merrell et al. (2008) reviewed studies from 1980 through 2004 and found that only awareness of bullying as a measure showed significant improvement. Positive peer interaction, feeling safe at school, social skills, and bullies talked to or teacher responded, and sympathy for victims, showed no improvement. In fact, there was a negative correlation with feeling safe at school and interactions with peers, and an increase in bullying others as a result of the intervention programs.

Beyond the challenge of bullying occurring outside school walls, an additional challenge of cyberbullying is that school personnel are less aware and lack understanding of the nature of cyberbullying. In an interview of school administrators, counselors, teachers, and support staff, Cassidy et al. (2012) found that although staff members were very concerned about cyberbullying, they did not have policies or programs to address it. This may, in part, be due to
that fact that they were unfamiliar with the uses of technology and social media. Additionally, compared to what students reported with cyberbullying, the adults in that educational community had little knowledge of what was occurring with their students.

**Resilience Theory**

To frame the understanding of early adolescent growth in the social realm of school, where the stressful social experience of bullying challenges youth, this researcher turns next to the literature on resilience. Resilience theory provides the guiding principles as to what individuals need for healthy growth despite adversity in their lives. Resilience is defined as “the capacity of a child to deal effectively with stress and pressure, to cope with everyday challenges, to rebound from disappointment, mistakes, trauma, and adversity, to develop clear and realistic goals, to solve problems, to interact comfortably with others and to treat oneself and others with respect and dignity” (Goldstein & Brooks, 2005, p.3).

Resilience theory is founded on the view of the interactive nature of an individual and his environment (Flach, 2004; Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Ungar, 2011; Werner & Smith, 1992). Although the current research emphasizes internal capacities, it does not do so without acknowledgement of the importance of critical external aspects such as patterns of interaction with parents, spiritual affiliations, and cultural dynamics and expectations (McCubbin, McCubbin, Thompson, & Thompson, 1998; Ungar, 2005).

With regard to the individual, the resilience literature circles closely back to the idea of having needs met. Researchers have described that resilience results from children having met their needs for belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity despite people and circumstances that create stress (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & VanBockern, 2002; Benard, 2004). In other words, individuals are on a trajectory toward growth and well-being as identified from the
humanistic perspective of development, and the ability to continue growing positively, despite life stress, is largely dependent on attributes identified in resilience research.

The fact is that upwards of 85% of the student population in school, particularly at the middle school level, face the stress and pressure of the bullying experience (Craig & Pepler, 1997). But to varying degrees, even not at all, this experience has negative effects on adolescents in the process of development and growth in well-being.

Resilience is not only necessary when faced with significant adversity, it is also necessary in the process of growth and development which is marked with challenges. So even “normal” adolescent experiences around the striving to be independent, productive, and self-expressive, while managing to still fit in with peer groups, creates stress. In the broadest sense, stressful life circumstances can be defined as a state of physical and psychological arousal that signals some challenge or difficulty (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

While much of the study of resilience has focused on extreme adversity (Greenberg, 2006; Masten, 2014), some important similar findings have been found in responding to the stress of everyday life. In particular, Flach (2004) studied resilience in children during adolescence. He identified the importance of external factors in the environment, such as family relationships and community, and cultural factors that add or reduce stress for an individual at this formative period of their life. But he highlighted that while there are some changes that can be made to the external environment to reduce this stress, it is the ability of individuals to utilize internal strengths that reflect a positive focus, such as hope and creative problem solving, that is a key indicator for resilience in responding to life stressors and developing well-being (Flach, 2004).
One of the most recognized studies in understanding resilience was conducted by Werner and Smith, (1982). These researchers did a longitudinal study following high-risk children from Hawaii into adulthood. Although each individual had similar adverse experiences, 60 percent of them made positive life adjustment. They found that external resources of strong bonds with others and supportive environments, were critical to future well-being. As a result, much has been done in the field to increase these dynamics positively.

The literature that extended what is meant by supportive environments influenced modern approaches to bully prevention. This includes the necessity of structure with defined expectations. Adults who are accepting, empathetic, trustworthy, respectful, and positive are important in enhancing this type of environment (Ungar, 2011).

However, no amount of external support such as showing care and concern and teaching skills will penetrate the attitude of an individual. In fact, Werner & Smith (1982) also found the individuals studied also possessed particular character strengths such as positive dispositions, personal competence and self-determination. This started a movement to look at such internal states as cognitive ability and temperament, which, at the time, appeared to be unalterable.

Benard (1991) extended Werner’s findings to include all youth, not just those from high risk situations, advocating that every individual can potentially develop resiliency. The character qualities that he identified were persistence, hardiness, goal-directedness, achievement motivation, healthy success orientation, educational aspirations, a belief in the future, a sense of anticipation, a sense of purpose, and a sense of coherence.

Perhaps it is because earlier beliefs were held that these internal capacities were unalterable, that little was done in this area in regards to prevention and intervention. But what
we learned early on about stress is that internal factors are critical in the experience, and, therefore, it is crucial to develop them.

Lazarus (1999) contends that “it is the meaning constructed by a person about what is happening that is crucial to the arousal of stress reactions” (p.55). An individual’s attitude guides the unique private logic, or thoughts, he has toward the external stress of life. Therefore, to assist young individuals in facing the challenging stressors of life, we must understand internal character traits that influence the creation and development of resilience.

Wyman, et al. (1992) state that youth found to be “stress resilient” revealed feelings of self-efficacy to master challenges, positive future expectations, and empathy. These researchers interviewed ten to twelve year-olds exposed to major stress and found that beyond the external supports of positive caregiver relationships and consistent discipline practices, the existence of internal capacities produced resilient outcomes.

A summary of research findings over time indicates internal qualities, or rather character strengths, aspects of families, and qualities of the social environment as being integral in building resilience (Greenberg, 2006; Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Ungar 2011; Werner & Smith, 1982). In other words, the ability for an individual to meet needs is largely dependent on his or her attitude, paired with external supports.

Although resilience has been a topic of study for decades, with each subsequent wave of examination brings changing emphases. Initially, its study focused on behavioral functioning – the protective and risk factors in the individual and in the environment. Subsequently, the emphasis moved to promoting competence via a focus on external supports in the environment, assuming that the identified internal capacities were unchangeable. The most recent focus has been on examination from a genetic and biological perspective (Cichetti & Blender, 2006;
Greenberg, 2006; Masten & Obradović, 2006). As a result of pioneering work in the field of neuroscience, resilience has once again turned to the individual and his or her interaction with the environment and moved beyond temperamental qualities and cognitive abilities (Greenberg, 2006; Peterson, 2006).

Those recent researchers who focused study on the internal qualities found some important capacities, rather than coping skills, that are important to resilience. Attributes such as flexibility, empathy, love and caring, sense of humor, problem-solving skills, adaptable personality, self-regulation skills, easy temperament, positive self-perception, goal-directedness and a clear sense of identity, an optimistic outlook on life, hope and belief in the future, forgiveness, and a general positive presentation of self that appeals to others (Aspinwall, Richter, & Hoffman, 2001; Masten, Cutili, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Peterson, 2006; Rydell, Berlin, & Bohlin, 2003). In the neurological study of resilience this has included processes involved with executive functioning which refers to the conscious control of thought (Greenberg, 2006).

The research that examined emotions in resiliency looked at it from a temperament frame. A one year longitudinal study of five to six year old children examined emotionality and emotional regulation of these 151 individuals (Rydell, Berlin, & Bolin, 2003). Assessing emotionality – how easily and intensely emotions are aroused – and emotional regulation – management of that arousal – by parent questionnaires at the beginning of the study, researchers garnered baseline data on individual functioning. A year later, teacher and parent rating provided data on the impact of these levels in the school environment on behavior. They found that those high in both negative (anger) and positive (exuberance) emotionality had greater difficulty with prosocial competence and problem behavior. Furthermore, whether negative or positive
temperament, low levels of regulation resulted in problem behavior. However, positive temperament was associated with prosocial competence.

In Greenberg’s study (2006) on the potential for impacting executive functioning, he conducted a study of 318 second and third grade students. He trained teachers to implement a program that taught students ways to develop emotional regulation and problem-solving processes. Results showed statistically significant improvement in this area of functioning.

In a summary of resilience research emphasizing positive attributes, Peterson (2006) also noted that a high level of personal discipline and a sense of responsibility were more conducive to resilience. In addition, the stronger the creative capacity one had, the greater the resilience. Characteristics such as open-mindedness, receptivity to new ideas, and a willingness to dream leads to greater problem-solving, a key component of resilient individuals. Having a wide range of interests and not only recognition of, but development of, one’s gifts and talents supports the capacity to be resilient.

He also provides evidence for the importance of faith, or a philosophical and spiritual framework within which to interpret and understand with meaning of experiences. The universal needs for independence and generosity when developed well, and without being reluctant to rely on others, is also significant. And finally, resilient individuals look at life with hope and optimism. These characteristics will be explored further in the review of the literature in positive psychology. From a humanistic developmental perspective, early adolescence is a critical time when many of these characteristics begin to develop.

**Positive Psychology**

To enhance the emphasis in resilience theory on examining the characteristics that support the ability to ‘bounce back’ despite adversity, this researcher views this investigation
through the lens of positive psychology. Positive psychology is the scientific study of what goes right in life despite adversity (Peterson, 2006, p.4). In other words, it provides equal emphasis on strengths as well as weaknesses, building the best of ourselves as well as mending the worst, and as focused on contentment of life for healthy people as much as healing the wounded. The literature in this field of study examines positive emotions, positive traits, strengths and virtues, and abilities. It also looks at how positive organizations can influence these characteristics and facilitate their development (Park & Peterson, 2003).

This review starts at the beginning of this developing field of study. Its formal existence has only spanned the last fifteen years, but has already made a significant contribution to the study of human behavior. Martin Seligman is the name most associated with this movement because it was he who introduced it while president of the American Psychological Association. Researchers in this field study positive experiences, positive personality, and the positive social contexts in which they thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

While psychology’s mission had always been about curing mental illness, improving lives, and developing genius, the latter two were deemphasized after World War II for primarily economic reasons – grant monies supported the study of the first (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). It was at the turn of the century when the focus on prevention turned psychology back to the inclusion of the others. The following literature review encompasses much of what this study has found.

The prevailing assumption has previously been that having good mental health meant there was an absence of mental illness, thus the goal of curing mental illness would increase the mental health of society. Examples of this perspective are studies addressing the needs of young
individuals who show signs of depression (Brunswasser & Gillham, 2008; Gillham, Hamilton, Freres, Patton, & Gallop, 2006).

So why is the study of the positive side of psychology important? Keyes (2005) research provides further insight. Keyes conducted a survey of over 3,000 individuals. Participants completed a telephone interview followed by two written questionnaires that measured mental illness and mental health. The mental health measure includes aspects of emotional, psychological, and social well-being, heretofore referred to as subjective well-being. Results indicated that only one in five adults who did not have mental illness were completely mentally healthy. In fact, those who scored lowest on the mental health indices had worse life functioning than those identified as mentally ill. These results support the value of studying and addressing the positive.

*Happiness and Subjective Well-Being*

Subjective well-being is about an individual’s attitude toward their perceived quality of life, or in more general terms, happiness. Happiness has been studied extensively, even prior to the positive psychology movement. The value of happiness has a long history with recent study suggesting that individuals who are happy live longer, have more success, and have better relationships (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005)

In an effort to make its study more quantifiable, researchers in this movement have broken the concept into distinct dimensions. Happiness, or well-being, consists of (1) positive emotions (emotional well-being) – contentment with the past, present and future; (2) engagement (psychological well-being) – using one’s strengths; and (3) meaning (social well-being) – serving a positive institution such as family or work (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005; Vella-Brodrick, Park, & Peterson, 2009).
Known advocate in the domain of emotion, Goleman (1995) contends that individuals with strong emotional well-being – know and control feelings, and interpret and respond positively to other people’s feelings - are better able to manage stress and have positive perceptions of life circumstances (p.36). It includes a balance of the positive emotions (e.g. joy, pride) and the negative emotions (e.g. anger, sadness), and a sense of satisfaction with life (Bryant & Veroff, 1982; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Shmotkin, 1998).

When an imbalance leaning toward higher levels of negative emotions exists, evidence links them to poor behavioral responses to stressful life circumstances (Bosworth, Espelage, & Simon, 1999). In addition, individuals who experience high levels of negative emotions, such as those experienced by depressed individuals, tend to view the world, the future, and themselves in negative ways (Kovacs & Beck, 1977).

Conversely, those who have studied positive emotions have found that individuals who experience these emotions are more likely to be flexible in their perceptions (Ashby, Isen, & Turken, 1999). In addition, they are more likely to be positive toward and help others (Fredrickson, 2002; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987) and solve problems (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987). In fact, recent research that looked specifically at adolescents found that positive effect was even more important than external relationships or events that occurred in the environment (Gentzler, Ramsey, Yuen Yi, Palmer, & Morey, 2014).

Fredrickson’s (2002; & Joiner, 2002) research studied the emotions’ influence on thinking and perception, finding that positive emotions increase awareness of the many things occurring in the outside world, effectively enhancing problem solving skills that are important to resilience. In other words, when experiencing a positive emotion, such as joy, an individual is more amenable to new ideas and thoughts. The opposite occurs when feeling a negative emotion
such as sadness, where the individual has little faith in themselves, the world, and their future (Kovacs & Beck, 1977).

One of the more recent studies on positive emotion supports the notion that those with positive emotions viewed others’ nonverbal communication in a more positive way and thus had greater life satisfaction (Sanchez & Sanchez, 2014). Sanchez and Sanchez sampled 83 undergraduate students and assessed positive and negative mood states and life satisfaction. Positive mood was positively connected with life satisfaction. Furthermore, participants with positive moods and high life satisfaction fixated on happy faces, while the converse was true of those with negative moods.

The second aspect of happiness studied is engagement. One researcher that studied engagement found that of the approximately 400 undergraduate students assessed on measures of subjective well-being, those identified as being high in this reported low procrastination, high self-control, high goal orientation, and high grades (Howell, 2009). Garcia and Moradi (2012) also found that self-directed adolescents had higher levels of subjective well-being.

The final facet of the study of happiness is a life of meaning (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005; Steger, 2009). Emmons and McCullough (2003, p. 108) states that life meaning occurs in achievement, relationships, spirituality, and self-transcendence. According to Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky (2013), happiness from having meaning is linked more closely to one’s cultural identity. It is about making a difference with others. These researchers surveyed 397 individuals online at three different points in time assessing happiness and meaning to discern nuance differences. One nuance is that meaningfulness was associated with doing positive things for others.
Some research has been done with adolescent happiness and behavior. Suldo and Huebner (2006) found that those who had high measured level of happiness displayed less emotional and behavioral problems. In their study of nearly 700 middle and high school students, life satisfaction, self-efficacy, social support, and personality were measured. Important findings include not only less emotional and behavior problems, but better interpersonal and intrapersonal functioning. More specifically, individuals who felt supported by classmates and teachers (even more than close friends) had higher life satisfaction. Moreover, the individual’s perception of social competence as well as perceived ability to cope with negative emotions was positively related to life satisfaction.

Researchers have found that the creation of happiness can be taught. One study that exemplifies this was conducted by Seligman, Steen, Park, and Peterson, (2005). Via online recruitment, they assessed 411 individuals on a measure of happiness to garner baseline data. This was then followed with participants completing writing exercises for a week consisting of a gratitude letter, three good things a day, identification of and how one uses a signature strength each day, and the individual at their best. Post assessment results indicated that using signature strengths in a new way and writing three good things led to increased happiness and decreased depression for six months. Writing a gratitude letter also caused a significant change lasting one month.

**Character Strengths**

Character strengths are the foundation of the study of positive psychology because positive experiences are enabled by character (Park & Peterson, 2009; Peterson, Ruch, Beermann, Park, & Seligman, 2007). There are 24 of these strengths categorized under six universally accepted virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006). As
defined by Peterson and Seligman (2004), virtues are “the core characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.” (p.13). Furthermore, character strengths are “the psychological ingredients – processes or mechanisms – that define the virtues.” (p.13).

The most current listing of these strengths categorize them as follows: Strengths of wisdom and knowledge – creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning, and perspective; strengths of courage – bravery, perseverance, honesty, and zest; strengths of humanity – love, kindness, and social intelligence; strengths of justice – teamwork, fairness, and leadership; strengths of temperance – forgiveness, humility, prudence, and self-regulation; and strengths of transcendence – appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor, and spirituality (Niemiec, 2014).

With adolescents, researchers have linked these strengths to achievement (Lounsbury, Fisher, Levy, & Welsh, 2009; Shoshani & Slone, 2013; Weber & Ruch, 2012), aggression, anxiety, and depression (Huta & Hawley, 2010; Park & Peterson, 2008), and school adjustment (Shoshani & Ilanit Aviv, 2012).

One study that looked at adolescents’ character strengths in relation to adjustment in middle school and subjective well-being, found that strengths of wisdom and knowledge, along with strengths of temperance, were related to achievement; strengths of humanity and transcendence were strongly connected to social functioning; and strengths of temperance and transcendence were predictive of subjective well-being (Shoshani & Slone, 2013). This last finding reinforces earlier findings about the importance of strengths of temperance and transcendence in happiness, specifically, love, hope, and gratitude (Lay & Littman-Ovadia, 2011; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004).
Several other studies have linked the individual’s strengths to successful life functioning (Linley, Nielson, Gillett, & Biswas-Diener, 2010; Mongrain & Anselmo-Matthews, 2012; Park, & Peterson, 2008). Linley et al. (2010) studied 240 college students in England in regards to attainment of goals. After participants completed measures of character strengths, satisfaction with life, affect, and psychological needs scales, researchers asked participants to identify short-term goals and their use of signature strengths, those “displayed most naturally across multiple settings and infuse us with energy” (Niemiec, 2014, p.26-27). They found that signature strength use showed a significant relationship to goal progress, which led to greater need satisfaction and well-being. Diener, (2000) determined that temperament and personality influence subjective well-being as well, and identified that an individual’s values and goals are closely linked to how experiences are viewed.

*Strengths of Transcendence*

These strengths relate to connecting with the universe as well as the search for meaning in life. They include hope and optimism, gratitude, humor, appreciation of beauty, and spirituality.

Hope, presented as synonymous with optimism (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), has been studied extensively and relies on the belief in a positive outlook on the future, and setting a path to reach the best life. One early example of research on this strength found that when responding to stressful life circumstances, optimists utilize a problem-solving approach (Scheirer, Weintraub, & Carver, 1986). They see their lives filled with challenges and opportunities, whereas pessimists see these same challenges as frustrating hassles (Dykema, Bergbower, & Peterson, 1995).
In a more recent longitudinal study of middle and high school students, Valle, Huebner, and Suldo (2006) shared findings supporting that hope has a significant relationship to adolescent well-being. Furthermore, this relationship exists when individuals are faced with stressful or traumatic life events (Valle, Huebner, & Suldo, 2006; Park & Peterson, 2009). Hope has also been shown to be predictive of achievement in middle school students (Park & Peterson, 2009). Finally, researchers have also found those low in hope to have more challenges with social adjustment, and negative thoughts and feelings (Gillman, Dooley, & Florell, 2006).

Even the future-positive experience of feeling lucky is an example of how an optimistic perspective influences a person’s experiences. Wiseman, (2003) found that individuals who felt lucky actually have more luck than those that feel unlucky. This is, at least in part, due to the fact that individuals with this optimistic view notice and act on lucky opportunities more often than those without this view.

Gratitude is about being thankful for all life offers, and expressing that appreciation. Researchers on the strength of gratitude found it to be strongly associated with psychological and overall subjective well-being (Froh, Sefick, & Emmons, 2008; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Watkins, Woodward, Stone, & Kolts, 2003). Counting your blessings on a regular basis makes you happier and more content with life (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & SchKade, 2005; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). An important extension of this is that gratitude has been found to motivate individuals to trust others, especially those they don’t have a strong connection to, and to show prosocial behavior (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). They are more supportive, helpful, empathic and forgiving individuals (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).
At first, one might have difficulty seeing humor as defining the virtue of transcendence. However, as with the other strengths of this virtue, humor extends a person outside of themselves towards a positive outcome, whether for themselves (seeing the bright side) or for others (making them smile). Seeing the funny side of one’s problems can elevate feelings of well-being when faced with stressful life circumstances (Martin, Kuiper, Olinger, & Dance, 1993).

Appreciation of Beauty reflects simply noticing the beauty in nature, people, and situations. This strength has been linked to better management of life stress (Kuo, 2001), as well as stronger emotional well-being (Cohen, Gruber, & Keltner, 2010). Cohen et al., (2010) also found that females have been noted to measure higher in this character strength than males.

The final transcendental character strength is spirituality, holding to a belief in a higher meaning to the universe and life. One of the key findings in the extensive literature on the subject is the positive correlation between spirituality in children and adolescents and a higher level of emotional self-regulation (Donahue & Benson, 1995; Stevenson, 1997).

A more recent study by Holder, Coleman, & Wallace, (2010) found spirituality to be predictive of happiness. Their study of nearly eight hundred children between the age of eight and ten, found that spiritual beliefs, rather than religious practices, were strongly correlated with happiness and sense of well-being.

*Strengths of Temperance*

These are strengths that represent self-control or restraint, protecting against excess. Strengths tied to temperance include self-regulation, prudence, forgiveness, and humility.

Self-regulation is about discipline of emotions and behavior. The literature on this concept is extensive as has been referred to as emotional regulation, self-regulation, and self-control. This strength has been positively correlated with a number of examples of successful life
functioning. Not only has it been positively associated with the ability to manage stress and react to traumatic experiences (Park & Peterson, 2006a; 2009), it has also been linked to school success (Weber & Ruch, 2012). And self-regulation, if developed in youth, has been shown to minimize social problems such as substance abuse, aggression, dropping out, and other behavioral problems (Greenberg et al., 2003; Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004).

A longitudinal study by Gillham, et al., (2011), examined the character strengths of approximately 150 9th grade students through two years. They found that those with strengths in temperance, including self-regulation, had low levels of depressive symptoms by the end of the second year.

To be prudent means to carefully consider choices and decisions. Researchers examining the impact of specific character strengths found prudence to be positively correlated with positive classroom behavior (Weber & Ruch, 2012), improved academic performance (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011), and overall school success (Lounsbury, Fisher, Levy, & Welsh, 2009). In Weber and Ruch’s (2012) study of 247 Swiss students aged 11-12, character strengths were also measured by the VIA-Inventory of Strengths for Youth, as well as teacher ratings. These students were also found among those rated by teachers as the “popular” students (Park & Peterson, 2009).

The strength of forgiveness helps prevent vengeful behavior and allows one to accept the shortcomings of others. According to McCullough, (2000), being strong in forgiveness leads to prosocial behavior toward others where one neither avoids nor plans to seek revenge. In fact, an individual high in forgiveness, wishes to act positively toward the one whom he or she forgives. Other research concludes that empathizing with the offender, having a commitment to forgive, as
well as having emotional regulation skills and strategies, is associated with forgiveness outcomes (Wade, Worthington, & Meyer, 2005).

This category of strengths concludes with humility which reflects one’s ability to allow accomplishments to speak for themselves. To date, few significant correlations between this strength and its impact on life satisfaction or social functioning have been found. One study did identify a link between humility and helpfulness with those high in this strength likely to be more helpful towards others (LaBouff, Rowatt, Johnson, Tsang, & Willerton, 2012).

*Strengths of Justice*

The civil strengths represented here bring about a positive social group experience in relation to community. These are fairness, teamwork, and leadership.

The concept of treating people equally and in accordance with what he or she needs encompasses fairness. To date, no significant correlations between this strength and its impact on life satisfaction or social functioning have been found.

As this compound word’s parts suggest, teamwork is about working well in a team and committing to that group. In the study by Gillham et al. (2011), this character strength was predictive of a lesser number of depressive symptoms by the adolescent youth.

Leadership in this categorization of strengths refers to the ability to organize people around a common goal. This is another of the strengths of justice that correlates with fewer challenges with depression and anxiousness (Park & Peterson, 2008).

*Strengths of Humanity*

The virtue of humanity stems from the nurturing and supporting interpersonal strengths. Included in this list is kindness, love, and social intelligence.
The caring for and helping of others defines kindness. In a study by Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui, & Fredrickson, (2006), the researchers examined the strength of kindness. In this study of almost 200 Japanese college students, they found that when participants focused on acts of kindness they had higher subjective well-being.

Love as a strength of character is about valuing the closeness to others. In a recent study with regard to the strength of love, Hutcherson, Seppala, & Gross, 2008, discovered that by cultivating this strength toward oneself and towards others increased social connectedness and positivity towards others. In another study by Durlak, et al., (2011), love, as well as social intelligence, influenced academic performance.

This strength of social intelligence refers to the ability to adjust to varying social situations and recognize the feelings of others. In addition to the above-mentioned association, it has also been linked to fewer negative effects from trauma and stress (Park & Peterson, 2006a, 2009).

*Strengths of Courage*

Strengths of courage are emotional strengths that require will to meet goals in the face of both internal and external challenges. Hannah, Sweeney, & Lester (2007), propose that strengths of courage play an important role in positive life experiences as well. Seligman and Peterson (2004, p.199) defined courage as “the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, either external or internal.” Courage strengths exist on a continuum, based on the amount of fear experienced, what experience causes the courageous behavior, and how others respond (Hannah, Sweeney, & Lester, 2007). The character strengths categorized under this virtue are bravery, perseverance, honesty, and zest.
A study of courage with Holocaust survivors provides interesting conclusions. Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, (2007) interviewed 79 non-Jewish rescuers and 73 non-Jewish bystanders who had lived in Europe during World War II. Rescuers showed a significant difference on the combined measures of empathy, social responsibility, altruistic reasoning, and risk-taking. While empathy was displayed by both rescuers and bystanders for those who were persecuted, it was the risk-taking that distinguished the rescuers. In other words, courage led these individuals to act on the compassion that they felt.

Bravery is not only about physical valor, but also about acting on beliefs and convictions even when they are not the popularly held ones. Although little research on the positive effects of bravery on life satisfaction have been indicated, studies like the one on Holocaust survivors are beginning to recognize the interactive nature of the strengths.

To persevere is to stick to a path, even if obstacles exist, until the end. Research that examined this strength found it to be correlated with school success and positive classroom behavior (Weber & Ruch, 2012; Lounsbury, et al., 2009). It was also linked to lower aggression (Park & Peterson, 2008).

Honesty refers not only to being truthful, but also to taking responsibility for one’s actions and feelings. This, too, was predictive of fewer externalizing behaviors such as aggression (Park & Peterson, 2008).

The last strength in the category, zest, identifies a high level of enthusiasm and vitality put into life experiences. This vitality is predictive of lower levels of anxiety and depression in those who strongly possess this trait (Park & Peterson, 2008).

Strengths of Wisdom and Knowledge
As one might expect, the strengths of this virtue are in cognition and involve gaining and using knowledge. Creativity, curiosity, judgment, love of learning and perspective make up the strengths of this virtue.

Creativity refers to finding original ways of doing things and approaching life tasks. The strength of curiosity involves a desire to explore, discover, and understand things. Those who are curious tend to believe they control what happens and the decisions that are made. In other words, they have been found to be high in self-efficacy and self-determination (Hunter & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003).

Rather than the negative connotation judgment brings to mind, one must understand this strength as the ability to consider information from all aspects and make a sound and fair conclusion. Specific study of this character strength has not been apparent in the literature.

Love of learning is similar to curiosity, but expands it to involve the aspiration to master new skills and interests. This strength, not surprisingly, has been linked to successful grades and positive classroom behavior (Weber & Ruch, 2012; Lounsbury et al., 2009).

And finally, perspective is the ability to not only look at the world from various angles, but to convey these views to others. It has been found to safeguard against the effects of trauma and abuse (Park & Peterson, 2006a; 2009).

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the understanding and needs of those involved in the bullying experience. With an emphasis on the research that examined internal capacities, in relation to the environment, one has a clearer understanding of the negative aspects of both risk factors and negative consequences.
The researcher presented key research to support how focusing on the study of positive character strengths is crucial to guiding future efforts in addressing bullying. With resilience theory, the importance of positive influences on resiliency shifted understanding to what individuals’ internal characteristics and external supports resulted in the most positive outcomes. The literature is replete with examples in the positive psychology realm of how recognizing and developing strengths via teaching and establishing environments that support this development leads to increased well-being.

What has been provided here is prior research which informs the current study supporting the view that if one experiences and perceives strong well-being, then positive social behavior and experiences will ensue. The current research will strengthen the connection to the phenomenon of bullying in order to improve lasting outcomes with associated interventions.
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the researcher outlines the research design and methodology that are critical to answering the questions posed by this study. The researcher gathered data from over 1,000 students in the 7th and 8th grades of five school districts. This chapter discusses the methodology used to collect that data. First, the research hypotheses and questions will be reviewed. An explanation of the research design, participants, and description of the survey instruments follows. Finally, data collection and analysis procedures are explained in relation to the research questions.

The problem investigated by this study is the phenomenon of bullying and the existence of a gap in understanding of critical positive factors associated with its avoidance. This research increases understanding of positive internal characteristics that provides greater insight into what is needed to reduce the incidence of bullying. By examining the character strengths of those who are involved in bullying situations, and of those who are not involved, this study can help identify important internal capacities youth need to avoid experiences around bullying.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two provides the foundation for the following hypotheses:

1. Being an averter is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.
2. Being a bully is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.
3. Being a victim is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.
4. Being a bully-victim is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.
5. The student’s gender is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.
6. The student’s grade level is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.
**Research Design**

The research tradition that guides this study is a quantitative approach. Quantitative research includes a well-identified problem statement, clearly articulated research questions, a concise study design to answer the questions, a systematic approach to data collection, a plan for data analysis that utilizes the level of data collected, and an objective interpretation of findings followed by presentation and dissemination of findings (Grinnell & Unrav, 2005).

The research questions that guide this study are the following:

1. Is being an averter related to any of the 24 character strengths?
2. Is being a bully related to any of the 24 character strengths?
3. Is being a victim related to any of the 24 character strengths?
4. Is being a bully-victim related to any of the 24 character strengths?
5. Is the student’s gender related to any of the 24 character strengths?
6. Is the student’s grade level related to any of the 24 character strengths?

Social research is difficult due to the complex dynamic of the human condition. Survey design provides the opportunity to quantify trends with regards to attitudes or opinions of individuals (Creswell, 2014). The bullying status survey utilized in the current study was a self-report measure that determines prevalence of bullying, identifies students who are victims, students who bully, students who are bully-victims, and those who are averters of the bullying dynamic. In the bullying literature, surveys have been found to be highly convergent with peer and teacher nomination (Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003). A second survey measure was given in order to measure character strengths. Both surveys have been tested and standardized and will be described in detail below.
To answer the questions posed by this study, a descriptive correlational analysis was utilized. A correlational method allows the researcher to explore relationships between variables (Borg & Gall, 1989, p.576). The bullying measure must assess four different categories of bully status. This becomes more complex when they are examined in relation to an individual’s degree of each of 24 character strengths. This method permits the assessment of a large number of variables, and provides the degree to which each variable is related.

*The Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* recommends that in order to comprehensively describe the results, the use of statistically significant testing, confidence intervals, and effect size is critical (Creswell, 2014, p.165). Using a point-biserial correlation provides a measure of effect size - weak ($r = .10$), moderate ($r = .30$), or strong ($r = .50$) – in large samples that shows a truer statistically significant correlation. This statistic is used to determine the degree of relationship between a naturally occurring dichotomous nominal scale (e.g. gender, age) and an interval scale (e.g. behavior, character strength) (Howell, 2014).

**Participants**

After removing incomplete surveys, and those with procedural errors that prevented the linking of the two surveys, this study was able to use data from 685 students surveyed. The participants were early adolescent students in the 7th and 8th grades attending five school districts located in the northwestern region of Michigan. This convenience sample represented public local education agencies within the region where the researcher is employed. Of the 685 students, 49.4% were girls and 50.2% were boys. 50.1% of the students were in 7th grade and 49.9% were in 8th grade with ages ranging from 12 to 15 years old. Demographics in these schools were comprised of predominately white, middle- to low-income individuals.
Demographic variables were assumed to be uniform enough between participants and were not aggregated in the current study.

**Instrumentation and Materials**

In order to assess bullying status and character strengths, the students were given survey questions that included situational questions to which they provided a Likert-scaled response. Researchers studying youth resilience argue that by putting the voices of youth in the research, their unique way of interpreting situations, we can more deeply understand how they manage to successfully thrive in a complex, stressful world (Brentro & DuToit, 2005; Luthar, 1999). Peterson & Seligman (2004) suggest that by surveying in this manner, one is able to determine the attitudinal approaches that are most likely to be shown by a particular individual.

**Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument**

The Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument (APRI) is a 36-item measure with six subscales assessing the frequency of physical, verbal, and social bullying as both the perpetrator and victim (see Appendix A). Students self-report frequency of bullying behaviors they engaged in and bullying behaviors that have occurred to them on a 6-point Likert scale. (1=never to 6=every day). Sample items on the scale include ‘left them out of an activity on purpose’ (bully characteristic), ‘threatened to physically harm or hurt a student’ (bully characteristic), ‘I was teased by students saying things to me’ (victim characteristic), and ‘things were said about my looks I didn’t like’ (victim characteristic). This scale provides information on the degree of the behaviors. Scores averaging 3 (one or two times per month) or more met the criteria for the category. The intended target group for this assessment is youth ages 12-17 years old (Parada, 2000). This instrument is one of a select group of surveys in a compendium of assessment tools recommended by the Center for Disease Control (Hamburger, Basile, & Vivolo, 2011).
Reliability can be assessed by examining test-retest correlations if the questionnaire items under consideration are assessing a variable that should be stable across time. Reliability is assessed by administering the questionnaire and then using the data to calculate a measure of internal consistency (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2009). Usually a Cronbach’s alpha for each set of statements is intended to measure a single underlying factor. Using a higher number of statements for each variable tends to produce more accurate measurement, but also tends to cause participant fatigue. Ideally an alpha should be above .80 (Liebenberg, & Ungar, 2009, p.169).

The literature assessing the prevalence of bullying in schools utilizes self-assessment surveys to measure the bullying status of individuals, and have found them to be reliable, sensitive to all forms of aggression and victimization (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995;1996), and to help to understand the private logic of those involved in the experience (Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002). This method has been shown to be a reliable indicator to identify bullies, victims, bully-victims, and those who are not involved in bullying, having a strong correlation with peer and teacher nomination (Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003).

The APRI has an internal consistency of median $\alpha .88$ (Parada, Marsh, & Craven, 2005). This consistency was assessed for both boys (median $\alpha .89$) and girls (median $\alpha .85$), with excellent reliability.

Another reason that this measure was selected involves the work of the creator. Parada, as well as his colleagues, has conducted several studies of the individual in the context of bullying through the lens of the perceptions of both the target and perpetrator (Parada, 2006; Marsh et al., 2011). This shapes the type of questions that are asked and provides additional literature to enhance this study and the interpretation of the results of the survey instrument. This instrument
comprehensively delves into psychosocial factors such as locus of control, coping styles, anger management, depression, and self-concept. In addition, the measure has evidence of providing consistent results over time (Marsh et al., 2011).

Permission was granted for using this measure via email by Roberto Parada, developer (Appendix B).

*Values in Action (VIA) Inventory of Strengths – Youth Version*

In order for the researcher to quantifiably examine attitude, a set of character strengths was studied. The researcher examined the 24 character strengths that align with the research on resilience and positive psychology, and were developed in a measurable inventory of strengths for youth (Park & Peterson, 2006b; Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

The Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth) is a self-report assessment for 10-17 year olds that identifies strengths by posing statements to respondents about circumstances in which these strengths are most likely to be shown (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It takes approximately 15 minutes and consists of 96 items (see Appendix C). The youth is asked to rate each of the 96 items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (‘not like me at all’) to 5 (‘very much like me’). Sample items of the VIA-Youth include, ‘I expect good things to come my way (hope), ‘I review the positives and negatives of every option when I am making a decision’ (prudence), ‘My temper often gets the best of me’ (self-regulation), and ‘I treat everyone fairly even if I don’t like them’ (fairness). Once related items are averaged, the traits are given a number representative of the degree to which the individual has the strength. These are then presented in rank order.
The VIA-Youth survey has been shown to be reliable and have validity, and in addition, has been shown to have consistency over at least six months’ time (Park & Peterson, 2003; Park & Peterson, 2006b; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). With regard to reliability, all scales have internal consistency with Cronbach’s alphas greater than .70. Psychometric data for the short-form version (VIA New Youth Survey) has a mean reliability alpha coefficient that was almost exactly the same as the long form. The short form is a more efficient and equally valid alternative to the 198 question survey.

Validity measures show that self-nomination of strengths correlates (.50) with the matching scale scores for all 24 strengths (LaFollette, 2010; VanEeden, Wissing, Dreyer, Park, & Peterson, 2008).

Permission for use of this instrument was granted by the VIA Institute (Appendix D).

Data Collection and Analysis

For this study, ethical issues have been addressed consistent with the codes set forth by the National Research Act, and have been approved by Eastern Michigan University’s Human Subjects board (Appendix H). In accordance with these standards, the study received consent from the superintendents of each of the five districts (Appendix E). Prior to the start of the surveying, passive parental informed consent was obtained (Appendix F). At the time of the survey, participants were also given the option of not participating (Appendix G). At any time during the surveying, participants were allowed to withdraw.

In the winter of 2015, students were administered two surveys during one class period (approximately 45 minutes). In order to protect the confidentiality of participants in this study, students were randomly assigned a personal identification code number. This number was utilized for the purpose of linking surveys together for a comparative analysis. Students
completed the Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument (APRI) in a hardcopy format of the survey questionnaire. After that survey was finished, students completed the online Values in Action for Youth (VIA –Youth) short-form survey. Rather than put their name in the registration process, students used the participant code number listed on the APRI survey in order to link the surveys and maintain the anonymity of the participants.

A Spearman’s correlational analysis was conducted of the usable data. Spearman’s correlation coefficient is used on ranked data in order to down-weight extreme scores. This keeps each of the character strengths at the same general level of magnitude (Howell, 2014, p.197).

Summary

Utilizing a quantitative research approach, this investigator examined character strengths and the bullying status of 685 7th and 8th grade students in rural northwestern Michigan. The study assessed bullying status – bully, victim, bully-victim, or non-bully status – by using a reliable and valid measure recommended by the Center for Disease Control. This researcher further completed descriptive and correlational analyses in order to answer the questions posed by the study, and to determine relationships between bully status and character strengths. This chapter reviewed the tools and procedures that guided the investigation. The following chapter reviews the results of these analyses.
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to identify important attitudinal traits (character strengths) youth possess who avoid becoming a victim or perpetrator of bullying, and identified those traits weakest in both the victims and perpetrators of bullying. There were 685 student participants.

Table 1 displays the frequency counts for gender and grade level. Both males (50.2%) and females (49.4%) participated in this study. The students were in either seventh (50.1%) or eighth (49.9%) grade (Table 1).

Table 1
Frequency Counts for Gender and Grade (N = 685)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>50.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>341</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>Seventh</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>50.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eighth</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 displays the psychometric characteristics for the eight aggregated scale scores. Among the bullying scores, the most common type was verbal bullying ($M = 9.83$) while the least common was physical bullying ($M = 8.14$). Among the victimization scores, the most common type was verbal victimization ($M = 12.61$) while the least common was physical victimization ($M = 9.99$). The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients for the eight scales ranged in size from $\alpha = .68$ to $\alpha = .95$ with a median sized alpha being $\alpha = .88$. This suggested that all scales had adequate levels of internal reliability (Cresswell, 2014) (Table 2).
Table 2
*Psychometric Characteristics for Aggregated Scale Scores (N = 685)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Score</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>α</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Bullying</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.83</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Bullying</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.14</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>50.00</td>
<td>.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Bullying</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>2.30</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>27.00</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Bullying Score</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25.35</td>
<td>9.04</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>93.00</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Victim</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12.61</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Victim</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9.99</td>
<td>5.39</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Victim</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.36</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>36.00</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Victim Score</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>32.96</td>
<td>16.90</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>108.00</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 displays the frequency counts for the bully and victim variables. The majority of the participants were averters of conflict (67.0%). Ten percent met criteria for being bullies and 29.6% met criteria for being a victim (Table 3).

Table 3
*Frequency Counts for Bully and Victim Variables (N = 685)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grouping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Averter</td>
<td></td>
<td>459</td>
<td>67.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Bully</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Victim</td>
<td></td>
<td>157</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Bully and Victim</td>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

61
Table 3 cont.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>616</td>
<td>89.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>482</td>
<td>70.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 displays the 24 character strength scores sorted by the highest mean. The most prevalent strengths were for item 10, “Gratitude ($M = 4.19$)” and item 13, “Humor ($M = 4.18$).” The least prevalent strengths were for item 21, “Self-Regulation ($M = 3.16$)” and item 18, “Love of Learning ($M = 3.21$)” (Table 4).

Table 4
*Ratings of Character Strengths Sorted by Highest Mean ($N = 685$)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Gratitude</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Humor</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teamwork</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Creativity</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Zest</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Social Intelligence</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. Kindness</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Love</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Curiosity</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bravery</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Forgiveness</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Perseverance</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Hope</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Fairness</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Appreciation of Beauty</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Honesty</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Humility</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Perspective</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Leadership</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Judgment</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Prudence</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Spirituality</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Love of Learning</td>
<td>3.21</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Self-Regulation</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rating based on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 = not like me at all to 5 = most like me.
Addressing the Research Questions

Research Question One

Research question one asked, “Is being an averter related to any of the 24 character strengths?” The related research hypothesis one predicted that, “Being an averter is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.” To test this, Table 5 displays the Spearman correlations for the 24 character strengths with being an averter. Examination of the table found being an averter was related to 17 of the 24 signature character strengths. The strongest correlations were for being an averter with Hope ($r_s = .24, p < .001$) and Self-Regulation ($r_s = .27, p < .001$). This combination of findings provided support for hypothesis one (Table 5).

Table 5
Spearman Correlations for Character Strengths with Selected Variables ($N = 685$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Averter $^a$</th>
<th>Total Bullying Score</th>
<th>Bully $^a$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Appreciation of Beauty</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.17 ****</td>
<td>-.12 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bravery</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.26 ****</td>
<td>-.19 ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Love</td>
<td>.20 ****</td>
<td>-.20 ****</td>
<td>-.11 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Prudence</td>
<td>.18 ****</td>
<td>-.41 ****</td>
<td>-.22 ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teamwork</td>
<td>.11 ***</td>
<td>-.25 ****</td>
<td>-.15 ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Creativity</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.15 ****</td>
<td>-.10 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Curiosity</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.17 ****</td>
<td>-.11 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Fairness</td>
<td>.16 ****</td>
<td>-.39 ****</td>
<td>-.21 ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Forgiveness</td>
<td>.18 ****</td>
<td>-.31 ****</td>
<td>-.17 ****</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Averter&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Total Bullying Score</th>
<th>Bully&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. Gratitude</td>
<td>.20 ****</td>
<td>-.31 ****</td>
<td>-.16 ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Honesty</td>
<td>.14 ****</td>
<td>-.33 ****</td>
<td>-.18 ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Hope</td>
<td>.24 ****</td>
<td>-.20 ****</td>
<td>-.13 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Humor</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Perseverance</td>
<td>.20 ****</td>
<td>-.29 ****</td>
<td>-.19 ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Judgment</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-.29 ****</td>
<td>-.16 ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Kindness</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.27 ****</td>
<td>-.18 ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Leadership</td>
<td>.11 ***</td>
<td>-.08 *</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Love of Learning</td>
<td>.11 ***</td>
<td>-.24 ****</td>
<td>-.14 ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Humility</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-.24 ****</td>
<td>-.15 ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Perspective</td>
<td>.13 ****</td>
<td>-.16 ****</td>
<td>-.09 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Self-Regulation</td>
<td>.27 ****</td>
<td>-.36 ****</td>
<td>-.19 ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Social Intelligence</td>
<td>.21 ****</td>
<td>-.32 ****</td>
<td>-.20 ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Spirituality</td>
<td>.08 *</td>
<td>-.19 ****</td>
<td>-.11 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Zest</td>
<td>.18 ****</td>
<td>-.17 ****</td>
<td>-.10 **</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* <i>p < .05</i>.  ** <i>p < .01</i>.  *** <i>p < .005</i>.  **** <i>p < .001</i>.

<sup>a</sup> Coding: 0 = No  1 = Yes.

Research Question Two

Research question two asked, “Is being a bully related to any of the 24 character strengths?” The related research hypothesis two predicted that, “Being a bully is related to at
least one of the 24 character strengths.” To test this, Table 5 displays the Spearman correlations for the 24 character strengths with both the total bully score and whether the student met criteria for being a bully. For the resulting 48 correlations, 45 were significant. The strongest correlations were the negative correlations between the total bully score with Prudence ($r_s = -.41, p < .001$), Fairness ($r_s = -.39, p < .001$), and Self-Regulation ($r_s = -.36, p < .001$). This combination of findings provided support for hypothesis two (Table 5).

**Research Question Three**

Research question three asked, “Is being a victim related to any of the 24 character strengths?” The related research hypothesis three predicted that, “Being a victim is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.” To test this, Table 6 displays the Spearman correlations for the 24 character strengths with the total victim score and whether the student met criteria for being a victim. For the resulting 48 correlations, 33 were significant. The strongest negative correlations were for the total victim score with Self-Regulation ($r_s = -.28, p < .001$), Gratitude ($r_s = -.23, p < .001$), and Hope ($r_s = -.23, p < .001$). This combination of findings provided support for hypothesis three (Table 6).

**Research Question Four**

Research question four asked, “Is being a bully-victim related to any of the 24 character strengths?” The related research hypothesis four predicted that, “Being a bully-victim is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.” Given that only 46 students in the sample (6.7%) met criteria for being both a bully and a victim (Table 3), this hypothesis was not tested.

**Research Question Five**

Research question five asked, “Is the student’s gender related to any of the 24 character strengths?” The related research hypothesis five predicted, “The student’s gender is related to at
least one of the 24 character strengths.” To test this, Table 6 displays the Spearman correlations for the 24 character strengths with the student’s gender. Examination of the table found gender to be related to 8 of 24 correlations. The strongest correlations found girls to more commonly appreciate beauty ($r_s = .29, p < .001$) and show kindness ($r_s = .22, p < .001$). This combination of findings provided support for research hypothesis five (Table 6).

Research Question Six

Research question six, “Is the student’s grade level related to any of the 24 character strengths?” The related research hypothesis six predicted, “The student’s grade level is related to at least one of the 24 character strengths.” To test this, Table 6 displays the Spearman correlations for the 24 character strengths with the student’s grade level. Examination of the table found 8 of 24 correlations to be significant. Among the strongest correlations, seventh graders were more commonly brave ($r_s = -.13, p < .001$) and more commonly had a zest for life ($r_s = -.13, p < .001$). This combination of findings provided support for research hypothesis six (Table 6).

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Total Victim Score</th>
<th>Victim $^a$</th>
<th>Gender $^b$</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Appreciation of Beauty</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>**** .01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Bravery</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Love</td>
<td>-.19 **</td>
<td>-.17 ****</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 Continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Total Victim Score</th>
<th>Victim (^a)</th>
<th>Gender (^b)</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Prudence</td>
<td>-.21 ****</td>
<td>-.13 ****</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teamwork</td>
<td>-.12 ***</td>
<td>-.09 *</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Creativity</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.12 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Curiosity</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.10 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Fairness</td>
<td>-.16 ****</td>
<td>-.11 ***</td>
<td>.08 *</td>
<td>-.10 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Forgiveness</td>
<td>-.20 ****</td>
<td>-.16 ****</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Gratitude</td>
<td>-.23 ****</td>
<td>-.18 ****</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.11 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Honesty</td>
<td>-.17 ****</td>
<td>-.11 **</td>
<td>.11 **</td>
<td>-.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Hope</td>
<td>-.23 ****</td>
<td>-.21 ****</td>
<td>-.08 *</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Humor</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Perseverance</td>
<td>-.20 ****</td>
<td>-.17 ****</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>-.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Judgment</td>
<td>-.11 ****</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Kindness</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.22 ****</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Leadership</td>
<td>-.11 **</td>
<td>-.13 ***</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Love of Learning</td>
<td>-.10 *</td>
<td>-.09 *</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Humility</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>.11 **</td>
<td>.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Perspective</td>
<td>-.12 ****</td>
<td>-.12 ****</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Self-Regulation</td>
<td>-.28 ****</td>
<td>-.24 ****</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Social Intelligence</td>
<td>-.21 ****</td>
<td>-.19 ****</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>-.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Additional Findings

Table 7 displays the Spearman correlations for the eight scale scores with the student’s gender and grade level. For the resulting 16 correlations, nine were significant. The strongest correlations found boys to be more likely to engage in physical bullying ($r_s = -.23, p < .001$) while girls were more likely to be social victims ($r_s = .23, p < .001$). In addition, verbal bullying was more common among the eighth grade students ($r_s = .20, p < .001$) (Table 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Score</th>
<th>Gender $^a$</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Bullying</td>
<td>-.15  ****</td>
<td>.20  ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Bullying</td>
<td>-.23  ****</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Bullying</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.11  ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Bullying</td>
<td>-.16  ****</td>
<td>.17  ****</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ Coding: 0 = No  1 = Yes.

$^b$ Gender: 1 = Male  2 = Female

* $p < .05$.  ** $p < .01$.  *** $p < .005$.  **** $p < .001$.  

---

Table 6 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Total Victim Score</th>
<th>Victim $^a$</th>
<th>Gender $^b$</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23. Spirituality</td>
<td>-.08 *</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>-.10 *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Zest</td>
<td>-.17 ****</td>
<td>-.18 ****</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.13 ****</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^a$ Coding: 0 = No  1 = Yes.

$^b$ Gender: 1 = Male  2 = Female

* $p < .05$.  ** $p < .01$.  *** $p < .005$.  **** $p < .001$.  

---

Table 7

**Spearman Correlations for Scale Scores with Gender and Grade (N = 685)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale Score</th>
<th>Gender $^a$</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Bullying</td>
<td>-.15  ****</td>
<td>.20  ****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Bullying</td>
<td>-.23  ****</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Bullying</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.11  ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Bullying</td>
<td>-.16  ****</td>
<td>.17  ****</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 continued
Summary

In summary, this study used data collected from 685 student surveys to identify important attitudinal traits (character strengths) youth possess who avoid becoming a victim or perpetrator of bullying, and identified those traits weakest in both the victims and perpetrators of bullying. Research hypothesis one (strengths with being an averter) was supported (Table 5). Research hypothesis two (strengths with being a bully) was supported (Table 5). Research hypothesis three (strengths with being a victim) was supported (Table 6). Research hypothesis four (strengths with being a bully-victim) was not tested due to a small available sample (Table 3). Research hypothesis five (strengths with gender) was supported (Table 6). Research hypothesis six (strengths with grade level) was supported (Table 6). In addition, boys were more likely to be bullies and girls were more likely to be social victims (Table 7). In the final chapter, these findings will be compared to the literature, conclusions and implications will be drawn, and a series of recommendations will be suggested.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Introduction

Bullying in schools is an important social issue that impacts many students, families and communities. Because of this, the subject has been researched, programs have been implemented, monies have been spent, and it is very high on lists of public concern. Unfortunately, despite this recognition, intervention efforts have failed to produce significant or lasting results (Ferguson et al., 2007; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Merrell, Gueldner, Ross, & Isava, 2008; Sherman, 2000; Thompson & Cohen, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

The current study has focused the analysis of bullying on the character strengths of individuals who bully, are victims, and of those who do not perceive significant instances of these experience, the averters. By understanding the positive characteristics of averters, we may better understand the characteristics that are important to develop in children. By understanding weaknesses in character strengths of those who present under the status of bully or victim, we can also learn more about what to develop.

Finally, by knowing if particular character strengths prevent a bullying dynamic, educators can teach ways to develop these strengths. Programs are starting to be developed to do just that (Brunswasser & Gillham, 2008; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). If we can help individuals develop these strengths, then they will be able to utilize more positive strategies, and have more optimistic perspectives, and the bullying phenomenon will be positively impacted.

In the current study, 685 seventh and eighth grade students in five school districts in northern Michigan completed two surveys. One measure, the APRI, determined prevalence of bullying and victimization, and identified students who are classified as victims, bullies, bully-
victims, and averters. The other, the VIA-Youth (short form), provided a rank ordering of the 24 character strengths of each of these individuals.

This chapter discusses the key findings. The researcher provides a discussion regarding its agreement, or disagreement, with previous research, and its link to the theoretical framework provided in Chapter Two. Implications for practice are provided next. Finally, a series of recommendations for future research, policy, and practice will conclude the chapter.

The purpose of this study was to identify important attitudinal traits (character strengths) youth possess who avoid becoming a victim or perpetrator of bullying, and identify those traits weakest in both the victims and perpetrators of bullying. The results provided in Chapter Four indicate that a significant relationship between particular character strengths and bullying status exists. Self-regulation was found to be significant in all three domains. For the 67% of students surveyed who were averters, the character strengths that were most strongly represented in these individuals were hope and self-regulation. This positive correlation existed in the reverse for those who were victimized (29.6%). For these individuals, a negative correlation showed a significant weakness in the character strengths of hope and self-regulation, as well as gratitude. The third dynamic, perpetration of bullying characteristics which represented 10.1% of the respondents, was also significantly negatively correlated with the character strength of self-regulation, as well as those of prudence and fairness. Due to the small percentage (3.4%) of students falling in the fourth classification, bully-victim, this category was not evaluated. Implications and discussion of these findings follows.

**Discussion of Findings**

One challenge with social research utilizing a survey method is that the participants responded to questions on socially desirable and undesirable behaviors (Mneimneh, Heeringa,
Tourangeau, & Elliott, 2014). Humor and gratitude were the most prevalently reported strengths, indicating the potential social desirability of these strengths (Table 4). Love of learning and self-regulation were the least prevalent strengths, receiving the lowest score by all participants. This may, in part, be an indication of the social undesirability of these strengths (Table 4). However, for self-regulation, previous research also found it to be among those character strengths that are least prevalent (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006). Therefore, it is also possible that character strengths such as self-regulation are simply not as strong in individuals.

The current study found that 10.1% of the respondents were identified as bullies. These results were consistent with the study by Nansel, et al., (2001) which indicated an 11% rate of bullying. However, more recently, Kowalski, et al. (2012) indicated different findings. They found that bullies constituted almost three times that number with 32% of the respondents using traditional bullying. This number was compounded by another 11% who used electronic methods. Other researchers found elevated results as well indicating that 18% bullied traditionally, while another five percent used electronic methods (Monks, et al., 2012).

In the current study, 29.6% of the respondents reported as victims. These results were similar to results reported by Dinkes, Kemp, and Baum (2009). This research also found that nearly one third of the respondents indicated being a victim of bullying. Referring again to Nansel, et al. (2001), results indicated that only nine percent experience victimization. However, the most recent research in the field has found a difference indicating a higher rate of victimization. In the studies that included cyberbullying, research indicated that approximately half of the respondents reported being victims of traditional or cyberbullying (Kowalski, et al., 2012; Monks, et al., 2012; Smith, et al., 2008).

*Research Question One*
Research question one asked, “Is being an averter related to any of the character strengths? The results indicate that two character strengths stood out as stronger in these individuals confirming the hypothesis. These are hope and self-regulation.

This study found youth who do not perceive themselves as victims or perpetrators of bullying rate themselves high in hope, or optimism. This is consistent with research that found that those with an optimistic outlook on life, hope, and belief in the future, were more resilient in facing adversity (Masten, Cutili, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Peterson, 2006; Rydell, Berlin, & Bohlin, 2003). This adversity encompasses adjustment to life-threatening illness, new situations such as major life transitions, and to the small hassles of daily life (Aspinwall, Richter, & Hoffman, 2001). Finally, this research is in line with Flach’s (2004) contention that a positive focus, such as having hope, is key to resilient life outcomes.

The character strength of self-regulation, the conscious control of thought and emotion, was also found to be positively associated with averters. Resilience researchers also found self-regulation to impact resilient outcomes in the face of adversity (Greenberg, 2006; Masten, Cutili, Herbers, & Reed, 2009; Peterson, 2006; Rydell, Berlin, & Bohlin, 2003). In addition, researchers who studied the development of self-regulation in youth indicated that these individuals were better at responding to social challenges having fewer behavior problems, and lower aggression and substance abuse (Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004).

However, other previous research points to a broader set of important character strengths, notwithstanding that the research has not examined resilience in the context of bullying. Researchers found love, humor, perseverance, love of learning, and forgiveness to be among strengths also important to positive social and resilient outcomes (Benard, 1991; Durlak, et al., 2011; Lounsbury, et al., 2009; Masten, et al., 2009; McCullough, 2000; Weber & Ruch, 2012),
while Peterson (2006) contends that judgment (open-mindedness), spirituality, and creativity are essential as well.

Research Question Two

Research question two asked, “Is being a bully related to any of the character strengths? The results indicate that three character strengths stood out as weakest in these individuals, confirming the hypothesis. These are prudence, fairness, and self-regulation.

The negative correlation of prudence with bullying behavior is consistent with findings from Weber and Ruch (2012) who found it to be positively correlated with appropriate classroom behavior. Prudence not only represents making choices carefully, but also limiting undue risk-taking, and not doing or saying things that might later be regretted. Previous research also confirms the link between weak self-regulation (i.e. anger management) and bullying behavior (Marsh et al., 2011; Swearer & Cary, 2003). To date, findings associating the concept of fairness with social outcomes has not been found.

Research also exists that disagrees with the importance of self-regulation, prudence, and fairness when examining behavior finding that other strengths are more critical. Park and Peterson (2008) concluded that individuals high in perseverance and honesty had lower incidence of aggressive behavior.

Research Question Three

Research question three asked, “Is being a victim related to any of the character strengths? The results indicate that three character strengths stood out as weakest among students identified as victims. These are self-regulation, gratitude, and hope.

As with those that are perpetrators of bullying behavior, victims of bullying have been found to have correlations in the literature to lack of anger management, as well as depression
and lack of coping skills (Marsh, et al., 2011; Swearer & Cary, 2003). Gillham, et al., (2011) in their longitudinal study, found that those with strengths in temperance, including self-regulation, had low levels of depressive symptoms by the end of the second year. Depression has been strongly linked to victims of bullying (Austin & Joseph, 1996; Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Marttunen, Rimpela, & Rantanen, 1999; Slee, 1995).

And finally, previous research supports the conclusion that low levels of feeling gratitude affects perception of social experiences. Researchers found that gratitude motivates individuals to trust others, especially those they don’t have a strong connection to, and to show prosocial behavior (Dunn & Schweitzer, 2005; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). They are more supportive, helpful, empathic and forgiving individuals (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

Students identified as victims were less hopeful. While the current research supports the importance of hope in averters, it also supports its negative correlation with those with perceived victimization. Previous researchers have found those low in hope to have more challenges with social adjustment, and negative thoughts and feelings (Gillman, Dooley, & Florell, 2006) as well.

Research Question Five

Research question five asked, “Is the student’s gender related to any of the character strengths? The results indicate that the strongest correlations existed with the relationship of girls to appreciation of beauty and kindness. This finding is consistent with previous research on these two strengths (Shimai, Otake, Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006). Cohen et al., (2010) also found that females have been noted to measure higher in appreciation of beauty than males.

Research Question Six
Research question six asked, “Is the student’s grade level related to any of the character strengths? The results found that character strengths of bravery and zest for life were more common among seventh graders. The significance level for both of these strengths is weak. Little previous research was found examining character strength differences at such a close age group. However, Weber and Ruch (2012) show similar findings in the weak correlation of age and character strengths.

Additional Findings

Additional findings are supported by the literature with regards to bullying status and gender. The current study found boys to be more likely to engage in physical forms of bullying and girls more likely to be social victims. This is consistent with previous research with regards to physical bullying; however, girls were found to be victims of social bullying when it came to cyberbully, not traditional forms (Kowalski, et al., 2012; Marsh, et al., 2011). Results also indicated that eighth grade students were more likely to display bullying behavior than seventh graders.

Summary

The findings from the current study differ from the findings found in some prior studies. This section will discuss factors that may account for those differences.

One possible explanation for the differences in bullying prevalence may be due, in part, to the expanded methods of bullying found in cyberbullying, and inconsistencies of measurement. One of the challenges with the current study was that the researcher did not include an instrument that utilized questions regarding electronic methods of bullying. The reason for this is not only that the utilized instrument had established reliability and validity, and was recommended by the Center for Disease Control, but also that instruments used to assess
cyberbullying are not as yet supported with a similar level of reliability and validity. This has led to varying degrees of consistencies in the results.

In addition, the higher prevalence rate of bullying in eighth grade boys over seventh grade may be due to the increased power differential at this level. It is during this year of growth that we find a larger variance in physical size (power difference) in boys than is indicated in the earlier year. Lastly, both bullying and victimization may be over or under reported because of perceived social desirability with these characteristics.

Bullying, the word itself bears a strongly negative connotation in our society. Perhaps this is why this behavioral dynamic has not been considered in the wealth of literature promoting positive, strength-based practices identified in the literature on resilience and positive psychology. The current research, therefore, contributes to the field in a significant way. By refocusing energy back to the individual, this research draws the interventionist into a strengths-based framework and thus may spur a new compendium of intervention programs focused on this framework.

Aligning the study practices addressing bullying with the theoretical framework provided in this research expands the lens for proposing appropriate models of prevention. The current findings support the resilience and positive psychology structure of improving outcomes for individuals based on development of strengths. For example, examining the attitudes of individuals in the context of bullying, as suggested in the theoretical framework, provided results supporting how important perspective (i.e. hope) and emotions (self-regulation) are in this dynamic. The literature in positive psychology on the importance of developing positive emotions is supported here (Ashby, Isen, & Turken, 1999; Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987;

In conclusion, the literature that examines behavior in relation to attitudinal traits reflects the findings found in the current study (Gentzler, Ramsey, Yuen Yi, Palmer, & Morey, 2014; Shoshani & Slone, 2013; Suldo & Huebner, 2006). Those that disagree tend to examine behavior more broadly, or do not study it in relation to bullying status. In addition, methodology differs amongst the studies with limitations identified in the current research.

The current research adds to the literature on bullying, resilience, and positive psychology, and provides a bridge connecting these bodies of study. This provides an opportunity to address bullying in schools with a whole new focus on developing the correlates of well-being described in the literature. The following section further indicates the implications for practice.

**Implications for Practice**

This research comes at an important time in our educational history. Particularly in Michigan where a task force is currently in the process of developing a social emotional learning component to add to the Michigan Common Core Standards (Kazee, 2015). Michigan follows several states in the recognition that social-emotional development is critical to success in school, and in life. It’s not just a “feel good” notion, but rather has a strong research base linking it to well-being, reduced depression, and improved academic performance (Huta & Hawley, 2010; Lounsbury, Fisher, Levy, & Welsh, 2009; Shoshani & Slone, 2013). Educational leaders at all levels play a critical role.

The good news is that character strengths can be systematically and deliberately developed (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2011; Louis, 2011). One instance of this
teaching has been done in the domain of the character strength of hope and optimism. Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox, & Gillham (1995) have found that optimism is a characteristic approach that can be learned. Furthermore, in studying learned optimism, research has revealed that it leads to more effective coping with life stressors (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000).

Another study on developing the character strengths found that those instructed had an improved sense of life satisfaction compared to those who were not instructed (Proctor, et al., 2011). The researchers conducted a study of over 300 adolescents between the ages of twelve and fourteen with whom were taught ways to build the character strengths.

Developing an individual’s character strengths can be done within the social context (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005; Littman-Ovadia & Steger, 2010). Duckworth et al., found that the environments within which an individual functions can serve to help, or hinder, the development of strengths. Steen, Kachorek, and Peterson (2003) conducted focus groups with 459 Midwest high school students from five schools to determine what they thought about character strengths. They found that students believed strengths existed in degrees, and that they could be developed best through life experiences. In addition, other individuals, whether peers, parents, or school adults, could serve to either enhance and build strengths, or tear them down.

Perseverating on the pejorative label of “bully” is misguided, and maintains a perspective of intolerance, accountability, and punishment for those who use these behaviors. This response only serves to tear individuals down. The current research supports the need to refocus energy on the positive, and build individuals up.

The next sections provide recommendations for what can be done moving forward with research, policy, and practice in order to achieve that end.

**Recommendations for Future Research**
Prior studies on bullying have limited examination of the phenomenon from a positive psychology based perspective. Currently, the word “bullying” is a pejorative word making it difficult for responders to take anything but punitive measures to address it. Even when little evidence exists for the effectiveness of these measures, and a preponderance of evidence exists for using restorative, strength-based practices, programs of intervention emphasize consequences as the main method of intervention. Future research is needed to unpack bullying behaviors in a frame that leads to improved outcomes.

The current study was one of the first of its kind in linking positive psychology’s character strengths to bullying behaviors, and avoidance of these behaviors. Continued research is needed to support these findings and to determine if they hold with culturally different populations, in different environments such as urban and suburban schools, as well as with children at different ages of development. Others can improve on this research by utilizing methods that incorporate instruments assessing electronic forms of bullying, and replicating the study longitudinally.

Future research also is needed to better understand the multi-dimensional nature of the character strengths and methods for developing the strengths. While some research exists, in recent years there has been a greater appreciation for the need to examine character strengths. Programs utilizing teaching of strengths need further study to make them thoroughly evidence-based practices. Only then can we determine if these programs have a significant impact on the environment of bullying in schools.

Future research questions include, “Will conducting this study in urban and suburban areas result in similar findings?” “Are the character strengths interrelated, requiring a combination of strengths to influence attitude?” “Can approaching this study from a qualitative
design reveal nuances in the interrelatedness of the character strengths?” “What practices best develop these strengths?” “What kinds of curricula need to be developed in order to implement evidence-based practices that support the development of important character strengths?”

**Recommendations for Policy**

Currently, national policy-makers advocate intolerance and accountability practices in addressing the issue of bullying (U.S. Congress, 2012). This pejorative language invokes practices that reinforce punitive measures. Legislators, working alongside educators and mental health professionals, can begin the shift to a restorative approach to addressing this issue starting with strengths-based language that conveys the very hope that individuals need in order to make change.

Nearly $40 million has been allocated to address bullying. Rather than spend it on security cameras and guards, monies may be more effectively spent on developing positive education programs promoting well-being in schools. Only then can real change in this dynamic occur.

Social-emotional learning has finally found a place in our education system. While a handful of states have recognized this with supporting policy, Michigan among them, all states and countries around the world should follow suit. Although it may be a few years before the state of Michigan core standards officially would require assessment of social-emotional learning standards, educational leaders at the intermediate school district level, as well as district and building level administrators, can take steps to implement practices that support this development.

**Recommendations for Practice**
Few educational programs exist to develop the character strengths. Developing these programs within current systems of supports, can ensure that they become part of the fiber of learning. Positive behavior supports practices provide a framework to begin the work. But current practices provide just the tip of the iceberg for intervention. We must move beyond setting clear expectations and having rewards and punishments alone, for these are just surface efforts. It is imperative that we get at the attitude of the individual.

An individual’s attitude cannot be altered by telling him or her to change what to think, or how to feel. As with academics, it requires instruction and practice at thinking in different ways. Educational leaders can take steps now to implement simple exercises into the daily routine of their classrooms, exercises that can merge into the academic framework.

This study confirms that self-regulation is critical to avoiding the bullying dynamic. Currently, positive behavior supports advocate anger management training to address this. But other practices more succinctly focus on self-regulation. Mindfulness is one practice that supports the development of self-regulation (Masicampo & Baumeister, 2007). Baumeister, Matthew, DeWall, and Oaten, (2006) suggest that self-control practices like this, when done daily, increase the capacity of self-control in individuals.

To develop hope, practitioners can utilize the “best possible self” exercise which involves visualizing and writing about one’s best possible self at a time in the future. This simple exercise has been proven to increase hope, optimism, and well-being (King, 2001; Meevisen, Peters, & Alberts, 2011; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006).

Closely tied to hope is gratitude, also found to be in short supply for victims of bullying. Research has shown that it can be developed by having individuals do daily reflections and list all the good things that happened that day. More formal approaches have been to write down
three good things that happened, tell how that good thing came to be, and identify how one can get more of that good thing, or simply a daily exercise of journaling things one is grateful for (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Gander, Proyer, Ruch, & Wyss, 2013).

The character strengths, prudence and fairness, can be developed through educational practices currently in place in the curriculum. Prudence can be developed through doing activities involving compare-contrast activities such as cost-benefit analyses, while fairness can be developed through cultural and sensitivity awareness activities (Miller & Rollnick, 1991) and role-plays on perspective-taking (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

**Summary**

Bullying in schools has been a major concern of our society. Awareness of the problem permeates the communities of our schools. Tragic stories are highlighted on the news, in movies, and on the worldwide web. Currently, the research on prevention and intervention with bullying has focused on external environmental control, but very little has been done to understand the attitudes of individuals beyond evaluating pathologies such as depression and deviance. Programs have emphasized a system of social control whereby expectations are established, rules are made, and consequences are enforced.

The growing body of literature shows that bullying continues to affect children in schools, and the percentage of children affected has increased with the use of electronic methods such as social media, texting, and the like (Kowalski, Morgan, & Limber, 2012; Rivers, Poteat, Noret, & Ashhurst, 2009). When examining the internal characteristics of those involved in the experience, prior research has found connections between those who bully and those who are victims such as low self-concept, depression, and poor coping skills (Gladstone, Parker, & Mahli, 2006; Swearer, Song, Cary, Eagle, & Mickelson, 2001). Positive psychology offers a
framework to examine what positive traits are necessary to create a sense of well-being in early adolescent at a stressful time in development where resilience outcomes can be achieved.

The current study examined character strengths in relation to an individual’s status as a bully, a victim, or an averter of this dynamic. Utilizing pre-existing surveys, 685 7th and 8th grade students in the rural region of northwest Michigan were evaluated based on perceptions of bullying experiences, as well as on scenarios indicative of the 24 universal character strengths.

Results indicated that those who averted the bullying experience had a significant relationship with having strength in hope and self-regulation. Conversely, those who were perpetrators of bullying, and those who were victims, were both significantly low in self-regulation. In addition, those who bullied were low in prudence and fairness. Lastly, the victims were low in hope and gratitude.

These results suggest that these character strengths, particularly hope and self-regulation are critical strengths that need to be developed in our youth. If we develop them, well-being in individuals will not only be increased, but a decrease in bullying behaviors and perceptions of being bullied will result. These character strengths can be taught and systematic instruction in methods to do so should be incorporated in our schools.
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APPENDICES

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<td>C</td>
<td>Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>EMU Human Subjects Review Committee (UHSRC) Approval</td>
<td>154</td>
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</table>
### Appendix A: Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument (APRI-BT © 2003)

#### SECTION A

Since you have been at this school THIS YEAR how often HAVE YOU done any of the following things to a STUDENT (or students) at this school. CIRCLE THE NUMBER THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOUR ANSWER.

In the past year at this school I...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Once or Twice a Month</th>
<th>Once a Week</th>
<th>Several Times a Week</th>
<th>Everyday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Teased them by saying things to them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pushed or shoved a student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Made rude remarks at a student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Got my friends to turn against a student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Made jokes about a student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Crashed into a student on purpose as they walked by</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Picked on a student by swearing at them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Told my friends things about a student to get them into trouble</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Got into a physical fight with a student because I didn't like them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Said things about their looks they didn't like</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Got other students to start a rumour about a student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I slapped or punched a student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Got other students to ignore a student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Made fun of a student by calling them names</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Threw something at a student to hit them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Threatened to physically hurt or harm a student</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Left them out of activities or games on purpose</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Kept a student away from me by giving them mean looks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION B

Please indicate how often a student (or students) at this school has done the following things TO YOU since you have been at this school this year. CIRCLE THE NUMBER THAT IS CLOSEST TO YOUR ANSWER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the past year at this school…</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Once or twice a month</th>
<th>Once a week</th>
<th>Several times a week</th>
<th>Every-day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I was teased by students saying things to me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 I was pushed or shoved</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 A student wouldn't be friends with me because other people didn't like me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 A student made rude remarks at me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 I was hit or kicked hard</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 A student ignored me when they were with their friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Jokes were made up about me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Students crashed into me on purpose as they walked by</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 A student got their friends to turn against me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 My property was damaged on purpose</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Things were said about my looks I didn't like</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 I wasn't invited to a student's place because other people didn't like me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 I was ridiculed by students saying things to me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 A student got students to start a rumour about me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Something was thrown at me to hit me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 I was threatened to be physically hurt or harmed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 I was left out of activities, games on purpose</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 I was called names I didn't like</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© 2003 Roberto H Parada. SELF Research Centre, University of Western Sydney. Australia.
Dear Vikki

Please accept my apologies for my delay in responding. Here in Australia someone decided it would be a good idea to place final government grant proposal submission deadlines and students returning to their studies on the same week!

Your research sounds quite interesting.

I have attached for you some materials that may assist you in your study. Please take this email as my permission to use the APRI for your studies.

It seems to me from the brief description of your research that you may also want to consider looking at what is termed in the bullying literature as “participant roles” which looks at not just bully/victim dichotomies but also non-directly involved students such as bully-helpers, passive and active reinforcers of the bullying and advocates for victims. Also, I am wondering whether you have considered conducting some level of Discriminant Analysis to complement your correlation analysis as I would imagine that with your sample size you will have sufficient power to actually find many of your correlations significant at the .05 level. Then you will be in a bit of trouble on how to explain this. In any case just a thought, best to discuss it with your supervisor.

Best wishes in your studies. Please let me know if I can help with anything else.

Kind regards

Roberto

Dr Roberto H Parada PhD MAPS
Lecturer Adolescent Development, Behaviour, Wellbeing and Pedagogical Studies
Centre for Positive Psychology and Education (CPPE)
School of Education | University of Western Sydney

Locked Bag 1797 Penrith, NSW, 2751 Australia
Ext: 2051
Direct: (612) 4736 0051
Fax: (612) 4736 0400
E-mail: r.parada@uws.edu.au
Appendix C: Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth

Survey questions copyrighted by VIA Institute and removed from this document. Contact the VIA Institute at kellya@viacharacter.org for further information.
Hello Vikki,

We are very pleased to provide permission to use the VIA Youth Survey of Character in your research project, thereby expanding the knowledge base on the VIA Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues.

To use the VIA Survey, your subjects may go online to: https://www.viame.org/survey/Account/Register

If the participants are under the age of 13, they will need to have apparent or guardian register them on the website in order to take the survey.

Please tell your participants to watch for the field requesting a research code (after completing the survey), and to be certain to enter your code:

SGGV227

Use of the code will enable us to compile your data for you into a single Excel spreadsheet. When you want your results, just let me know via e-mail. You may not charge your research subjects any fee for taking the VIA survey. **Please note that we will not release identifying information (name or email address) for the individuals on the Excel sheet. The report you will receive from the VIA Institute will not include this information with the VIA scores—only age and gender will be included. If you need to identify individual participants you will need to assign them a “Participant ID Code”. The “Participant ID Code” field will be immediately after the “Research Code” field. If you do not need to identify individual participants, you may instruct them to leave this field blank.

We very much want to retain the scientific integrity and reputation of the VIA Survey of Character, and so request that you limit your application and interpretation of results to that which is provided by VIA and otherwise is scientifically based. Here is a link to the VIA Institute's Guidelines for Use and Interpretation:

Finally, in exchange for providing this free service, VIA requests that you share your research results with us. Please do so by e-mailing me a report, which I shall share with the VIA staff. Again, thank you for your interest in expanding the body of scientific knowledge on character strengths and for including the VIA Survey on Character in your work. We look forward to learning of your results and wish you good luck in conducting your study. Don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions or concerns.

(permissions continued)
(permission continued)

Regards,

Kelly Aluise
Communications Specialist
VIA Institute on Character
312 Walnut St., Suite 3600
Cincinnati, OH 45202
(513) 621-7501
www.viacharacter.org
Appendix E: Superintendent Informed Consent Letter
To: Charlevoix-Emmet Intermediate School District Superintendents

Researcher: Vikki E. Seger
Behavior Consultant, Char-Em ISD
Doctoral Candidate, Eastern Michigan University

Project Title: The attitudes of bullies, victims, bully-victims, and individuals who experience none of these roles: understanding the relationship of bullying status and character strengths

I am a doctoral candidate at Eastern Michigan University. As part of my work I am conducting a study that I believe is relevant and important to schools in the Char-Em Intermediate School District. Current literature suggests that little long-term improvements have resulted from intervention efforts targeted at bully prevention (Smith et al., 2004; Merrell et al., 2008; Ferguson et al., 2007), yet districts are often pressured by their communities to address the issue. This often requires tapping an already constrained budget. The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between an individual’s attitude and whether or not they bully or are bullied. The study also seeks to identify the strengths and attitudes that help students resist bullying.

I would like to gather information about this topic from students in seventh and eighth grade in your district. This would involve completing two surveys. The first survey, the Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument, is a 36-item measure with six subscales assessing the frequency of physical, verbal, and social bullying as both the perpetrator and victim (Attachment 1). Students self-report frequency of bullying behaviors they engaged in and bullying behaviors that have occurred to them on a 6-point Likert scale. The survey takes approximately 10 minutes. The second survey, the VIA (Values in Action) Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth), is a 96-question and is completed via a 5-point Likert scale (Attachment 2). This survey is completed online and takes approximately 15 minutes.

Only a research code number will identify the respondents. At no time will individual names be associated with the responses. Demographic information that will be gathered includes gender and grade level of the student. There are no foreseeable risks to your students participating in these surveys as the results will be kept completely confidential. The study is expected to provide you with information that will better inform the practices utilized in your schools to address the issue of bullying.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw your permission at any time. Results will only be reported in aggregate form. No names or individually identifying information will be revealed. Results will be made available to you and your building administrators, and may also be presented at conferences, in scientific publications, and as part of the doctoral thesis of the principal researcher.
If you have any questions, or would like to see more comprehensive information regarding this study, please contact me at 231-237-9305, or via email at segerv@charenisd.org. You may also contact my dissertation chair Dr. Ronald Williamson at Eastern Michigan University (rwilliams1@emich.edu).

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Vikki E. Seger
Behavior Consultant
Charlevoix-Emmet Intermediate School District

Consent to Participate:
I have reviewed all of the above information about this research study. The consent and meaning of this information has been explained and I have no further questions at this time. I hereby give consent for_______School to take part in this study.

District Policy requires parental consent to be obtained in the following manner(s):

☐ Signed Consent
☒ Opt-out
☐ Either opt-out or signed consent

PRINT NAME: John P. Seger

SIGNATURE: [Signature]
If you have any questions, or would like to see more comprehensive information regarding this study, please contact me at 231-237-9505, or via email at segerv@charlemiad.org. You may also contact my dissertation chair Dr. Ronald Williamson at Eastern Michigan University (rwilliams1@emich.edu).

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Vicki E. Seger
Behavior Consultant
Charlevoix-Emmet Intermediate School District

Consent to Participate:
I have reviewed all of the above information about this research study. The consent and meaning of this information has been explained and I have no further questions at this time. I hereby give consent for __________ School to take part in this study.

District Policy requires parental consent to be obtained in the following manner(s):

☐ Signed Consent
☐ Opt-out
☒ Either opt-out or signed consent

PRINT NAME: Peter Moss

SIGNATURE: Peter Moss
If you have any questions, or would like to see more comprehensive information regarding this study, please contact me at 231-237-9305, or via email at segerv@charemisd.org. You may also contact my dissertation chair Dr. Ronald Williamson at Eastern Michigan University (rwilliams1@emich.edu).

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Vikki E. Seger
Behavior Consultant
Charlevoix-Emmet Intermediate School District

Consent to Participate:
I have reviewed all of the above information about this research study. The consent and meaning of this information has been explained and I have no further questions at this time. I hereby give consent for East Jordan Public School to take part in this study.

District Policy requires parental consent to be obtained in the following manner(s):

☐ Signed Consent
☒ Opt-out
☐ Either opt-out or signed consent

PRINT NAME: Matt Stevenson

SIGNATURE: [Signature]
If you have any questions, or would like to see more comprehensive information regarding this study, please contact me at 231-237-9305, or via email at segerv@charermisd.org. You may also contact my dissertation chair Dr. Ronald Williamson at Eastern Michigan University (rwilliams1@emich.edu).

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Vikki E. Seger
Behavior Consultant
Charlevoix-Emmet Intermediate School District

Consent to Participate:
I have reviewed all of the above information about this research study. The consent and meaning of this information has been explained and I have no further questions at this time. I hereby give consent for  Charlevoix Public School to take part in this study.

District Policy requires parental consent to be obtained in the following manner(s):

☐ Signed Consent
☒ Opt-out
☐ Either opt-out or signed consent

PRINT NAME: Thomas Stobie

SIGNATURE: Thomas Stobie

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If you have any questions, or would like to see more comprehensive information regarding this study, please contact me at 231-237-9305, or via email at segery@charlevoix.org. You may also contact my dissertation chair Dr. Ronald Williamson at Eastern Michigan University (rwilliams@emich.edu).

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Vikki E. Seger
Behavior Consultant
Charlevoix-Emmet Intermediate School District

Consent to Participate:
I have reviewed all of the above information about this research study. The consent and meaning of this information has been explained and I have no further questions at this time. I hereby give consent for School to take part in this study.

District Policy requires parental consent to be obtained in the following manner(s):

☐ Signed Consent
☒ Opt-out
☐ Either opt-out or signed consent

PRINT NAME:
Monique Davis

SIGNATURE:
Monique Davis, Superintendent
Petoskey Public Schools
Appendix F: Parental Informed Consent Letter

RESEARCH @ EMU

Parental Consent Form

The person in charge of this study is Vikki E. Seger. Ms. Seger is a student at Eastern Michigan University. Her faculty adviser is Dr. Ronald Williamson.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research study is to understand the relationship between an individual’s character strengths and whether or not they bully or are bullied. The study also seeks to identify the strengths and attitudes that help students resist bullying.

What will happen if my child participates in this study?

Participation in this study involves

- Completion of two surveys.
  - The Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument, is a 36-item measure with six subscales assessing the frequency of physical, verbal, and social bullying as both the perpetrator and victim via a 6-point Likert scale.
  - The VIA (Values in Action) Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth), is a 96-question and is completed via a 5-point Likert scale.
- Both surveys will be completed during one class period (approximately 40 minutes) on one day during either the month of January or February. The APRI survey will be a paper and pencil copy to which the researcher will provide a randomly assigned research code number as an identifier. The VIA-Youth is an online survey. Your child will be asked to put the same research code number for this survey in order to link the two surveys. At no time will individual names be associated with the responses. Demographic information that will be gathered includes gender and grade level of the student.

What are the anticipated risks for participation?

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks to participation. However, some of the survey questions are personal in nature and may make your child feel uncomfortable. Your child does not have to answer any questions that make him or her feel uncomfortable or that he or she does not want to answer.

Are there any benefits to participating?

You and your child will not directly benefit from participating in this research. However, benefits to society may include a greater understanding of the strengths

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: 684688-1
Study Approval Dates: 12/10/15 – 12/18/15
associated with avoiding the bullying experience, and other information that will better inform practices to utilize in schools to address the issue of bullying.

What are the alternatives to participation?

The alternative is not to participate.

How will my information be kept confidential?

Your child's information will be kept completely confidential using a research code to label data. No names or individually identifying information will be attached to the completed surveys. Demographic information that will be gathered includes gender and grade level of the student. The information will be stored in a password-protected computer file accessible only to the researcher.

Results will only be reported in aggregate form. Results will be made available to local school districts. Other groups may have access to your child's research information for quality control purposes. These groups include the University Human Subjects Review Committee, the Office of Research Development, or other federal and state agencies that oversee the review of research. The University Human Subjects Review Committee is responsible for the safety and protection of people who participate in research studies.

The results of this research may also be presented at conferences, in scientific publications, and as part of the doctoral thesis of the principal researcher.

Storing study information for future use

The research coded information from this study will be stored for possible future research use related to bullying. Only a research code will identify the data. No names or individually identifying information will be attached to the completed surveys. The code key will be kept in a password-protected computer file accessible only to the researcher.

Are there any costs to participation?

Participation will not cost you or your child anything.

Will my child be paid for participation?

Your child will not be paid to participate in this research study.

Study contact information

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: 684888-1
Study Approval Dates: 12/18/14 – 12/18/15
If you or your child has any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Vikki E. Seger at segerv@charemisd.org or by phone at 231-237-9305. You can also contact Vikki’s adviser, Dr. Ron Williamson, at rwilliams1@emich.edu or by phone at 734-417-4949.

For questions about your child’s rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

**Voluntary participation**

Participation in this research study is your and your child’s choice. Your child either will be asked independently for assent or his or her dissent will be respected. You and your child may refuse to participate at any time, with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you and your child are otherwise entitled. If you and your child leave the study, the information your child provided will be kept confidential.

**Statement of Consent**

Please contact [principal’s name] at [school phone number] if you or your child do not wish to participate.

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UHSRC Protocol Number: 684888-1
Study Approval Dates: 12/18/14 – 12/18/15
Appendix G: Student Assent Letter

RESEARCH @ EMU

Assent Form

Introduction
- You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies are conducted by scientists or other researchers to answer questions and learn new things.
- The researcher conducting this study is Vikki E. Seger. Ms. Seger is a student. Her supervisor is Dr. Ronald Williamson. In this form Ms. Seger will be referred to as the investigator.
- The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between participants’ character strengths and whether or not participants bully or are bullied. The study also seeks to identify the strengths and attitudes that help students resist bullying.
- Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you have before deciding to participate in this study.

Study Procedures
- If you agree to participate in this study, we will ask you to complete two surveys.
- Your participation will last for one class period, or approximately 40 minutes.
- If you choose not to take part, your teacher will provide you with other choices for this class period.

Risks
- There are no risks to taking part in these surveys.
- You might feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions in the interview/survey. You do not have to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable. If any questions make you feel uncomfortable, you can also talk to the investigator about this, take a break, or stop the study.

Benefits
- You will not personally benefit from participating in this study.
- However, possible benefits to society include better understanding of what students need to avoid bullying, and ways schools can help.

Confidentiality
- Your name will not be connected with either of the surveys. The researcher will give you a randomly selected research code to connect one survey to the other.
- Your information will be stored in a password-protected computer, and will not be identified on the surveys.

Approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee
UBSRC Protocol Number: 684988-1
Study Approval Dates: 12/19/14 – 12/18/15
Payments
• You will not be paid to complete the surveys.

Voluntary Participation
• The decision to participate is up to you. You can refuse to participate in this study now or at any time. You can choose to participate and then, at any time during the study, choose to stop participating.
• Your parents will also be asked to give permission for you to participate. Even if your parents let you participate, you can still refuse to participate.

Contact Information
• If you have questions about this study at any time, you can contact the investigator, Vikki E. Seger at 231-237-9305 or segery@charemsd.org. You can also contact Ms. Seger’s adviser, Dr. Ronald Williamson, at 734-417-4949 or rwilliams1@emich.edu with any questions.
• If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you can contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee (UHSRC) at 734-487-3090 or human.subjects@emich.edu. The UHSRC reviews and monitors research studies to make sure that participants’ rights are respected.
Appendix H: EMU Human Subjects Review Committee (UHSRC) Approval

RESEARCH @ EMU

UHSRC Determination: EXPEDITED INITIAL APPROVAL

DATE: December 18, 2014

TO: Vikki Seger, Ed.D
Eastern Michigan University

Re: UHSRC: # 864888-1
Category: Expedited
Approval Date: December 18, 2014
Expiration Date: December 18, 2015

Title: Understanding the relationship of bullying and character strengths

Your research project, entitled Understanding the relationship of bullying and character strengths, has been approved in accordance with all applicable federal regulations.

This approval included the following:

1. Enrollment of 1000 subjects to participate in the approved protocol.
2. Use of the following study measures: APRI-BT, Data Collection Survey
3. Use of the following stamped recruitment materials: Parental Notification/Permission
4. Use of the stamped: Assent, Parental Consent Form

Renewals: This approval is valid for one year and expires on December 18, 2015. If you plan to continue your study beyond December 18, 2015, you must submit a Continuing Review Form by November 18, 2015 to ensure the approval does not lapse.

Modifications: All changes must be approved prior to implementation. If you plan to make any minor changes, you must submit a Minor Modification Form. For any changes that alter study design or any study instruments, you must submit a Human Subjects Approval Request Form. These forms are available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website.

Problems: All major deviations from the reviewed protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may increase the risk to human subjects or change the category of review must be reported to the UHSRC via an Event Report form, available through IRBNet on the UHSRC website.

Follow-up: If your Expedited research project is not completed and closed after three years, the UHSRC office requires a new Human Subjects Approval Request Form prior to approving a continuation beyond three years.

Please use the UHSRC number listed above on any forms submitted that relate to this project, or on any correspondence with the UHSRC office.

Good luck in your research. If we can be of further assistance, please contact us at 734-487-3090 or via e-mail at human.subjects@emich.edu. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,