

The facilitation of character strengths during early adulthood through Adventure Therapy: A critical review

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SUMMARY

The facilitation of character strengths during early adulthood through Adventure Therapy: A critical review

Keywords: adventure therapy, character strengths, positive mental health, positive psychology, and youth development.

Emerging adults are faced with a variety of challenges, including being constantly exposed to risk factors. Research, however, states that character strengths are significant enough to develop in their own right because they have great potential benefits for positive youth development and ultimately positive mental well-being (Park, 2004). Therefore, having the development of character strengths facilitated through individual or group intervention could help young adults cope better with the challenges and transitions they face. Strength-based approaches to therapy and interventions have increasingly been used to develop strength of character in children and youth at any level (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). One example of this type of intervention is Adventure Therapy, which has been useful as a vehicle for helping early adults to negotiate the challenges they face more successfully, by recognizing and developing their strengths (Schreiner, 2015). Participation in wilderness education has also been correlated with developmental outcomes such as self-actualization, increased interpersonal and team building skills (Ewert & Garvey, 2007).

Although research on AT as a potential preventative intervention is gathering momentum, relatively little is known (or there are discrepant results found in literature) about its effectiveness in facilitating character strengths, and its impact on the positive well-being of participants who fall in the developmental period of ‘youth’ or ‘emerging adulthood’. The aim of this critical review was to identify which character strengths are facilitated through AT, and what aspects/ activities of the AT intervention have proven to be effective in facilitating these strengths.

This study was a critical review and complied with the steps proposed by Carnwell and Daly (2001) as cited in De Klerk and Pretorious (2019), in order to critically review and synthesize the scientific literature to gain a better understanding the psychological strengths that are facilitated during AT.

From the research process, the literature included in this review included peer-reviewed and journal studies that came from sources published in English. After the literature sources were gathered and their critical appraisal was conducted, a total of six studies were included in the final analysis. Thematic analysis was used as an analysis tool to identify themes for the study. The following are the strengths that emerged from the analysis, and falls within the Values in Action Inventory (VIA) classification system of character strengths (VIA Institute on Character, 2021): *Perspective* and *Creativity* (through the virtue of wisdom and knowledge), *Bravery* (through the virtue of courage), *Love* and *Kindness* (through the virtue of humanity), *Teamwork* and *Leadership* (through justice), *Self-regulation* (through temperance), and *Hope* (through transcendence). These themes were discussed.

The findings of this research study revealed that AT is effective in facilitating character strengths among emerging adults. Furthermore, the research results can inform evidence based policy and practice for AT developers, health practitioners, researchers, and professionals alike.

PREFACE

Following Rule A 4.4.2.9 of the North-West University, this mini-dissertation complies with the predetermined rules and regulations for utilising the article model. This entire mini-dissertation adheres to the established guidelines provided by the American Psychological Association (APA), seventh edition. Meanwhile, Section 2 of the mini-dissertation maintains the author guidelines of the described journal. It is also the plan that this mini-dissertation's section 2 to be submitted to the *Journal of Experiential Education*, a quarterly peer-reviewed academic journal, for publication purposes. As shown in the table of contents and in the journal guidelines, the mini-dissertation pages are numbered chronologically for examination purposes. Section 1 starts on page 1, and the page numbers will continue consecutively until the complete reference list at the end is reached. A professional language editor attended to the language editing of this mini-dissertation.

The researcher obtained ethics approval from the North-West University's Health Research Ethics Committee for conducting this critical review (see Appendix A). The entire mini-dissertation was then submitted to Turnitin in order to provide the North-West University researchers with a report, stating the similarities that were discovered in the mini-dissertation in relation to international databases. Thereafter, it was decided (after necessary adjustments) that it fell within the norms of acceptable similarities.

PERMISSION LETTER FROM SUPERVISOR

I, Prof Johan Potgieter, hereby grant permission for Sibongiseni Mazibuko to submit this mini-dissertation for examination purposes.

Prof Johan C. Potgieter
Supervisor

DECLARATION

I, Sibongiseni Mazibuko, declare that this research study, *The facilitation of character strengths during early adulthood through Adventure Therapy: A critical review*, is authentic work done by myself. This research study serves in the partial fulfilment of my master's degree in Counselling Psychology done at the North-West University in Potchefstroom. The consent necessary of all the relevant parties has been given to conduct this study, and all over this mini-dissertation all reference material has been acknowledged accordingly.



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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

Early adulthood is a distinct developmental period during which individuals are faced with a variety of changes and challenges, such as the transition from school to the first year of college or university (Mutch, 2005). Research indicates that the transition to independence, and full engagement in post-school life drastically impacts the dynamic of daily life and responsibility. Emerging adults are burdened with increased levels of stress, anxiety and depression, that can be overwhelming for them as they try to individually manage their unique experience (Dickson & Gullo, 2015, Kreider et al., 2015). This contributes directly to the fact that, in South Africa, approximately thirty percent of the small number of students, who are in the Higher Education system, withdraw annually or are prohibited academically to continue for a year of their studies (>20 percent of contact students) (Scott, 2008).

Despite these challenges, some emerging adults manage the transition successfully. Jama (2008) argued that if institutions and key stakeholders were aware of the factors that help facilitate successful transition, they could collaborate, communicate and work together to provide an integrated and holistic programme of action to support and develop these individuals. Research suggest that the development of so-called character strengths offers an important avenue to promote well-being, and shield against the detrimental effects of stress experienced by the youths (Park, 2004).

These strengths, which lie at the core of the movement of positive psychology, not only provide protection, but they also enable conditions that facilitate thriving even during challenging times (Park, 2004). According to Park (2004), character strengths are worth developing and have significant positive benefits for youth development, and ultimately mental well-being.

One type of intervention that has gradually been developing a reputation for being effective in the facilitation of such strengths, especially in the age group of emerging adulthood, is Adventure Therapy (AT). AT involves the intentional use of adventure activities for the purpose of cognitive

(e.g., information acquisition), physical (e.g., technical skill development), and/or affective (e.g., emotional and social development) development, as defined by Glass and Myers (2001).

Participating in adventure learning has been found to assist emerging adults to address some of the age-related challenges they experience (Priest, 1999). It has also been correlated with developmental outcomes such as self-actualization, increased interpersonal and team building skills (Ewert & Garvey, 2007), which is strongly aligned with strengths research.

This study aims to identify which character strengths have been found to be facilitated through AT involving emerging adults, and what aspects/activities of the AT intervention have been proven effective in facilitating these strengths.

Early Adulthood

Early adulthood (spanning approximately ages 18 to 25), also referred to broadly as ‘youth’ (Arnett, 2004) is a distinctive stage in the human life span (Arnett, 2000). Early adulthood is a transitional period – a time of transforming between one phase of life to another (Arnett, 2000). This developmental phase involves the sense, shared among many individuals worldwide, who find themselves ending their teenage years. And are emerging into adulthood, yet they are not there (Arnett, 2003; Macek et al., 2007; Mayseless & Scharf, 2003; Nelson et al., 2004, as cited in Arnett, 2004).

During adolescence, trial and error with various modes of adult behaviour is disorganized and trivial. Moving towards early adulthood, there is more stability regarding taking responsibility which include moving out of the family home, the development of more stable relationships and the self-direction toward adult identity by choosing a particular career pathway (Bynner, 2005). According to Arnett (1998), the main tasks for emerging adults includes taking on responsibility, exercising autonomy in decision-making, and becoming financially self-reliant in order to be self-sufficient. Furthermore, Arnett (2000) argues that because marriage and parenthood only occur between the mid or late twenties for most people, it is no longer normative for early adulthood to be a time of entering

and committing into long-term adult roles. On the contrary, these years are more typically a period of frequent change and exploration (Arnett, 2000).

According to Erikson's lifespan theory of development, explorations have been correlated with adolescence. However, according to more recent research, explorations are considered to take place mainly during the period of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2014). During emerging adulthood, people tend to contemplate about what will help them establish their adult lives in love and work relationships (Arnett, 2014). Some individuals are able to accomplish age-related tasks effectively, while others struggle to define and maintain engagement to their tasks, and as a result they begin to experience personal difficulties.

As mentioned one of the major challenges faced during this period is the transition from school to the first year of college or university (Mutch, 2005). McInnis and James (1995) found that, during this transition, a significant percentage of students leave their studies for a number of reasons; including academic failure, adjustment difficulties, goals that were not achieved, uncertainty, commitments that become too demanding, financial difficulties, and isolation. The transition to tertiary education and full engagement in the student role drastically impacts the dynamic of lifestyle and responsibility. Of particular concern are the individual and interpersonal challenges faced by students, which include limited emotional regulation skills, low self-esteem, low motivation, substance abuse, perceived stress, financial insecurity, inefficient studying, organisational skills, competitive peers, problematic or abusive relationships; and/or limited family support (Goodman, 2017). In light of these challenges, there is a significant need to address the mental health needs of young people who are nearing the end of their teenage years and entering early adulthood. Key events during emerging adulthood shape young people, which often results in more permanent effects on personal identity throughout adulthood (Demiray et al., 2009; Elnick et al., 1999). It is therefore worrying that relatively little is known about mental health during this developmental period (Tanner, 2015).

Character Strengths

Recent research suggests that young people who do manage to function well are those who, in the face of challenges, possess internal resources that allow them to thrive (Park, 2012). Several studies in positive psychology have successfully identified factors that contribute to subjective well-being (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham & Reivich, 2009). Among these are factors such as creativity, gratitude, hope, humour and other character strengths (Peterson & Seligman 2004) that have been gradually correlated with subjective well-being (SWB) in youth (Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2013). Character strengths can be defined as positive traits observed in the thoughts, feelings, and behaviour of individuals (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

These positive, stable and moral traits can be found at different levels, and can be measured as individual differences (Park & Peterson, 2009; Peterson & Seligman 2004; Park et al., 2004). Although these strengths are relatively stable, they are able to change, as they are interactive and interdependent (Niemić, 2013). Niemić (2013) argues that individuals are therefore likely to present their character strengths in different manners which also based on the conditions they find themselves in. It also appears that in most instances, individuals will show a combination of these character strengths together (e.g., curiosity and creativity), rather than one-character strength alone (Niemić, 2013). The development of the Values in Action (VIA) classification and survey of strengths was created with the intention to establish a valid measure and classifications system of strengths, which focuses on what is going right about people, and how these strengths of character promote an individual's optimal development (Park & Peterson, 2009). The VIA classification recognizes twenty-four universally-valued character strengths and groups them under six broad virtues (see Table 1) (Park & Peterson, 2009). These strengths are assessed through a self-report survey entitled the VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) (Park & Peterson 2009), and the VIA Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth) for those under 18 years of age.

TABLE 1. VIA Classification of Character Strengths

1) **Wisdom and knowledge:** *cognitive strengths that involve the acquisition and use of knowledge*

- **creativity:** thinking of innovative and productive ways to do things,
- **curiosity:** go into an interest in all of ongoing experience,
- **open-mindedness:** thoroughly evaluate and examining things from all sides,
- **love of learning:** mastering new skills, topics, and adding of knowledge, and
- **perspective:** being able to provide good advice to others.

2) **Courage:** *emotional strengths that entails using willpower in order to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, either external or internal.*

- **honesty:** speaking the truth and presenting yourself as a genuine person,
- **bravery:** not shy away from challenges, difficulties, or pain,
- **persistence:** completing what one starts, and
- **zest:** attitude to life with excitement and energy.

3) **Humanity:** *interpersonal strengths that involve “tending and befriending” others*

- **kindness:** being of service and doing good deeds for others,
- **love:** appreciating close relations with others, and
- **social intelligence:** being aware of the intentions and feelings of oneself and others.

4) **Justice:** *civic strengths that inspire healthy community life*

- **fairness:** treating all people the same based on the concept of fairness and justice,
- **leadership:** organizing group activities and ensuring that they happen, and
- **teamwork:** collaborating well as a member of a group or a team.

5) **Temperance:** *strengths that protect against surplus*

- **forgiveness:** being merciful to those who have done wrong,
- **modesty:** not being proud about one’s accomplishments,
- **prudence:** being able to discipline one’s choices, and

- **self-regulation:** Regulating one's emotions and behaviour.

6) **Transcendence:** *strengths that build connections to the larger universe and provide meaning*

- **appreciation of beauty and excellence:** being aware of and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life,
- **gratitude:** being thankful for the good things that happen,
- **hope:** to want something, expecting the best and making efforts to achieve it,
- **humour:** being funny, liking to laugh and make jokes; bringing smiles to other people, and
- **religiousness:** having conviction on beliefs about the higher purpose and sense of meaning of life.

Growing evidence shows that character strengths play a major role in tendering, reworking, regulating, and transforming the challenges and hardships of life (Niemic, 2019). In addition, character strengths encourage young people to thrive and develop to their optimal potential, and are correlated with a number of desired outcomes like academic success, leadership, tolerance and appreciating differences, the capacity to delay gratification, having kindness, and altruism (Park, 2004). The emerging field of positive psychology distinctively emphasizes building a good life by determining individual strengths of character and cultivating them (Seligman, 2002).

There are many ways whereby character strengths could prevent mental illness, and foster positive outcomes (Gillham, 2011), especially among emerging/early adults. Other additional strengths may for example build friendships and enhance the social support people receive from others, which in turn, could improve positive experiences that lead to prosperity and protect against depression (Gillham, 2011). Transcendence strengths may increase well-being by providing emerging adults a deeper sense of purpose and connection to others, and by giving comfort during setbacks (Eckstein, 2000). Intellectual strengths may increase emerging adults' commitment to the world around them, and temperance strengths are said to help early adults to divert bad experiences (such as injury, over-

indulgence, addiction) that threaten their well-being (Gillham, 2011). These strengths may also enable students to persist (and ultimately reach their goals) when they encounter challenges (Gillham, 2011).

Therefore, based on the abovementioned benefits, having the development of these strengths facilitated through individual or group intervention could help early adults cope better with the challenges and transitions they are facing. Character strengths form part of an individual's distinct personality as these so-called signature strengths are already part of a functioning person. It is always easier and more delightful for students when they get to work with these strengths (Park & Peterson, 2009). These strengths may broaden and build in response to crucial life events, or as a result of conscious way of living, actions or deliberate interventions (Niemi, 2013).

Strength-based approaches to therapy and interventions have therefore increasingly been used to develop these strengths of character with children and youth at any level (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). For example, one study revealed that, among the youth, important goal-setting, combined with using strengths in different ways led to improvements in student commitment and hope (Madden et al., 2011).

A study by Linley et al. (2010) indicated that the strong correlation between well-being and use of strength was somewhat brought about by the realization that one is progressing toward one's objectives, and having basic needs for independence, positive relationships, and competence being met. Ideally, character strengths are taught and acquired by practising them. Scholars have shown that character must be cultivated by action instead of merely thinking or talking about it (Park & Peterson, 2009). There has therefore been rapid growth in programming that attempts to achieve strengths development through experiential learning.

A number of youth development programmes for example, try to deter or negotiate in the development of trouble behaviours by constructing character strengths such as social intelligence, morality, self-control, and spirituality (Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004). Character strength such as Appreciation of beauty can be developed by wilderness experiences similar to those provided by

Outward Bound programmes, and built spirituality is often found cultivated from faith-based interventions (Park, 2004).

In combination, these studies propose that character strengths are significant enough to develop and have tremendous benefits for positive youth development and ultimately positive mental well-being (Park, 2004). These strengths are related to students' ability to sustain their mental health and well-being while facing the developmental challenges that was discussed earlier. Various types of programmes have been useful as vehicles in helping early adults negotiate the challenges they face more successfully, by recognizing and developing their strengths (Schreiner, 2015). One type of intervention that has gradually been developing a reputation for being effective in the facilitation of such strengths is Adventure Therapy (AT).

Adventure Therapy

Adventure Therapy (AT) programmes have shown promising results in providing platforms for youth strength development (Park, 2004). AT involves the intentional use of adventure activities for the purpose of cognitive (e.g., information acquisition), physical (e.g., technical skill development), and/or affective (e.g., emotional and social development) development (Glass & Myers, 2001). Since its emergence in the early 1900s, there have been ongoing steps by youth programme developers to boost its effectiveness in assisting youth to achieve positive mental health.

A research study revealed that the parents of youth, who participated in an outdoor behavioural programme conducted by the Outdoor Behaviour Healthcare (OBH) project, reported that their kids reflected almost three times more growth after one year in contrast to those who remained in their communities to attend the more traditional program (University of New Hampshire, 2018). According to some literature sources, Outward Bound International (OBI) is arguably the prominent service provider in the adventure programming industry, delivering a diversity of programmes to facilitate positive change and personal growth (Fletcher & Hinkle, 2002; Ritchie et al., 2013). Its aim is to achieve this by facilitating participants' development through a series of

challenges in a safe and supportive group environment. Ritchie et al. (2013) explains that during these programmes, consecutive problems are dealt with, and then restructured into learning that may change to life beyond the outdoor experience. Youth development programmes have been shown to cultivate character strengths such as social intelligence, morality, self-control, and spirituality (Weissberg & O'Brien 2004). In addition, examples from evaluations of youth programmes have been shown to build character strengths such as social intelligence, optimism, self-control skills, and increasing hope for the youth, to enhance positive well-being (Park, 2004). Another example is an Australian outdoor adventure intervention that showed participants engaging in adventure interventions and thereafter reported personal and social development (Bowen et al., 2016). Participation in adventure education has also been correlated with developmental outcomes such as self-actualization, increased interpersonal and teambuilding skills (Ewert & Garvey, 2007).

Positive outcomes have also been found in the academic environment, including cognitive restoration, improved working memory, and many other areas of cognitive functioning and attention through merely strolling in nature (Berman et al., 2012). Furthermore, psychological well-being, finding meaning and strength were found to be strongly associated with connectedness to nature (Cervinka et al., 2012). Increased self-esteem and mastery, and attainment of personal goals which facilitate young people's recovery in various domains of life and helps them re-establish their developmental trajectory, and has also been found to represent some of the common outcomes in outdoor adventure therapy (Schell et al., 2012). Lastly, through nature, participants have been found to gain new attitudes on their everyday environments, experience progress through overcoming cognitive dissonance, and reported raised levels of intrinsic motivation (self-determination theory) (Ryan et al., 2010).

In combination, these interventions have therefore been found to assist emerging adults, and address some of their age-related challenges (Priest, 1999). Many of the studies mentioned above also involve strengths that form part of the VIA classification system. Individually, these studies seem to

suggest that AT is an effective type of intervention to facilitate strengths development. However, in spite of these individual successes, there is no broad overview of which strengths are typically addressed in AT programming, and in which AT activities are typically found to be effective in developing these strengths. It is not clear which character strengths are facilitated specifically within the developmental period of emerging adulthood, through participating in AT programmes. Furthermore, the AT activities and practices that are effective in facilitating these strengths, have not been identified. As authors like Norton et al. (2014) encourage the development of the evidence base of AT practices, incorporating better documenting of program models, and gaining a wider understanding of the systems of change, a critical review of such interventions and their outcomes will make an important contribution to knowledge about such phenomena.

Relevance of the Study

Emerging adults represent an important population in which to review positive mental health, and the presence of psychological strengths that would assist them in facing the challenges they experience in their environment. Despite strong indications from existing studies that AT interventions could play a significant role in assisting young adults to develop a variety of character strengths that would help them adapt in this challenging development period, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding on which VIA strengths are typically addressed within AT programmes, and which elements of AT programming seem to have the most significant impact on achieving these successes. Thus, this study aims to identify which character strengths are typically facilitated through AT, and what elements of the AT intervention have been proven effective in facilitating these strengths.

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SECTION 2: ARTICLE

Manuscript for Examination

This article will be submitted for publication in the *Journal of Experiential Education*. The summary of the author guidelines will be provided below, after which the article will follow.

Manuscript Title

The facilitation of character strengths during early adulthood through Adventure Therapy: A critical review

Instructions for Authors

Article Format

This mini-dissertation will follow the article format as described by General Academic Rules 4.4.2 of the North-West University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a professional Master's degree.

Intended Journal

The Journal of Experiential Education (JEE) is the intended journal for publication. The research manuscript and reference lists have been written in accordance to the specifications of the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition publication guidelines for the purpose of examination. Appropriate amendments which may differ from the APA publication guidelines will be made before submission for publication.

Page numbers

For examination purposes the pages will be numbered from the title page and numbering will follow accordingly.

Manuscripts

Journal of Experiential Education (JEE) uses an electronic submission and review process. Authors must prepare manuscripts according to the most current edition of the Publication Manual

of the American Psychological Association (APA Style Manual). Authors should use inclusive language in their manuscripts-that is, avoid language that could be construed as sexist, racist, or biased in other ways. Manuscripts are between 4,000 and 8,000 words in length, including the abstract and all references, and typically follow the general format of a research article (introduction, review of literature, method, results, discussion, references).

Submission

All parts of the manuscript, including the title page, abstract, references, and tables and figures, should be provided in MS Word or RTF format, in English. Authors seeking to publish reports of qualitative or quantitative research are encouraged to read this article prior to submission, as it describes important guidelines for writing research reports, and should contact the Editor in Chief Jayson Seaman [jee@aee.org].

Manuscript format

Manuscript format: All parts of the manuscript, including the title page, abstract, references, and tables and figures, should be provided in MS Word or RTF format, in English. Allow margins of one inch on all sides, and number the manuscript pages consecutively throughout. The title page should include the full title of the paper (no longer than 12 words), the name of each author, the title of each author (e.g., Assistant Professor, Director), the affiliation of each author, the e-mail address of each author, the mailing address and phone number of the principal author, and a word count for the manuscript. Upload the title page as a separate document during the submission process. The first page of text should begin with the full title of the paper, but NOT the name(s) of the author(s). In preparation for the blind peer review, all author identifiers within the text, citations, and properties should be removed.

Abstract: The JEE requires abstracts to conform to a structured format with the following headings exactly as they appear here: Background, Purpose, Methodology/Approach, Findings/Conclusions, and Implications. Abstracts must be 200 words or fewer. Further guidelines can be found here. The

submitted manuscript should begin with a page including the title of the manuscript and the abstract, but NOT the name(s) of the author(s).

Keywords: The JEE appeals to a board and diverse readership. Three to five keywords should appear three lines after the end of the abstract and should be entered on the JEE website, using the list provided, when submitting a manuscript online. Select keywords that are likely to help attain maximum visibility with all audiences who might find interest in your paper, either within or outside traditional experiential education audiences.

Headings: Appropriate headings should be used to help organize the manuscript and should follow APA Style Manual guidelines. For theoretical manuscripts, authors are encouraged to use headings that clarify the flow of the manuscript as well as assist the reader in understanding the content of the paper. Authors are encouraged to use up to two (2) additional levels of headings in accordance with APA Style Manual guidelines.

Tables and figures: Tables should be titled and numbered at the top of the table. They should be numbered consecutively as they appear in the text. Tables should be clear, concise, and able to stand alone. Complete headings and footnotes should be included to clarify entries. Figures should be numbered consecutively, at the bottom of the figure, with a short and concise description. Fonts used in any table or figure should be compatible with that used in the text. All tables and figures should be included at the end of the manuscript and referred to in the text with a notation made in the manuscript indicating approximately where each should be located (e.g., [insert table 1 here]). Illustrations should be of professional quality and supplied in EPS, tiff, or PDF formats.

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Literature cited: All citations and references must be complete and accurate on submission and should follow the APA Style Manual. Manuscripts cannot be reviewed if they have references that are found to be incomplete or inaccurate. All applicable references should include doi numbers with https prefixes and hyperlinks (e.g., <https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825917740155>).

Length: Regular articles will be no more than 8,000 words, including the abstract and references. Book reviews will be no longer than 750 words. Longer manuscripts will be unsubmitted by the Editor and returned to the author for revision before being considered for review.

Human Subjects: Submitted manuscripts reporting research on human subjects must state in the methods section that the relevant Ethics Committee or Institutional Review Board provided (or waived) approval. Please ensure that you have provided the institution of the review committee in your text.

Authorship: All parties who have made a substantive contribution to the article should be listed as authors. Principal authorship, authorship order, and other publication credits should be based on the relative scientific or professional contributions of the individuals involved, regardless of their rank or status.

Funding: Journal of Experiential Education requires all authors to acknowledge their funding in a consistent fashion under a separate heading. Please visit the Funding Acknowledgements page on the SAGE Journal Author Gateway to confirm the format of the acknowledgment text in the event of funding, or state that: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors

Article

Running Head: STRENGTHS FACILITATED THROUGH ADVENTURE THERAPY

The facilitation of character strengths during early adulthood through Adventure Therapy: A
critical review

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Abstract

Existing studies offer strong indications that Adventure Therapy (AT) interventions play a significant role in development of a variety of strengths that would help individuals adapt to life's challenges. In spite of this, a comprehensive understanding of which VIA character strengths are addressed within AT programs, and what elements of the AT intervention have been proven effective in facilitating these strengths is lacking, especially during the challenging developmental period of emerging adulthood. This critical review aimed to address these lacunae in our understanding, and involved a survey of existing, peer reviewed literature. The results yielded 11 of the character strengths as described in the Virtues-in-Action (VIA) classification system as being facilitated through AT interventions. In addition, the analysis showed 10 different AT program elements contributing to the successful facilitation of these strengths. The research study concluded that AT interventions were successful in facilitating the development of several character strengths, and particularly so when a number of critical programme elements were present. Future research could quantitatively test the themes and hypotheses emanating from this review, and in so doing increase our confidence and understanding of the positive outcomes offered by AT.

Keywords: adventure therapy, character strengths, positive mental health, positive psychology, and youth development

Introduction

Early or emerging adulthood, also referred to broadly as ‘youth’, spans the ages eighteen to twenty-five. According to Arnett (2004) this is a transitional period and a unique developmental phase that is characterized by a number of features, which include a feeling of being ‘in between’, identity exploration as well as a degree of instability in love, work and place of residence.

Emerging adults are burdened with increased levels of stress, anxiety and depression, that can be overwhelming for them as they try to individually manage their unique experience (Dickson & Gullo, 2015; Kreider et al., 2015). Arnett (2015) explains that emerging adulthood is therefore a developmental period which encompasses uncertainty and change, increased egoism, but, it also constitutes a period marked by possibility.

Some individuals are able to accomplish age-related tasks effectively, while others struggle to define and maintain engagement to their tasks, and as a result they begin to experience personal difficulties (Arnett, 2014).. Recent research suggests that young people who do manage to function well in spite of the age-related challenges that have been mentioned are those who, in the face of challenges, possess internal resources that allow them to thrive (Park, 2012). Several studies in positive psychology have successfully identified factors that contribute to subjective well-being (Seligman et al., 2009), during this developmental period.

Among these are factors such as creativity, gratitude, hope, humour and other so-called ‘character strengths’ (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) that have been gradually correlated with Subjective Well-being (SWB) in the youth (Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2013). Defined as positive traits observed in the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of individuals (Park et al., 2004), according to Park (2004) these character strengths assist young people to thrive and develop to their optimal potential, and are associated with a number of desired outcomes such as academic success, leadership, tolerance and appreciating differences, the capacity to delay gratification, having kindness, and altruism.

Research has revealed a number of routes through which character strengths not only prevent psychopathology, but also promote positive outcomes and flourishing (Gillham, 2011) among emerging adults. The image below shows the VIA classification of virtues and the associated twenty-four character strengths.

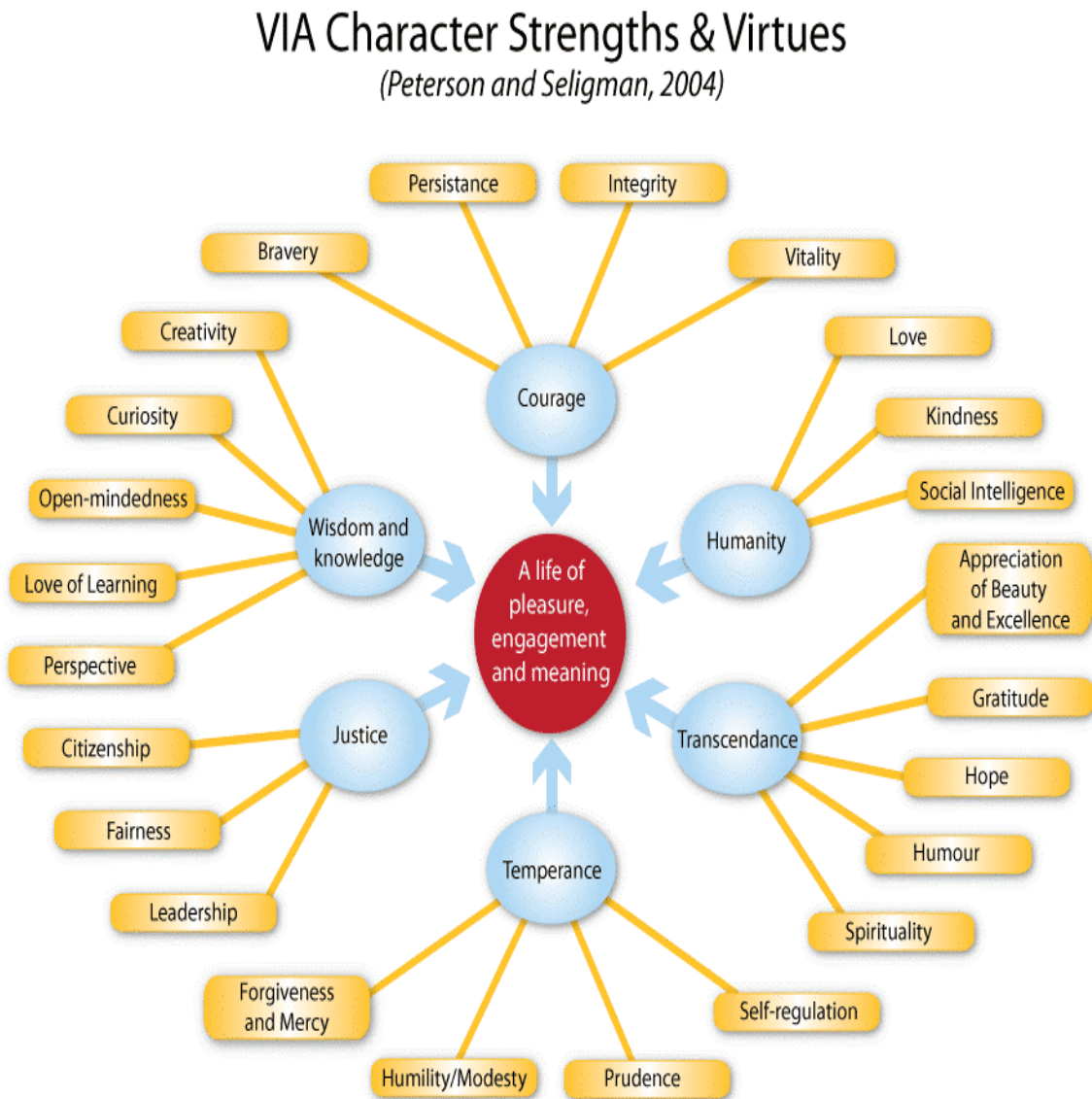


Figure 1. VIA Character Strengths and Virtues

Source: Peterson and Seligman (2004)

Although these strengths are relatively stable, they can and they do change, as they are interactive and interdependent (Niemi, 2013). Concentrating on the development of character strengths, Park and Peterson (2009) found that strengths are optimally taught and acquired by

practising them. Scholars have shown that character must be cultivated by action instead of merely thinking or talking about it (Park & Peterson, 2009).

Experiential learning programmes have therefore been found particularly successful in building character strengths such as social intelligence, morality, self-control, and spirituality (Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004). Experiential learning interventions that specifically use Adventure Therapy (AT) as a core aspect of their intervention strategy have drawn an increasing amount of research attention in recent years.

AT involves the intentional use of adventure activities for cognitive (e.g., information acquisition), physical (e.g., technical skill development), and/or affective (e.g., emotional and social development) development and growth (Glass & Myers, 2001). Participation in adventure education has been correlated with a large and diverse number of positive developmental outcomes such as self-actualization, increased interpersonal and teambuilding skills (Ewert & Garvey, 2007).

In terms of the development of character strengths, examples exist of youth programmes that have been shown to build character strengths such as social intelligence, optimism, self-control and self-regulation and hope, all of which can serve to enhance positive well-being, mental health and successful adaptation (Park, 2004; Ritchie et al., 2013).

Strong indications therefore exist that AT interventions play a significant role in developing a wide variety of character strengths among the youth. However, despite its apparent success in fostering character strengths in this particular age group, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding of which VIA strengths are specifically addressed with AT programmes, and what elements of AT programmes play a role in successfully facilitating the development of these strengths.

Therefore, this study will be guided by the following research questions: *a) What character strengths are facilitated among youth/emerging adults through participating in AT programmes? b) What elements of the AT intervention have been proven effective in facilitating these strengths?*

Aim of the Research Study

The aim of this study is to critically review and synthesize the scientific literature surrounding AT for evidence regarding the use of AT interventions in facilitating the development of character strengths in emerging adults/youth. Specific objectives are to:

1. Identify which VIA character strengths are successfully facilitated in AT programmes among youth, and
2. Determine what elements of the AT intervention have been proven effective in facilitating these strengths.

Method of Investigation

Approach and design

A critical review was used for this study. According to Grant and Booth (2009), a critical review goes beyond the mere description of identified literature sources and requires a degree of analysis and abstract innovation. It presents, analyses and synthesizes material from diverse sources (Grant & Booth, 2009). This research study followed the steps as described by Carnwell and Daly (2001), which are as follows:

Step 1: Selecting and defining the review topic. An opportunity was identified to provide a more comprehensive understanding of AT programmes and their impact on facilitating character strengths among emerging adults. The research questions that were formulated, focused specifically on which VIA strengths are typically addressed within AT programmes, and what elements, among the diversity of AT programmes found, seem to contribute to the facilitation of these character strengths.

Step 2: Identifying sources of relevant scientific literature. The researcher followed a systematic approach when identifying relevant scientific literature (Carnwell & Daly, 2001). Databases used to retrieve appropriate studies included: EBSCO Discovery Service (EDS), ScienceDirect, Academic

Search Premier, SocINDEX with Full Text, CINAHL with Full Text, MasterFILE Premier, Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, EBSCOhost, MEDLINE, JSTOR journals and more. The following keywords and search terms were combined or modified using a Boolean search, in order to produce relevant results: “adventure therapy”, “character strengths”, “positive mental health”, “positive psychology”, and “youth development”. In addition, Google scholar short searches were used in order to be thorough and not exclude relevant articles.

This search was conducted in consultation with a North-West University library information specialist, and was performed independently by the primary reviewer (master’s student), and the second reviewer (study leader), who monitored the review process and acted as a co-analysis of extracted data.

Step 3: Selecting and deselecting prominent literature. Studies were included if they comprised published literature (full text journal articles, books, and dissertations/theses), and had been published between 2000 (which is considered the ‘birth’ of positive psychology and the strengths perspective) and 2019. Excluded from the search were studies published in languages other than English, non-peer-reviewed studies, conference proceedings, and studies focusing on participant groups that fall outside of the developmental period of emerging adulthood (i.e., ages eighteen to twenty-five). The search initially yielded four hundred and sixty-three, of which a total of eight articles were finally included. *Figure 2* below presents and summarizes the search strategy process.

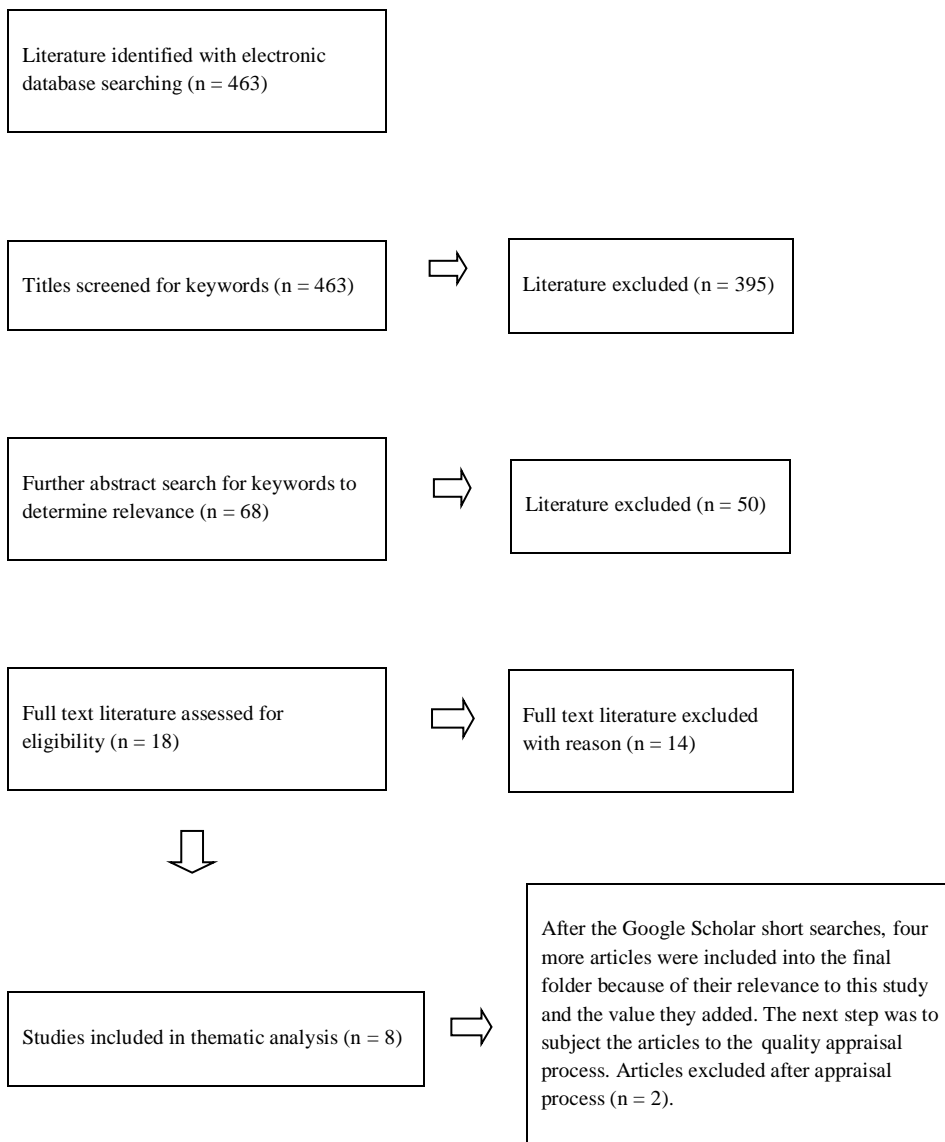


Figure 2: Flow Chart of Data Source Selection

The next step was to subject the eight articles that emerged from our search to a quality appraisal process. According to Grant and Booth (2009) critical reviews and attempts to evaluate it according to contribution do not comprise formal quality assessment. Critical appraisal is the method of action for watchfully and systematically investigating research to assess its reliability, value and relevance (i.e., contribution) to the context in which it is conducted (Al-Jundi & Sakka, 2017).

The articles identified in the previous step were evaluated and assessed independently by the two co-reviewers using four appraisal instruments, which included the Joanna Briggs Institute –

Qualitative Assessment and Review Instrument (JBI-QARI) (2017), the CASP Checklist (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme, 2018), the Critical Appraisal of Qualitative Studies (2014), and the Critical Appraisal Checklist for Qualitative Research Studies (2000).

Step 4: Data extraction. Data extraction refers to identifying the certain data or data components you want to extract from each examined study, to analyse in order to achieve the aims of the study. The data extracted for this review included all relevant text from the studies' methodology, results, discussion and conclusion sections. To aid the process of analysis, and avoid the exclusion of valuable information, all extracted data was included onto a data sheet for further analysis.

Step 5: Data analysis. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) was used to analyse the findings from the extracted data. The six steps described by these authors were followed as guidelines, which included the researcher familiarizing himself with the data; generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the research article.

The secondary reviewer (the study leader) monitored this whole process, including a quality appraisal of the literature. This included independently co-reviewing the literature, based on the inclusion/ exclusion criteria; as well as the quality appraisal instruments, as stipulated in the research proposal. After the primary and secondary reviewers discussed their respective assessments of the articles, an agreement was reached as to which articles were to be included before the process of data analysis began.

Ethical Considerations

As this study did not include real participants, ethical considerations regarding the protection of participants (for example, maintenance of confidentiality and obtaining informed consent) did not apply. The aim of this critical review was to effectively analyse, synthesize and present material from diverse sources (Grant & Booth, 2009). Hence, a number of ethical considerations were kept in mind to prevent or avoid ethical insufficiencies.

The first was that the reviewers (the researcher and the study leader) identified and excluded those studies where there may have been doubts about the reliability and validity of the results, due to methodological issues (Wager & Wiffen, 2011). Another precaution in this regard was to prevent the inclusion of any unethical research or /studies.

In the name of maintaining the scientific rigor of this study, included studies had to meet the ethical principles and standards required (see rigor). This critical review was done solely by the authors, who tried their utmost to ensure the transparency of the research process (Wager & Wiffen, 2011). Finally, good practice guidelines for conducting a critical review as described by De Klerk and Pretorius (2019) was adhered to.

The researcher (the primary reviewer or writer) is registered as a master's student for the MA Counselling Psychology Programme at the North-West University (NWU). The researcher attended the necessary ethical training as required by the NWU. The second reviewer is Professor Johan Potgieter (the study leader), who assisted in monitoring the critical review process of the primary reviewer, including co-appraising the data. Professor Potgieter has experience in the fields of experiential education, positive psychology and adventure therapy, and was therefore able to provide a number of sources which informed this process.

Ethical approval was obtained from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the NWU (ethics approval number NWU-00427-20-A1).

Scientific Rigour

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is used to demonstrate the quality of the data, and the data extraction process (Bradshaw, 2017). The four pillars of trustworthiness include credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Bradshaw, 2017), all of which was maintained throughout this study.

Credibility was maintained through a thorough process of data gathering as described by Carnwell and Daly (2001).

Confirmability was achieved by the primary and the secondary reviewer who kept an audit trail of the critical review process. Regarding the collection and analysis of the data, the steps described by Carnwell and Daly (2001) for conducting a critical review were followed.

Dependability was achieved by maintaining the audit trail, for example, tracking and noting changes and keeping updates of the review process.

Transferability was maintained thoroughly and consistently throughout the review, by providing comprehensive descriptions during the research process, including section 2 of this critical review which contains the methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion.

Findings

Table 2 below shows the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data included, respectively addressing the two research objectives of the study. The first research objective was to identify which VIA character strengths are successfully facilitated in emerging adults who participate in AT programmes.

The strengths that emerged will be reported according to the respective virtues found in the VIA classification system. In addition to those results, our analysis also yielded a number of *internal assets* that were facilitated during these AT programmes, but does not necessarily form part of the VIA classification system of strengths. These internal resources could be grouped into the following themes, as described in the table below: *Competence, Positive identity, Acquisition of skills, Resilience, Internal locus of control, and Optimal use of external resources.*

Table 2: *Character Strengths and Internal Assets Facilitated through Adventure Therapy (AT)*

Author/Title	VIA Classified Virtues	Character Strengths	Internal Assets
<p>Norton and Watt (2014)</p> <p><i>‘Exploring the Impact of a Wilderness Based Positive Youth Development Programme for Urban Youth’</i></p>	<p>Wisdom and Knowledge (this theme includes cognitive strengths that involve the acquisition and use of knowledge)</p> <p>Humanity (this virtue includes interpersonal strengths that involve “tending and befriending” others)</p> <p>Temperance (this virtue includes strengths that protect against surplus)</p>	<p>Perspective (this strength falls under the VIA virtue <i>Wisdom and Knowledge</i>, and refers to being able to provide good advice to others)</p> <p>Love (this strength falls under the VIA virtue <i>Humanity</i>, which refers to appreciating close relations with others)</p> <p>Kindness (this strength falls within the VIA virtue <i>Humanity</i>, and refers to being of service and doing good deeds for others)</p> <p>Social intelligence (refers to being aware of the intentions and feelings of oneself and others, and falls within the VIA virtue <i>Humanity</i>)</p> <p>Self-regulation (this strength falls within the VIA virtue <i>Temperance</i>, and refers to regulating one’s emotions and behavior)</p>	<p>Positive identity (from the literature, includes participants’ sense of pride, personal power, self-esteem, and purpose)</p> <p>Acquisition of skills (defined as skills that participants gain while participating in AT)</p>

	Transcendence (this theme entails strengths that build connections to the larger universe and provide meaning)	Hope (this strength falls within the VIA virtue <i>Transcendence</i> , and refers to wanting something, expecting the best and making efforts to achieve it)	
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Table 2: *Character Strengths and Internal Assets Facilitated through Adventure Therapy (AT) (continued)*

Author/Title	VIA Classified Virtues	Character Strengths	Internal Assets
Gonzales (2014) <i>'The effects of an adventure based programme: Mechanisms promoting resilient outcomes among youth in transition from childhood to adulthood'</i>	Wisdom and Knowledge Courage (this theme involves emotional strengths that entails using willpower in order to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, either external or internal) Humanity	Creativity (this strength also falls under the VIA virtue <i>Wisdom and Knowledge</i> , and involves thinking of innovative and productive ways to do things) Bravery (this VIA strength falls under the VIA virtue <i>Courage</i> , and involves not shy away from challenges, difficulties, or pain) Perseverance (refers to completing what one starts, and is a strength that falls under the VIA virtue <i>Courage</i>) Love Kindness	Competence (defined as participants' ability to do tasks successfully) Positive identity Acquisition of skills Resilience (defined as a trait that allows individuals to thrive, mature, and increase their competence when they are in difficult situations) Internal locus of control (this theme falls under internal assets and refers to the extent to which participants discovered that they have control over the events during programming)

	<p>Justice (this theme entails civic strengths that inspire healthy community life)</p>	<p>Leadership (this strength falls within the VIA virtue <i>Justice</i>, and refers to the tendency of organizing group activities and ensuring that they happen)</p> <p>Teamwork (this strength also falls within the VIA virtue <i>Justice</i>, and refers to collaborating well as member of a group or a team)</p>	<p>Optimal use of external resources (this theme involved participants' discovery and use of a number of external resources during AT interventions)</p>
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Table 2: *Character Strengths and Internal Assets Facilitated through Adventure Therapy (AT) (continued)*

Author/Title	VIA Classified Virtues	Character Strengths	Internal Assets
Passarelli, Hall and Anderson (2010) <i>'A Strengths-Based Approach to Outdoor and Adventure Education: Possibilities for Personal Growth'</i>	<p>Courage</p> <p>Humanity</p> <p>Justice</p>	<p>Bravery</p> <p>Love</p> <p>Kindness</p> <p>Social intelligence</p> <p>Teamwork</p>	<p>Acquisition of skills</p>

<p>Kelly (2019)</p> <p><i>'Influence of Outdoor and Adventure Activities on Subjective Measures of Resilience in University Students'</i></p>	<p>No virtues</p>	<p>No character strengths</p>	<p>Resilience</p>
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Table 2: *Character Strengths and Internal Assets Facilitated through Adventure Therapy (AT) (continued)*

Author/Title	VIA Classified Virtues	Character Strengths	Internal Assets
<p>Greffrath et al. (2013)</p> <p><i>'A comparison between centre-based and expedition-based (wilderness adventure experiential learning regarding group effectiveness: A mixed methodology'</i></p>	<p>Wisdom and Knowledge</p> <p>Courage</p> <p>Justice</p> <p>Transcendence</p>	<p>Perspective</p> <p>Creativity</p> <p>Bravery</p> <p>Perseverance</p> <p>Leadership</p> <p>Teamwork</p> <p>Hope</p>	<p>Positive identity</p> <p>Acquisition of skills</p> <p>Resilience</p> <p>Internal locus of control</p>

Table 2: *Character Strengths and Internal Assets Facilitated through Adventure Therapy (AT) (continued)*

Author/Title	VIA Classified Virtues	Character Strengths	Internal Assets
Le Roux (2019) [Masters Dissertation] <i>'An exploration of mindset and resilience in an adventure-based experiential learning programme'</i>	Wisdom and Knowledge Humanity Justice Temperance Transcendence	Perspective Creativity Love Kindness Teamwork Self-regulation Hope	Positive identity Acquisition of skills Resilience Internal locus of control

As can be seen in Table 2 above altogether there were eleven character strengths that were facilitated, and all six VIA virtues were represented. From the analysed literature, a number of participants reflected on these strengths respectively, with Love, Kindness and Teamwork which were strongly and equally represented. The second objective of the study was to identify which elements of the AT interventions contributed to the facilitation of the strengths and other internal assets mentioned. In reviewing the available literature, the following adventure therapy programme components were found to have contributed to the positive outcomes listed above: *outdoor / natural environment, overcoming challenges, teamwork, reciprocal support and cheering, experienced staff members, mentoring, autonomy, strength-awareness approach, reflective sessions, and programme follow up.*

Table 3: Adventure Therapy Elements Effective for Facilitating Character Strengths and Internal Assets

Title/Author	Adventure Therapy Elements and their Descriptions
<p>Norton and Watt (2014) <i>'Exploring the Impact of a Wilderness Based Positive Youth Development Programme for Urban Youth'</i></p>	<p>Outdoor/Nature environment (this theme refers to AT programmes providing participants with exposure to adventure activities in a nature setting such as rock-climbing)</p> <p>Reciprocal support and cheering (this theme encompasses support provided to participants from AT staff members, and participants learning to give support to others or their peers.)</p> <p>Mentoring (this theme illustrates an aspect of facilitators mentoring participants through some of their mental or psychological obstacles they faced)</p> <p>Programme follow up (this theme refers to the positive effects that long term follow-up had for the participants)</p>
<p>Gonzales (2014) <i>'The effects of an adventure based programme: Mechanisms promoting resilient outcomes among youth in transition from childhood to adulthood'</i></p>	<p>Outdoor/Nature environment</p> <p>Overcoming challenges (this theme describes the effect of being exposed to challenging activities and the challenge element during AT participation)</p> <p>Teamwork (this theme refers to the fact that programmes often require participants to work together as a team)</p> <p>Reciprocal support and cheering</p> <p>Experienced staff members (this theme involves AT programmes having employed experienced staff members)</p> <p>Mentoring</p>

Title/Author	Adventure Therapy Elements and their Descriptions
Passarelli et al. (2010) <i>'A Strengths-Based Approach to Outdoor and Adventure Education: Possibilities for Personal Growth'</i>	<p>Outdoor/Nature environment</p> <p>Overcoming challenges</p> <p>Reciprocal support and cheering</p> <p>Autonomy (This theme included participants having the choice regarding which challenges they would face, at what pace they would complete it, and in the process retaining a sense of autonomy)</p> <p>Strength-awareness approach (this theme encompasses adventure programmes using a strengths-based approach by bringing out participants' attention to their own character strengths)</p> <p>Reflective sessions (this theme refers to AT programmes providing participants with group discussions and reflection or debriefing sessions, following adventure activities)</p> <p>Programme follow up</p>

Table 3: *Adventure Therapy Elements Effective for Facilitating Character Strengths and Internal Assets (continued)*

Kelly (2019) <i>'Influence of Outdoor and Adventure Activities on Subjective Measures of Resilience in University Students'</i>	<p>Overcoming challenges</p>
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<p>Greffrath et al. (2013)</p> <p><i>'A comparison between centre-based and expedition-based (wilderness adventure experiential learning regarding group effectiveness: A mixed methodology'</i></p>	<p>Outdoor/Nature environment</p> <p>Teamwork</p> <p>Mentoring</p> <p>Reflective sessions</p>
<p>Le Roux (2019) [Masters Dissertation]</p> <p><i>'An exploration of mindset and resilience in an adventure-based experiential learning programme'</i></p>	<p>Outdoor/Nature environment</p> <p>Overcoming challenges</p> <p>Teamwork</p> <p>Reciprocal support and cheering</p>

As can be seen in Table 3 above, the results show what AT programme elements have been proven effective in facilitating the positive outcomes described in Table 2 earlier. From the analysis, it is indicated that the programme element that was strongly represented is the Outdoor/Nature environment. The respective themes are discussed below

Discussion

The purpose of this review study was to identify which character strengths are facilitated among emerging adults through participating in AT programmes. Secondly, this study also set out to determine what elements of the AT intervention effectively contributed towards facilitating these strengths. As seen in the results section, the findings indicated that a number of character strengths representing each of the six virtues of the VIA classification system were facilitated through participation in AT programmes.

Under the virtue of **Wisdom and knowledge** – defined in the results section above, four of the studies included in the review showed participants developing the associated character strengths of *perspective* and *creativity*. Both of these strengths were called upon when participants were physically and intellectually challenged during programme activities, which required them to think in a different way. In line with this, the participants forming part of the AT programmes often indicated gaining an increased understanding of themselves, and clarity about their future. This may be due to what McKenzie (2000) described as the unfamiliar nature of adventure programming settings, which has been credited with fostering new perspectives (Scheinfeld et al., 2011). Participants from the studies included in our analysis also frequently indicated receiving advice or direction from the staff members and their peers (see discussion of research question 2), which assisted them in gaining a new perspective. It may therefore also be that the guidance and perspective offered by facilitators may have contributed to the development of the strengths mentioned.

Through facing challenges associated with the AT programme activities, the virtue of **Courage** was also exercised, as indicated in three studies included in this review. The character strength *Bravery* was described by a number of the studies included, and was often associated with participants' exposure to challenging activities. The VIA Institute on Character (2021) argue that to be brave, one has to face one's challenges or difficulties. In addition to offering opportunities for facing physical and mental challenges, one of the studies linked increases in bravery to staff members

explaining to participants how AT equipment works for activities such as kayaking, backpacking, hiking, fishing and climbing, among others. This made participants feel more comfortable, confident and 'brave' enough to participate in adventure activities. Another character strength described under the virtue of **Courage** by a number of the studies was *Perseverance*, which was also often associated with participants' exposure to challenging activities. In line with the VIA Institute on Character (2021), participants from the studies included in this review exercised perseverance by completing AT activities after overcoming thoughts of giving up.

A participant from one of the studies remarked:

“Agree like it really built my confidence. Because the first day that we went climbing I was like wow this is going to be really hard, but then the last day you don't think about it much. First you struggle and then you get kinda good at it.”

The studies included in this review indicated a number of strengths related to the virtue of **Humanity** as being facilitated through AT programmes. This could probably be expected because of the opportunities for group interaction that AT programmes typically provide. Participants in the studies included in this review exercised the character strengths of *Love*, *Kindness* as well as *Social intelligence* - all three occurring during and after the completion of adventure activities. It appears that involvement in AT activities increased participants' understanding of the value of interpersonal relationships, and their ability to relate well with others. This has a beneficial developmental purpose in that emerging adults need developmental relationships (that is connections that give care and support) and opportunities for effective transitioning into young adulthood and for continued well-being (Scales et al., 2016). In this study, several participants indicated similar opinions about their experiences and the benefits of these strengths, including having a high level of comfort across various social situations, and an openness to new experiences and the development of meaningful relationships.

With regard to the virtue **Justice**, the studies included in this review demonstrated the facilitation of the character strength of *leadership*. Instances where this strength came to the fore revolved around participants taking the opportunity during an adventure activity to inspire the group to achieve a certain goal. As a result of these experiences, some participants from our analysis reported on the realization of their leadership skills. Daniel et al. (2014) reported that leadership is frequently found to be a characteristic that participants of EAP's become conscious of through their participation. The character strength *teamwork* was also prevalent among the studies included in this review. AT programmes frequently provided situations where, through group activities and teambuilding exercises, participants were able to develop their ability to work together as a team. Research by Tucker (2009) confirmed this observation, by arguing that AT allows members of a group to become engaging participants in the group process. According to Tucker (2009) this allows for reflection on real life experiences, which differs significantly from more passive approaches to therapy.

Within the virtue of **Temperance**, which refers to strengths that help to manage habits and protect against excess, is the character strength of *self-regulation*. The VIA Institute on Character (2021) define this strength as regulating one's feelings and actions. In line with this definition, several articles included in this study described self-regulation in relation to participants having to manage their emotions during and after facing challenging situations forming part of AT interventions. Several of the studies included in this review cited the development of self-regulation skills. At some point during challenging AT activities, in order to deal with struggling and getting stuck, AT provided opportunities for participants to learn self-regulating skills; often facilitated by the involvement of AT staff members. Some of those skills included taking a deep breath, approaching things one step at a time, and other skills related to the successful use of self-regulation as a resource.

Finally, *Hope* was among the character strengths observed, and represents the virtue of **Transcendence**. A number of the AT programmes included in our analysis mentioned the

development of hope, as was observed in participants' reflections. Hope was present both in participants' optimistic thinking about the future, and their increased motivation to reach for goals.

Considering all the character strengths represented in the studies included in our analysis, it is clear that AT has been successful in facilitating strengths representing each of the virtues that form part of the VIA classification system of character strengths. Furthermore, these findings are in keeping with the studies by Thakre (2013) and Converse et al. (2018) indicating that the development of these strengths positively correlates with improvements in well-being and life contentment, which plays an important role in the development of emerging adults.

In addition, to the VIA character strengths mentioned above, a number of **internal assets** were facilitated among the participants during their participation in AT programmes. Although they do not necessarily form part of the VIA classification system of strengths, these assets serve a similar function as they are positive traits reflected in the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals (Seligman et al., 2004). These internal assets are important because, within the multitude of challenges faced by young people today, is exposure to a variety of risk factors. Internal assets can be vital predictors of prosperous outcomes (Norton & Watt, 2014).

The first of these internal assets, *Competence*, was associated with participants facing and overcoming a variety of challenges during AT programmes, being physical, mental, social and emotional in nature. A number of the studies included in this review stated how a heightened level of competence impacted other aspects of participants' lives, such as increasing their levels of self-efficacy. This result confirms the general notion that AT characteristically leads to the development of greater self-efficacy, self-esteem, and an internal locus of control in participants across most age groups (Hans, 2000; Sibthorp, 2003). Notably, it was helpful that staff members explained how some of the adventure activity equipment worked (as further discussed as an important programme element under the second objective of this study later), as the participants reflected that this helped enhance the development of competence and feeling confident about engaging in AT activities.

Furthermore, a sense of *Positive identity* resulted from participating in and completing adventure activities. Participants from the studies included reported developing a sense of pride, personal power, self-esteem and a sense of purpose, which led to a positive view of themselves and their future. This finding is consistent with the meta-analytic results of Bowen and Neill (2013) who found significant improvements in the self-concept of AT participants from various age groups. This has a beneficial developmental function in that emerging adults need to establish their identity in order for successful transitioning and the achievement of independence to occur (Arnett, 2004).

In addition to acquiring the character strengths and internal assets mentioned thus far, a number of the studies included in this review reported participants acquiring a number of *skills* while participating in the adventure programmes. Among these were interpersonal skills, the constructive use of time, making optimal use of opportunities for continued learning, as well as developing their problem-solving and decision-making proficiency. This is in line with Butselaar (2013), who stated that participation in an Adventure-based experiential learning (ABEL) programme, in a group setting can allow for the facilitation of a variety of skills, including social skills and a greater sense of belonging.

Several of the studies included in this review showed that participants, while being confronted with challenging situations, increased their sense of *Resilience*. Existing research on resilience supports this finding, as Booth (2015) and Masten and Reed (2002) argued that resilience can be developed during AT participation through gradual exposure to challenging exercises which require participants to apply different coping strategies to adjust to the situation. Although this result from the studies included seeing a common increase in resilience, it is noteworthy that the element at work in increasing resilience is the arbitrary challenge or exposing participants to appropriate levels of challenge, rather than obvious exposure to outdoor activities. This will be addressed in the discussion of the second objective of this study. Allan and McKenna's (2019) study showed that resilience was

derived from actively confronting challenges, and therefore it appears that AT programmes do offer an ideal opportunity to such exposure.

In line with the finding of increased competence mentioned above, several studies included in this review report that participants' *internal locus of control* increased, due to learning how to successfully overcome challenges associated with adventure programmes. Fleischer et al.'s (2017) meta-analysis indicated that adventure therapy significantly strengthened self-concept as measured by internal locus of control, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. This study however provides more clarity on which program variable assisted in facilitating these positive outcomes. Participants from the articles included in the review reported that the challenging nature of adventure activities helped them discover that they have control over the events during programming.

Lastly, in addition to the VIA character strengths and the internal assets which were facilitated by participation in AT programming, the studies included mentioned the *Optimal use of external resources* as an important programme outcome. Although it does not form part of the VIA classification system, participants' discovery and optimal use of a number of external resources during AT interventions is worth mentioning. These experiences led to a realization that such resources are also available in their respective home environments, and like character strengths, they function to modify the negative effects of risk factors (Norton & Watt, 2014). Participants from the studies included in this review reported the (re)discovery and renewed use of and appreciation of the following resources:

- ***Support systems:*** This refers to support from home/family, peers/friends and supportive relationships with teachers/advisors.
- ***Adult mentorship:*** This involves participants receiving guidance from a more experienced person(s), and
- ***Involvement with healthy activities:*** This includes a variety of opportunities provided to participants to engage in physical activities in their home environment.

The second objective of the study was to identify which elements of AT interventions contributed to the facilitation of the strengths mentioned. The findings of this review study identified several AT programme elements that came to the fore as contributing to these positive outcomes. No two articles included in this review presented identical AT programmes, although numerous ‘typical’ aspects of AT programmes were replicated in a number of the studies. These were related to the positive outcomes achieved during AT programmes in a number of ways.

In this study, the **outdoor/natural environment** element of AT helped participants acquire and master a number of skills, including increasing levels of competency, perseverance, self-regulation, bravery, and internal locus of control. Similarly, to these outcomes, a study by McKenzie (2000) found that the physical environment of AT programmes contributed to cultivating new perspectives, a growing sense of mastery, and even spiritual development and transformation among participants. This is in line with Itin and Mitten’s (2009) suggestion that being outside in nature is the most important element of successful AT. The following excerpt from one of the studies illustrates the powerful role played by the natural environment beautifully:

“For me, it was in the mountains (wilderness), the environment where you were. It played the strongest role ... it is the environment that does it to you, that gives you that power, which gives you energy.”

Capaldi et al. (2015) suggested that repeated contact with nature produces larger improvements in well-being than other interventions often cited in the positive psychology literature. The effect of this element of AT could, according to Taniguchi et al. (2009), be at least partly explained by the fact that staff members/counselors have been found to be more approachable in outdoor therapy. It appears that the intentional use of the outdoor element is considered valuable.

Overcoming challenges was another AT programme aspect found in this study to be effective in cultivating strengths. Several studies revealed that challenge was a common element/factor of the AT programmes studied, and could be defined as anything that nudged participants out of their

comfort zones. Due to being exposed to challenging activities, like making it through a three-hour hike for example, a number of studies reported that participants had to engage in adaptive coping. This programme element was also associated with increased self-regulation, internal locus of control, perseverance, and bravery, as illustrated through participants' own reflections.

“So, when you are rock-climbing ... I remember I would get really nervous, and I would just like not know what to do, so I would take a deep breath and had to calm myself down and still be able to go. So, I learned that it's okay to take a breath but not like give up.”

AT programmes from the studies included in this review always involved a level of challenge, which was often physical. Most often this was included intentionally with the objective to nudge participants out of their comfort zones, in order for them to engage intellectually, emotionally or physically with experiences, in order for learning to take place, and to have participants explore their own skills and abilities. Although Brown (2008) argued that the biggest amount of growth and development occurs when participants experience sense of safety, feel secure and accepted, the majority of studies in this case indicated that for this age group growth resulted from overcoming challenging activities, which led to the development of both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, both of which have a positive correlation with mental health (Bowen & Neill, 2015).

The **Teamwork** theme refers to the fact that programmes often require participants to work together towards the attainment of a shared objective. Many of the activities referred to in the reviewed articles, including but not limited to rock climbing, hiking, camping, learning coping skills, and canoeing, appeared to have teamwork as one of the central mechanisms at work. As part of the adventure programmes, structured group experiences such as these led participants to experience the application of new skills such as enhanced interpersonal skills, increases in self-regulation, self-respect and a sense of brotherhood. This is in line with Norton and Tucker (2010) who found that

participants from different backgrounds would interact and collaborate toward goal attainment, and this provided many opportunities for social skills development.

Reciprocal support and cheering during the programmes also emerged as a central theme that contributed to the success of AT programmes as could be seen from the studies included in this review. This element was found at a number of levels, including peer to peer support during adventure activities, AT facilitator support to participants, and between participants and their family members once back at home. AT programmes included in this review promoted support by giving participants access to caring adults, which resulted in participants reporting an increased level of resilience, perseverance and motivation. This resonates with the research by Norton and Tucker (2010) who also reported on the advantages of providing participants with a support system during these interventions, and providing opportunities to explore commonalities among group members. It appears that one of the important functions of this programme component is to counteract disappointment while dealing with failure by connecting with support. A significant finding of this study is that AT programmes were successful in raising awareness among participants of the availability of support in their respective home environments, including support received from family members. It appears that participants, from the studies included in this review, were encouraged to challenge themselves due to the support and encouragement they received:

“I think having support is like really important for me at least. Like sometimes I might not want to push myself or just want to take the easy way as much as possible. But like having people to encourage me to like challenge myself is really good for me.”

Another significant finding in this study involves the importance of AT programmes employing **experienced staff members**. Staff members’ possession of so-called ‘hard skills’ is noteworthy due to its apparent association with increased levels of competence, confidence, perseverance and self-efficacy reported by participants for a number of the studies that were included. Participants in these AT programmes benefited from having experienced staff members, like

professional guides and schoolteachers, present during the challenging activities typically forming part of AT programmes. Details regarding the qualifications and experience of staff members were however only provided in the most basic manner, if indicated at all. Although information regarding staff members' credentials were scarce, most studies indicate that the relationships between staff members and participants was the more important component for participants to achieve success (Rothwell, 2008).

Related to the above, is staff members' possession of soft skills that enable them to engage with effective **Mentoring**. AT involves exploring nature through canoeing, rock-climbing and other outdoor activities. AT programmes from the articles included in this review effectively implemented mechanisms like giving appropriate responsibility and guidance or coaching to participants during these adventure activities. In the hands of experienced mentors, these activities resulted in a number of positive outcomes, including enhanced awareness, improvements in confidence levels, perseverance, resilience, social intelligence and personal development. This is in line with Jones and Deutsch (2011) who found that youth-staff relationships establish the bedrock for youth involvement in programmes, as well as favorable developmental outcomes in after-school programmes. Although the context differs, our study suggests similar findings for emerging adults in the AT programming context. AT programmes that are understaffed, or that employ staff who are unable to meet the participants' needs for enriching guidance or mentor/mentee relationships have been found by Norton and Watt (2014) to lessen the AT programme effectiveness in terms of reaching programme outcomes.

Autonomy as a programme element involves participants having the choice regarding which challenges they would face, and at what pace they would complete them, and in the process retaining a sense of autonomy. A participant from one of the studies remarked:

“... So, in real life you don't have to like, if things are challenging you don't have to feel like you are pressured or rushed or anything - you can just take your time.”

It appears that AT programmes factored in, intentionally or unintentionally participants' abilities to retain a sense of control over their own choices and growth process. One of the studies included indicated using mechanisms such as encouraging participants to become more aware of the learning opportunities that the programme presented. By translating talents and the development of these into personal learning objectives, participants were encouraged to take responsibility and ownership for their own growth and as a result reported gaining perspective, increases in bravery, and acquiring additional skills. This has a helpful developmental function in that emerging adults, as described by Arnett (2011), the need for psychological perception of independence and autonomy.

Another important component which contributed to the AT programmes' effectiveness was the **Strength-Awareness approach** that most of the programmes took. The majority of studies included achieved this by bringing participants' attention to their own character strengths. This refers to the prominent focus on the discovery and application of one's psychological strengths during AT activities. The data showed that the personal growth that participants reported was significantly correlated with their strengths awareness, and using opportunities for application of these strengths. Both these elements of awareness and application seem to contribute significantly to participants reporting increased levels of personal growth, as illustrated by the following quote from one of the studies:

“These experiences opened my eyes to previous situations where I have used my Harmony skills ... and I have learned to embrace this strength and value the qualities it encompasses.”

Data from this review supports existing literature by Govindji and Linley (2007), who developed appraises to assess strengths knowledge and strengths use, and established that strengths knowledge did not predict subjective well-being, but strengths use did.

Reflective sessions is another theme that emerged as an important AT programme component. In this review it was found that continued group discussions, and the provision of time for reflective

sessions following AT activities contributed strongly to outcomes such as character strength creativity, leadership, as well as problem-solving. Jeffery (2017) explained that when facilitated reflection follows adventurous activity, it generally takes the form of a talk based group session. From this study, this theme involved participants being provided with room and time to reflect on their experiences. The following excerpt from one of the studies illustrate an example of this:

“I think growth rather came from the discussion afterwards... An activity would not have done much, to my mind, the discussions did it.”

As shown by this excerpt, a significant finding from this review is the fact that some participants from the studies included felt that the reflections and group discussions following adventure activities launched their growth and contributed to the development of bravery, perseverance and learning self-regulation, rather than the outdoor activity itself. This is in line with Vossen et al. (2017) who stated that opportunities for reflection are strongly connected to the therapeutic outcomes achieved by clients. Vossen et al. (2017) contended that it is these reflections that bring meaning to learning. As mentioned earlier, it is noteworthy and surprising that some AT programmes included little, if any reflective time. In light of the internal assets mentioned above, this study found that it is necessary to have one-on-one or group interactions with participants in order for the realization of external resources to surface.

Lastly, and related to the above, it was found that **Programme follow-up** is another AT programme element that could contribute significantly to programme success. This refers to the positive effects that long term follow-up had for participants. Evidence from several studies showed that some programmes created opportunities for follow-up discussions between mentors and participants, which included outings, phone calls, contact through emails, post outing dinners or backpacking. Such activities, without exception, were associated with the degree to which increased developmental assets, such as acquiring skills and raising awareness on available external resources, developed during the AT programme were sustained over time. Although some studies indicated the

positive effects of follow-up, it was clear that this practice is in fact relatively uncommon. The positive outcomes associated with this programme element appear, however, to play an important role in the success with which obstacles experienced post-treatment are dealt with. This is in line with Draper et al. (2013) and Russell (2005), as cited in Dobud (2016), whose participants reported that although challenges still occurred, they were adequately equipped to handle the associated stress in a positive way, due to follow-up support.

Conclusion

This study aimed to identify which character strengths were facilitated among the youth/emerging adults through participating in AT programmes, and to identify which elements of the AT intervention contributed to the success of such programmes. In summary, the participants' reflections revealed that their experience during AT programmes facilitated the development of a number of VIA character strengths, including *Perspective* and *Creativity* (representing the virtue of Wisdom and knowledge), *Bravery* (Courage), *Love* and *Kindness* (Humanity), *Teamwork* and *Leadership* (Justice), *Self-regulation* (Temperance), and *Hope* (Transcendence). In addition to addressing strengths from each of the virtue groups, these interventions contribute to the development of a number of **internal assets** including *Competence*, *Positive identity*, *Acquiring skills*, *Resilience*, *Internal locus of control* and the *Optimal use of external resources*. These results point to the fact that various types of AT programmes represented in this review are useful as vehicles for recognizing and developing the psychological strengths of early adults, thus helping them to negotiate the challenges they face more successfully.

Secondly, this review found that several AT programme elements successfully facilitated the strengths development mentioned above. These include the *Outdoor/Nature Environment*, *overcoming challenges*, *teamwork*, *reciprocal support and cheering*, *experienced staff members*, *mentoring*, *autonomy*, *strength-awareness approach*, *reflective sessions*, and *programme follow-up*. A significant finding considering the second research question was that in spite of the variety of AT

programmes that exist, a surprisingly small number of programme elements could significantly impact the positive outcomes achieved.

Altogether, the results from the reviewed literature suggested that AT can be effective in the facilitation of character strengths among the early adults population, and furthermore, the findings provided, which showed that AT programme elements can contribute to the successful facilitation of strengths development reported above. However, because the majority of the studies included in this review study did not include much information about the characteristics of the programmes being reviewed, therefore there is a need for more specific information on each individual program elements/characteristics that contributed to the positive outcomes mentioned above. With this information, programmes can be more optimally effective. However, this study shows promise that there is a relationship between AT interventions and the development of strengths.

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SECTION 3: CRITICAL REFLECTION

The following section contains my critical reflection on the research process, as well as my personal reflection.

Critical Reflection

The research aimed to identify what character strengths are facilitated among the youth/emerging adults through participating in AT programmes. The second aim was to identify what elements of the AT intervention have been proven effective in facilitating these strengths. A critical review was used for this study. This critical review followed the six steps described by Carnwell and Daly (2001), including *defining the scope for the review, identifying the sources of relevant information for the review, reviewing the literature, writing the review and applying the literature to the research study.*

Through assembling, appraising, and synthesising (Puks, 2016) the studies included in this review, the researcher was able to provide more up to date knowledge on what character strengths are facilitated by AT programmes and what elements of the AT interventions contributed to programmes' effectiveness in facilitating these strengths. This provided information on the impact of AT intervention (and certain programme elements) on character strengths development among emerging adults, which should be valuable for researchers, AT developers and AT practitioners.

The Research Process

For the purpose of addressing the research questions of this study, the researcher saw it necessary to use a critical review approach and methodology, because it would include critically evaluating literature in order to synthesize the evidence following a step-by-step process, and to address an existing knowledge gap in the literature on this subject (De Klerk & Pretorius, 2019). This critical approach was deemed suitable also due to Grant and Booth's (2009) statement that the function of a critical review is to present, analyse and synthesize material from diverse sources –

which would help to address this study's objectives. Therefore, by following a critical review approach, it was possible to critically explore what character strengths are facilitated through AT programmes. This then enabled the researcher to determine which AT elements are effective in facilitating these strengths among participants.

The possible limitations of this approach also needs to be considered, though. While there is substantial value in trying to identify all the available literature sources on a topic under review, Grant and Booth (2009) outlined the scarcity of a systematised approach to conducting a critical review. As suggested by Grant and Booth (2009), this study followed the guidelines proposed by De Klerk and Pretorius (2019) to avoid this possible drawback; and to guarantee that our review was conducted in a structured and systematic manner.

Conducting an overview as proposed by Puks (2016), is another approach that could have been considered as an alternative to critical review. According to Puks (2016), an overview can be seen as an alteration of a critical review, due to its similar end goals, although it offers more freedom of choice when selecting the methods for conducting the review. Alternatively, a systematic search and review as defined by Grant and Booth (2009) could also have been considered as it incorporates the strengths of a critical review with a more thorough search process. A systematic review often addresses broad questions and incorporates multiple study types rather than focusing on a particular study design (Grant & Booth, 2009).

Although the critical review approach was in our opinion successful in reviewing and synthesizing the scientific literature surrounding AT for evidence regarding its effectiveness in facilitating the development of character strengths in emerging adults; we are aware of other methodologies that could also have been followed. We therefore recommend that a quantitative research approach and experimental design be used as a follow up to produce objective data, in order to better understand AT's effectiveness in facilitating the development of character strengths in emerging adults.

Data Collection

The researcher began this process by gathering existing published data to present, analyse and synthesize information (Grant & Booth, 2009) that is relevant to the research objectives. In considering the scientific rigour of this process, the researcher and the secondary reviewer ensured that the included studies met the ethical principles and scientific standards required. The second reviewer, Professor Johan Potgieter (who was also the study leader), was in charge of monitoring the review process, including the appraisal of existing literature and the analysis thereof. This was done to ensure that the data from the reviewed sources was relevant and in line with the inclusion criteria (De Klerk & Pretorius, 2019). In order to ensure that this process is conducted in a systematic manner, the search process was done independently by the two reviewers, and in consultation with Mr Nestus Venter, who is an information specialist at the North-West University, Potchefstroom, Ferdinand Postma Library. The process of gathering data for this critical review was long and challenging.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The next step was data analysis. The researcher followed the steps described by Carnwell and Daly (2001). All the articles selected for inclusion in this study (that is – those that met the inclusion/exclusion criteria described in the research proposal) were subjected to a rigorous appraisal process. The second reviewer (Professor Johan Potgieter) who monitored the search process, also participated in the process of appraising the quality of literature. The research process was thoroughly documented throughout.

In line with what the Joanna Briggs Institute (2017) explained that the purpose of this appraisal was to evaluate the methodological quality of each study, and to ascertain the extent to which each of the studies met the possibility of bias in its design, conduct and analysis. Following this, data was extracted, and a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the data. The results and the findings of this study were presented in a clear and consistent manner, in line with the

previously defined aim of the research (Puks, 2016). The findings were presented in two tables, respectively addressing the research objectives.

Findings of the Study

The final analysis of this review study included a discussion of the interpretation of the findings. In most of the studies reviewed, AT interventions were found to be effective in facilitating character strengths, based on the positive outcomes reflected by the participants. Additionally, AT programmes were found to cultivate *internal assets* among emerging adults. The findings also indicated what elements of these AT intervention were successful in contributing to the facilitation of these strengths. In reporting the findings, the researchers kept in mind (1) the variations in the sample size among the studies included (ranging from thirteen to fifty-eight participants), and (2) limited variation in participants' demographics (including their age, gender, and race), both of which limits the generalizability of the research results.

Limitations of the Study

No two articles presented AT programmes that are identical to another, although numerous AT aspects were replicated in a number of the articles. Although the majority of the studies therefore supports the findings of this critical review, the study was conducted within the age group of emerging adults, who therefore reported specific age-relevant positive outcomes after their participation during AT programmes, which could possibly differ from that of other age groups.

Another limitation of this study that needs to be considered is variation in programme characteristics. This includes variations in programme location, time spent on the programme, the number of staff members available to participants in the programme, and the number of AT programme activities. The geographical area of the programmes from the studies included in this review also varied in location, with the majority conducted in the United States and South Africa. This could possibly limit the generalizability because the participants reflected experiences within

their own context. An important consideration is the time spent on, or the duration of the AT programme. From the studies included in this review, the period varied from a four-day intervention to a three-week intervention. A question that comes up, that future research could address, is whether and how time spent in AT interventions affects the development of positive outcomes.

Another factor that needs to be considered in this regard is the number of staff members available for the participants in each AT programme. One of the important findings of this study was the positive impact on AT programme outcomes of providing participants with access to caring and experienced staff. However, only one of the studies specified having 2 staff members assigned to every eight participants. An area to be explored in future research is the advantages or disadvantages of different staff-to-participant ratios for the effectiveness of the AT programme objectives, and for the participants' personal development.

A further factor that the researcher was cognizant of, and which could affect or limit the generalizability of results, is the variation in programme activities and context. Because the AT programmes in this study included activities that were presented outdoors, the results reported can only be considered relevant to adventure programmes focused on outdoor interventions.

Lastly, an important limitation to consider is the limited number of studies the researcher could find on this specific topic, involving this specific age group. This suggests a gap in the existing literature, and it is recommended that future research should continue to do research within this area, to enhance the understanding of AT and its outcomes among emerging adults.

In spite of the limitations cited, this study strongly suggests the existence of a relationship between AT interventions and the development of psychological strengths among emerging adults.

Personal Reflection

During this journey, the researcher personally experienced a lot of growth and development. After the time spent in this process, I was interested to see AT becoming a "common practice" in the

healthcare space. The process has made me aware of AT's potential to become a space that provides the necessary positive development 'ingredients' that we don't get naturally. Organizations that share this vision include The Australian Association for Bush Adventure Therapy Inc (AABAT). This professional body has an interest in supporting, developing and promoting the field of Bush Adventure Therapy (which is a diverse field of practice combining adventure and outdoor environments, with the intention of achieving therapeutic outcomes for those involved). This is good news because it means that such structures are available, especially for those who share the same interests to get connected with such associations.

Regarding this study, the researcher really enjoyed learning about adventure therapy and character strengths among emerging adults. Although at some stages I got worried and was concerned over my own pace and progress and wondered if I would complete this study, I was glad for the opportunity to have come to this point. Moving forward, I am very interested to further expose myself to research in AT as well as AT interventions. I hope that the findings from this study can contribute to a better understanding of AT interventions, including being intentional and selective when developing a programme to ascertain what to consider, respectively.

I am grateful for this experience of learning about AT, and its unique role and impact on bringing positive mental health to South Africa's youth.

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Appendix A



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**North-West University Health Research Ethics
Committee (NWU-HREC)**

Tel: 018 299-1206
Email: Ethics-HRECAppl@nwu.ac.za (for human
studies)

7 August 2020

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE LETTER OF DECISION: NO RISK

Based on the review by the North-West University Health Research Ethics Committee (NWU-HREC) on 07/08/2020, the NWU-HREC hereby clears your study as a no risk study. This implies that the NWU-HREC grants its permission that, provided the general conditions specified below are met, the study may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Study title: The facilitation of character strengths during early adulthood through Adventure Therapy: A critical review																															
Principal Investigator/Study Supervisor/Researcher: Prof JC Potgieter																															
Student: SB Mazibuko - 25102605																															
Ethics number:	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>N</td><td>W</td><td>U</td><td>-</td><td>0</td><td>0</td><td>4</td><td>2</td><td>7</td><td>-</td><td>2</td><td>0</td><td>-</td><td>A</td><td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">Institution</td> <td colspan="5">Study Number</td> <td colspan="2">Year</td> <td colspan="5">Status</td> </tr> </table>	N	W	U	-	0	0	4	2	7	-	2	0	-	A	1	Institution			Study Number					Year		Status				
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Commencement date: 07/08/2020																															

General conditions:

The following general terms and conditions will apply:

- The commencement date indicates the first date that the study may be started.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the NWU-HREC reserves the right to:
 - request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the study;
 - to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research;
 - withdraw or postpone clearance if:
 - any unethical principles or practices of the study are revealed or suspected;
 - it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the NWU-HREC or that information has been false or misrepresented;
 - submission of the required amendments, or reporting of adverse events or incidents was not done in a timely manner and accurately; and/or
 - new institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.
- NWU-HREC can be contacted for further information via Ethics-HRECAppl@nwu.ac.za or 018 299 1206

Please note: Due to the nature of the study i.e. (a critical review investigating the facilitation of character strengths during early adulthood through Adventure Therapy), this study will be able to proceed during the current alert level, following receipt of the approval letter. No additional COVID-19 restrictions have been placed on the study except that the researcher must ensure that before proceeding with the study that all research team members have reviewed the North-West University COVID-19 Occupational Health and Safety Standard Operating Procedure.

The NWU-HREC would like to remain at your service and wishes you well with your study. Please do not hesitate to contact the NWU-HREC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely,

 Digitally signed by Prof
Petra Bester
Date: 2020.08.13
12:29:32 +02'00'

NWU-HREC Chairperson

 Digitally signed by Wayne
Towers
Date: 2020.08.07
13:47:16 +02'00'

Head of the Faculty of Health Sciences Ethics Office for Research, Training and Support

Current details: (13210572) G:\My Drive\My Documents 20190227\NWU-HREC\NWU-HREC_Approval Letters\9.1.5.4.3_LOD_NWU-00000-20-A1_2020mmdd.docm
13 February 2020

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Appendix B



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Proofreading and Editing Certificate

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that we Hugo Chandler and Brenda van Rensburg the owners of Busy Bee Editing are both professional freelance proof-readers and editors.

We have completed the proofreading, editing, syntax, language editing, layout, spelling, grammar and reference check to the best of our ability on a 17,366-word Dissertation titled: *The facilitation of character strengths during early adulthood through Adventure Therapy: A critical review* for Sibongiseni Bobo Mazibuko, Student No. 25102605 submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology at the North-West University.

Hugo Chandler

Hugo Chandler

Brenda van Rensburg

Brenda van Rensburg

Date: 16 September 2021