

## Background

Character strengths:

- Adaptive individual differences that inform how people relate to themselves and others (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).
- May be pertinent for young adult development in a college environment.
- We tested individual differences in character strengths of **curiosity**, **grit**, **gratitude**, **hopefulness**, and **forgiveness**,
- Considered undergraduates' reports of **identity development** and **psychological well-being**.
- We also tested differences in character strengths given **identity stages** (diffusion, moratorium, foreclosure, and achievement)

## Hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1** (Strengths and Identity Development):

- College is a structured period for personal exploration and discovery (Côté, 2006),
- We expected individual differences in character strengths to be positively associated with **identity exploration (1a)**, but we did not expect that strengths would be robustly associated with **identity commitment (1b)**.

**Hypothesis 2** (Strengths and Well-Being):

- We expected character strengths to be robustly and positively associated with measures of well-being (**2a**), including **personal flourishing**, **subjective happiness**, **life satisfaction**, and **college belonging**.
- Given previous findings suggesting that hopefulness is robustly and uniquely tied to well-being when considered alongside other strengths (Manuscript in Preparation), we expected **hope** in particular to be a consistent and robust predictor of well-being (**2b**).
- We expected these effects beyond covariates of demographic variables and personality traits (see Hayes & Joseph, 2003).

## Method

We recruited 269 undergraduates ( $M$  Age = 19.53 years,  $SD$  = 1.28; 79.9% women). Most participants identified as White (76.2%), followed by Southeast Asian (7.8%), Multiracial (4.5%), Black (3.0%), Latinx (3.0%), Indo-Asian (2.6%), or American Indian (0.4%). Participants completed standard self-reports of personality traits, character strengths, identity, and well-being as part of a larger, online study. Participants received extra credit for their Psychology courses.

Measure	$\alpha$	Measure	$\alpha$
Curiosity and Exploration Inventory (Kashdan et al., 2009)	.88	Ego Identity Process Questionnaire (Balistreri, Busch-Rossnagel, & Geisinger, 1995)	exploration = .72 commitment = .57
Forgiveness Scale-Revised (Rye et al., 2001)	.83	Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985)	.85
The Grit Scale (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009)	.75	Psychological Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2009)	.91
Gratitude Questionnaire-6 (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002)	.84	Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999)	.86
Adult Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991)	.90	Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale (Goodenow, 1993)	.90

## Results

Addressing **hypothesis 1** (identity development), as expected, curiosity, gratitude, and hope were positively associated with greater identity exploration. Unexpectedly, hope was positively associated with identity commitment.

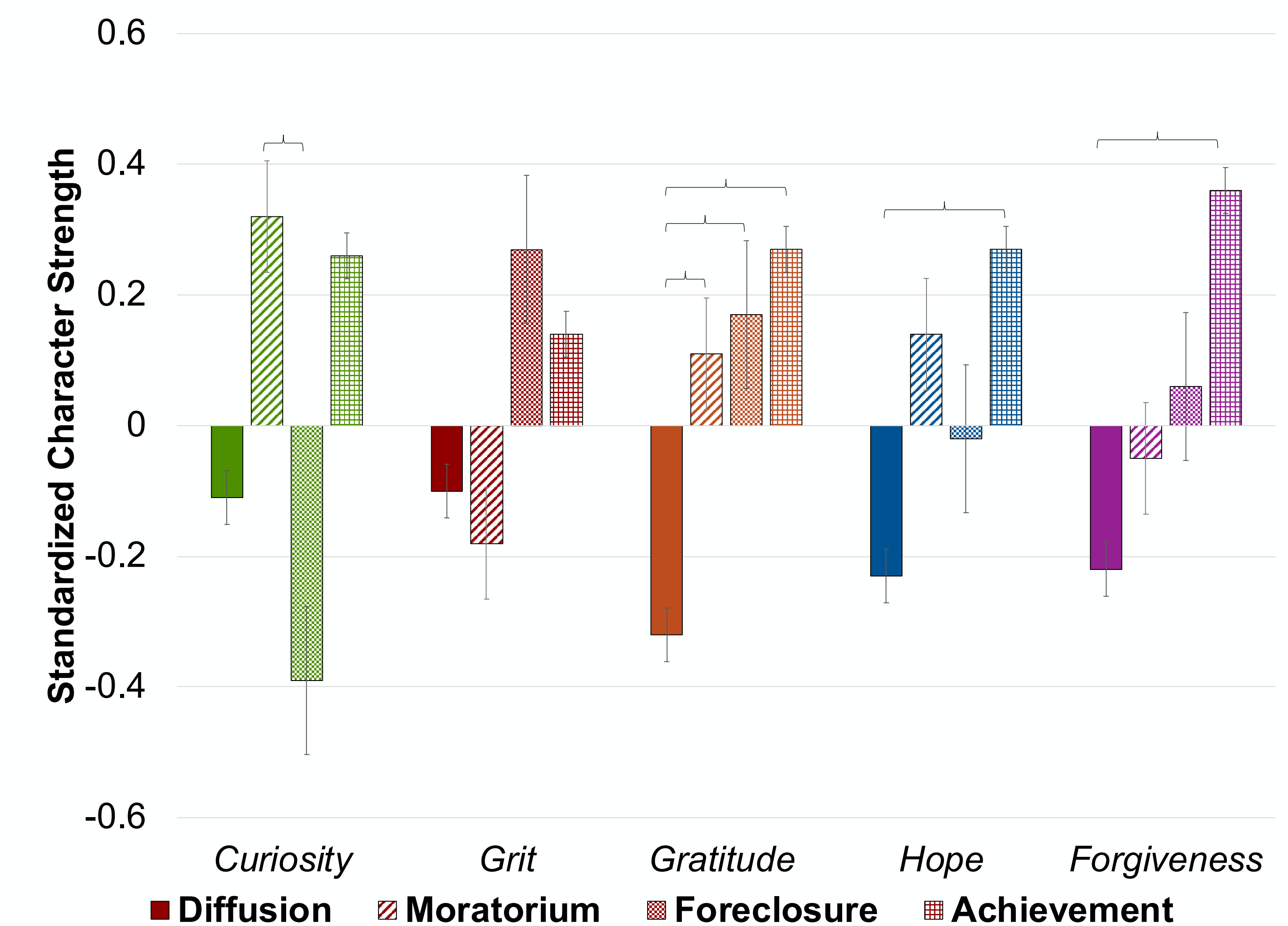
Addressing **hypothesis 2** (well-being), forgiveness, gratitude, and hope were positively associated with multiple reports of well-being. Surprisingly, grit was negatively associated with reports of psychological flourishing.

**Table: Hierarchical Linear Regressions**

	Identity Exploration		Identity Commitment		Life Satisfaction		Personal Flourishing		Subjective Happiness		College Belonging	
	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
<b>Step 1</b>	.03		.00		.00		.00		.01		.01	
Age		-.15		.07		-.04		.04		-.12		-.14
Academic Level		.17		-.11		.02		-.05		.05		.06
Sex		.13*		-.03		-.01		-.05		.02		.07
<b>Step 2</b>	.06*		.13**		.19**		.33**		.31**		.23**	
Extraversion		-.03		<b>.20**</b>		<b>.17**</b>		<b>.14*</b>		<b>.25**</b>		<b>.21**</b>
Agreeableness		.02		.08		<b>.12*</b>		<b>.18**</b>		.07		.10
Conscientiousness		-.09		<b>.15**</b>		.10		<b>.18**</b>		.01		.11
Neuroticism		-.01		<b>-.14*</b>		<b>-.30**</b>		<b>-.34**</b>		<b>-.38**</b>		<b>-.23**</b>
Openness		<b>.23**</b>		<b>-.32**</b>		.04		<b>.19**</b>		<b>.15**</b>		<b>.20**</b>
<b>Step 3</b>	.11**		.06*		.26**		.31**		.10**		.22**	
Curiosity		<b>.14*</b>		-.12		-.05		-.04		-.02		.06
Grit		-.10		.03		-.09		<b>-.14**</b>		-.03		.09
Gratitude		<b>.19*</b>		.12		<b>.26**</b>		<b>.28**</b>		<b>.18**</b>		<b>.25**</b>
Hope		<b>.23**</b>		<b>.19*</b>		<b>.38**</b>		<b>.56**</b>		<b>.27**</b>		<b>.32**</b>
Forgiveness		.09		.06		<b>.25**</b>		<b>.08*</b>		.10		<b>.17**</b>
F(13, 252)		4.73		4.64		15.45		35.70		13.84		16.47
Model Sig.		.000		.000		.000		.000		.000		.000

Note. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . For Sex, women received the higher value. Bolded values were significant at the  $\alpha = .05$  level.

## Figure: Character and Identity Stages



Patterns of identity stages given exploration and commitment scores were then formed given mean-split scores of identity exploration and commitment. Tukey-corrected contrasts at the  $\alpha < .05$  level and are denoted with brackets above.

## Discussion

Associations of character strengths with identity were tested in two ways:

- Character strengths of curiosity, gratitude, and hope accounted for variance in identity exploration; hope also accounted for variance in identity commitment
- Identity stage differences in curiosity, gratitude, hope, and forgiveness were also supported. Curiosity distinguished moratorium and foreclosure, whereas gratitude, hope, and forgiveness were notably low in diffusion.

In regard to well-being:

- Surprisingly, curiosity was not associated with any measures of well-being, and grit was negatively related to personal flourishing
- Though forgiveness and gratitude were also consistently associated with well-being, hope showed the strongest relations to well-being

Future directions:

- Given hope's link to both identity and well-being, longitudinal work should examine trajectories of identity development and hope from adolescence through young adulthood
- Identifying antecedents of hope is also needed