

Strengths among Contemporary Teenagers: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Male and female are two indispensable wheels of a chariot, thus both complement each other and this is a fact that without any one of them, it is just impossible to imagine the smooth continuation of the journey of life. India is a country where women were worshiped as Goddess. Though the society in which we live has been shaped historically by males. But recently the existing scenario appears to be changing with the realization of strengths among females. A harmonious society appears to be emerging with the fast speed of decline in gender-specificity. In order to empirically confirm these notions, the present researchers decided to explore and compare the profile of strengths of male-female adolescents. A test of Hindi adaptation of Value In Action (VIA) Inventory of Strengths for Youth by Shree and Singh (2013) was used. A purposive sample of 150 adolescents in which 75 were males and 75 were females with the age range of 13-17 years was drawn from Rohtak city, Haryana. The descriptive statistics was used to find out the mean differences in strengths of male and female adolescents. They differed to some extent in their profile of signature strengths. Further the profile of top five strengths also called “signature strengths”, the male and female differed in two out of five signature strengths. The similar signature strengths found in both male and female adolescents were such as judgment/critical thinking, appreciation of beauty and love, however they differed on two strengths such as zest and perspective were found in male while kindness and modesty were found in female. The inference drawn from the current study is that females are more humane than the male counterpart whereas males are found to be more courageous than females. The need to foster or enhance certain strengths in specific gender are discussed in the paper.

Keywords: *Strengths, Signature Strengths, Contemporary Teenagers, Gender*

In India discriminatory attitude towards men and women has existed for generations and effect the lives of both genders externally as well as internally. Although the constitution of India has granted men and women equal rights, still, society creates gender disparity. However over the

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past decade in India due to the efforts of the people and government gender equality has not only been explicitly but also implicitly recognized. It is a stage of exciting personality growth and character development. Due to the tremendous personality, cognitive, and moral changes occurring during adolescence, it is not surprising that studies have found that adolescents manifest more character strengths in their behavior (Park and Peterson, 2006a) than young children (Park and Peterson, 2006b). Strengths have been defined as pre-existing qualities that arise naturally, feel authentic, are intrinsically motivating to use, and energizing, thereby increasing the probability of healthy outcomes (Linley, 2008; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character strengths in adolescents have been associated with desirable outcomes such as subjective well-being, life satisfaction, fewer symptoms of depression, suicidal ideation and stress (Park, 2004; Park and Peterson, 2006a; Gillham, Deusch, Werner, Reivich, Heindl, Linkins, Winder, Peterson, Park, Abenavoli, Contero, and Seligman, 2011; Liu and Li, 2016), leadership, tolerance, ability to delay gratification, kindness, and altruism (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000), and a reduction of problems such as substance use, alcohol abuse, smoking, school dropout, juvenile crime, alcohol and drug use, and unwanted pregnancy and violence (Park, 2004 and Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, and Hawkins, 1999). Earlier in psychology the main focus was given on weakness and emphasis was on repairment of what has been broken. Recently the focus is being given on positivity i.e. strengths and virtues. Now-a-days psychologists are concerned about prevention and promotion of one's being. They are bothered not only about one's survival, but how to thrive and flourish in one's life. So Peterson and Seligman (2004) developed an inventory to assess adults' character strengths. Recently an inventory i.e. values in action by Park, and Peterson (2006) has been developed to assess six virtues (Wisdom, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance and Transcendence) and twenty four character strengths of teenagers. Virtues are core characteristics of the personality, embedded with 24 character strengths (Creativity, Curiosity, Judgment / critical thinking, Love of learning, Perspective, Bravery, Persistence, Authenticity/honesty, Zest, Love, Kindness, Social intelligence, Citizenship, Fairness, Leadership, Forgiveness, Modesty, Prudence, Self-regulation, Appreciation of beauty, Gratitude, Hope, Humor and Spirituality).

Being a nascent area there is a limited literature emphasizing the role of gender in determining the profile of character strengths of male-female adolescents. As it has been empirically proved that females scored higher in the character strengths of kindness (Ngai, 2015), than their male counterparts. In India Shree and Singh (2013) reported kindness and Judgment / critical thinking as signature strengths common among male and female adolescents. Similarly earlier Bhatt, Tweed, Dooley, Viljoen, Douglas, Gagnon and Besla (2012) found similarity in top seven choices of strengths between boys and girls. On the contrary Ngai (2015) highlighted the difference in profile of strengths among boys and girls, where girls exceeded boys in the strengths of kindness, love, self regulation and fairness etc. With this background adolescence which is generally considered a period of storm and stress the focus should be to avoid that storm, one should take preventive measures while revealing their hidden strengths which may

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serve as a resource for facing the harsh realities of life. Further the question arises that whether gender differences exist in developing these inner strengths which are largely affected by the surrounding environment and societal norms?.

On the basis of above notions the following problem was selected for the current research work.

Problem:

To assess and compare the profile of character strengths of male-female adolescents. On the basis of above problem, the following objectives were formulated

- 1) To identify and compare the global profile of character strengths of male-female adolescents
- 2) To highlight and compare the profile of signature strengths of male-female adolescents.

METHODOLOGY

Design:

Two group design was used to assess and compare the character strengths/signature strengths of male and female adolescents. In which gender is the independent variable and character strengths is the dependent variable. It may be summarized as follows

Design of the study

Gender (independent variable)	
Male	Female
Character strengths (dependent variable)	
n=75	n=75

N=150

Sample:

In the present study, a purposive sample of one hundred fifty adolescents of both sexes (75 Males, 75 females) with the age range of 13-17years was selected from Rohtak district of Haryana state with the following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria:

- Adolescents belonging to low and middle strata of society, belonging to urban background only.
- With the age range of 13-17years.
- Equal number of male and female.
- Minimum qualification up to 5th standard having almost similar family and school environment.

Exclusion criteria:

- Adolescents suffering from terminal or incurable diseases/Drug abused/Delinquent/ higher strata of society.

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Tools:

In the present study the following tool was used.

Hindi adaptation of Value In Action (VIA) Inventory of Strengths for Youth by Shree and Singh (2013)

It is a self-report inventory for children and youth (ages 10 to 17). It measures 6 virtues such as (Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, Transcendence) these virtues are embedded with 24 character strengths (Creativity, Curiosity, Judgment / critical thinking, Love of learning, Perspective, Bravery, Persistence, Authenticity/honesty, Zest, Love, Kindness, Social intelligence, Citizenship, Fairness, Leadership, Forgiveness, Modesty, Prudence, Self-regulation, Appreciation of beauty, Gratitude, Hope, Humor and Spirituality). It consists of 198 questions. On an average, an individual usually completes this inventory in 35 to 45 minutes. Participants have to respond on 5 point Likert scale ranging from 1 =(very much unlike me), 5 =(very much like me). It is fully reliable. The test re-test reliability for the strengths is .42-.77 and inter virtues correlation is found to be .60-.71. At the virtue level (each virtue comprising of cluster of strengths) the value of Cronbach alpha is found to be high (.81 to .88) while exclusively calculating for each strength Cronbach alpha is found to be ranging from moderate to high level (.46 to .65).

Procedure:

First of all investigators sought the permission to work on adolescents from the concerned authorities of various schools. After acknowledging the participants about the goals of the study, rapport was established with each participant. Relevant instructions related to inventory were given and they filled the profoma accordingly. Scoring was done as per norms and data were subjected to statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The scores obtained on the “Hindi adaptation of Value In Action (VIA) Inventory of Strengths for Youth” of male and female adolescents, the data have been analyzed by using descriptive statistics as shown in Table 1.

Table 1, Mean and Standard Deviation of scores of Virtue-wise Character Strengths of Male and Female Adolescents

Sr. No.	Character strengths	Male Adolescents		Female Adolescents	
		Mean Scores	SD	Mean Scores	SD
	Wisdom and Knowledge				
1	Creativity	4.1100	.67282	4.2050	.59155
2	Curiosity	4.0383	.73750	4.2433	.67530
3	Judgment/critical thinking	4.5017	.47153	4.6500	.37387
4	Love of learning	4.2350	.63037	4.3667	.59924

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Sr. No.	Character strengths	Male Adolescents		Female Adolescents	
		Mean Scores	SD	Mean Scores	SD
5	Perspective	4.4033	.56785	4.3433	.47890
	Courage				
6	Bravery	4.3350	.49540	4.4350	.44521
7	Persistence	4.1511	.52646	4.3007	.48321
8	Authenticity/honesty	4.3167	.55307	4.3517	.55852
9	Zest	4.4083	.52001	4.3650	.47566
	Humanity				
10	Love	4.4267	.50458	4.6207	.33686
11	Kindness	4.0889	.52084	4.4533	.41444
12	Social intelligence	4.0800	.66324	4.3000	.55561
	Justice				
13	Citizenship	4.1167	.54460	4.2367	.57999
14	Fairness	4.0533	.45643	3.9170	.51182
15	Leadership	4.1467	.62072	4.0900	.53924
	Temperance				
16	Forgiveness	3.9010	.62525	4.1844	.71342
17	Modesty	4.1289	.56480	4.4430	.42072
18	Prudence	4.1783	.58995	4.3383	.48490
19	Self-regulation	3.7111	.51016	3.7852	.44231
	Transcendence				
20	Appreciation of beauty	4.4300	.40019	4.4817	.42548
21	Gratitude	4.1567	.64071	4.1483	.74624
22	Hope	4.1917	.65481	4.2167	.65222
23	Humor	3.7170	.68501	3.8030	.52198
24	Spirituality	4.0733	.72015	4.3367	.61580

Table 1 clearly reveals the almost similar profile of character strengths across gender. As the highest magnitude of character strength i.e. Judgment/critical thinking (mean score 4.5017, 4.6500) is found in both male and female adolescents respectively as being at the top of the hierarchy of character strengths. Similarly at the bottom level i.e. the least developed character strength i.e. self regulation is apparent in both male and female adolescents, which highlight the fact that at the top as well as at the bottom both groups shared the almost similar pattern of profile of character strengths. In other words it may be stated that out of six virtues embedded with twenty four character strengths revealed that virtue of wisdom and knowledge consisting of a character strength of Judgment/critical thinking is dominating among adolescents of both sexes. It reveals that during this phase of life cognitive growth appears to be at the peak, hence empowering other virtues such as humanity, courage, justice, temperance and transcendence etc. The least developed character strength i.e. self-regulation (under the virtue of temperance male mean scores 3.7111, female mean scores 3.7852) in both sexes clearly shows that the adolescents may be either male or female of contemporary society are unable to monitor themselves may be

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due to their inability to fix the goals of their life (till date) as references for directing and regulating their actions at this time. Hence it leads to discrepancy between their current state and future goal because the actual discrepancy lies between what they are now and where they want to go.

Thus according to control theory of self regulation based on “feedback loops” that are used to control some process relative to a given point (Austin, Vancouver, 1996; Carver and Scheier, 1981). Further adolescents’ weakness in self regulation may be attributed to their discrepancy among their actual, ideal and ought self. In other words it may be stated that discrepancies are central to self regulation. Thus without crystal clear goals and standards they are unable to monitor their progress, hence failed to attain goal. Over all it may be inferred that inadequate parenting and inappropriate living environment also may appear to be the key factors for failure in self-regulation among adolescents.

The complete profile of twenty four character strengths of male and female adolescents revealed that male scored a bit higher mean scores on character strengths of zest, fairness, leadership and gratitude than their female counterparts, while in rest of the character strengths such as creativity, curiosity, judgment / critical thinking, love of learning, perspective, bravery, persistence, authenticity/honesty, love, kindness, social intelligence, citizenship, forgiveness, modesty, prudence, self-regulation, appreciation of beauty, hope, humor and spirituality. females scored a bit higher than male adolescents. The complete profile of twenty four character strengths of male and female adolescents have been depicted in Figure 1.

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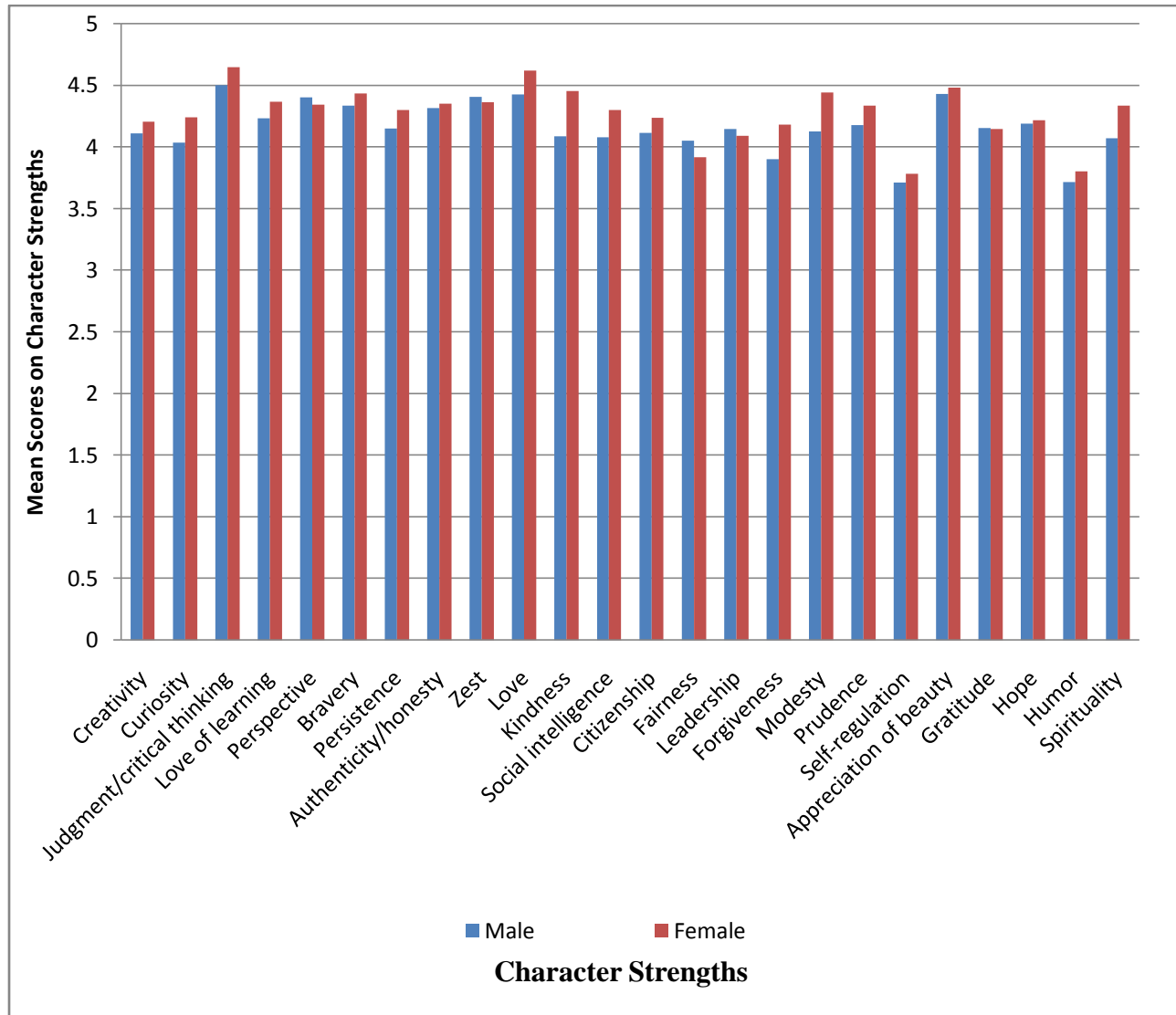


Figure 1. Profile of character strengths of male and female adolescents.

Figure 1 clearly highlights the almost similarity in profile of character strengths of both sexes such a higher degree of similarity in character strengths among male-female adolescents indicates that there existed no gender disparity as far as strengths are concerned. Both male and female adolescents are found to be equal in the fostering and nurturance of strength, may be due to the equal treatment given to them not only by parents but also by society at large. After capturing the global profile of character strengths based on their magnitude further frequency and percentage of endorsement of each of character strength rated as signature strength (top five character strengths) have been shown in Table 2 and more clearly evident in figure 2.

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Table 2, Frequency and Percentage of Endorsement of each of the Character Strength rated as Signature Strength (Top five character strengths) by Male-female Adolescents

Sr. No.	Character strengths	Male Adolescents (n=75)		Female Adolescents (n=75)	
		F	%	F	%
1	Creativity	18	24	9	12
2	Curiosity	20	26.6666667	25	33.3333333
3	Judgment/critical thinking	37	49.3333333	39	52
4	Love of learning	23	30.6666667	28	37.3333333
5	Perspective	28	37.3333333	17	22.6666667
6	Bravery	22	29.3333333	26	34.6666667
7	Persistence	14	18.6666667	13	17.3333333
8	Authenticity/honesty	18	24	19	25.3333333
9	Zest	27	36	23	30.6666667
10	Love	27	36	34	45.3333333
11	Kindness	11	14.6666667	22	29.3333333
12	Social intelligence	18	24	23	30.6666667
13	Citizenship	15	20	16	21.3333333
14	Fairness	7	9.3333333	2	2.6666667
15	Leadership	21	28	15	20
16	Forgiveness	9	12	17	22.6666667
17	Modesty	13	17.3333333	16	21.3333333
18	Prudence	18	24	14	18.6666667
19	Self-regulation	2	2.6666667	3	4
20	Appreciation of beauty	24	32	25	33.3333333
21	Gratitude	23	30.6666667	18	24
22	Hope	27	36	19	25.3333333
23	Humor	6	8	2	2.6666667
24	Spirituality	22	29.3333333	22	29.3333333

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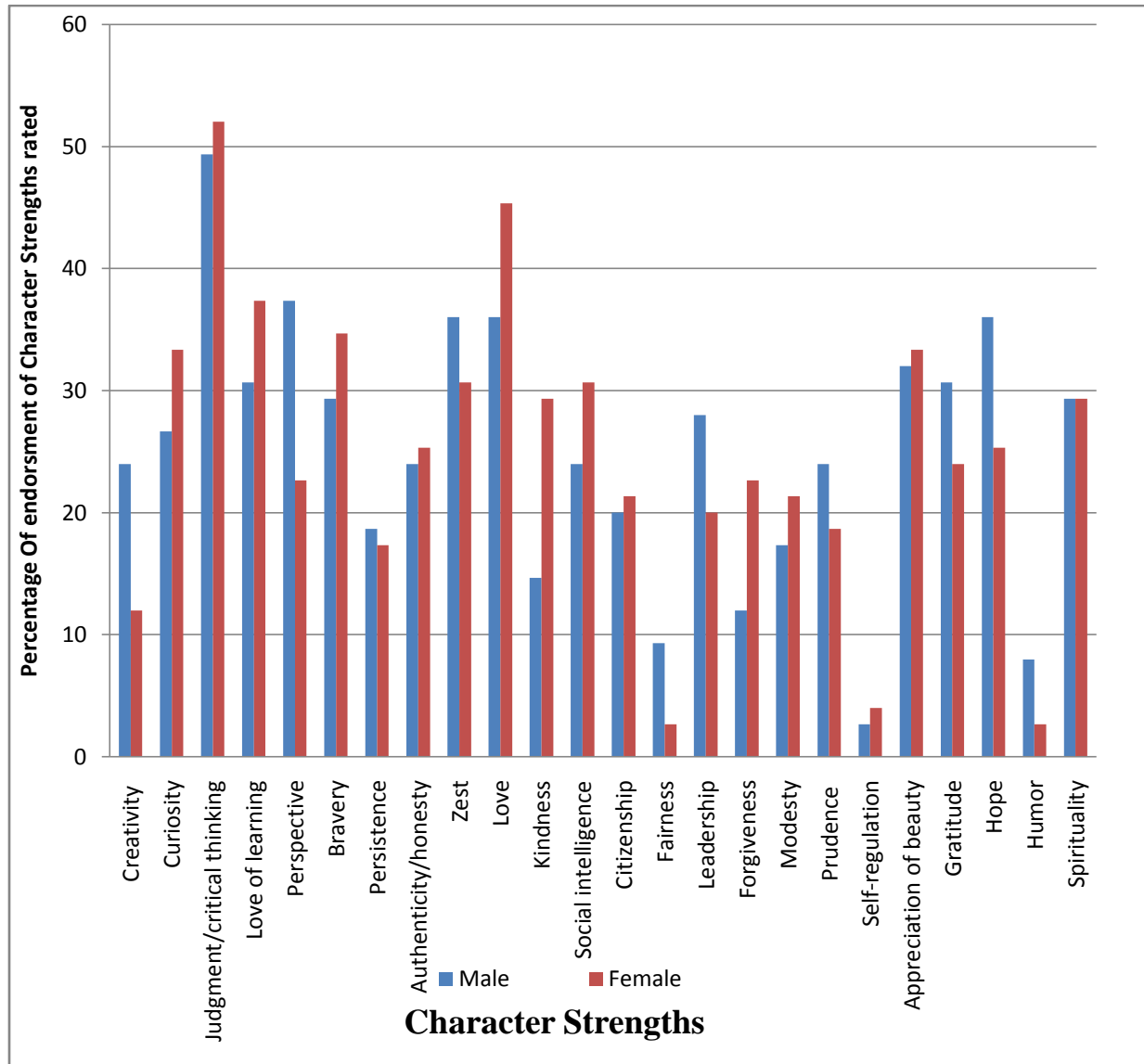


Figure 2. Percentage of endorsement of each of the character strength rated as signature strength by male-female adolescents.

From Table 2 and Figure 2 it is evident that maximum endorsement was given by both sexes to a strength of Judgment/critical thinking as a signature strength. However the minimum endorsement as signature strength was given to a character strength of self regulation (2.6%) in the case of male while humor and fairness were found least endorsed signature strengths in the case of females. It may be stated that self regulation is just a “missed strength” in almost all the male adolescents. While humor and fairness appear to be almost missing in the females profile of signature strengths, the reason may be attributed to their fight for “fairness” and lack of humor may be due to facing of more struggles in this phase of life both physically and mentally.

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After getting insight about the global profile of character strengths across gender, the top five character strengths (signature strengths) were ranked and have been depicted in Table 3.

Table 3

Signature Strengths (Top 5 virtue-wise Character Strengths) of Male- Female Adolescents

Ranking	Male Adolescents	Female Adolescents
1	Judgment / critical thinking (Wisdom and Knowledge)	Judgment / critical thinking (Wisdom and Knowledge)
2	Appreciation of beauty (Transcendence)	Love (Humanity)
3	Love (Humanity)	Appreciation of beauty (Transcendence)
4	Zest (Courage)	Kindness (Humanity)
5	Perspective (Wisdom and Knowledge)	Modesty (Temperance)

From Table 3 it is apparent that both males and females have almost similar profile of signature strengths. Out of five signature strengths they are found equal in three strengths such as judgment / critical thinking, appreciation of beauty and love (however their sequence differed in both sexes). Earlier Shree and Singh (2013) also reported judgment / critical thinking as signature strength common among male and female adolescents. The present findings are in consonance with the earlier findings of Bhatt et al. (2012) who also found similarity in top seven choices of strengths between boys and girls. However zest (embedded in courage virtue) and perspective (embedded in wisdom and knowledge virtue) were found in male adolescents' profile of signature while in females kindness (embedded in humanity virtue) and modesty (included in temperance) were found. In other words male adolescents appear to be enthusiastic, full of vigor and vitality; while kindness appeared to be the inbuilt jewel of females and the strength of modesty itself manifested their inner capabilities and sincerity. The present findings strengthened the previous findings of Ngai (2015) who reported that girls exceeded boys in the strength of kindness.

On the basis of above findings it may be inferred that in the existing social scenario/particularly in the urban areas of Haryana the gender gap related to the profile of strengths in disappearing may be due the equal treatment given to the both sexes. This finding is of utmost importance because it is highlighting the fact that our society is moving towards gender equality. The present findings have highlighted the hidden fact that females are equal to their male counterpart as far as wisdom and knowledge, transcendence and humanity are concerned.

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In a nut shell it may be summarized that specifically in the urban areas of Haryana females have boosted their inner strengths as equal to their male counterparts.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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