• Hero: a person who knowingly, and voluntarily, acts for the good of one or more people at significant risk to themselves, without being motivated by reward.
  • Heroes are universally valued across cultures and throughout history.
  • Although heroes are rare, they exemplify human excellence and deserve empirical attention.
• Adults in multiple studies consider firefighters heroes when they go above and beyond the call of duty. Clearly firefighters can be considered heroes.
• Understanding how children and adolescents view the character and qualities of heroes may reveal specific strengths to encourage in character development programs for youth, which can then build heroes.

Methods
• Using Q-sort methodology, 89 children and adolescents (Mage = 13, 9-19, 51% female) sorted 12 character strengths by placing them into five categories ranging from “exactly like a firefighter” to “least like a firefighter” based on their view.
• Character Strengths (responsible, leader, generous, future-minded, purposeful, amazed, creative, thrifty, forgiving, grateful, humble, joyful)
• At the conclusion of the sorting activity, subjects were questioned about the constructs they chose as “exactly like a firefighter”.

Q factor analysis identified homogeneous groups of youth with similar views on the character strengths of firefighters.

Similarities Between Groups or Factors
• (Q factor analysis)
• Differences Between Groups or Factors
• (Q factor analysis, Pearson Chi Square, and Correlations)

Open Ended Answers from Interview Questions

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Strength</th>
<th>Z Score</th>
<th>Character Strength</th>
<th>Z Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful</td>
<td>1.373</td>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>1.774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>1.346</td>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>1.738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>1.101</td>
<td>Generous</td>
<td>1.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generous</td>
<td>0.606</td>
<td>Humble</td>
<td>0.057</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future-minded</td>
<td>0.567</td>
<td>Joyful</td>
<td>-0.038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grateful</td>
<td>-0.126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Purposeful</td>
<td>-0.365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forging</td>
<td>-0.625</td>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>-0.504</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazed</td>
<td>-0.724</td>
<td>Forgiving</td>
<td>-0.559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thrifty</td>
<td>-1.011</td>
<td>Future-minded</td>
<td>-0.823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyful</td>
<td>-1.150</td>
<td>Amazed</td>
<td>-1.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
<td>-1.464</td>
<td>Thrifty</td>
<td>-1.120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Z-scores are the weighted averages of the values given to each character strength by individuals in the factor solution.

For all youth: Firefighter heroes are responsible, leaders, and generous, but NOT forgiving, amazed, thrifty, or creative.
• For some youth: Firefighters act with purpose and are future minded.
• For others: Firefighters do not act with purpose and are not future minded.
• Groups did not differ significantly on gender, age, grades, or mothers’ education.
• Correlations of the character strength ratings without concern for factor solutions revealed differences. Across the sample, older youth were more likely to see firefighters as future-minded (r = .310, p < .004) and purposeful (r = .229, p = .035), and were less likely to see them as thrifty (r = -.240, p = .027), joyful (r = -.228, p = .036), or grateful (r = -.221, p = .042).

Discussion and Implications
• Firefighters are fantastic examples of relatable, common heroes.
• Young people’s view that firefighter heroes are responsible, leaders, and generous, but not forgiving, amazed, thrifty, or creative may be a universal conceptualization.
• Shared conceptions and individual differences of strengths young people attribute to firefighters, a common hero, can enhance character development programs that wish to encourage youth to develop heroic character.
• Character education could emphasize groups of strengths, such as heroic strengths, rather than solitary strengths.

Participant Comments

Firefighters are Leaders: “They’re telling other firefighters what to do.”

Firefighters are Generous: “Generous is always doing favors...and they always help people like get out of the fire.”

Firefighters are Purposeful: “People can die in the fire...they’re helping people that really need help.”

Firefighters are not Future-minded: “Future-minded is the least because firefighters never know what’s gonna [sic] happen.”

References