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"Dear Diary, I'm Feeling...": Within-Country Diversity in Guatemalan Adolescents' Gratitude and Hassles

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Background

Gratitude is a positive emotion experienced when a benefactor does something kind for a beneficiary (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). In Guatemalan youth, higher gratitude was correlated with higher life satisfaction and lower envy (Poelker, Gibbons, Maxwell, & Elizondo-Quintanilla, 2017). Results from a qualitative study indicated that gratitude in Guatemalan youth is often rooted in reciprocity, depicting the importance of peer and familial support in Guatemalan culture. Furthermore, both connective and verbal expressions of gratitude are common in Guatemalan children and adolescents (Poelker et al., 2017; Poelker & Gibbons, 2018). Hassles, on the other hand, are relatively frequent and annoying inconveniences that, when built up over time, are stressful and are negatively associated with well-being (Wright, Creed, & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2010). Australian adolescents reported being hassled by parents, schoolwork, worries about fear acceptance, not feeling respected, and feeling unsafe (Wright et al., 2010).

Current Study

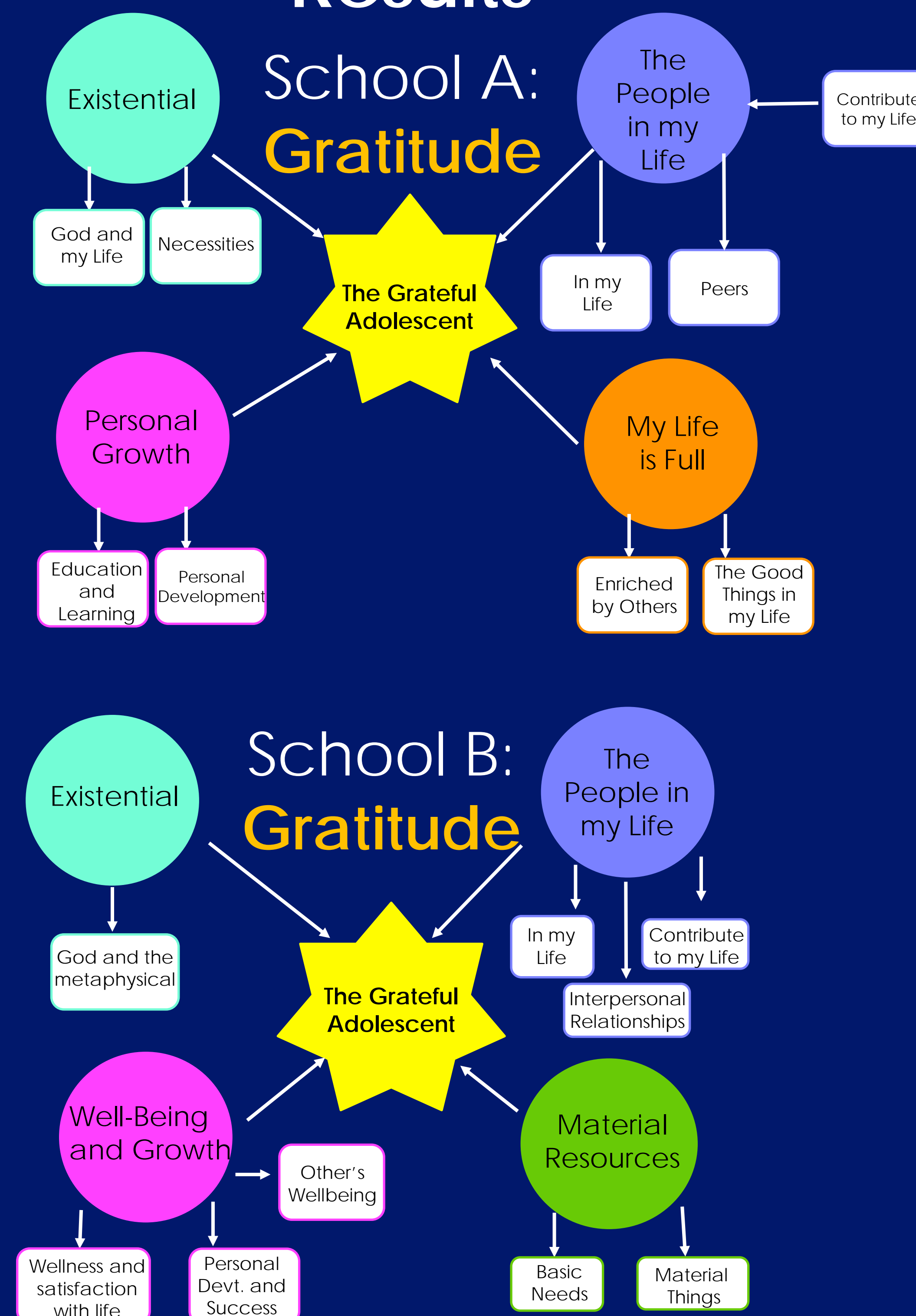
The purpose of the current study was to explore the diversity of Guatemalan adolescents' daily gratitude and hassles depending on their access to economic resources. Guatemala has very high rates of economic inequality, allowing us to address the importance of within-country diversity in adolescents' daily lives. We wanted to answer the following questions: (1) How does gratitude differ among Guatemalan adolescents of different SES? and (2) How do hassles differ among Guatemalan adolescents of different SES?

Methods

Participants: Eighty Guatemalan adolescents from two schools and ranging in age from 12-17 participated. Students from School A had access to few economic resources ($n = 37$; $M_{age} = 14.35$, $SD = 1.11$, 18 girls, $M_{SES} = 4.14$ of 14 items and amenities at home). Students from School B are raised in middle-class families ($n = 43$, $M_{age} = 15.77$, $SD = 1.15$, $M_{SES} = 11.98$ of 14 items and amenities at home, 22 girls).

Materials and Procedure: Adolescents were randomly assigned to journal about either gratitude or hassles in Spanish for 10 days using paper and pencil questionnaire packets. The responses were coded using Braun & Clark's (2006) thematic analysis to determine similarities and differences across the participants' experiences from the two schools.

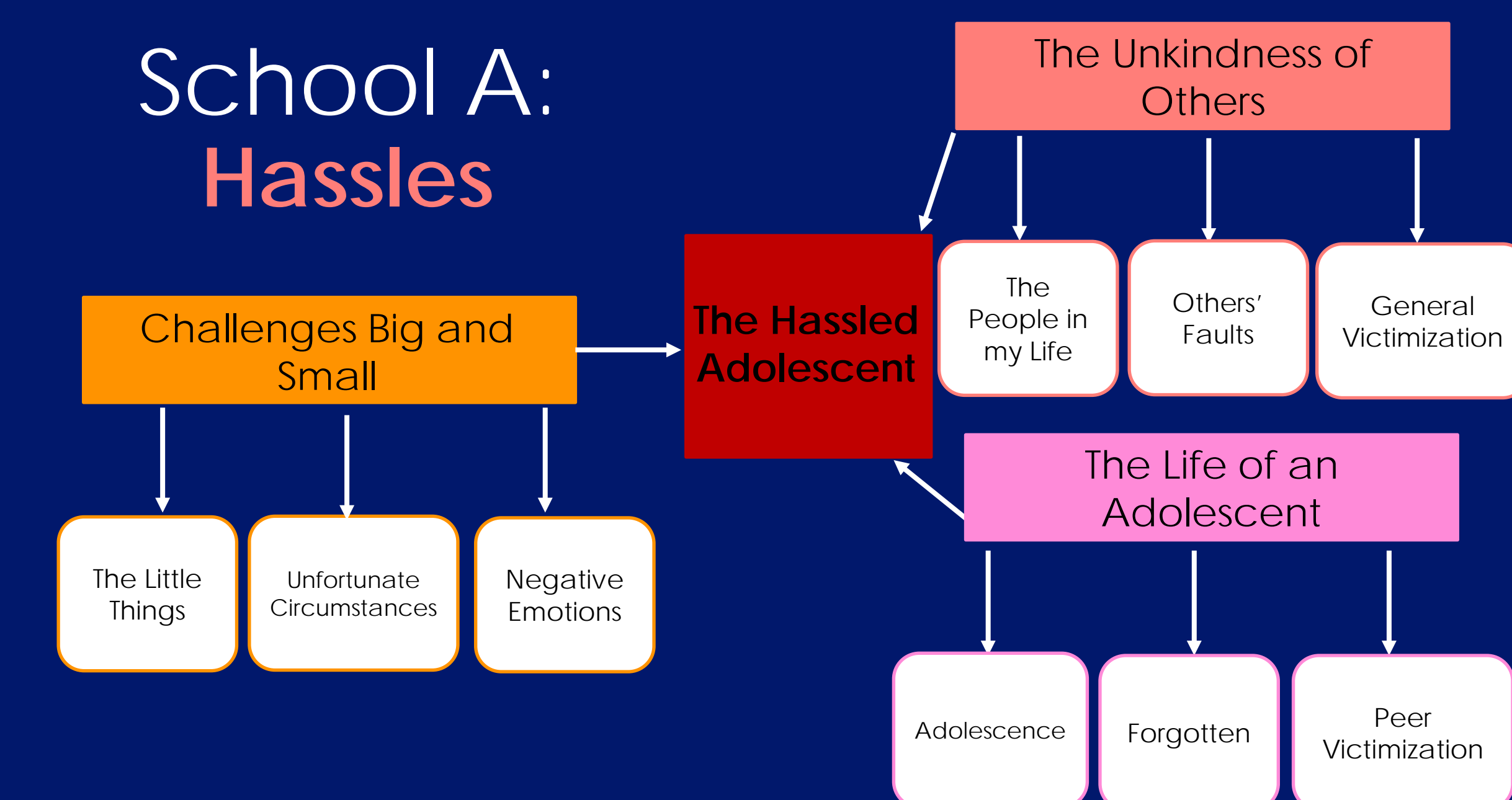
Results



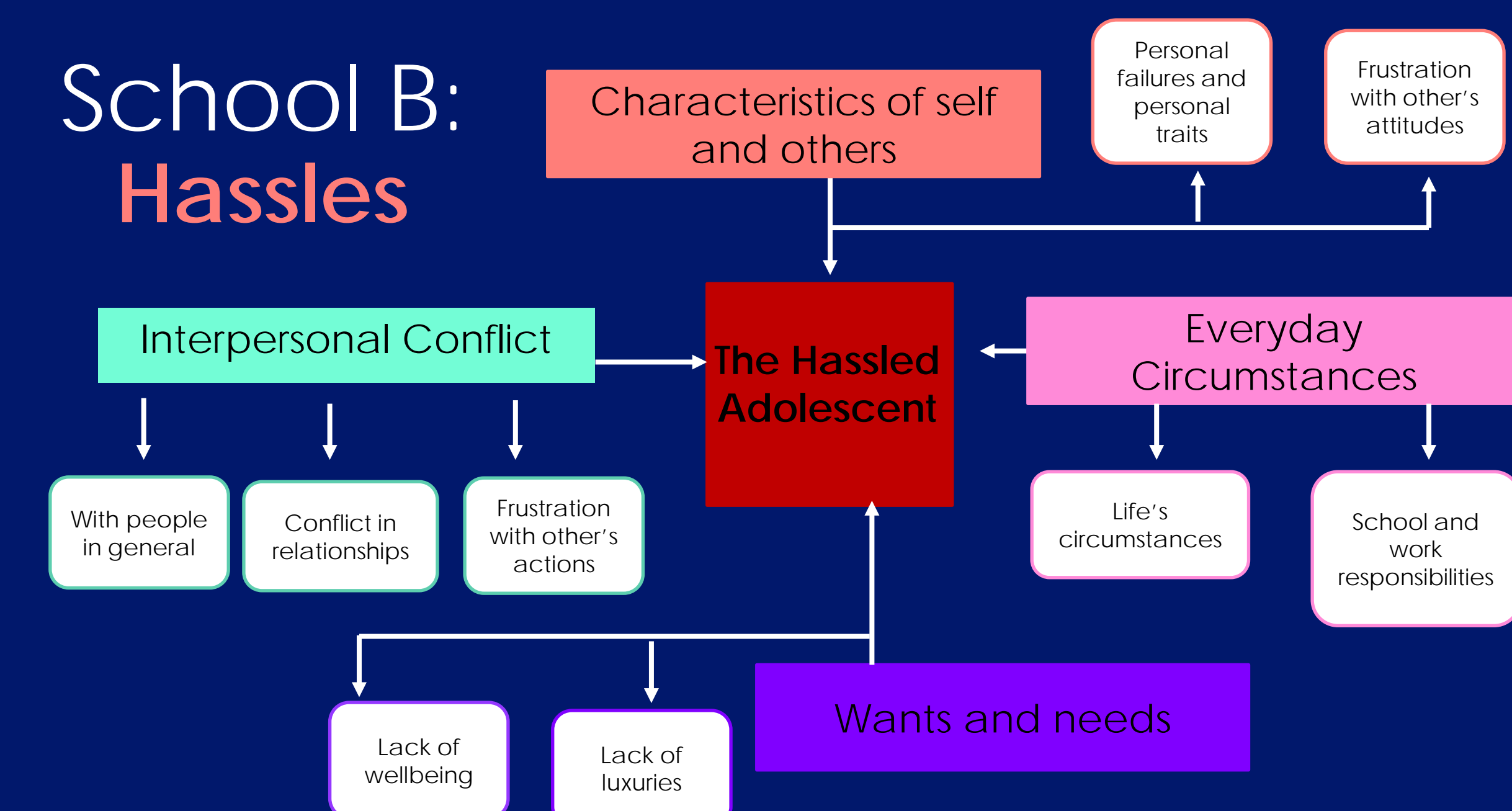
Gratitude Similarities: Students from both schools recognized the importance of close others, whether it was the simplicity of one's presence in their lives, or from specific actions that triggered gratefulness. They also appreciated opportunities for growth based upon access to education and future career and vocational goals. Lastly, they mentioned gratitude for being alive, having basic needs met, and God's presence in their lives.

Gratitude Differences: Students differed in who they acknowledged as their provider of basic needs. Adolescents from School A identified God as the provider, and students from School B identified their parents. Regarding growth opportunities, students from School A were grateful for education, but also for learning new things, whereas students from School B had broader responses, not only identifying education, but also their overall well-being and personal successes.

School A: Hassles



School B: Hassles



Hassles Similarities: Both groups of adolescents were hassled by interpersonal conflict, identifying either specific actions or personality traits of others. Participants from both resource groups also brought up common frustrations of adolescence, such as schoolwork and a lack of autonomy.

Hassles Differences: Although both groups mentioned peer victimization, students from School A mentioned direct conflict with others, such as teasing or bullying, whereas students from School B experienced indirect conflict, such as hypocrisy or "fake friends." School B students also felt that they were victims of others' actions, in comparison with School A students who owned up to their own faults. School A students were more often hassled by others' suffering, perhaps indicative of higher levels of empathy. Lastly, groups differed in regards to non-essential material items; School B students were more often hassled by a lack of luxuries than School A students.

Discussion

The thematic analysis revealed similarities and differences in Guatemalan adolescents' daily experiences with gratitude and hassles. This information will be beneficial when designing culturally sensitive interventions to promote well-being among Guatemalan adolescents.

Limitations: We have identified several limitations of our research. First, although the open-ended journal method was effective in reducing bias and allowing students to choose for themselves what they felt grateful or hassled by, there was no opportunity for clarification or follow-up at the end of the 10-day collection period. Furthermore, there are constraints when comparing qualitative data. Our goal here was to describe participants' experiences from the two economic resource groups.

Future Directions: To advance and address our limitations, we plan to conduct follow-up quantitative studies. Additionally, we plan to develop sample-specific interventions to foster gratitude and reduce hassles, of which we would be useful to teachers, administrators, parents, and the adolescents themselves.