ASSESSMENT OF CHARACTER STRENGTHS AMONG YOUTH:

THE VALUES IN ACTION INVENTORY OF STRENGTHS FOR YOUTH

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Abstract

What is good character, and how can it be measured? Starting with the premise that character is best approached as a family of positive traits—individual differences that exist in degrees and are manifest in a range of thoughts, feelings, and actions— we developed the Value In Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth), a self-report inventory for children and youth (ages 10 through 17). The VIA-Youth measures 24 different strengths of character in an efficient way, allowing ipsative identification of "signature strengths" for the individual as well as group comparisons. Preliminary studies support the reliability and validity of this measure, although further research is needed. Uses of the VIA-Youth are discussed in positive youth development research and practice.

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Raising virtuous children is an ultimate goal not only of all parents and educators but also of all societies. Across different eras and cultures, identifying character strengths (virtues) and cultivating them in children and youth have been among the chief interests of philosophers, theologians, and educators. With a few exceptions, these topics have been neglected by psychologists. However, the emerging field of positive psychology specifically emphasizes building the good life by identifying individual strengths of character and fostering them (Seligman, 2002). Character strengths are now receiving attention by psychologists interested in positive youth development. They may contribute to a variety of positive outcomes as well as work as a buffer against a variety of negative outcomes, including psychological disorders.

What is character, and how can we measure it? In recent years, we have made a serious effort to answer these questions scientifically (e.g., Peterson & Park, 2003; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, in press). Although the answers are neither simple nor final, here we offer a progress report that focuses on our attempt to conceptualize and operationalize the construct of good character among youth. To frame this progress report, we start with the following assertions:

- good character is neither unitary nor discrete

- rather, character is comprised of a family of positive traits: individual differences that exist in degrees and are manifest in a range of thoughts, feelings, and actions

- what counts to someone as good character can be influenced by contextual factors like culture, religion, or political persuasion

- however, some components of good character are ubiquitous and perhaps universal

- good character is not outside the realm of self-commentary and certainly not a mystery to those in one's immediate social circle

- many of the core components of good character are already present as individual differences among young children

- the manifestations of character nonetheless change across the lifespan

These conclusions have important implications for assessment.

First, as a family of traits, character needs to be measured with an appropriately broad strategy. There is no reason for a researcher to refrain from assessing a single component of good character—kindness or wisdom, for example—but it would be misleading to then treat this single component as the whole of character. People can be of very good character but still lack one or more of its components. Conversely, individuals might be very kind or very wise but lack other components of good character; they can of course be described as kind or wise, but only as that. We therefore believe that researchers interested in character per se must assess it in its breadth. Good character can only be captured by a set of components that vary across people. The same argument has prevailed in recent decades with respect to the meaning and measurement of intelligence (Gardner, 1983; Sternberg. 1985). Most now agree that intelligence is plural—shown in different ways by different people—and that attempts to arrange people in a single line according to their IQ scores is not only bad science but bad practice (cf. Gould, 1981).

Second, as individual differences that exist in degrees, the components of character must be assessed in ways that allow gradations. Politicians and everyday citizens alike may talk about character as present versus absent (e.g., "Character must be restored to government"), but such statements are rhetorical and at odds with a considered definition of good character. We need to

be cautious about searching for single indicators of good character or even single indicators of a component of good character. Some indicators are important in their own right and can be assessed with simple yes-no questions: e.g., sexual abstinence or sobriety among teenagers. But we should regard these behaviors as indicative of themselves and not infallible signs of prudence as a trait and certainly not of good character in its broad sense. If our interest lies beyond specific behaviors, the best we can do as researchers is to ask about a range of behaviors and look for common threads.

Third, especially in a culturally diverse society like the contemporary United States, there is good reason for researchers interested in character and its components to focus on widely-valued positive traits and not those that we have dubbed culture-bound (Peterson & Seligman, in press). So, individuality and competition are valued traits in some cultures but not others, and a measure of character that privileges these to the exclusion of more universally-valued traits is likely to lack generality and thus validity. We hasten to add that such culture-bound traits may be of great interest to researchers or practitioners in a given setting, and they can and should assess them. However, this assessment should not be interpreted in broader terms than is justified.

Fourth, most philosophers emphasize that moral activity involves choosing virtue in light of a justifiable life plan (Yearley, 1990). This characterization means that people can reflect on their own strengths of character and talk about them to others. They may of course be misled and/or misleading, but character is not in principle outside the realm of self-commentary (cf. Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Self-report surveys are therefore one reasonable way to assess the components of character.

Indeed, we can point to previous research that measured character strengths with self-

report questionnaires (e.g., Cawley, Martin, & Johnson, 2000; Greenberger, Josselson, Knerr, & Knerr, 1975; Ryff & Singer, 1996). Different clusters of strengths always emerged in these different studies. External correlates were always sensible. There is the possibility that some strengths of character lend themselves less readily to self-report than do others. For example, strengths like authenticity and bravery are not the sorts of traits usually attributed to oneself. But this consideration does not preclude the use of self-report to assess other strengths of character. Indeed, researcher should avoid value-laden labels in survey questions and ask instead about more concrete behaviors that arguably reflect a character component. For example, "I am humble" may be not a valid question for ascertaining humility, but "I prefer to let other people talk about themselves rather than listen to me" on the face of it seems valid. Our point about assessing multiple behaviors per character component is reinforced by this example, because humility is but one reason for letting other people talk.

There are also legitimate concerns about the pitfalls of self-report and the validity threat posed by "social desirability" (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). The premise of these concerns is nevertheless worth examining. We seem to be quite willing, as researchers and practitioners, to trust what individuals say about their problems. With notable exceptions like substance abuse and eating disorders, in which denial is part-and-parcel of the problem, the preferred way to measure psychological disorder relies on self-report, either in the form of symptom questionnaires or structured interviews. So why not ascertain good character in the same way? Character strengths are not contaminated by a response set of social desirability; they *are* socially desirable, especially when reported with fidelity.

In order to improve the validity of assessment, additional or alternative strategies are

needed, such as reports from knowledgeable informants (family members, friends, and teachers), *in vivo* observations, and scenario methods. Different strategies of assessment should converge, and we have found in our research that they indeed do, so long as we give informants the option of saying that they have not had the opportunity to observe the component in question. They do not exercise this option in the case of tonic character strengths like kindness (which can be evident in many if not all situations), but they occasionally do so in the case of phasic strengths like bravery (which can only be shown in situations that produce fear).

Fifth, even very young children possess character strengths such as curiosity and persistence, although self-report questionnaires to measure them are not useful. Some character strengths may be rooted in temperament differences like sociability, and they take on moral meaning very early in life. For example, the infant-mother relationship may set the stage for the character component we identify as love (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), and early sibling relationships may be the crucible for the character strength of kindness (Dunn & Munn, 1986). Other components of good character—like open-mindedness and fairness—require a degree of cognitive maturation, as developmental psychologists have long documented (cf. Kohlberg, 1981, 1984; Piaget, 1932). It is an empirical question how young is too young to show good character, and one of our intended projects is to devise methods for assessing the components of good character among toddlers by relying on observations and parental reports. For practical reasons, our assessment work to date has extended only to ten year-olds who are able to complete self-report questionnaires.

Sixth, although we are interested in the long-term developmental trajectory of good character, it is not plausible to use the same measures across the lifespan. Adolescents may show

their bravery by the type of clothes they wear or their willingness to befriend otherwise ostracized classmates. Adults in contrast may show their bravery by dissenting from the majority in town meetings or by blowing the whistle on wrong-doing at work. There is clear continuity in the psychological meaning of these acts, although the behaviors of course differ across developmental stages. So, there is a need for parallel measures across the lifespan that are at the same time developmentally appropriate. In our project, we devised surveys which use developmentally-appropriate questions but measure the same components of character among youth and adults.

<div align="center">Positive Psychology and the Values in Action (VIA) Classification</div>

Our work on good character has been self-consciously conducted under the umbrella provided by the field of positive psychology, which calls for as much focus on strength as on weakness, as much interest in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst, and as much concern with fulfilling the lives of healthy people as healing the wounds of the distressed (Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The past concern of psychology with human problems is of course understandable and will not be abandoned anytime in the foreseeable future, but psychologists interested in promoting human potential need to pose different questions from their predecessors who assumed a disease model (Peterson & Park, 2003). The most critical tools for positive psychologists are a vocabulary for speaking about the good life and assessment strategies for investigating its components. As noted, we have focused our attention on positive traits—strengths of character such as curiosity, kindness, and hope. What are the most important of these, and how can they be measured as individual differences?

Our project—the *VIA (Values in Action) Classification of Strengths*—means to complete

what the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM)* of the American Psychiatric Association

(1987) has begun by focusing on what is right about people and specifically about the strengths

of character that make the good life possible (Peterson & Seligman, in press). We are following

the example of DSM and its collateral creations by proposing a classification scheme and by

devising assessments for its entries.

The project first identified consensual components of character and then devised ways to

assess these components as individual differences. The components of good character exist at

different levels of abstraction. *Virtues* are the core characteristics valued by moral philosophers

and religious thinkers: wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence.

These six broad categories of virtue emerge consistently from historical surveys (Dahlsgaard,

Peterson, & Seligman, 2002). We speculate that these are universal, perhaps grounded in biology

through an evolutionary process that selected for these predispositions toward moral excellence

as means of solving the important tasks necessary for survival of the species (cf. Bok, 1995;

Schwartz, 1994).

Character strengths are the psychological ingredients—processes or mechanisms—that

define the virtues. In other words, they are distinguishable routes to displaying one or another of

the virtues. For example, the virtue of wisdom can be achieved through such strengths as

curiosity, love of learning, open-mindedness, creativity, and what we call perspective—having a

big picture on life. These strengths are similar in that they all involve the acquisition and use of

knowledge, but they are also distinct. Again, we regard these strengths as ubiquitously

recognized and valued, although a given individual will rarely if ever display all of them (Walker

& Pitts, 1998). We regard character strengths as dimensional traits—individual differences—that

exist in degrees.

We generated the entries for the VIA Classification by reviewing pertinent literatures (contemporary and historical) that addressed good character—from psychiatry, youth development, character education, religion, ethics, philosophy, organizational studies, and psychology (e.g., Peterson, 2003). From the many candidate strengths identified, we winnowed the list by combining redundancies and applying the following criteria:

1. A strength needs to be manifest in the range of an individual's behavior—thoughts, feelings, and/or actions—in such a way that it can be assessed. In other words, a character strength should be trait-like in the sense of having a degree of generality across situations and stability across time.

2. A strength contributes to various fulfillments that comprise the good life, for the self and for others. Although strengths and virtues no doubt determine how an individual copes with adversity, our focus is on how they fulfill an individual. In keeping with the broad premise of positive psychology, strengths allow the individual to achieve more than the absence of distress and disorder. They break through the zero point of psychology's traditional concern with disease, disorder, and failure to address quality of life outcomes (Peterson, 2000).

3. Although strengths can and do produce desirable outcomes, each strength is morally valued in its own right, even in the absence of obvious beneficial outcomes. To say that a strength is morally valued is an important qualification, because there exist individual differences that are widely valued and contribute to fulfillment but still fall outside of our classification. Consider intelligence or athletic prowess. These talents and abilities are cut from a different cloth than character strengths like humor or kindness. Talents are valued more for their

tangible consequences (acclaim, wealth) than are strengths of character. Someone who "does nothing" with a talent like a high IQ or physical dexterity courts eventual disdain. In contrast, we never hear the criticism that a person did nothing with his or her hope or authenticity. Talents and abilities can be squandered, but strengths of character cannot.

4. The display of a strength by one person does not diminish other people in the vicinity but rather elevates them. Onlookers are impressed, inspired, and encouraged by their observation of virtuous action. Admiration is created but not jealousy, because character strengths are the sorts of characteristics to which all can—and do—aspire. The more people surrounding us who are kind, or curious, or humorous, the greater our own likelihood of acting in these ways.

5. As suggested by Erikson's (1963) discussion of psychosocial stages and the virtues that result from their satisfactory resolutions, the larger society provides institutions and associated rituals for cultivating strengths and virtues. These can be thought of as simulations: trial runs that allow children and adolescents to display and develop a valued characteristic in a safe (as-if) context in which guidance is explicit.

6. Yet another criterion for a character strength is the existence of consensually-recognized paragons of virtue. Paragons of character display what Allport (1961) called a cardinal trait, and the ease with which we can think of paragons in our own social circles gives the lie to the claim that virtuous people are either phony or boring (Wolf, 1982). Certainly, the virtuous people we all know are neither. In one of our preliminary strategies of validating assessment strategies, we asked our research assistants to nominate people of their acquaintance who are paragons of virtue and prevail upon them—without full disclosure why—to complete our measures. No one has had any difficulty thinking of appropriate respondents.

7. *A final criterion is that the strength is arguably unidimensional and not able to be decomposed into other strengths in the classification*. For example, the character strength of tolerance meets most of the other criteria enumerated but is a blend of open-mindedness and fairness. The character strength of responsibility seems to result from persistence and teamwork. And so on.

When we applied these criteria to the candidate strengths we identified through literature searches and brainstorming, what resulted were 24 positive traits organized under six broad virtues (see Table 1). In some cases, the classification of a given strength under a core virtue can be debated. Humor, for example, might be considered a strength of humanity because playfulness can create social bonds. It might also be classified as a wisdom strength, inasmuch as humor helps us acquire, perfect, and use knowledge. But we had a reason for dubbing humor a strength of transcendence: Like hope and spirituality, humor connects us to something larger in the universe, specifically the irony of the human condition, the incongruent congruencies to which playful people call our attention, for our education and amusement. In any event, we have not directly measured the more abstract virtues. We have measured only the more specific strengths, although we plan eventually to test the hierarchical classification in Table 1 empirically with appropriate multivariate techniques. If the data suggest—for example—that humor belongs elsewhere because of its co-occurrence with other strengths, the classification system will be modified accordingly.

Insert Table 1 about here

Assessment of the VIA Strengths among Youth

What distinguishes the VIA Classification from previous attempts to articulate the components of good character is its simultaneous concern with broad-based assessment. The strategy we have most extensively developed to date entails self-report surveys able to be completed by respondents in a single session. We have devised several versions of a self-report questionnaire for youth, the *VIA Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth)*. We experimented with different item formats and phrasings before arriving at the current inventory, which is still under development and not presented here in its entirety. We describe representative items and preliminary psychometrics, but these are intended as illustrations.

Originally, we created separate inventories for preadolescents and adolescents by adapting items from our adult survey and phrasing them in what we thought were developmentally appropriate ways. This work was informed by the results of separate focus groups with developmental and educational psychologists and with students in 20 different high school classes in Michigan (Steen, Kachorek, & Peterson, 2002). We then decided that the preadolescents and adolescents versions were not sufficiently different, so we created a single inventory suitable for children and adolescents between the ages of 10 and 17. We also varied the response format (3-point scales versus 5-point scales) before concluding that 5-point scales were able to be used by even the youngest of our respondents and that they yielded more reliable composites.

We found that most individuals in a small sample of 8-year olds had difficulty completing the VIA-Youth, and so we recommend that the measure be used only with children who are at least 10 years of age. However, 10-year olds show a tendency to "inflate" across the

board their self-ratings of character strengths, just as they do measures of self-esteem or well-being, perhaps as a result of egocentrism. Accordingly, comparisons between pre-adolescents and adolescents on the VIA-Youth scores should be interpreted with a caution.

The latest measure contains 182 items (7-9 items for each of the 24 strengths, placed in a nonsystematic order) and a small number of demographic questions. Table 2 presents sample items for the character strength of persistence. As shown, respondents use a 5-point Likert scale (5 = very much like me to 1 = not like me at all) to respond to each question.

Insert Table 2 about here

Most of the scales include one or more reverse-scored items, although we believe we should have more than we do, and our next version of the VIA-Youth will include a greater number of reverse-scored items. These have proved difficult to write given our conceptualization of character strengths as involving more than the absence of the negative. That is, we could write questions that tap—for example—meanness, but someone who fails to endorse these questions is not necessarily kind. Another challenge we have faced is the need to keep the VIA-Youth short enough not to burden young respondents but long enough so that individual scales are still reliable.

Previous and current versions of the VIA-Youth has been completed by more than 1400 middle and high school students of varying ethnicities and SES levels in seven different states (Alabama, California, Nebraska, New Jersey, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas). These inventories were administered in a group format during regular class times by the regular classroom

teachers, who read the instructions aloud to the students and answered any questions by the students. It took 40-45 minutes for students to complete the survey. About 3% of respondents fell into a pattern of answering all the questions on a given page with the same option; their data were excluded from the final analyses. Information on the disability status of individual students was not collected.

Although it is preliminary, a recent study with high school students provides promising evidence of the reliability and validity of the VIA-Youth. Along with measures of subjective well-being, the most recent version of the VIA-Youth was completed by 306 students in two different Philadelphia public schools (46% eight graders, 30% ninth graders, and 24% tenth graders). The sample consisted of 50% males and 50% females. Fifty-three percent self-identified as African-American, 5% as Asian-American, 8% as Latino, 1% as Native American, 27% as white, and 6% as "other."

Insert Table 3 about here

Overall, mean scores for all strengths are in the positive range but still show variation (see Table 3). Most scales have moderate to satisfactory alphas (see Table 3), although the strengths of temperance have proven more difficult to measure reliably than other strengths. We find the same challenge in writing converging temperance items for adults, implying that these characteristics may be less "traited" (more contextualized) than other strengths in our classification. There are gender differences. Girls score higher than boys on a number of the strengths (e.g., appreciation of beauty, open-mindedness, gratitude, kindness, love, perspective,

spirituality; all ps < .05). Age differences are also observed. In general, tenth graders score

higher than eighth graders on most of the strengths, although tenth graders show a slight decrease

in the strengths of temperance and spirituality (all ps < .05). There are no meaningful ethnic

differences on any of the scales except for spirituality, where non-white students (especially

African-Americans) score higher than white students (p < .001).

The results also support the validity of the VIA-Youth. Students' subjective well-being

correlated with most of the interpersonal strengths, a finding consistent with results from our

studies of adults (ps < .001). Strengths of temperance predict grades in English, math, and

science courses, even when ability test scores are controlled (ps < .01).

Principle component analysis of scale scores using varimax rotation suggest a four factor

solution—not surprisingly a somewhat simpler structure than the five- or six-factor solution we

usually find for adults (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, in press). We tentatively identify three of

these factors as akin to basic traits captured in the Big Five taxonomy: conscientiousness (e.g.,

prudence, self-control, persistence) openness to experience (e.g., creativity, curiosity, zest), and

agreeableness (e.g., kindness, fairness, forgiveness), plus a fourth factor comprised mainly of St.

Paul's theological virtues (e.g., spirituality, hope, and love). As we develop the VIA-Youth

further and obtain larger samples, further exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses both of

individual items and scale scores are needed to confirm this solution.

Studies with previous versions of the VIA-Youth further support the validity of the scale

(Dahlsgaard, Davis, Peterson, & Seligman, 2002). Self-nomination of strengths correlate with the

majority of the matching scale scores. Teacher nomination of strengths correlate with the

matching scale scores for about half of the strengths—those manifest in everyday behavior as

opposed to those requiring specific occasions (like the experience of fear or threat for the display of courage). Also, teacher ratings of student popularity correlate with interpersonal strengths.

Conclusions

Although our work is in progress, findings support the potential utility of the VIA-Youth measure for assessing character strengths among youth. First, let us mention how our measures might be used in basic research. Almost all of the strengths in the VIA Classification have been the subject of previous empirical research using various strategies of assessment (Peterson & Seligman, in press). However, despite likely links, these lines of research have been conducted in isolation from one another, in part because an efficient battery of strength measures has not existed. One could assemble such a battery by collating existing measures, but respondent burden would quickly become prohibitive as more and more surveys are added. The VIA-Youth in contrast allow 24 different strengths to be assessed comprehensively and efficiently, making research possible that looks at the joint and interactive effects of different character strengths. Furthermore, the VIA measures allow an investigator to control for one strength when ascertaining the correlates or consequences of another. Conclusions can thereby become more crisp. For example, a researcher using the VIA measures would be able to say that spirituality has (or does not have) consequences above-and-beyond contributions of associated strengths like hope, a conclusion not possible if only measures of spirituality are used in a study.

Second, the VIA measures can be used in applied research to evaluate prevention and intervention programs for positive youth development. Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) reported that character-building is the second most frequently-cited goal of youth development programs. Despite growing interest in character education curricula and wellness promotion programs,

empirical validation of their effectiveness is scant (Eccles & Goorman, 2002). In some cases, strengths of character are the explicit outcome of interest, and in other cases, one or another character strength is proposed as a mediator or moderator of the effects of the intervention on other outcomes. The availability of our character measures will allow such interventions to be rigorously evaluated and perhaps will lead to the discovery of unanticipated effects of interventions. Eventually, this information will provide a concrete basis for designing effective youth development programs.

Third, the VIA-Youth may have some utility—theoretical and practical—when scored ipsatively. That is, its scales not only allow comparisons and contrasts of character strengths scores among individuals and groups, but they also can be used to identify an individual's "signature strengths" relative to his or her other strengths. We have speculated that most individuals have such signature strengths (Peterson & Seligman, in press). Encouraging youth to identify their defining strengths of character and to use them at work, love, and play may provide a route to the psychologically fulfilling life (Seligman, 2002). The effects of naming these strengths for an individual and encouraging their deployment deserve study.

It is worth emphasizing that ipsative assessment of character strengths is not the same as the specification of cutpoints—e.g., decreeing that someone who scores above 4.5 on our curiosity scale is curious, whereas someone who scores below 4.5 is not. Indeed, our conceptualization of character strengths as traits—dimensions or continua—argues against the use of cutpoints except as a shorthand way of saying that individuals score relatively high or relatively low in a strength. This is hardly a novel conclusion; modern personality theories no longer posit types of people, despite the intuitive appeal of being able to speak about someone as

an introvert or an optimist (Peterson, 1992).

Fourth, although we have concluded that the measures we have developed are efficient, they are not as instantaneous as exit interviews, and they would be expensive if used with state or national samples. Our surveys take as long as 40-45 minutes to complete, and younger respondents require supervision to prevent break-off effects due to wandering attention. As we noted, VIA-Youth is not designed for practitioners looking for single indicators of character strengths. Character strengths are sufficiently complex that a single-indicator approach to their assessment poses serious limitations. Anyone interested in assessing strengths needs to appreciate that there is no shortcut to measuring good character.

Some researchers or practitioners with a more focused goal may administer only selected subscales if they so desire, although it is not recommended at this point. Presenting respondents with 8 or 10 items measuring—for example—forgiveness and nothing else might create a demand for socially desirable responses that the full batteries seem to avoid by allowing all respondents to say something positive about themselves.

Fifth, we may eventually create shorter versions of our survey, not by eliminating items from a given scale but by collapsing scales following factor analyses indicating redundancy. If the factor analyses we have done hold, it is conceivable that our work may result in a "brief" measure of character strengths that containing 12-15 items for each of the basic factors. We are not yet ready to say that this is scientifically desirable. We observe with some irony that one of the most widely studied and validated personality inventories for adults—the NEO-PI—which began with the goal of capturing basic personality traits by factor analysis has of late been elaborated to include thirty so-called facets that provide a more nuanced view of the basic traits,

even though these facets are *not* compelled by factor analytic results (McCrae & Costa, 2003).

Sixth, although self-report seems to be a valid way of measuring psychological constructs, we still have lingering concerns about "social desirability" (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). A youth development leader might inadvertently "teach to the test." Also, survey methods based on self-report have obvious limitations for measuring character strengths among very young children or children with certain disabilities. Accordingly, in order to improve validity, assessment should include alternative method like informant reports and observations. Structured interviews to measure character strengths also deserve attention.

Finally, although we have argued that the character strengths in the VIA Classification are ubiquitously valued—perhaps universally so—there is a need to test this argument with cross-national and cross-cultural data. We have so far surveyed respondents from almost 50 different nations about character strengths that are most valued. Our results will tell us which strengths should be included in a more final version of our classification.

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Author Notes

Table 1

VIA Classification of Character Strengths

_____

1. wisdom and knowledge – cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge.

creativity: Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things; Includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it

curiosity: Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience; finding all subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering

judgment/critical thinking: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; *not* jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly

love of learning: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally. Obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add *systematically* to what one knows

perspective: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to the self and to other people

2. courage – emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal

bravery: *Not* shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; Includes physical bravery but is not limited to it

industry/perseverance: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; "getting it out the door"; taking pleasure in completing tasks

authenticity/honesty: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions

zest: Approaching life with excitement and energy; *not* doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated

3. humanity – interpersonal strengths that involve "tending" and "befriending" others (Taylor et al., 2000)

kindness: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them

love/intimacy: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people

social intelligence: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and the self; knowing what to do to fit in to different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick

4. justice – civic strengths that underlie healthy community life

teamwork/citizenship: Working well as member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share

fairness: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; *not* letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance

leadership: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen

5. temperance – strengths that protect against excess

forgiveness/mercy: Forgiving those who have done wrong; giving people a second chance; *not* being vengeful

modesty/humility: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; *not* seeking the spotlight; *not* regarding one's self as more special than one is

prudence: Being careful about one's choices; *not* taking undue risks; *not* saying or doing things that might later be regretted

self-control/self-regulation: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions

6. transcendence – strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning

awe/ appreciation of beauty and excellence: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience

gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks

hope: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is

something that can be brought about

playfulness: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes

spirituality: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort

_____

Table 2

_____

Items for Persistence Scale of VIA-Youth

_____

Q010   I give up at things too easily. (reverse-scored)

     O Very Much Like Me

     O Mostly Like Me

     O Somewhat Like Me

     O A Little Like Me

     O Not Like Me At All

Q034   When I start a project, I always finish it.

Q058   I keep at my homework until I am done with it.

Q082   Whenever I do something, I put all my effort into it.

Q106   I keep trying even after I fail.

Q130   I don't put things off for tomorrow if I can do them today.

Q154   People can count on me to get things done.

Q172   I am a hard worker.

_____

Note.—Numbers in front of items refer to placement within the questionnaire.

Table 3

Psychometrics of VIA-Youth (n = 306)

	Number of items	Alpha	Mean (SD)
1. wisdom and knowledge			
creativity	7	.86	3.72 (.80)
curiosity	7	.76	3.73 (.74)
Judgment/critical thinking	8	.85	3.61 (.76)
love of learning:	8	.87	3.63 (.86)
perspective	8	.84	3.66 (.78)
2. courage			
bravery	8	.78	3.62 (.71)
persistence	8	.82	3.75 (.79)
authenticity/honesty	8	.75	3.41 (.76)
zest	7	.73	3.67 (.73)
3. humanity			
love	7	.85	4.00 (.86)
kindness	8	.81	3.83 (.77)
social intelligence	8	.77	3.71 (.70)
4. justice			
citizenship	8	.78	3.69 (.73)

fairness	8	.74	3.66 (.72)
leadership	7	.84	3.48 (.86)
5. temperance			
forgiveness	7	.76	3.24 (.78)
modesty	8	.73	3.51 (.70)
prudence	8	.70	3.27 (.69)
self-regulation	9	.66	3.23 (.67)
6. transcendence			
appreciation of beauty	7	.82	3.59 (.95)
gratitude	7	.85	4.14 (.75)
hope	7	.82	3.88 (.77)
humor	7	.81	3.91 (.79)
spirituality	7	.85	3.37 (1.06)