



The structure of virtue: An empirical investigation of the dimensionality of the virtues in action inventory of strengths

Jessica Shryack^{a,*}, Michael F. Steger^b, Robert F. Krueger^c, Christopher S. Kallie^d

^a TriO, Minneapolis Community and Technical College, United States

^b Department of Counseling Psychology and Applied Social Psychology, Colorado State University, United States

^c Department of Psychology and Psychiatry, Washington University, St. Louis, United States

^d Department of Psychology, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 23 February 2009

Received in revised form 16 October 2009

Accepted 9 January 2010

Available online 7 February 2010

Keywords:

Positive psychology

VIA-IS

Virtues

Character strengths

Factor analysis

ABSTRACT

Research on virtues and character strengths has increased over the past decade. The virtues in action classification (VIA; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) is a comprehensive catalogue of 24 strengths organized under six broad-band virtues purported to be ubiquitous across time and culture. This study uses multiple criteria to determine the dimensionality of the VIA character strengths in an adult sample. Our results revealed that a three- or four-dimensional model best fit the data. We integrate our results with research from personality and positive psychology.

© 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Virtue has recently been defined as “any psychological process that enables a person to think and act so as to benefit him- or herself and society” (McCullough & Snyder, 2000, p. 1). As such, virtue-related concepts historically have been of considerable interest to psychological researchers and practitioners, as exemplified in the humanistic psychology tradition (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and in family social science research on family strengths and resilience (Sandage & Hill, 2001). The past decade has seen a burgeoning research literature develop on character strengths and virtues, for example in personality psychology (e.g., Krueger, Hicks, & McGue, 2001), moral development (e.g., Walker & Pitts, 1998), positive youth development (e.g., Rich, 2003) and educational psychology (e.g., Narvaez & Lapsley, 2005). Empirical studies of virtue have used various analytic approaches to capture the implicit, folk psychological understanding as well as the self-reported features and hierarchical dimensions of moral personality, ranging from use of the lexical method (Cawley, Martin, & Johnson, 2000) to similarity sorting and prototypicality ratings (Haslam, Bain, & Neal, 2004; Walker & Pitts, 1998). Beyond content and structure, a number of practical applications for this work have been suggested, for exam-

ple in education (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006; Steen, Kachorek, & Peterson, 2003), clinical settings (Seligman & Peterson, 2003; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005), and organizations (Peterson & Park, 2006).

Perhaps the most systematic approach to studying virtue and character strengths from a psychological perspective has come from the field of positive psychology. The model proposed by Peterson and Seligman (2004) – called herein the virtues in action (VIA) model (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) – is a putatively comprehensive classification initially created to balance a so-called pathology focus in psychology with a focus on human flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) (Note: The model has recently been renamed simply VIA, although the original model was called “virtues in action” and was referred to as such in numerous previous publications.). *Virtues*, as described in the VIA model, are assumed to be broad-band, socially desirable, individual difference constructs that are valued across cultures, and include wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence. These relatively abstract virtues are differentiated from *character strengths*, which are the observable traits manifest in cross-situationally consistent behavior (see Table 1).

The original VIA classification was driven by both a comprehensive literature review and professional consensus (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), as opposed to factor analysis. Seligman and Peterson (2003) noted that their classification is “a very tentative enumeration” (p. 309) and later suggested it will change “by reformulating [the

* Corresponding author. Address: TriO, Minneapolis Community and Technical College, 1501 Hennepin Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55403, United States. Tel.: +1 612 659 6527; fax: +1 612 659 6544.

E-mail address: jshryack@umn.edu (J. Shryack).

Table 1

Means and standard deviations for 24 character strengths.

| Virtue | Strength | <i>M</i> | <i>SD</i> |
|--|--|----------|-----------|
| Wisdom (cognitive strengths of acquiring and using knowledge) | Creativity (thinking of novel means and concepts) | 2.63 | .706 |
| | Curiosity (interest in things, exploring) | 2.23 | .577 |
| | Perspective (understanding world, wise counsel) | 2.43 | .520 |
| | Judgment (weighing all evidence fairly) | 2.31 | .524 |
| | Love of learning (systematically add knowledge) | 2.77 | .707 |
| Courage (emotional strengths, exercise will to accomplish goals) | Perseverance (completing tasks one starts) | 2.28 | .545 |
| | Bravery (not shrinking from threat or difficulty) | 2.52 | .576 |
| | Honesty (presenting oneself in a genuine way) | 2.04 | .424 |
| | Zest (feeling alive and excited) | 2.38 | .599 |
| Humanity (interpersonal strengths, cultivating relationships) | Social intelligence (understanding social world) | 2.45 | .539 |
| | Kindness (helping and taking care of others) | 2.05 | .521 |
| | Love (valuing close relationships) | 2.17 | .541 |
| Justice (civic strengths underlying healthy community life) | Leadership (organizing group activity) | 2.37 | .520 |
| | Fairness (treating everyone fairly and justly) | 2.05 | .468 |
| | Teamwork (being a good team member) | 2.34 | .497 |
| Temperance (strengths protecting against excesses) | Forgiveness (forgiving others) | 2.32 | .534 |
| | Self-regulation (regulating feelings and actions) | 2.66 | .568 |
| | Prudence (choosing actions with care) | 2.41 | .467 |
| | Modesty (not overvaluing self) | 2.41 | .488 |
| Transcendence (strengths providing meaning, links with universe) | Spirituality (beliefs about purpose and meaning) | 2.29 | .780 |
| | Appreciation of beauty (awareness of excellence) | 2.58 | .676 |
| | Hope (expecting/working toward good future) | 2.35 | .546 |
| | Gratitude (thankfulness for good things) | 2.05 | .531 |
| | Humor (seeing light side of life, liking to laugh) | 2.22 | .592 |

Note: VIA-IS labels and descriptions were originally adapted by Steger et al. (2007) from Peterson and Seligman (2004).

Table 2

Number and labels of virtue dimensions from selected publications.

| Authors and date | Instrument | Extraction method | Retained dimensions | Labeled dimensions |
|---|---------------|---------------------|---------------------|--|
| Cawley et al. (2000) | Virtues scale | Factor analysis | 4 | Empathy, order, resourcefulness, serenity |
| Dahlsgaard (2005) | VIA-Y | Components analysis | 4 | Temperance, intellect, transcendence, gregariousness |
| Park and Peterson (2005) | VIA-Youth | Components analysis | 4 | Conscientiousness, openness, agreeableness, theological strengths |
| Park and Peterson (2006) | VIA-Youth | Factor analysis | 4 | Temperance strengths, other-directed strengths, intellectual strengths, theological strengths |
| Peterson and Park (2004) | VIA-IS | Factor analysis | 5 | Conative strengths, emotional strengths, cognitive strengths, interpersonal strengths, transcendence strengths |
| Peterson and Seligman (2004) | VIA-IS | Factor analysis | 5 | Restraint strengths, interpersonal strengths, intellectual strengths, emotional strengths, theological strengths |
| Peterson et al. (2008) | VIA-IS | Components analysis | 5 | Interpersonal, fortitude cognitive, temperance, transcendence |
| Van Eeden, Wissing, Dreyer, Park, and Peterson (2008) | VIA-Youth | Components analysis | 1 | Unidimensional virtue factor |

Note: all data were collected with adult samples except Dahlsgaard (2005), Peterson and Park (2006) and Van Eeden et al. (2008). Oblique rotations (versus orthogonal rotations) were used by Park and Peterson (2006) and Van Eeden et al. (2008).

strengths'] organization under core virtues" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 31). Indeed, when the virtues in action assessment tool, the VIA-IS, has been subjected to empirical analysis, Peterson and Park (2004), Peterson and Seligman (2004) and Peterson, Park, Pole, D'Andrea, and Seligman (2008) have found only moderate support for the conceptual structure. Specifically, support for a five- rather than six-factor model has been found (see Table 2).¹

¹ Park and Peterson (2005), Peterson and Seligman (2004) and Peterson and Park (2004) provided synopses of their analyses including labeled dimensions, but did not list factor loadings in these reports.

In studies with youth, results converged on a four-factor model (Dahlsgaard, 2005; Park & Peterson, 2006; Peterson & Park, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

How does virtue content in the reduced models specifically compare to virtue content in the theoretical classification? Much VIA research suggests that strengths from two theoretically distinct virtues – justice and humanity (see Table 1) – collapse into a single factor in both youth (Park & Peterson, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and adult samples (e.g., Peterson, Park, Pole, D'Andrea, & Seligman, 2008; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These findings are important because the juxtaposition of these theoret-

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/892309>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/892309>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)