A Q-Analysis of Youth Understanding of Associations Between Character Strengths and Civic Involvement

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Background and Research Question
- Youth character has been linked to the development of civic values and behaviors (Zaff et al., 2010).
- Previous research has measured character broadly rather than considering specific character strengths (Lerner et al., 2005).
- Specific character strengths may be linked with different forms of civic participation.

Research Goal and Questions
- GOAL: Explore youth’s understanding of the links between character Strengths and civic activity.
- QUESTIONS: Do youth view specific character strengths as important for civic involvement? Do youth apply distinct character strengths to different categories of civic behavior?

Method
- Sample: 90 youth in grades 4-12
  - 24 Elementary (grades 4-5)
  - 30 Middle School (grades 6-8)
  - 36 High School (grades 9-12)
  - M ages = 13.00, SD = 2.68, 9 - 18
- Three different Geographic Regions
- Youth sorted character strengths based on how well the strengths described individuals who engaged in four different civic activities.
  - Volunteering
  - Voting
  - Protesting
  - Environmental/conservation

Q-sort Methodology
- Youth sorted 12 character strengths
  - Leadership
  - Future-Mindedness
  - Responsibility
  - Joy
  - Creativity
  - Forgiving
  - Generosity
  - Humility
  - Thriftiness
  - Gratitude
  - Amazed (Awe)

Youth were instructed to “Think about someone who (e.g., volunteers).” You youth sorted the 12 character strength cards onto a sorting board based on how well each strength described someone engaged in the activity.
- “Exactly like” 2 cards
- “Most like” 2 cards
- “Sort of like” 4 cards
- “A less like” 2 cards
- “Least like” 2 cards
- Interviewer then asked youth to explain why they placed one of their character strengths “exactly like” category.

Results
- Table displays means and standard deviations from ANOVAs which assessed youth’s placement of each character strength across the four civic activities.
- Means with different superscripts are significantly different from one another after Bonferroni Correction
- Highest means for each character strength highlighted in red

Discussion and Implications
- Future-mindedness, Leadership, Responsibility were rated as important for multiple forms of civic involvement:
- Youth differentiated among types of civic involvement
- Potentially indicates the development of a nuanced understanding of different forms of civic engagement (Metzger & Ferris, 2013).
- Future research should anticipate specificity between some character strength and individual skills and specific forms of civic involvement.

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