CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS’ APPLICATION OF CHARACTER STRENGTHS TO ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES

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CORRELATES OF ENVIRONMENTALISM

• Links between environmental behaviors, attitudes, and social-psychological constructs
  (De Groot & Steg, 2008; Montada et al., 2007; Oreg & Katz-Gerro, 2006, Poortinga et al., 2013)

• Developmental antecedents
  – Environmental education (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002)
  – Youth understanding of nature & environment
    (Bonnett & Williams, 1998; Palmer, 1995)
CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTALISM

• Potential associations between character strengths and environmental behavior and attitudes (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

• Roots of Engaged Citizenship Project

• FIRST STEPS:
  – Q-sort methodology: Youth subjective understanding
  – Assessment: Patterns and demographic predictors
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

• What types of character strengths do youth apply to individuals who participate in environmental/conservation activities?
  – Descriptions
  – Person-centered profiles

• Demographic correlates:
  – Age?
  – Sex?
  – Geographic location?
SAMPLE:
3 GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS
SAMPLE

- 90 youth, 46 female

- $M_{age} = 13.00$
  \[SD = 2.68\]

- Grades 4 - 12
  - 24 Elementary (grades 4-5)
  - 30 Middle School (grades 6-8)
  - 36 High School (grades 9-12)

- Demographics
  - White: 43%
  - Hispanic: 19%
  - Black: 14%
  - Asian: 7%
  - Other: 8%
  - Mixed: 9%
**Q-SORT**

- **Step 1: Definition check**
  - Youth were asked to define 12 character strengths:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Future-Mindedness</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Joy</th>
<th>Creativity</th>
<th>Forgiving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sense of Purpose</td>
<td>Generosity</td>
<td>Humility</td>
<td>Thriftiness</td>
<td>Gratitude</td>
<td>Amazed (Awe)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Errors corrected with a standard definition

- 12 character sorting cards
Q-SORT
(STEPHENSON, 1922)

• Youth sorted the character cards 6 times:

• Environmental/conservation sort
  – Youth were instructed to “Think about someone who engages in environmental or conservation activities”
  – Picture illustrating the activity
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXACTLY</th>
<th>MOSTLY</th>
<th>SORT OF</th>
<th>LESS</th>
<th>LEAST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>like this person</strong></td>
<td><strong>like this person</strong></td>
<td><strong>like this person</strong></td>
<td><strong>like this person</strong></td>
<td><strong>like this person</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- EXACTLY: 2
- MOSTLY: 2
- SORT OF: 4
- LESS: 2
- LEAST: 2
METHODS: Q-SORT
RESULTS: OVERVIEW

- % “mostly” or “exactly” like

- Purpose
- Generous
- Future-Minded
- Responsible
PERSON-CENTERED ANALYSES

• Q-Factor analysis (Block, 2008; Watts & Stenner, 2012)
  – Assess q-sorts for similar patterns
  – Shared subjective viewpoints
  – Analysis
    • PQMethod
    • Scree plots and eigenvalues
    • Varimax Rotation
    • Factor loadings and rankings
Group 3 Prioritized:

- **GRATITUDE**
- **RESPONSIBILITY**

“...they’re just grateful for the planet they live on so they wanna give back to that...they wanna help keep that going”
Group 2 Prioritized:

- Leadership
- Generosity
- Joy

“Because they’d be a leader and do that… the other people might join in and help out the environment”
Group 1 Prioritized:

THRIFTINESS

FUTURE-MINDEDNESS

CREATIVITY

SENSE OF PURPOSE

“Cause like if you’re helpin’ the environment, you’re recycling, you’re pickin’ up stuff, you’re reusing…they [are] not wasteful people”
RESULTS: COMPOSITION OF PROFILES

• Profiles did not differ by
  – Gender
  – Geographic location
PROFILES: AGE DIFFERENCES

F(2, 87) = 4.64, p = .012
DISCUSSION

• Youth have varied views of individuals engaged in environmental activities
  – Profiles and individual variation
  – Age differences: A shift toward practicality?

• Implications
  – Theory building and future research
  – Civic, character, and environmental education
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