Typologies of Character among Children and Adolescents

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Character Strengths

- No empirical studies have been able to replicate the six virtue structure of the VIA classification using factor analytic techniques.
- Despite empirical support, there are notable consistencies in the ways in which factors group together across studies.

Table 1: Similarities in Character Strengths: Factors Among Factor Analytic Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Factor 3</th>
<th>Factor 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grateful, Humble, Joyful, Leader, Purposeful, Responsible, Thrifty</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>55.3%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purposeful</td>
<td>0.192</td>
<td>0.088</td>
<td>0.162</td>
<td>0.577</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

- 90 Semi-structured interviews and a Q-sort protocol across sites in rural West Virginia, suburban southern California, and urban Minnesota.
- Overall goal of study was to explore association between character and civic engagement.
- One-on-one interviews were conducted in elementary (n = 24), middle (n = 30), and high schools (n = 36).

Q-Methodology

- Traditional psychology employs R methodology – a variable centered methodology that focuses on “bias of people.”
- Q methodology is holistic – it maps out similar individuals on their whole personality, revealing profiles of character strengths shared by subgroups of individuals.
- The use of rank ordering allows specific strengths to be prioritized over other strengths.
- Participants used a grid to rank their own character strengths according to perceived importance in a process known as Q-sorting.
- To insure Q-sorting task would not be overwhelming, the following strengths representing the five dimensions were used:
  - Amazed, Creative, Forgiving, Future-minded, Generous, Grateful, Humble, Joyful, Leader, Purposeful, Responsible, Thrifty

Discussion and Implications

- Q-Methodology is a useful approach for children and adolescents.
- With age, youth prioritize some strengths over others.
- Character education programs may benefit by taking an holistic approach to character; emphasizing specific groupings of strengths rather than solitary strengths.

Research Questions

- Explore the ways strengths coalesce into distinct typologies across childhood and adolescence.
- Explore age differences in the attribution of specific typologies of character strengths.

Methods

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References

- Please e-mail author at jshubert3@rochester.edu for a list of references.