

KARAKTERSTERKTES IN SUID-AFRIKAANSE HOËRSKOOL LEERDERS

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Erkenning

My opregte dank en waardering aan die volgende individue en organisasies wat 'n bydrae gelewer het tot die voltooiing van hierdie studie:

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Opsomming

Karaktersterktes in Suid-Afrikaanse hoërskool-leerders

Die doel van hierdie ondersoek was om karaktersterktes in jong mense van 13 tot 17 jaar oud te verken, vanuit 'n literatuur- asook empiriese perspektief en met die oog op toekomstige ontwikkeling en/of bevordering van karaktersterktes en morele bevoegdhede in Suid-Afrikaanse jeug. Die studie was gebaseer op die opkomende teoretiese perspektief van Positiewe Psigologie of Sielkunde, waarvan karaktersterktes 'n kernkonsep is wat deur die Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth) geoperasionaliseer word. 'n Totale groep van 1691 leerders uit agt skole in die Vaaldriehoekstreek het deelgeneem, en vier kultuurgroepe verteenwoordig, naamlik Swart (n=778), Wit (n=536), Bruin (n=156) en Moslem-Indiër (n=221), deelnemers. Dit was 'n dwars-snit navorsingsontwerp waarvan die resultate in drie artikels aangebied is: 1. Karaktersterktes herontdek in die Sielkunde; 2. Validering van die VIA-Youth in 'n groep Suid-Afrikaanse leerders, en 3. Konvergensie en diversiteit van karaktersterktes in verskeie groepe Suid-Afrikaanse leerders.

Die eerste artikel was 'n literatuuroorsig waarin karakter en karaktersterktes, wat belangrike konsepte in Psigologie oor die algemeen en Positiewe Sielkunde in besonder is, ontleed is. Die wisselvallige geskiedenis van die moreel-etiese "karakter" konsep in die vroeë jare van Psigologie as wetenskap, asook Seligman (2002a) se herontdekking en instelling van die konsep as kernkonstruk in die Positiewe Sielkunde perspektief, met teoretiese-, navorsing- en toepassings-waarde, is uiteengesit. Die gekonseptualiseerde karaktersterktemodel van Peterson en Seligman (2004), bestaande uit ses deugdegroepe gemanifesteer deur 24 karaktersterktes, is ontleed. Praktiese toepassingsmoontlikhede en aspekte van verdere navorsing met die karaktersterktemodel, is verken en aanbevelings gedoen.

Die tweede artikel het die resultate van die ondersoek na die psigometriese eienskappe van die VIA-Youth (Park & Peterson, 2006) in 'n multi-kulturele groep Suid-Afrikaanse leerders, gerapporteer. Beskrywende statistiek, betroubaarheidskoëffisiënte en korrelasies is bereken en bevestigende en verkennende faktorontledings is uitgevoer. In die totale multi-kulturele stedelike groep (N=1362) asook in die onderskeie stedelike subgroepe is aanvaarbare betroubaarheids-koëffisiënte verkry vir meeste van die sterkte-subskale. Gemiddelde tellings vir die karaktersterktes het goed vergelyk met ander bevindings in die literatuur. Kriterium-verwante geldigheid was ondersteun deur verwagte korrelasies tussen VIA-Youth subskale en indekse van psigologiese welstand en patologie in die geval van die multi-kulturele stedelike groep. Ontleding van konstruktgeldigheid deur middel van strukturele-vergelykingsmodelle en die toepassing van bevestigende en verkennende faktorontledings, het getoon dat die VIA-Youth meer homogeen of

een-dimensioneel as multi-dimensioneel is. Bevindinge het nie die teoreties-gehipotetiseerde ses deugde model van karaktersterktes bevestig nie. Implikasies vir praktyk en navorsing is aangedui.

Die derde artikel het die bevindinge van die studie wat moontlike verskille en ooreenkomste in die manifestasie van karaktersterktes in verskeie groepe Suid-Afrikaanse leerders verken het, aangebied. Die Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (Park & Peterson, 2006) is voltooi. 'n MANOVA, t-toetse, en Cohen se praktiese effekgroottes is gebruik om moontlike beduidende verskille tussen Swart, Wit, Bruin en Moslem-Indiër leerders sowel as tussen seuns en (n=561) en dogters (n=801), te bepaal. Bevindinge was: Dat daar heelwat beduidende verskille in grootte-orde van die verskillende karaktersterktes tussen kultuur-kontekstuele groepe was, maar min verskille het 'n groot praktiese beduidendheid gehad; dat dogters beduidend hoër tellings as seuns op al die karaktersterktes behaal het, maar net vir "Kindness" en "Appreciation of beauty" effekgrootte van praktiese beduidendheid verkry het, en dat alle subgroepe bo-gemiddelde tellings op alle sterktes behaal het. Aanbevelings vir verdere navorsing en voorstelle vir praktiese toepassing is gedoen.

Finale gevolgtrekkings was dat die VIA-Youth 'n konseptueel sosiaal-relevante en potensieel bruikbare meetinstrument is vir gebruik in die Suid-Afrikaanse multi-kulturele jeugkonteks. Uitgebreide navorsing moet egter in die Afrika-kultuurkonteks gedoen word na die konseptuele duidelikheid van die teoretiese model van ses deugdegroepe, waarin 24 sterktes vervat is om die Values in Action Inventory of Strengths te konstateer. Die konseptualisering en manifestasie van karaktersterktes in beide volwassenes en die jeug in Suid-Afrika, vereis dus verdere klarifikasie.

Summary

Character strengths in South African secondary school learners

The aim of this investigation was to explore character strengths in young people aged 13 to 17 years, from a literature as well as an empirical perspective, with a view to future development and/or enhancement of character strengths and moral competencies in South African youth. The study was based on the emerging theoretical perspective of Positive Psychology, of which character strengths is a core concept and the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth), is the operationalization. A total group of 1691 learners from eight schools in the Vaal Triangle region participated, representing four cultural groups namely African (n=778), White (n=536), Coloured (n=156) and Muslim-Indian (n=221) participants. This was a cross-sectional research design of which the results were reported in three articles: 1. Character strengths rediscovered in Psychology; 2. Validation of the VIA-Youth in a group of South African learners, and 3. Convergence and diversity of character strengths in various groups of South African learners.

The first article was a literature review in which character and character strengths as important concepts in Psychology in general and Positive Psychology in particular, were analysed. The tainted historical background of the moral-ethical “character” concept in the early years of Psychology as a science, as well as Seligman’s (2002a) “resurrection” of the concept to a theoretical and research construct with application potential, was discussed. The conceptualized character strengths model of Peterson and Seligman (2004), consisting of six virtue clusters manifested by 24 character strengths, was analysed. Practical application potential and aspects for further empirical scrutiny of the character strengths model, was indicated and recommendations were made.

The second article reported the results of the investigation of the psychometric properties of the VIA-Youth (Park & Peterson, 2006) in a multi-cultural group of South African learners. Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients and correlations were calculated and confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses were performed. In the total multicultural urban group (N=1362), as well as in the separate urban subgroups, acceptable reliability coefficients were obtained for most of the strengths-subscales. Mean scores for the character strengths compared well with those found in literature. Criterion related validity was supported by correlations in expected directions between VIA-Youth subscales and indices of psychological well-being and pathology in the case of the multi-cultural urban group. Exploration of construct validity by testing of structural equation models and performance of confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses, revealed that the VIA-Youth is more homogeneous or uni-dimensional than multi-dimensional. Findings did not support

the theoretically hypothesized six virtue-cluster model of character strengths. Implications for practice and further research were indicated.

The third article presented the findings of the study exploring possible differences and similarities in the manifestation of character strengths in various groups of South African learners. The Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth, (Park & Peterson, 2006) was completed. A MANOVA, t-tests and Cohen's practical effect sizes, were used to determine possible significant differences among African, White, Coloured and Muslim-Indian learners as well as between males (n=561) and females (n=801). The main findings were: That there were many significant differences in magnitude of the various character strengths among the cultural-contextual groups involved, but very few differences were of large practical significance; that girls scored significantly higher than boys on all measured character strengths, but showed large effect size practical significances only for Kindness and Appreciation of beauty, and that all sub-groups had above average mean scores on all strengths. Recommendations for further research were made, and some suggestions provided for practical application.

It was finally concluded that the VIA-Youth is a conceptually socially relevant and potentially useful measuring instrument in the South African multi-cultural youth context. Extensive further research needs to be done regarding the conceptual clarity in an African cultural context, of the theoretical model of six virtues in which 24 strengths cluster to constitute the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths. The conceptualization and manifestation of character strengths in both adults and youth in South Africa, thus needs further clarification.

VOORWOORD

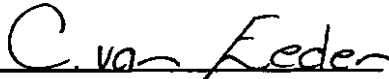
- Hierdie proefskrif is gedoen in die artikelformaat soos aangedui in A.14.4.2 van die jaarboek van die NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT.
- Die drie artikels waaruit hierdie proefskrif bestaan word voorgelê aan onderskeidelik die *Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*, *South African Journal of Psychology* en die *South African Journal of Education*. Al drie artikels word tans hersien en/of sal binnekort ingedien word.
- Al drie artikels word volgens die voorskrifte van die American Psychological Association (APA) aangebied, behalwe waar voorskrifte aan outeurs verskil het by die *Suid-Afrikaanse Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* en die *South African Journal of Education*.
- Vir die doel van hierdie proefskrif word die artikels aaneenlopend genummer. Elke artikel is egter afsonderlik vanaf bladsy een genummer vir indiening by die onderskeie Tydskrifte.
- Aangeheg is die toestemmingsbrief, geteken deur die promotor en mede-promotor ter magtiging van die indiening van hierdie artikels, om te voldoen aan die vereistes vir die toekenning van 'n PhD. graad.

Toestemmingsbrief

Hiermee word toestemming verleen dat die volgende manuskripte:

1. *Karaktersterktes herontdek in die sielkunde;*
2. *Validation of the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth), in a group of South African learners, en*
3. *Convergence and diversity of character strengths in various groups of South African learners,*

deur Jeanette E. Dreyer voorgelê mag word met die doel om 'n PhD graad in Psigologie te verwerf.



Dr. C van Eeden: Studieleier



Prof. MP Wissing: Medestudieleier

Datum: 2007/02/26

Datum: 26/02/07

Afdeling 1: Inleiding

Die fokus van hierdie studie was gerig op karaktersterktes in Suid-Afrikaanse Hoërskool leerders. Motivering vir hierdie navorsing het ontstaan uit die herontdekking van die karakterkonsep in die Sielkunde, as konstruk vir navorsing en met praktiese toepassingswaarde.

Positiewe Sielkunde (Positive Psychology) is deur Seligman en Csikszentmihalyi (2000) aan die wetenskapwêreld bekend gestel as 'n nuwe denkraamwerk in die Sielkunde, waarin daar wegbeweeg word van die siekte ideologie en gefokus word op welsyn, tevredenheid, geluk, interpersoonlike vaardighede, deursetting, talent, wysheid en persoonlike verantwoordelikheid van mense. Dit is binne hierdie psigofortologiese (Wissing & Van Eeden, 2002) en positiewe psigologiese (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) perspektiewe, wat hierdie ondersoek na die manifestasie van karaktersterktes in jongmense plaasgevind het. Seligman (2002a) het die begrip van goeie karakter as 'n kernaanname van die Positiewe Psigologie voorgestel, en daarop gewys dat karakter as 'n sentrale konsep in die studie van menslike gedrag gesien moet word. Die individu word nie meer gesien as passiewe wese wat reageer op invloede vanuit die omgewing nie, maar as 'n outonome besluitnemer met keuses, voorkeure, bevoegdheid, aktualisering van potensiaal en persoonlike deugde en sterktes, gekonseptualiseer as karaktersterktes (Seligman, 2002b).

Karakter, as teoretiese konsep en wetenskaplike konstruk, het egter 'n lang en wisselvallige geskiedenis in die Sielkunde gehad. In die jare net na die eerste wêreldoorlog, het karakter 'n prominente teoretiese plek in die Sielkunde ingeneem, veral onder teoretici soos Roback (1931) en Reich (1933). Karakter en persoonlikheid was gesien as bykans dieselfde konsepte en beide het 'n sterk morele inslag gehad. Die ontwikkelingsverloop van Sielkunde as wetenskapveld, veral die opkoms van Behaviorisme en Personologie of Persoonlikheidsielkunde het meegebring dat karakter, grootliks vanweë die vaagheid en onnavorsbaarheid daarvan, vervaag het en later selfs oorgeneem is deur die terreine van Filosofie en Etiek. Seligman het egter tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat karakter weereens 'n sentrale plek in die wetenskaplike bestudering van menslike gedrag moet inneem en dat dit dus tyd geword het *to resurrect character* (2002a:128).

Om hieraan praktiese uitvoerbaarheid te verleen het Peterson en Seligman (2004) 'n deurtastende ondersoek gedoen na karaktereienskappe en deugde wat universeel in literatuur, filosofie, godsdiens en kultuur erken word. Ses deugde met universele waarde is geïdentifiseer. Peterson en Seligman (2004:33-52) stel die kerndeugde (core virtues) voor as: Wysheid en kennis (wisdom and knowledge); dapperheid (courage); medemenslikheid en liefde (humanity and love); geregtigheid (justice); gematigdheid (temperance) en transendering (transcendence).

Hierna het Peterson en Seligman (2004) 'n omvattende klassifikasiestelsel van karaktersterktes ontwikkel met die doel om navorsing en toepassing in die Positiewe Sielkunde te rig. In die klassifikasiestelsel word die ses deugde verbind aan 24 karaktersterktes wat beskou word as die roetes of manifestasies, waardeur die deugde in menslike gedrag gestalte kry. Die karaktersterktemodel is geoperasionaliseer deur middel van die Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) en die Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (Park & Peterson, 2006).

Die Positiewe Sielkunde het 'n nuwe denkklimaat in die Psigologie as wetenskap en dissipline aangewakker en die karaktersterktemodel het baie navorsings- en toepassingspotensiaal. Die vraag ontstaan egter waarom Afrika as wêrelddeel en die Afrikakosmologie as spiritueel-filosofiese werklikheidsverskynsel, nie ingesluit was in die universele ondersoek na deugde en karaktereienskappe van Peterson en Seligman (2004) nie? Hierdie leemte in die aanspraak op universaliteit van Peterson en Seligman bied 'n uitdaging aan navorsers in die Afrika-kultuurkonteks (wat ook multi-kultureel van aard is) om vas te stel of die karaktersterktes, asook die waarde-betekenis van die deugde, ooreenstem met die van populasies wat deur Peterson en Seligman ondersoek is, en of andersoortige deugde en karaktersterktes hier ter sprake is. Khumalo, Wissing en Temane (2006) met 'n groep Setswana-sprekende studente en Biswas-Diener (2006) met 'n groep Keniaanse Maasai, het die voortou geneem met navorsing soos hierbo bepleit. Hierdie huidige ondersoek beoog om 'n verdere bydrae te lewer met betrekking tot die manifestering van karaktersterktes in Suid-Afrikaanse jeug, wat deur vier kultuurgroepe verteenwoordig word naamlik, Swart (African), Wit, Bruin (Coloured) en Moslem-Indiese leerders. Geslag is ook, soos kultuur, deel van menslike diversiteit en word beïnvloed deur ontwikkeling- en sosialiseringfaktore. Geslagsverskille in karaktersterktes sal dus ook in hierdie ondersoek verken word.

Die motivering om in hierdie ondersoek op jongmense te fokus, was tweeledig van aard. Enersyds is min navorsing tot dusver met jongmense oor karaktersterktes gedoen. Park en Peterson (2006) het onlangs die Values in Action Inventory for Youth (VIA-Youth) bekendgestel en hul aanvanklike bevindinge met gebruik van die meetinstrument gerapporteer. Die bogenoemde outeurs bepleit uitgebreide navorsing oor die konstruk, en validering van die instrument vir gebruik in diverse groepe. Die huidige navorsing beoog om in dié verband 'n bydrae te lewer. Andersyds hou karakter verband met morele gedrag en volgens Park en Peterson (2006:892) vorm karakter die kern van wat hulle *moral competence* in die jeug, noem. Die morele heropbou van die Suid-Afrikaanse bevolking en veral morele ontwikkeling en versterking in die jeug, geniet tans nasionale aandag (vanaf gemeenskapsvlak tot by regeringsoproepe) en

voortspruitende inisiatiewe. Die Departement van Onderwys (2003; 2005) se beleidstukke oor *Values in Education* en *Moral regeneration of learners*, wat die grondslag gelê het van die Lewensoriënteringprogramme in skole, is 'n bewys hiervan. 'n Karaktersterktemodel, geoperasionaliseer deur 'n betroubare en geldige meetinstrument, kan van groot waarde wees om karaktersterktes in jeugdiges te bepaal, hulle van die belangrikheid van hul eie karaktersterktes bewus te maak en veral om intervensies vir die ontwikkeling, bevordering en versterking van karaktersterktes (morele bevoegdheid), te rig. Sodanig dus die motivering vir hierdie ondersoek na karaktersterktes in 'n multi-kulturele groep Suid-Afrikaanse leerders.

Die bevindinge van hierdie navorsing word aangebied in drie artikels, naamlik:

1. *Karaktersterktes herontdek in die Sielkunde*
2. *Validation of the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth) in a group of South African learners*
3. *Convergence and diversity of character strengths in various groups of South African learners*

Die drie artikels word aaneenlopend aangebied, tesame met die riglyne vir outeurs van die onderskeie joernale waar artikels voorgelê sal word vir publikasie. Die doel van die eerste artikel was 'n literatuuroorsig met betrekking tot die herontdekking van karakter as sentrale konsep van die Positiewe Psigologie of Sielkunde. Die karaktersterktemodel van Peterson en Seligman (2004) wat ses deugde en 24 verbandhoudende karaktersterktes voorstel, is krities bespreek. Praktiese implementeringsmoontlikhede en navorsingsvrae is gestel en daar is gepoog om terminologie van die opkomende vakgebied, die Positiewe Psigologie, as wetenskaptaal vir Afrikaans voor te stel. Die artikel is voorgelê aan die *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe*.

Die tweede artikel het gefokus op 'n ondersoek van die betroubaarheid en geldigheid van die Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth), in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse multi-kulturele konteks, met 'n groep leerders (jeugdiges). Beskrywende statistiek, betroubaarheidskoëffisiënte en kriteriumgeldigheid deur middel van korrelasies, is bereken. Bevestigende en verkennende faktorontledings is uitgevoer. Die artikel word voorgelê aan die *South African Journal of Psychology*.

In die derde artikel is ooreenstemmende en uiteenlopende aspekte van karaktersterktes in multi-kulturele leerders, deur middel van statisties beduidende verskille op die VIA-Youth tussen vier kultuur- en twee geslagsgroepe ondersoek. Daar is van variansie-ontledings, t-toetse en praktiese effekgrootte gebruik gemaak om konvergente en divergente manifestasies van karaktersterktes te bepaal. Die artikel word voorgelê aan die *South African Journal of Education*.

Die uitkomste van hierdie studie word weergegee in die afdeling vir gevolgtrekkings en aanbevelings.

Afdeling 2: Artikel 1

Karaktersterktes herontdek in die Sielkunde

Voorgelê aan die

Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe

2.1 Voorskrifte aan outeurs:

Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe

Voorskrifte aan skrywers:

Die *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* word gewy aan die publikasie van oorspronklike navorsings en oorsigartikels in die teologie, kuns en kulturele, sosiale, ekonomiese en opvoedkundige sowel as aan boekbesprekings, kronieke en gedigte. Artikels of bydraes wat elders verskyn het, sal nie vir publikasie oorweeg word nie. Twee eksemplare van die uitgawe waarin 'n bydrae verskyn, sal gratis aan die outeur verskaf word. Indien meer eksemplare verlang word, kan dit van die Akademie kantoor bestel word teen die heersende prys.

Die volgende voorskrifte geld vir voorgelegde manuskripte:

- Indien slegs per pos, moet manuskripte in triplikaat aan die redaksie voorgelê word. Stuur verkieslik 'n elektroniese kopie aan publikasies@akademie.co.za – in welke geval dit nie nodig is om drie afskrifte per pos te stuur nie. Manuskripte moet in dubbelspasiëring getik word met Arial 12-punt skrifgrootte en 'n 25 mm linkerkantlyn.
- Die manuskripte moet **persgereed en taalversorg** wees. Skrywers moet skriftelik bewys lewer dat die artikel deur 'n erkende taalversorger geredigeer is.
- Bydraes moet in Afrikaans geskryf wees en beperk wees tot **6000** woorde.
- Dit moet vergesel gaan van 'n opsomming van **100-250** woorde in Engels of Duits of Frans. Die opsomming word begin met die **vertaling van die titel**.

- **Illustrasies** of **tekeninge** moet van toepaslike onderskrifte voorsien wees en moet ten opsigte van grootte rekening hou met die formaat van die *Tydskrif*.
- Opskrifte in die *Tydskrif vir Geesteswetenskappe* lyk soos volg:

1. HOOFOPSKRIFTE verskyn in hoofletters en is vetgedruk. Daar is 'n spasie tussen die hoofopskrif en die teks.

1.1 Opskrifte is in kleinletters en vetgedruk; daar is 'n spasie tussen die opskrif en die teks.

1.1.1 Subopskrifte is kursief; daar is 'n spasie tussen die opskrif en die teks.

Opskrifte mag genommer word indien verkies. Daar is geen punte na opskrifte nie.

Opskrifte by tabelle lyk soos volg:

TABEL 2: Ekonomiese ontwikkeling volgens rassegroep

Onderskrifte by figure lyk soos volg:

Figuur 3. Sistemiese interafhanklikheid in mensstrewes: die waardestruktuur.

- **Aanhalings** word nie kursief gedruk nie, ook nie as hulle in ander tale is nie. Aanhalings wat langer as **drie** reëls is, word geïntendeer en het nie aanhalingstekens nie. Enige invoegsel binne 'n aanhaling staan tussen blokhakies. Verwys na die *Tydskrif* vir voorbeelde
- **Afkortings** moet sover moontlik vermy word.
- **Korreksies:** Ekstra korreksies moet deur die skrywer betaal word.

- **Literatuurverwysings** word volgens die verkorte Harvardmetode gedoen, met uitsondering van bepaalde vakgebiede.

Voorbeelde:

Boek: Olivier, D.V. 1996. *Die nag van die vlieë*. Kaapstad: Blackwell. **Tydskrifartikel:**

Van Wyk, B. 1993. Vesel voorkom hartsiektes. *SA Tydskrif vir Dieetkunde*, 19(3):56-59.

Hoofstuk in 'n boek: Elphick, R. & Malherbe, V.C. 1989. In Elphick & Giliomee (eds.).

The shaping of South African society 1652— 1840. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman.

Internetbron:

Gries, H.B. 1996. Media and experimental learning. *Education online*, 21(1).

<http://www.edu.learning.html> [October 2004].

OF IN AFRIKAANS:

Mc Farlane, L.R. 2004. Afrikaans en die media. *SA Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns*,

<http://www.akademie.co.za> [Oktober 2004].

Indien die bron Afrikaans is, is al die bibliografiese inligting in Afrikaans, of andersom in Engels.

Bronverwysings in die teks:

...Volgens Swan (1996:45)

OF: ... (Swan 1996:45)

OF: ... (Swan 1996:45). (aan die einde van 'n sin)

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2.2 Manuskrip

KARAKTERSTERKTES HERONTDEK IN DIE SIELKUNDE

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SUMMARY

CHARACTER STRENGTHS REDISCOVERED IN PSYCHOLOGY

In this article, character and character strengths as important concepts in Psychology in general and Positive Psychology in particular, are analysed. The character concept has had a long history in Psychology, from being an important theoretical concept in the 1920's to losing its theoretical and empirical relevance in favour of personality psychology or personology in decades thereafter. The (moral-philosophical) concept "character" has evaded empirical scrutiny in the early years of psychology as a discipline, and this has led to its exclusion from mainstream Psychology. The emerging perspective of Positive Psychology however, has resurrected the character concept and operationalized it in terms of character strengths (Seligman, 2002a). The character strengths model of Peterson and Seligman (2004) introduces 24 manifestations of character, clustered into six groups of virtues. This model represents a core construct of Positive Psychology and holds much promise for practice and research aimed at understanding and promoting psychological well-being of individuals and communities. However, further research on this model and validation of measures thereof, is necessary in the South African context.

KARAKTERSTERKTES HERONTDEK IN DIE SIELKUNDE

Die ou waarheid dat daar niks nuuts onder die son is nie, is tans in die Sielkunde as wetenskap en professie weer van toepassing, maar wel in 'n ander gedaante. In 1915 skryf 'n onbekende doktorale student aan die Cambridge Universiteit dat: "... speculative writing on the subject of character has been very extensive; scientific evidence very meagre" (Webb 1915:75).

In 2006 beklemtoon navorsers op die derde Europese konferensie van Positiewe Sielkunde (Positive Psychology)¹ in Portugal weer dat die "karakter"-konsep vaag en filosofies is, sonder deeglike empiriese begronding. 'n Oplossing hiervoor mag lê in die konsep van karaktersterktes, wat gesien word as die manifestasie van karakter en wat waarneembaar en meetbaar is (Peterson, 2006; Seligman 2000:133; Snyder & Lopez 2002:755).

Die doel van hierdie artikel is om aan te toon dat karaktersterktes weer 'n belangrike terrein vir beide navorsing én toepassing in die Sielkunde (of Psigologie) geword het, en teoreties veranker staan binne die opkomende raamwerk van die Positiewe Sielkunde (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000:48), en die psigofortologie (Wissing & Van Eeden 2002:42). Aangesien hierdie studie die eerste van dié aard in Afrikaans is, bied publikasie in 'n Afrikaanse wetenskaptydskrif die geleentheid om nuwe terme van 'n vakgebied soos Sielkunde (of Psigologie) as wetenskaptaal vir Afrikaans voor te stel². In hierdie artikel sal "Sielkunde" en "Psigologie" as naam van die vakgebied as sinonieme gebruik word.

¹ Positiewe Sielkunde is 'n opkomende wetenskapgebied binne die Sielkunde, gekonseptualiseer deur Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000) as Positive Psychology en word in hierdie artikel bespreek. Die term "Positiewe Sielkunde" sal deurgaans gebruik word.

² Die toepaslike konsepte van die Positiewe Sielkunde sal in hierdie artikel eenmalig aangedui word deur die voorgestelde Afrikaanse term gevolg deur die oorspronklike Engelse term in hakies. Daarna word slegs die Afrikaanse term gebruik.

1. KARAKTERSTERKTES: 'N HISTORIESE OORSIG

Soos ander wetenskappe het die Sielkunde ook ontwikkel vanuit 'n filosofies-teoretiese posisie (Kuhn 1970), waar empiriese bewyse vir psigologiese verskynsels nog ontbreek het en teorieë soos dié van Freud, Jung en die psigoanalitiese perspektiewe, spekulatief en filosofies-verklarend tot stand gekom het. In hierdie tydperk was karakter 'n prominente konsep binne die Sielkunde en het skrywers soos Shand (1914) se *The foundations of character*, Roback (1931) se *The psychology of character* en veral Reich (1933) se *The character analysis*, groot deurbrake gemaak. Karakter is beskryf as die kenmerke van persoonlikheid wat uitstaan wanneer kognitiewe, affektiewe en fisieke aspekte nie 'n rol speel nie, en wat dus in wilsaspekte (volitional) en inhiberende aspekte van gedrag na vore kom (Roback 1931 & 1951:160). Reich (1933:xiii & xxv) het karakter enersyds beskou as die eiesoortige gedrag van die individu wat hom beskerm teen onbewuste inhoude in die persoonlikheid, en andersyds as die uitlewing van geïnternaliseerde sosio-kultureel-ekonomiese waardes van die tyd.

Wat besonder interessant is, is dat beide Roback (1931:156) en Reich (1933:xxiii) so lank gelede al aangetoon het dat karakter die somtotaal is van alle eienskappe wat 'n persoon uniek maak en waarin mense duidelik verskil. Dit resoneer later in Peterson en Seligman (2004:12) en Seligman (2002:160) se beklemtoning dat karaktersterktes en veral unieke sterktes (signature strengths) eie is aan die individu en dat individuele verskille hierin sal voorkom.

Hoewel die werk van Roback en Reich sterk gestaan het in die Strukturalisme en Funksionalisme van hul tyd en beide aanspraak gemaak het op die wetenskaplikheid van hul teoretiese perspektiewe, het die Sielkunde van tóé 'n sterk morele inslag gehad. Veral Roback (1931:160-162) het daarin geslaag om die morele en normatiewe aard

van karakterwetenskap te verantwoord, maar dit het nie stand gehou teen die kritiek wat vanuit die Behaviorisme en later ook uit die Persoonlikheid of Personologie gekom het nie. Die felste kritiek en die meeste invloed vir die verwydering van karakterologie uit die wetenskapveld van die Sielkunde het gekom van Gordon Allport wat beskou word as die vader van die Personologie. Allport (1937:52) skryf:

Character is personality evaluated and personality is character devaluated.
Since character is an unnecessary concept for psychology, the term will not appear again in this volume, excepting in quotations from other writers, or in a clear historical context.

Hierop het Roback (1951:499) geantwoord deur tot die slotsom te kom dat persoonlikheid die mens oor die algemeen is, en karakter persoonlikheid is soos wat dit voorkom in gedifferensieerde mensheid. Karakterlose mense bestaan nie. Hy waarsku ook dat as die karakterkonsep uit die wetenskapveld geban sou word, dit die een of ander tyd weer sou terugkeer "... forcing you to salute it, in some other guise" (1951:714).

In die vyf dekades (vanaf ongeveer 1940 tot 1990) van die vorige eeu het Persoonlikheid of Personologie sterk posgevat en later selfs die wetenskapsterrein van die Sielkunde oorheers (saam met aspekte van psigopatologie). "Karakter" as konstruk het vervaag tot 'n onderafdeling van personologie wat net te make het met 'n persoon se keuse en uitleef van waardes en norme (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen 2003:11). In Europa het die karakterkonsep meer prominent gebly soos gevind kon word in die persoonlikheidsteorie van Erich Fromm (1949, in Meyer et al. 2003:175) waarin hy karakter beskryf het as die verworwe komponent van persoonlikheid en verwys het na

sosiale karakter en vyf karaktertipes. Die karakterkonsep het egter nie 'n volwaardige teoretiese konstruksie geword wat aan empiriese ondersoek onderwerp kon word nie.

In dieselfde tydperk het skrywers vanuit uiteenlopende perspektiewe begin kyk na aspekte van positiewe menslike funksionering, byvoorbeeld: William James se siening van gesonde denke (healthy mindedness) (Roth 1971:xiii); Jung (1971) se konsepte van individuasie en selfrealisering; Maslow (1973) se selfaktualiseringskonsep; Allport (1961) se begrip van volwassenheid; Rogers (1961) se beskrywing van die optimaal funksionerende persoon en Marie Jahoda (1958) se uiteensetting van komponente van psigiese gesondheid. Karakter het nie gefigureer in hierdie teoretiese beskouings nie, maar menslike sterktes is hieruit afgelei (Ryff & Singer 1998; Smith 2006; Strümpfer 2005), en later is ook Peterson en Seligman (2004:59) se konseptualisering van karaktersterktes hierdeur beïnvloed, in so 'n mate dat Seligman (2002:128) tot die gevolgtrekking kom dat dit tyd geword het om karakter weer te herontdek as 'n sentrale konsep in die wetenskaplike studie van menslike gedrag.

Seligman is oortuig dat karakter in onguns verval het om die volgende redes:

- Karakter as fenomeen word slegs verwerf uit ervaring.
- 'n Wetenskap kan nie voorskriftelikheid ondersteun nie, maar kan net beskrywend wees.
- Karakter is waarde gelaai en word geassosieer met Victoriaanse Protestantisme (2002:128).

Karakter het dus nie beantwoord aan die empiriese vereistes van wetenskap nie, en het as gevolg van 'n morele of waarde-oriëntasie oorgehel na die terrein van die filosofie en etiek.

Onlangs, egter, het die karakterkonstruk weer sy verskyning in 'n nuwe gedaante in die Sielkunde gemaak. Peterson en Seligman (2004:4) bepleit dat karakter as konsep weer tuisshoort in die Sielkunde en die kernbegrip van die Positiewe Sielkunde moet wees. Seligman (2002:128) is oortuig dat:

any science that does not use character as a basic idea (or at least explain character and choice away successfully) will never be accepted as a useful account of human action.

Hy stel voor dat karakter gekonseptualiseer word uit deugde (virtues) wat universeel aanvaar word, en dat spesifieke karaktersterktes (wat op die vlak van die Sielkunde lê) die roetes of gedragswyses is waardeur die deugde vergestalt word (Seligman, 2002:133).

2. KARAKTERSTERKTES: DIE HUIDIGE STAND

Karakter is dus terug in die Psigologie. Die ontwikkeling van die vakgebied as sodanig en die opkoms van die wetenskapsfilosofie het meegebring dat daar voorsiening gemaak word (en verdraagsaamheid is) vir meer abstrakte konstrukte. Gesofistikeerde psigometriesse tegnieke en veral die ontwikkeling van kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodes het data-insamelingsmetodes en dataverwerkingsmetodes daargestel waarmee abstrakte en gekonstrueerde (sosiaal konstruktivistiese) verskynsels ondersoek kan word. Daarby het die bewustheid en intensiteit van menslike ellende en problematiek 'n kragtige appèl gerig tot wetenskapbeoefening oor die algemeen en die geesteswetenskappe in die besonder, om deur middel van sosiaal relevante navorsing kennis en vaardigheid daar te stel. Die terrein van die Positiewe Sielkunde waarvan karakter en karaktersterktes sentrale begrippe is, het volgens Seligman en Csikszentmihalyi (2000) drie doelwitte:

- Om positiewe emosies en ervarings te bestudeer.
- Om positiewe trekke, veral sterktes en deugde, maar ook vermoëns, te bestudeer.
- Om positiewe instellings te bestudeer soos demokrasie, sterk families en vrye inligtingverwerwing (free inquiry), wat deugde bou en daardeur weer positiewe emosies teweegbring.

Seligman (2002:xiii) is oortuig daarvan dat die begrip en bevordering van sterktes en deugde – onder andere waagmoed, perspektief, integriteit, gelykheid en lojaliteit – in moeilike tye noodsaakliker is as in goeie tye.

2.1 Terminologiese afbakening

Hoewel in hierdie artikel gefokus word op karaktersterktes soos gekonseptualiseer deur Peterson en Seligman (2004:28-30) is dit belangrik om daarop te let dat in Suid-Afrika en Europa die konsep “sterktes” en “menslike sterktes” gebruik word om ook na ander positiewe fasette van menslike funksionering te verwys en nie net na karaktersterktes nie (Linley 2006; Smith 2006 & Strümpfer 2005).

’n Kragtige impetus vir die bestudering van menslike sterktes het gekom deur Antonovsky (1979 & 1987) se bekendstelling van die begrip “salutogenesis” (“saluto” = gesondheid en “genesis” = bron of oorsprong). Hy het ook voorgestel dat mense bronne van weerstand teen lewenseise en lewenstres het (resistance resources) en dat dit kulmineer in ’n koherensiesin (sense of coherence) waaruit die persoon ervaar dat lewensrealiteite hanteerbaar (manageable), verstaanbaar (comprehensible), en sinvol (meaningful) is. Volgens Strümpfer (2005:33) is Antonovsky dié skrywer wat die meeste invloed gehad het in Europa en Suid-Afrika met betrekking tot die sterkteperspektief.

Strümpfer (1995) het uitgebrei op Antonovsky se salutogenesis, en het fortigenesis (“forti” = sterkte) voorgestel om te verwys na die bron of oorsprong van menslike sterktes oor die algemeen. Wissing en van Eeden (1997 & 2002) het ná ’n omvattende studie van mense se psigologiese welstand voorgestel dat **psigofortologie** as ’n nuwe subdissipline in die Sielkunde tot stand kom, waarin nie net die oorsprong van psigologiese gesondheid en welstand bestudeer sal word nie, maar die aard, manifestasies, patrone en bevordering van psigologiese welstand en gesondheid asook die ontwikkeling van menslike kapasiteit of sterktes (1997:5). Heelwat navorsing het reeds uit die psigofortologiese benadering voortgespruit, onder andere dié van Wissing, Temane, Wissing, Khumalo en Van Eeden (2006). Die term “fortologie” het inslag gevind en word tans in Suid-Afrika deur ander dissiplines soos maatskaplike werk, verpleegkunde, opvoedkunde, menslike bewegingskunde, voedingskunde en so meer gebruik. Dié interdissiplinêre gebruik van die sterktekonsep (fortologie) fokus op bio-psygo-sosio-, en spirituele sterktes in individue, instansies, gemeenskappe en kulture (Wissing 1998:17).

Ook in Europa word die breër siening van menslike sterktes verkies soos wat beskryf word in *A psychology of human strengths* (Aspinwall & Staudinger 2003). Volgens hierdie siening word sterktes verteenwoordig deur alle aspekte wat psigologiese gesondheid en welstand teweegbring, op kognitiewe, affektiewe, konatiewe, self-, interpersoonlike, spirituele en gedragsgebied. Volgens Aspinwall en Staudinger (2003:13):

It seems that it is not so much one or the other personality characteristic that should be called a human strength. Rather, it seems that human strengths may primarily lie in the ability to flexibly apply as many different resources and skills as necessary to solve a problem or work toward a goal.

Dit blyk dus dat psigofortologie en menslike sterktes (fortologie) verwys na alle aspekte wat bydra tot die individu se sielkundige en/of algemene welstand en gesondheid. Karaktersterktes daarenteen verwys spesifiek na die positiewe individuele (karakter)trekke wat volgens Peterson en Seligman (2004:5) die fokus van die tweede terrein van die Positiewe Sielkunde sal wees.

2.2 Kerndeugde as konseptuele bronne van karaktersterktes

Soos voorheen genoem is, is die teoretiese raamwerk waarbinne karaktersterktes bestudeer word, die Positiewe Sielkunde, wat deur Lopez en Snyder (2004:xv) beskryf word as die wetenskaplike en praktiese ondersoek van optimale menslike funksionering.

Om wetenskaplike geloofwaardigheid en universeel geldende toepassingswaarde te verleen aan 'n Positiewe Psigologie waarvan karakter 'n kernaanneme en later 'n basiskonstruk moet wees, het Peterson en Seligman (2004:13) omvattende navorsing gedoen om te bepaal watter eienskappe universeel bydraend is tot 'n vervulde lewe (well-lived life). Sodoende het hulle op ses breë kategorieë en deugde afgekom wat waarskynlik universeel en beslis alomteenwoordig is. Hoewel alle geloofs- en kultuurgroepe nie noodwendig dieselfde kerndeugde eksplisiet voorstaan nie, is verwysings na die deugde of kenmerke van die deugde gevind in die moreel-filosofiese geskrifte van alle bekende religieuse en kulturele tradisies en van filosowe soos Socrates, Plato, Aristoteles, Augustan en Aquinas (Seligman 2002:132). Carr (2004) beweer dat die deugde of eienskappe daarvan moontlik deur 'n evolusionêre proses biologies vasgelê is om die aanpassing en oorlewing van die menslike spesie te verseker. Die ses deugde of eienskappe daarvan dien as wegwysers vir die bestudering van karakter. Peterson en Seligman (2004:33-52) stel die kerndeugde (core virtues) voor as: wysheid en kennis (wisdom and knowledge); dapperheid (courage); liefde en

medemenslikheid (love and humanity); geregtigheid (justice); gematigdheid (temperance) en spiritualiteit en transendering (spirituality and transcendence).

Seligman (2002:135) onderskei soos volg tussen deugde en talente: Deugde is moreel-eties van aard teenoor talente wat nie aan 'n morele waarde gekoppel word nie; talente is ingebore teenoor deugde wat ontwikkel word; talente word outomaties aangewend teenoor deugde wat bewustelik toegepas word. 'n Persoon het 'n keuse om 'n deug aan te leer, te ontwikkel en toe te pas. Met genoegsame tyd, inspanning en deursettingsvermoë kan alle mense deugde aanleer. Die konsep van keuse en persoonlike verantwoordelikheid vorm volgens Seligman (2002:136) net so 'n sentrale deel van Positiewe Sielkunde soos goeie karakter, gemanifesteer in verskillende karaktersterktes.

Building strengths and virtues and using them in daily life are very much a matter of making choices. Building strength and virtue is not about learning, training or conditioning, but about discovery, creation and ownership.

Die bogenoemde ses universeel geldige deugde word gemanifesteer in 24 karaktersterktes wat as verskynsels op die terrein van die Psigologie as wetenskap lê, en van daaruit bestudeer en bevorder kan word. Deugde kom deur verskeie roetes tot stand en Seligman (2002:137-138) beskryf hierdie roetes as sterktes wat in teenstelling met abstrakte deugde meetbaar is en aangeleer kan word. Dit wil egter voorkom of daar ook sprake kan wees van 'n interaktiewe, sistemiese proses waardeur deugde en sterktes mekaar wedersyds bevorder.

Sterktes moet aan bepaalde kriteria voldoen alvorens dit as karaktersterkte gereken kan word, naamlik:

- 'n Sterkte is bydraend tot 'n goeie lewe (good life) vir die self en ander en lei tot die verwesenliking van die individu.
- 'n Sterkte is 'n trek, 'n sielkundige eienskap wat oor tyd en situasies stabiel en sigbaar bly.
- 'n Sterkte is waardevol in eie reg selfs sonder ooglopend voordelige uitkoms. Dit vereis geen eksterne motivering tot toepassing nie.
- Vertoon van sterkte deur een persoon laat ander nie minderwaardig voel nie, maar eerder geïnspireerd. Dit bevoordeel ander en laat die persoon met outentieke positiewe ervaring en emosie.
- 'n Sterkte het 'n toepaslike antoniem wat negatief is, en beide is meetbaar.
- Die gemeenskap versterk sterktes deur middel van kinderstories, kuns, liedere en gedigte. Rolmodelle van sterktes is bekend byvoorbeeld Mandela, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Moeder Theresa, en so meer.
- Sommige sterktes het prototipes, soos kinders wat die kenmerke vertoon op 'n baie jeugdige ouderdom.
- 'n Sterkte is duidelik onderskeibaar van ander positiewe kenmerke in die klassifikasie.
- Sterktes is begeerlike eienskappe wat geen regverdiging vereis nie en wat oor kulture heen waardeur word.
- Sterktes word universeel deur instellings onderskryf en bevorder.

2.3 'n Model van karaktersterktes

Die publikasie van Peterson en Seligman (2004) waarna voorheen verwys is, is 'n klassifikasie van karaktersterktes met die doel om 'n handleiding en riglyn daar te stel as konseptuele en empiriese werktuie om intervensies te ontwikkel en te evalueer (2004:3).

Die skrywers sê voorts dat "... the domain for us is not psychological illness but psychological health. In short our goal is a manual of the sanities" (2004:4).

Verder wil hulle 'n algemene vakwoordeskat daarstel om interdisiplinêre ooreengekome kommunikasie oor meetbare positiewe trekke en ander terme binne die Positiewe Sielkunde te bevorder; soos die DSM- en ICD-stelsels vir die kliniese vakgebied gedoen het.

Vervolgens word baie kortliks en met behulp van Peterson en Seligman (2004:29 & 30) se uiteensetting 'n oorsig oor die ses deugde en 24 verbandhoudende karaktersterktes gegee:

Deug 1: wysheid en kennis = *wisdom and knowledge*: kognitiewe sterktes wat die verkryging en gebruik van kennis behels

Verbandhoudende karaktersterktes

- **kreatiwiteit** (oorspronklikheid en vindingrykheid) = *creativity*: dink aan nuwe en produktiewe wyses om dinge te konseptualiseer en te doen; kan ook kunstigheid behels
- **nuuskierigheid** (belangstelling, oop vir ervaring, nuutheidsoekend) = *curiosity*: stel belang in voortdurende ervaring op sigself; bekoor deur voorwerpe en onderwerpe, ondersoekend en ontdekkend

- **openheid** (oordeel, kritiese denke) = *open-mindedness*: bedink en ondersoek alle kante van 'n saak, maak geen oorhaastige gevolgtrekkings nie; kan van mening verander met nuwe inligting, billike oorweging van alle inligting
- **leergierig** = *love of learning*: bemeestering van nuwe vaardighede, onderwerpe en kennis, hetsy individueel of formeel; dit is soos die kreatiwiteitsterkte, maar ook meer en sluit die neiging in om sistematies toe te voeg tot bestaande kennis
- **perspektief** (wysheid) = *perspective*: om ander met wyse raad en insig te adviseer; 'n realiteitsiening wat sin maak vir self en ander

Deug 2: dapperheid = *courage*: emosionele sterktes wat die aanwending behels van wilsaspekte om doelwitte te bereik ten spyte van interne of eksterne teenkanting

Verbandhoudende karaktersterktes

- **onverskrokkenheid** (waagmoed) = *bravery*: deins nie terug van bedreiging, uitdaging, moeite of pyn nie; uitgesproke oor wat reg is ten spyte van teenkanting, toon moed van oortuiging al is dit ongewild; mag ook fisieke dapperheid behels
- **volharding** (deursettingsvermoë, toewyding, ondernemend) = *persistence*: voltooi wat begin is, volhard in 'n aksie of aktiwiteit ten spyte van struikelblokke; vreugde in voltooide take
- **integriteit** (outentiek, eerlik) = *integrity*: praat die waarheid, wees oop en eerlik en tree opreg op, sonder aanstellerigheid, neem verantwoordelikheid vir eie gevoelens en aksies

- **vitaliteit** (lewenslus, entoesiasme, stukrag, energie) = *vitality*: opgewonde en energieke lewensbenadering, doen niks halfhartig of half nie; beleef die lewe as 'n avontuur, voel lewendig en aan die gang

Deug 3: medemenslikheid = *humanity*: interpersoonlike sterktes wat omgee vir en uitreik na ander (tending and befriending) behels

Verbandhoudende karaktersterktes

- **liefde** = *love*: waardeer naby verhoudings met ander, veral dié waarin meedeel en omgee wedersyds is; om naby ander te wees
- **goedhartigheid** (mededeelsaam, versorgend, omgee, meegevoel, altruïstiese liefde, vriendelikheid) = *kindness*: behulpsaam aan ander sonder beloning, hulpvaardig, versorgend en vrygewend
- **sosiale intelligensie** (emosionele intelligensie, persoonlike intelligensie) = *social intelligence*: bewus wees van eie en ander se motiewe en gevoelens; weet hoe om in sosiale situasies op te tree en in te pas, weet wat om van ander te verwag, hoe hulle kop werk

Deug 4: geregtigheid = *justice*: siviele of burgerlike sterktes wat gesonde gemeenskapslewe onderlê

Verbandhoudende karaktersterktes

- **burgerskap** (sosiale verantwoordelikheid, lojaliteit, spanwerk) = *citizenship*: (sosiale verantwoordelikheid, lojaliteit, goeie samewerking in groep- of spanverband, lojaliteit aan die groep, om jou deel te doen

- **regverdigheid** = *fairness*: om met billikheid en geregtigheid alle mense gelyk te hanteer; nie toe te laat dat persoonlike gevoelens besluite oor ander beïnvloed nie, gee elkeen 'n billike kans
- **leierskap** = *leadership*: om 'n groep aan te moedig om dinge te doen en terselfdertyd goeie verhoudings in die groep te handhaaf; organiseer groepaktiwiteite en sien toe dat dit gebeur

Deug 5: gematigdheid = *temperance*: sterktes wat teen oormaat beskerm

Verbandhoudende karaktersterktes

- **vergifnis en genade** = *forgiveness and mercy*: vergewe dié wat fouteer het, aanvaar die tekortkominge van ander, gee ander nog 'n kans; om nie wraaksugtig te wees nie
- **nederigheid en beskeidenheid** = *humility and modesty*: laat prestasies vanself spreek; om nie die kollig te soek nie, om jouself nie buitengewoon belangrik te ag nie
- **versigtigheid en omsigtigheid** = *prudence*: om versigtig keuses te maak, nie onnodige risiko's te loop nie; nie te sê of doen wat later berou mag word nie
- **selfregulering** (selfbeheersing) = *self-regulation*: reguleer eie gevoelens en dade, gedissiplineerd wees, beheer oor eie aptyt en emosies

Deug 6: transendering = *transcendence*: sterktes wat 'n verbintenis met die groter kosmos vind en betekenis en sin gee

Verbandhoudende karaktersterktes

- **waardering van skoonheid en uitnemendheid** (agting, verwondering, verheffing) = *appreciation of beauty and excellence*: waarneem en waardeer van skoonheid, uitnemendheid en/of vaardigheid in verskeie lewensgebiede, van die natuur tot kuns, wetenskap en alledaagse ervaring
- **dankbaarheid** = *gratitude*: om bewus van en dankbaar te wees vir die goeie wat gebeur, om dank te betuig, dankie te sê
- **hoop** (optimisme, toekomsdenke, toekomsgerigtheid) = *hope*: om die beste in die toekoms te verwag en te werk om dit te bereik, geloof dat 'n goeie toekoms teweeggebring kan word
- **humor** (speelsheid) = *humour*: lag en terg graag, laat ander glimlag; sien die ligte kant, maak (nie net vertel) grappies
- **spiritualiteit** (godsdiensig, geloof, singewing) = *spirituality*: om koherente geloof te hê oor die hoër doel en sin van die kosmos, om te weet waar jy inpas in die hoër orde, om oortuigings te hê oor die doel van die lewe wat gedrag rig en gerusstelling verleen

Volgens Carr (2004:53) sou 'n persoon wat een of twee sterktes binne elke deugdegroep manifesteer, beskou kon word as van goeie of sterk karakter. Seligman (2002:160) is egter oortuig dat geen persoon oor ewe veel van al die karaktersterktes beskik nie, maar dat elke mens 'n eiesoortige groep sterktes het waarmee hy optimaal funksioneer en 'n paar ander, wat as potensiaal verder ontwikkel kan word. Seligman onderskei dus unieke sterktes as unieke persoonlike sterktes wat ook met spesifieke deugde geassosieer word en is van mening dat indien sodanige sterktes gereeld in belangrike areas van daaglikse lewe gebruik word, tevredenheid en geluk beleef sal

word. Kriteria waaraan sulke unieke sterktes gemeet kan word, is volgens Carr (2004:54):

- Die wete dat die sterkte 'n kerneienskap van die self is.
- Gretigheid om die sterkte te gebruik.
- Versnelde leer tydens gebruik van die sterkte.
- Voortgesette leer van nuwe toepassings van die sterkte.
- 'n Verlange na beter benutting van die sterkte.
- 'n Gevoel dat die sterkte bruikbaar is in baie opsigte en situasies.
- Om versterk eerder as vermoei te word by gebruik van die sterkte.
- Die skep van persoonlike projekte rondom die sterkte.
- Gevoelens van vreugde, entoesiasme, opwinding en energie by gebruik van die sterkte.

Die karaktersterktemodel is 'n innoverende nuwe konstruk in 'n nuwe veld van die Psigologie wat baie uiteenlopende moontlikhede daarstel vir navorsing en toepassing. Die outeurs van die model (Peterson en Seligman 2004) en hul navorsingspan (befonds deur groot instansies in die VSA) het beslis moeite gedoen om die model 'n universele toepassingswaarde te gee. Die indruk bly egter dat Allport (1960:181) se ou waarneming dat "... American psychology bears the stamp of American democracy ..." nog geld. Die vraag ontstaan waarom deugde uit die Afrikakosmologie nie ingesluit is in die filosofiese ondersoek wat die model voorafgegaan het nie. Sou die model ook karaktersterktes uit

Afrikakulture weerspieël? Op 'n meer individuele vlak ontstaan die vraag of die karaktersterktemodel in diepte alle aspekte van menslike funksionering waarin karakter manifesteer (byvoorbeeld aspekte van self en van gedrag) evalueer.

2.4 Operasionalisering van die karaktersterktemodel

Die 24 karaktersterktes geassosieer met die ses deugde in die karaktersterktemodel is geoperasionaliseer met behulp van die Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS). Twee vraelyste is tans beskikbaar, naamlik:

- VIA Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) for Adults: Peterson en Seligman (2004:631).

Die vraelys is gerig op volwassenes van agtien jaar en ouer. Dit is 'n selfrapporteringsvraelys met 240 items wat elk van die 24 karaktersterktes in die VIA-klassifikasie meet. Die vraelys beskik oor goeie betroubaarheid met alfakoëffisiënte van >0.70 vir al die subskale, verkry in 'n Amerikaanse studie met 'n internasionale studiepopulasie. Geldigheidsaanduiders is bevredigend en navorsing hieroor gaan voort.

- VIA Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth): Peterson, Dahlsgaard en Park (Peterson en Seligman, 2004:635; Park en Peterson, 2006).

Die VIA-Youth-vraelys is gerig op jeugdiges tussen tien en sewentien jaar. Dit is 'n selfrapporteringsvraelys met 198 items wat elk van die 24 karaktersterktes in die VIA-klassifikasie meet. Die Cronbach-alfa- betroubaarheidsindeks is volgens Peterson en Seligman (2004) bo 0.65 vir elke subskaal. Park en Peterson (2006) het goeie betroubaarheidskoëffisiënte van 0.72 tot 0.91 gekry.. Die vraelys se geldigheid word tans wyd nagevors.

Afgesien van die VIA-IS en die VIA-Youth het Peterson en Seligman (2004) ook verwys na ander meetinstrumente waarmee die meeste van die karaktersterktes individueel gemeet kan word. Lopez en Snyder (2004) het 'n groot aantal vraelyste saamgevat wat uiteenlopende konstrakte vanuit die Positiewe Sielkunde meet, en aangetoon dat baie van hulle ook metings van spesifieke karaktersterktes is, byvoorbeeld hoop en optimisme, kreatiwiteit, wysheid, liefde, emosionele intelligensie, empatie, vergifnis, dankbaarheid, humor, spiritualiteit en so meer. Van hierdie meetinstrumente kan aangewend word om die konvergente geldigheid van die VIA-IS te bepaal.

Peterson en Seligman (2004) beoog dat die karaktersterktekoeffisiënt net so 'n aanvaarbare konsep en ingeburger in die volksmond sal word soos wat intelligensiekoeffisiënt oor al die jare was, veral wat status en bruikbaarheid aanbetref, maar sonder die negatiewe bagasie wat ook met IK-gebruik gepaardgegaan het. Dit spreek egter vanself dat dit baie tyd en navorsingsenergie gaan neem om karaktersterktes betroubaar en geldig te meet – soos wat dit geneem het om intelligensie betroubaar en geldig te bepaal – en daar is geen kortpaaie nie. Dit geld ook vir die validering van hierdie instrumente in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks.

2.5 Empiriese ondersoeke van die VIA-IS

Peterson en Seligman (2004:630-631) het 'n elektroniese weergawe van die VIA-IS daargestel (www.viastrengths.org), en mense uit veral Engelssprekende lande, maar ook uit Europa, Asië en Afrikalande het reeds die vraelys voltooi (sowat 150 000 mense uit 42 lande teen 2004). Uit die data wat op hierdie wyse bekom is, is die psigometriese eienskappe van die vraelys bepaal, en word dit steeds nagevors as 'n voortgaande proses. Faktorontledings van skaaltellings het vyf faktore geïdentifiseer, naamlik: kognitiewe sterktes (byvoorbeeld leergierigheid, kreatiwiteit en nuuskierigheid);

emosionele sterktes (byvoorbeeld speelsheid, lewenslus, intimiteit en hoop); konatiwe sterktes (byvoorbeeld vrydenkendheid, ondernemendheid, versigtigheid en selfregulasie); interpersoonlike sterktes (byvoorbeeld leierskap, vergifnis, spanwerk en goedheid) en transendente sterktes (byvoorbeeld verwondering, dankbaarheid en spiritualiteit). 'n Daaropvolgende faktorontleding op nuwe data wat elektronies verkry is, het weer vyf faktore geïdentifiseer, naamlik: sterktes van beheersdheid (restraint) (byvoorbeeld billikheid, nederigheid, genade en versigtigheid); intellektuele sterktes; interpersoonlike sterktes; emosionele sterktes en geestelike sterktes. Die laasgenoemde vier faktore het dieselfde sterktes bevat wat in die ooreenstemmende faktore van die eerste faktorontleding gevind is.

In Suid-Afrika het Khumalo, Wissing en Temane (2006) faktorontledings gedoen met VIA-IS-tellings wat met behulp van 256 Setswanasprekende studente verkry is. Drie duidelike emiese (emic) faktore is in die Afrikagroep geïdentifiseer, naamlik:

- Wysheid, kennis en waagmoed.
- Horisontale en vertikale verbondenheid.
- Integriteit in 'n groepkonteks: gematigdheid en regverdigheid.

Dié navorsers het tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat die faktorpatroon 'n kollektief-kulturele Afrikawaardesisteem reflekteer. Aangesien dit radikaal verskil van die oënskynlik Westerse faktorpatrone wat deur Peterson en Seligman (2004) gerapporteer is, asook van die ses gehipotetiseerde deugdegroepe van die VIA-IS, stel Khumalo et al. (2006) voor dat verdere navorsing gedoen word, waarna, indien nodig, wysigings en aanpassings vir 'n meer geldige vorm van die VIA-IS vir gebruik in die Afrikakonteks ontwikkel word. Die klem op emiese deugde- en sterktepatrone is volgens Khumalo et

al. (2006) belangrik en hul siening sluit aan by Constantine en Sue (2006:240) se gevolgtrekking dat karaktersterktes in mense van kleur in die VSA gedefinieer moet word volgens kulturele konstrakte wat verband hou met kollektiewe, spirituele en familiële aspekte van optimale menslike funksionering. Biswas-Diener (2006) het met navorsing in geselekteerde kulture in Afrika, Groenland en die V.S.A., heelwat ooreenstemming gevind met betrekking tot die bestaan, wenslikheid en ontwikkeling van karaktersterktes. Hulle het ook beduidende verskille gevind binne- en tussen kulture oor die waargenome belangrikheid van spesifieke sterktes.

3. KARAKTERSTERKTES: 'N TOEKOMSPERSPEKTIEF

Die sterktekonsep, beide die breër benadering en die meer gefokusde karaktersterktemodel wat albei gevestig is in die teoretiese raamwerk van die Positiewe Sielkunde, hou groot belofte in op praktiese toepassingsvlak sowel as vir navorsing.

3.1 Praktiese bruikbaarheid van die karaktersterktemodel

Die karaktersterktemodel het toepassingsmoontlikhede vir elke subdomein van die Sielkunde as toegepaste wetenskap:

- ***Ontwikkeling- en Kindersielkunde***

Hoewel Ontwikkelingsielkunde te make het met menslike ontwikkeling oor die totale lewensverloop, word daar tans sterk gefokus op die ontwikkeling van karaktersterktes in kinders om veerkragtigheid te bevorder en op die identifisering en benutting van ontwikkelingsbates (developmental assets) in die jeug (Scales & Leffert 2004). Peterson en Seligman (2004:83) vind heelwat ooreenkomste tussen ontwikkelingsbates en karaktersterktes, en Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas en Lerner (2005:10) wys daarop dat ontwikkelingsbates kulmineer in ses sterktes wat bevorder en versterk word in positiewe

jeugontwikkelingsprogramme, naamlik: bevoegdheid (competence), selfvertroue (confidence), karakter (character), omgee (caring) en bydrae (contribution). Hierdie ses kernsterktes (wat ook baie ooreenstem met karaktersterktes) vorm die konseptuele basis waarop diverse, interaktiewe, positiewe jeugontwikkelingsaksies gebaseer word. Wat die bevordering van karaktersterktes aanbetref, kan Hodges en Clifton (2004:256) se siening ook geld dat meer tyd en energie belê moet word in die versterking en uitbouing van reeds bestaande sterktes in jongmense, eerder as om nuwe sterktes te probeer ontwikkel. Hulle is oortuig daarvan dat 'n aantal optimaal ontwikkelde spesifieke sterktes meer voordelig is as verskeie gemiddelde sterktes. Dit stem ooreen met Seligman (2002) se siening van unieke sterktes en die waarde wat die identifisering en bevordering van unieke karaktersterktes vir jongmense sal hê, veral met betrekking tot persoonlike psigologiese groei, aanpassing en voorkoming van probleme. Larson et al. (2004:541) wys daarop dat georganiseerde jeugaktiwiteite waarin jongmense aktief betrokke is by gemeenskapsprogramme 'n besonder vrugbare konteks vir selfgegenereerde verandering is. Jongmense het in sulke programme hoër vlakke van persoonlike en sosiale leerervaringe as tydens skoolwerk of in interaksies met vriende. Dit blyk dus dat sodanige jeugprogramme 'n positiewe konteks is waarin karaktersterktes deur middel van ervaringsleer en *coaching*-aktiwiteite ontwikkel kan word.

Wat kinders betref, is dit bekend dat veerkragtigheid, optimisme en hoop vir hulle bykans natuurlike kenmerke is (Roberts, Brown, Johnson & Reinke 2002:664-666), en dat die kinderjare die optimale tyd is om gesonde gewoontes, gedrag, aanpassings- en *coping*-metodes, sosiale vaardighede, selfperspektief en ander bevoegdhede aan te leer (2002:671). Dit geld sekerlik ook vir die aanleer van unieke karaktersterktes.

- ***Kliniese en Voorligtingsielkunde***

Volgens Seligman (2002:6):

We have discovered that there is a set of human strengths that are the most likely buffer against mental illness: courage, optimism, interpersonal skill, work ethic, hope, honesty and perseverance.

Hy bepleit die terapeutiese identifisering en bevordering van karaktersterktes soos die bogenoemde in strategieë van sterktebou, sodat nie alleen 'n buffereffek teen patologie bereik kan word nie, maar ook 'n genesingseffek. Lopez en Snyder (2004:466) meen ook dat karaktersterktes geestesgesondheid mag verbeter. Maddux, Snyder en Lopez (2004:330) stel voor dat 'n karaktersterktebepaling saam met enige ander kliniese diagnose gedoen word en dat die psigoterapie daarop toegespits sal wees om nie net swakhede en gebreke te identifiseer nie, maar deurgaans op sterktes en vermoëns te fokus. Peterson en Park (2004:443) is oortuig dat mense se unieke sterktes terapeuties aangewend kan word om psigologiese groei en vervulling te bevorder.

- ***Bedryf- en Organisasiesielkunde***

Die Gallup Organization het in twee miljoen onderhoude die sterktes (wat ook karaktersterktes insluit) van leiers in hul werkmag bepaal en volgens Hodges en Clifton (2004:259) tot die gevolgtrekking gekom dat: "... each person's greatest room for growth is in the areas of the person's greatest strength."

Lopez en Snyder (2004:466) wys op die strategie vir sterktebestuur wat behels dat mense volgens hul sterktes geselekteer, geplaas en opgelei word en nie net om vaardigheidsleemtes te vul nie. Dit behels ook dat mense sal groei in hul werk en hul

beroep en nie net opwaarts bevorder sal word en uit hul sterkteveld sal beweeg nie. In Suid-Afrika het die Work Wellness-oriëntasie (Schaufeli, 2006) reeds goed posgevat.

- ***Gesondheidsielkunde***

Die positiewe verband tussen karaktersterktes en gesondheid is reeds bewys. Die benutting van mense se unieke sterktes kan nie alleen voorkomend en genesend inwerk nie, maar ook psigologiese buffers teen angstigheid, gevoelens van onmag en hulpeloosheid vorm, en mense bemagtig met hoop, optimisme en gevoelens van sterkte en siektebemeestering (Larson, Hemenover, Norris & Cacioppo 2003, in Aspinwall & Staudinger 2003:211-221). In Suid-Afrika kan die karaktersterktebenadering 'n besondere bydrae lewer tot die lewenstylverandering van mense wat met MIV/vigs moet saamleef.

- ***Geriatrisie Sielkunde***

Carstensen en Charles (2003:75) wys daarop dat die heersende benadering tot veroudering vanuit 'n verliesoogpunt is, waarin die verlies van fisieke en kognitiewe vermoëns die fokus is. 'n Karaktersterkteperspektief kan dit omswaai na 'n wins- of batebenadering, waarin die fokus is op die bemagtigende invloed wat die verdieping van lewensperspektief en -waardes vir ouer mense meebring. Fernandez-Ballesteros (2003:141-143) praat van positiewe psigogerontologie wat begrippe soos "successful ageing", "ageing well", "vital ageing" en "competent ageing" insluit. Ook in hierdie verband kan karaktersterktes 'n bemagtigende rol speel om ouer mense se eiewaarde en gemeenskapswaardes te bevestig. Ook ouer mense se veerkragtigheid moet behou en bevorder word deur nie op hul siekte, swakheid en geskondenheid te fokus nie, maar op dit wat hulle behou het, hulle deugde en sterktes (Seligman 2002:4; Valiant 2004:561-580).

- ***Forensiese Sielkunde***

Ward en Mann (2004:598-616) wys daarop dat rehabilitasieprogramme wat oortreders se karaktersterktes in ag neem en daarop gerig is om karakterleemtes aan te vul deur die ontwikkeling van sterktes, heelwat meer suksesvol is en 'n blywende invloed het en dat gedragsprobleme en terugvalgedrag of heroortreding beduidend verminder word. Hierdie beginsel is sekerlik ook waar in enige terapeutiese konteks waar rehabilitasie ter sprake is.

- ***Pastorale Sielkunde***

Karaktersterktes van transenderende aard, asook hoop en optimisme, vergifnis, genade en medemenslikheid, kan in pastorale programme en beraad benut word.

- ***Gemeenskapsielkunde***

Intervensieprogramme en voorkomende aksies wat die werkwyse van gemeenskapsielkundiges is, kan die ontwikkeling van karaktersterktes in diverse groepe en kontekste met vrug gebruik. Die derde pilaar waarop die Positiewe Sielkunde berus, is om gesonde gemeenskappe te bevorder, en die vestiging van waardes en karaktersterktes in veral risikogroepe kan hiertoe meewerk (Huppert 2004: 693-707).

- ***Sosiale Sielkunde***

Mense se karaktersterktes of -leemtes manifesteer in elke denkbare sosiale konteks. Daarom kan die bepaling en bevordering van karaktersterktes in terapeutiese kontekste soos huweliksberading, ouerskapopleiding, en in alle ondersteuninggroepe van waarde wees. Intervensiebenaderings met betrekking tot konflikthantering, onderhandeling en

probleemoplossing kan verryk word. Leierskapsopleiding moet gebaseer wees op die karaktersterktes van potensiële leiers.

Die bogaande uiteensetting van benuttingsmoontlikhede van die karaktersterktemodel is nie naastenby volledig nie, en toepassings mag ook tussen vakgebiede oorvleuel.

3.2 Verdere navorsing met betrekking tot die karaktersterktemodel

Toe Seligman en Csikszentmihalyi (2000) die raamwerk van die Positiewe Sielkunde bekendgestel het, was hulle uitgesproke daaroor dat die nuwe perspektief nooit gesien moet word as onwetenskaplik, vaag en wollerig omdat dit werk met oënskynlik abstrakte terme soos “geluk”, “sterktes”, “vervulling”, en so meer nie. Die Positiewe Sielkunde moet gegrond wees op universeel aanvaarde wetenskaplike beginsels en moet beantwoord aan deurtastende empiriese ondersoekmetodes. Dit het Peterson en Seligman (2004:31), na die bekendstelling van die karaktersterkteklassifikasiesisteem en -model, bevestig met:

The classification we present here is not a finished product, and we expect it to change in the years to come, as theory and research concerning character strengths proceed.

Om aan te sluit by die navorsingsmomentum wat Peterson en Seligman bepleit, kan die volgende aspekte nagevors word:

- Lopez et al. (2006:212) en Smith (2006:28) meen dat die 24 sterktes in die karaktersterktemodel nie alle moontlike sterktes verteenwoordig nie. Khumalo et al. (2006) en Constantine en Sue (2006:240) voeg by dat veral emiese sterktes van mense in nie-Westerse kulture ander karaktersterktepatrone mag vertoon. Meer empiriese inligting hieroor is nodig.

- Aspinwall en Staudinger (2003:15) en Smith (2006:25) vra of karaktersterktes stabiel oor tyd en konteks is en of dit varieer in verskillende omstandighede en situasies? Hierby sluit aan: Hoe ontwikkel karaktersterktes en wat sou die ontwikkeling daarvan bevorder of belemmer? Asook: Hoe manifesteer karaktersterktes in verskillende lewensfases in geslagte en in terme van kultuur?
- Hierbo (3.1) is 'n aantal toepassingsmoontlikhede van die karaktersterktemodel genoem. Peterson en Seligman (2003:315) bepleit die ontwikkeling en toetsing van intervensies vir elke faset van karaktersterktes. Intervensies se resultate of uitkomst moet ook voortdurend getoets en ondersoek word (Snyder en Lopez 2002:759).
- Peterson en Seligman (2004:631) het min etniese verskille in karaktersterktes tussen die grootste groepe in die VSA gevind, maar navorsers soos Constantine en Sue (2006), Heppner en Wang (2004), Khumalo et al. (2006), en Wissing et al. (2006) verskil hiervan. Uitgebreide navorsing met die karaktersterktemodel in veral Afrikakultuurkontekste en faktorontledings van die data sal kan aantoon of die model en die VIA-IS-meetinstrumente wel universele waardes en karaktereienskappe verteenwoordig, soos wat Peterson en Seligman (2004) meen.

4. GEVOLGTREKKING EN SAMEVATTING

Karakter as verskynsel en konsep was deel van die vroeë Sielkunde, maar het in onguns geraak vanweë die abstrakte, moralistiese en moeilik meetbare aard daarvan. Dit is vervang deur meer navorsbare konstrakte wat vanuit die personologiese en humanistiese benaderings die lig gesien het.

Die fokus op, en denke oor karakter in die Psigologie het egter verander, en gedurende die laaste jare het dit 'n sterk hernude belangstelling ontlok, veral vanuit die Positiewe

Sielkunde. Die abstrakte konsep het 'n teoreties verantwoorde en navorsbare konstruk geword, en die verskynsel het meetbare en waarneembare gemanifesteerde karaktersterktes geword. Die karaktersterktekonstruk is gevestig in 'n vernuwende teoreties-wetenskaplike raamwerk (paradigma?) wat as Positiewe Sielkunde of Psigofortologie bekend staan. Nuwe navorsingsmetodes en andersoortige navorsingsvrae het ook na vore getree.

Die karaktersterktemodel wat 'n kernkonstruk van Positiewe Sielkunde is, hou baie belofte in vir toepassing en navorsing. Dit is egter so dat 'n omvattende en koherente teorie – wat karakterontwikkeling en die manifestering (deur middel van sterktes) daarvan oor tyd, in lewenskontekste, geslagte en kulture verklaar – nog nie bestaan nie. Peterson en Seligman het karakter gekonseptualiseer uit die eklektiese samevoeging van moreel-filosofiese konsepte wat oënskynlik universele waarde het. Faktorontledings deur Peterson en Seligman van tellings behaal op die VIA-IS deur sowat 150 000 mense, het egter by twee geleenthede vyf faktore opgelewer wat verskil het van hul gehipotetiseerde ses deugde of sterktepatrone. Ook die faktorbevindinge van Khumalo et al. en van Wissing et al. in die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks het aangedui dat Peterson en Seligman se aanname dat die karaktersterktemodel universeel geldig mag wees, nie realiseer nie. Die vermoede ontstaan al hoe meer dat karaktersterktes ook idiosinkratiese en kultuur- en konteksgebonde fasette kan hê. Omvattende empiriese ondersoeke na die invloed van ouderdom, geslag, situasie en sosio-kultureel kontekstuele dinamiek op karaktersterktes, kan teorieskepping teweegbring wat meer universele verklaringswaarde mag hê.

In die bogaande uiteensetting van karakter as 'n herontdekte konsep in die Sielkunde is 'n historiese oorsig van die karakterkonsep gegee, die huidige fokusverskuiwing na karakter gemanifesteer in karaktersterktes is beskryf, en 'n toekomsblik op die praktiese

bruikbaarheid van, en navorsingsvrae oor die karaktersterktemodel is gegee. 'n Posing is ook aangewend om die nuwe vakterme van Positiewe Sielkunde in Afrikaans aan te bied en so 'n bydrae tot Afrikaans as wetenskaptaal te lewer.

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Afdeling 3: Artikel 2

Validation of the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth), in a group of South African learners

Sal voorgelê word aan die

South African Journal of Psychology

3.1 Guidelines for authors:

South African Journal of Psychology

Instructions to Authors

Submitting a manuscript

The South African Journal of Psychology (SAJP) is a peer-reviewed journal publishing empirical, theoretical, and review articles on all aspects of psychology. Articles may focus on South African, African, or international issues. Manuscripts to be considered for publication should be e-mailed to sajp@unisa.ac.za. Include a covering letter with your postal address, e-mail address, and telephone number. The covering letter should indicate that the manuscript has not been published elsewhere and is not under consideration for publication in another journal. An acknowledgement of receipt will be e-mailed to the author within a few days and the manuscript will be sent for review by three independent reviewers. Incorrectly structured or formatted manuscripts will not be accepted into the review process.

Manuscript structure

The manuscript should be no longer than 30 A4 pages and no shorter than 10 A4 pages

First page: The full title of the manuscript, the name(s) of the author(s) together with their affiliations, and the name, address, and e-mail address of the author to whom correspondence should be sent.

Second page: The abstract, formatted as a single paragraph, and no longer than 300 words. A list of at least six key words, alphabetically arranged, should be provided below the abstract with semi-colons between words.

Subsequent pages: A reference list, followed by tables and figures (if any). Each table or figure should be on a separate page. Tables and figures should be numbered consecutively and their appropriate positions in the text indicated. Each table or figure should be provided with a title

(e.g., Figure 1. Frequency distribution of critical incidents). The title should be placed at the top for tables and at the bottom for figures.

Manuscript format

The manuscript should be an MS Word document in 12 point Times New Roman font with 1.5 line spacing. There should be no font changes, margin changes, hanging indents, or other unnecessarily complex formatting codes. All text should be formatted as “Normal”. Then adjust font and line spacing as necessary.

American Psychological Association (APA) style guidelines and referencing format should be adhered to.

Headings should start at the left margin, and should not be numbered. All headings should be in bold. Main headings should be in CAPITAL LETTERS.

A line should be left open between paragraphs. The first line of a paragraph should not be indented.

Use indents only for block quotes. Apply these indents manually, using “Format: Paragraph”.

In the reference list, a line should be left open above each reference. Do not use indents or hanging indents in the reference list.

Language

Manuscripts should be written in English. As the SAJP does not employ a full-time or dedicated language editor, authors are requested to send their manuscripts to an external language specialist for language editing before submission.

3.2 Manuskrip

VALIDATION OF THE VALUES IN ACTION INVENTORY OF STRENGTHS FOR YOUTH (VIA-YOUTH) IN A GROUP OF SOUTH AFRICAN LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the reliability and validity of the Values in Action Inventory for Youth (VIA-Youth) of Park and Peterson (2006) in a multi-cultural group of South African learners aged 13 to 17 years (N=1691). Descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients and correlations were calculated and confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses were performed for the total group as well as for African, White, Coloured and Muslim-Indian subgroups separately. The VIA-Youth did not measure reliably in the rural African group (n=329), probably because of insufficient English language proficiency, and no further analyses were conducted on data from this rural subgroup. In the total multicultural urban group (N=1362), as well as in the separate urban subgroups of African (n=449), White (n=536), Coloured (n=156) and Muslim-Indian (n=221) participants, acceptable reliability coefficients were obtained for most of the strengths-subscales. Mean scores for the character strengths compared well with those found in literature. Criterion related validity was supported by correlations in expected directions between VIA-Youth subscales and indices of psychological well-being and pathology in the case of the multi-cultural urban group. Exploration of construct validity by testing of structural equation models and performance of confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses revealed that the VIA-Youth is more homogeneous or uni-dimensional than multi-dimensional. Findings did not support the theoretically hypothesized six virtue-cluster model of character strengths. Implications for practice and further research were indicated.

Keywords: Character strengths; psychometric properties; reliability; South African learners; validity; Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth; VIA-Youth.

In 2002 Seligman introduced the character strengths construct as a core concept of the emerging Positive Psychology perspective in the scientific field of Psychology. The character strengths model was operationalized with the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and recently with the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (Park & Peterson, 2006).

The Positive Psychology framework for science and practice was presented to the scientific world in 2000 in a ground breaking issue of the *American Psychologist*, edited by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000:5). They stated that *the aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities*. Positive Psychology focuses on three related topics: The study of positive subjective experiences; the study of positive individual traits; and the study of institutions that enable positive experiences and positive traits. Peterson and Seligman (2004) linked strengths of character to the second topic namely that of positive traits.

In order to conceptualize character strengths, Peterson and Seligman (2004) reviewed pertinent literature from universal theoretical disciplines, philosophies, religions and diverse cultural writings that addressed good character. From this search they derived six universal virtue clusters namely wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence, and conceptualized 24 virtue related features called character strengths. According to Peterson and Park (2004) character strengths are the psychological ingredients (the processes or mechanisms) that define the virtues. Together the virtues and strengths are the building blocks of psychological health and well-being and a life well lived. Virtue clusters and their embodying strengths are:

Wisdom and knowledge – cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge:

Curiosity, Love of learning, Open-mindedness, Creativity,
Perspective;

Courage – emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal: Valor or Bravery, Persistence, Integrity or Authenticity, Zest or Vitality;

Humanity – interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others:

Love, Kindness, Social intelligence;

Justice – civic strengths that underlie healthy community life: Citizenship, Fairness, Leadership;

Temperance – strengths that protect against excess: Self-regulation, Prudence, Forgiveness and Mercy, Modesty and Humility, and

Transcendence – strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning: Appreciation of beauty and excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humor and Playfulness, Spirituality or Religiousness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Criteria applied in the selection of strengths, were such that traits should be ubiquitous, fulfilling, morally valued, not diminishing others, measurable, have obvious antonyms, may be strikingly found in some individuals and not in others, exceptional children or youth may display these strengths precociously, and social institutions deliberately attempt to cultivate these traits in people (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The character strengths model in the Positive Psychology framework is a western concept, albeit intended by Peterson and Seligman (2004) to have ubiquitous value for practice and research. In order to test the assumption of its authors that it could have universal research and application value, Peterson (2002: Personal communication) at the Second Positive Psychology Summit in Washington called for English-speaking scholars from different nations to comment on the presence or absence of these virtues and strengths in their home cultures. Peterson and Seligman (2004) placed a Web-survey of character strengths on line (<http://www.viastrengths.org/international/>.) and to date close to 250 000 people from about 50 countries, mostly in Europe and Asia, completed the survey. Very few responses came from Africa. Except for the research of Biswas-Diener (2006) on Kenyan Maasai and that of Khumalo, Wissing and Temane (2006) and Wissing et al. (2006) in South Africa, very little research exists about the conceptualization of the character strength concept, and the manifestation of character strengths in an Afro-cultural context. Culture and context are powerful influences in human experience and manifestations of psychological well-being (Constantine & Sue, 2006; Ryff & Singer, 1998). Representations of self are also shaped and reinforced by culture (Smith, 2006; Sue, Diener, Oishi & Triandis, 1998). Most of the research on psychological well-being, strengths, and virtues has so far taken place within the USA and western European cultural contexts with research focusing predominantly on samples from white populations (see also Lopez, Prosser, Edwards, Magyar-Moe, Neeufeld & Rasmussen, 2002). Human experience of psychological well-being as seen from an African perspective still needs to be explored (Ryff & Singer, 1998 & Wissing, et al. 2006), and even more so character strengths as conceptualized and manifested in an Afro-cultural context (Biswas-Diener, 2006).

All the data gathered in the surveys and research projects referred to above, were based on the responses of adults using the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), a scale developed for persons from 18 years old. To date very little research could be found on character strengths in young people using the VIA-Youth form of the questionnaire, developed by Peterson, Dahlsgaard and Park (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), except for the initial research on the scale by Park and Peterson (2006). These authors reported good internal consistency, stability and validity for the VIA-Youth, with the highest mean scores for the strengths of gratitude, humor and love and lowest mean scores for prudence, forgiveness, religiousness and self-regulation. Exploratory factor analyses revealed a four-factor structure of the VIA-Youth subscales: Temperance strengths, intellectual strengths, theological strengths and other-directed (interpersonal) strengths. Park and Peterson (2006:905-906) concluded by calling for extended research on the VIA-Youth, also across cultures, in order to *understand the nature and development of good character and suggest how to cultivate it*.

Seligman (2002a) called for character strengths to be developed and/or enhanced in young people for prevention purposes. According to him *there is a set of buffers against psychopathology: the positive human traits and by identifying, amplifying, and concentrating on these strengths in young people at risk, we will do effective prevention* (Seligman, 2002b:5). He further stated that young people who are future-minded, interpersonally skilled, are involved in constructive work and recreational activities and have learned persistence under adversity (all strengths of character), are resilient and much less at risk for development of pathology. Furthermore, Park and Peterson (2006) suggested considering moral competence as an outcome of character strengths in young people. Good character is at the core of moral competence, which is conceptualized as the quality within young people that lead them to desire and to pursue what is good, that is, moral conduct. Currently, character and issues of morality among youth are receiving attention ranging from a hue and cry by parents, teachers and religious leaders, to high level policy making processes initiated by government and political leaders. Investigating character and the manifestation thereof through character strengths in young people, thus resonates well with the call by South African parents and leaders for moral (character) development and regeneration in South African youth, to prevent their vulnerability to and involvement in social problems like crime, substance abuse, school and gang violence, promiscuity and sexual risky behaviour, and more. For this purpose a measuring instrument like the VIA-Youth needs to be validated for use in South African young people.

In view of the possible social relevance of the further development and application of a model for character strengths to enhance moral development, and the paucity of research on the VIA-Youth and on character strengths in youth in general, the aim of this study was to examine the reliability and validity of the VIA-Youth questionnaire for use in a group of South African learners. As the VIA-Youth was developed in a western context (albeit with the intention to be globally valid), the reliability and validity of this scale cannot be accepted without validation thereof in the South African multi-cultural context, with learners from diverse socio-demographic backgrounds and with diverse cultural orientations and value preferences. In the South African context relatively more individualistic as well as relatively more collectivistic cultural orientations as well as combinations thereof, can be distinguished (cf Allik & McCrae, 2004; Wissing, Wissing, Du Toit & Temane, 2006). The White groups tend to be more individualistic, and the African groups are relatively more collectivistically inclined. Furthermore, the Muslim-Indian groups can be viewed as having a distinct cultural orientation and tradition, and their preferences and valuing of specific strengths may vary from that of the above-mentioned two groups. The same may, or may not, apply to the historically distinguished Coloured group. It was therefore decided to validate the VIA-Youth for the multi-cultural group as a whole, but also to explore its psychometric properties for the four main socio-historical or cultural- contextual groupings distinguished in the South African context (mainly the African, White, Coloured, and Muslim-Indian groups). Broadly viewed, participants in these groups have shared patterns of behavioural readiness, attitudes, beliefs, self-definitions, norms, rituals, historical background and language preferences.

According to Paunonen and Ashton (1998), invariance in the following psychometric properties may reflect cross-cultural applicability: Scale means and variances; reliabilities; factor structure, and pattern of correlations with other variables (criterion-related validity; convergent and discriminant validity). For purposes of the current study means and variances, reliability, criterion-related validity as well as construct validity of the VIA-Youth will be explored. As character strengths are hypothesized to be related to other indices of psychological well-being (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and were found to be associated with satisfaction with life (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004), indices of psychological well-being will be implemented in this study as criteria for establishment of criterion-related validity of the VIA-Youth.

METHOD

Design

A cross-sectional survey design was used.

Participants

This research was conducted in the extended Vaal Triangle of the Gauteng Province, an area often seen as a micro cosmos of the South African demographic context. All the grade 8 to 11 learners (N=1691), of eight selected schools were included and the ages ranged from 13 to 17 years old. Schools from the Sedibeng-East educational district were selected to ensure that learners from the following groups were represented, more or less in line with learner population percentages, namely African (n=778: urban, n=449, rural, n= 329), White (n=536: Afrikaans, n=369, English, n=167), Coloured (n=156) and Muslim-Indian (n=221) participants. Schools were approached by the District Office of the Department of Education to participate in the research project as part of the Life Orientation Programme of the Department.

Measuring instruments

Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth): Peterson, Dahlsgaard and Park (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Park & Peterson, 2006)

The VIA-Youth is a 198-item self-report questionnaire that uses a 5-point Likert scale. It has 24 subscales (strengths) and provides an indication of character traits constituting the VIA-classification, for respondents of 10 to 17 years of age. Respondents report the degree to which statements in the scale apply to them. Scores are calculated by reverse scoring of some items and then averaging responses for each subscale, with higher numbers reflecting more of the strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Self-report surveys are a reasonable way of assessing components of character (Peterson & Seligman, 2003). In addition, according to Steen, Kachorek and Peterson, (2003) the self-report nature of the VIA-Youth does not pose a social desirability threat to reliability since strengths are essentially socially desirable.

In this study a hard-copy version of the English VIA-Youth, similar to the internet version, was employed. At the time of this investigation, the VIA-Youth was still in the final stages of development and had to be obtained from, scored by, and used with the permission of Prof. C. Peterson for the Values in Action Foundation (Peterson, 2004/2005: Personal communication).

Peterson and Seligman (2004:635) reported *close to satisfactory alphas* (>0.65) for all subscales and Park and Peterson (2006) found reliability coefficients of 0.72 to 0.91. Reliability coefficients found in this study are reported in the section on results.

Affectometer 2: Short form (AFM) (Kammann and Flett, 1983)

The AFM is a 20-item self-report scale indicating quality of life as experienced on an affective level by measuring general feelings of happiness or sense of well-being (Kammann & Flett, 1983). The scale is divided into two subscales, namely positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA) and an affect balance is obtained by subtracting NA from PA ($PA - NA = AB$). In the original study Kammann and Flett (1983) reported a reliability index of 0.95 for the Affectometer. In a multi-cultural sample Wissing and van Eeden (2002) found Cronbach alphas of 0.86 for PA and 0.90 for NA. Reliability coefficients for this scale found in this study were 0.72 for PA and 0.82 for NA.

Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Larson and Griffen, 1985)

The SWLS is a 5-item scale to measure the cognitive appraisal component of subjective well-being, which is a global evaluation of one's own life satisfaction (Diener, et al., 1985). This is done with the individual's constructed standard of well-being, and not an externally imposed one (Pavot, Diener, Colvin & Sandvik, 1991). In the original study, a Cronbach alpha of 0.87 was found (Diener, et al., 1985). In a Setswana-speaking group Khumalo, et al. (2006) found an alpha of 0.61. The reliability coefficient for this scale found in this study was 0.70.

Ego-resiliency Scale (ERS) (Block and Kremen, 1996)

The ERS is a 14-item questionnaire that measures aspects of ego strength and ego resilience, which means the organized way in which the ego creates and maintains psychologically tenable adaptation modes. Block and Kremen (1996) found a Cronbach alpha score of 0.76 for the scale and in a South African sample Wissing, Wissing, du Toit and Temane (submitted) found a reliability coefficient of 0.80 for the ERS. The reliability coefficient for this scale found in this study was 0.81.

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) (Goldberg and Hillier, 1979)

The 28-item GHQ consists of four subscales measuring somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction and depression (Goldberg & Hillier, 1979; Werneke, Goldberg, Yalcin, & Ustun, 2000). A total score can also be calculated by summation of the subscale scores. It is

generally used as a screening instrument in clinical settings, focusing on one's inability to carry out normal healthy functions (Goldberg & Williams, 1988). Goldberg and Hillier (1979) reported internal consistency coefficients of 0.69 to 0.90. In a Setswana-speaking sample Khumalo et al. (2006) reported a Cronbach alpha of 0.86 for the total group. Reliability coefficients for this scale found in this study ranged from 0.68 to 0.76 for the subscales and 0.96 for the total score.

Procedure

The research proposed for this study was deemed relevant and in line with current curricula of the Life Orientation Programme of the Department of Education. According to the District Director who authorized the research, character strengths development was the primary aim of policies of the Department of Education (2003; 2005) such as Values in Education, Moral regeneration of learners and Religion in Education. After consultation with and approval by the school principals involved, the empirical research was incorporated into the Life Orientation Programmes at the schools. To this end, teachers were trained by the first author (who is also employed by the Department of Education) as facilitators. The learners were informed by teachers acting as facilitators, about the purpose and nature of the research project that was incorporated in their Programmes. Their active assent was obtained for participation, even though the process was part of their curricula. Learners were ensured that participation in measurement (for purposes of this research) was voluntary, and that their responses would be used anonymously. Completion of the questionnaires took place in facilitated group settings before or during the first class of the morning on a pre-arranged Friday for each school. The first author, who is also a registered psychometrist, was present at all the sessions and rendered assistance where necessary. The English version of the VIA-Youth was completed. English is the language of tuition at secondary schools and all the learners were supposed to have a fair language proficiency in English although it was not the home language of most of the participants. The first author noticed that teachers at the rural schools sometimes tended to revert to their mother tongue in giving explanations.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics and Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients were computed for all scales used, for the total group, as well as for the subgroups. Correlations between the VIA-Youth strengths and well-being measures were determined in order to explore criterion-related validity. Confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses were conducted to determine construct validity.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients for the VIA-Youth

Descriptive statistics and Cronbach alpha coefficients of the total group for the VIA-Youth are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Reliability indices ranged from 0.52 to 0.77 for the VIA-Youth. Seventeen strengths obtained reliability indices of above 0.65, described as close to satisfactory by Peterson and Seligman (2004), but as modest by Nunnally (1994). Low reliability coefficients for VIA-Youth were obtained for strengths of Industry, Love, Kindness, Social intelligence, Self-regulation, Modesty and Hope (all below 0.65).

Descriptive statistics for the four subgroups on the VIA-Youth are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

From an inspection of Table 2 it was clear that reliability indices were higher for the White, Coloured and Muslim-Indian groups than for the African group. Reliability indices for the White group ranged from 0.60 to 0.83 with 21 strengths of modest to high (>0.70) reliability and three strengths with low (<0.65) reliability. Reliability indices for the Muslim-Indian group were similar to those of the White group and ranged from 0.50 to 0.81 with 20 strengths of modest to high (>0.70) reliability and four strengths with low (<0.70) reliability. Reliability indices for the Coloured group ranged from 0.38 to 0.80 with 12 strengths of modest (>0.65) reliability, ten strengths with low (>0.50) reliability and two strengths with unacceptable reliability coefficients (<0.50) (Nunnally, 1994). Reliability indices for the African group ranged from 0.29 to 0.75 with seven strengths of modest (>0.65) reliability, 12 strengths of low (>0.50) reliability and five strengths with unacceptable (<0.50) reliability. As the impression during administration of scales was that the English language proficiency of rural African participants was notably poorer than that of urban African learners, it was decided to do separate further analyses for the urban ($n=449$) and rural ($n=329$) African subgroups. These two groups clearly differed with regard to the reliability indices obtained for subscales on the VIA-Youth. Reliability indices and descriptive statistics for the VIA-Youth for these two groups are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Reliability scores for the urban African group ranged from 0.53 to 0.81 with 14 strengths of modest to high (>0.70) reliability and ten strengths with low (<0.65) reliability. Reliability coefficients of the rural African group ranged from 0.10 to 0.52 with three strengths of low reliability (>0.50) and 21 strengths of unacceptable reliability coefficients (<0.50). The mean scores of this rural African group were also much lower than those of the urban African, Coloured, Muslim-Indian and White groups. In view of the low reliability indices for subscales on the VIA-Youth obtained by the rural African group, it was decided to exclude data from this group in further analyses for purposes of this study. As all the other groups were from urban and peri-urban areas and had acceptable reliability indices for most of the subscales, it was decided to combine their scores to form an urban, multi-cultural total group, for further analyses. Descriptive statistics for this total multi-cultural urban group (MUG) ($N=1362$) are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Reliability coefficients for this urban total group (MUG) ranged from 0.55 to 0.81 with 17 strengths of modest to high (>0.70) reliability indices and seven strengths with low (0.55 to 0.70) reliability indices. The relatively lower reliability indices for MUG on the strengths of Curiosity, Social intelligence, Self-regulation and Modesty, correspond with those found by Park and Peterson (2006). The Cronbach reliability index for the VIA-Youth as a whole, using the 189 specific items, was 0.93, and using the 24 character strengths was 0.93. These indices indicate a high internal consistency or homogeneity for the VIA-Youth as found in this group. As internal consistency or homogeneity of scales can better be judged by average inter-item correlations and item-total correlations, than by Cronbach alphas, these were also further explored for the VIA-Youth. Clark and Watson (1995) recommended a guideline of 0.15 to 0.50 for such correlations. Inter-item (strength-subscales) correlations were high, most of them higher than 0.4, and many higher than 0.5. Item (subscale) – total correlations were all higher than 0.4, with seven of them higher than 0.7. These findings point to a high degree of homogeneity in the VIA-Youth scale, but also to a redundancy in some strength subscales.

Considering the mean scores indicated in Tables 2, 3 and 4, it was clear that those of the White, Coloured and Muslim-Indian groups (Table 2) and the urban African group (Table 3) compared well with those found by Park and Peterson (2006) in American groups, ranging between 3.29 for Prudence and Self-regulation (Temperance) strengths, and 3.89 for Gratitude and 4.02 for Humor (Transcendence) strengths. The African group had relatively lower mean scores for Authenticity (3.25), Prudence (3.36) and Self-regulation (3.34) strength-subscales, and relatively higher scores for Spirituality (4.25), Hope (4.01) and Gratitude (3.98) strengths (these are only numerical scores and not statistical differences). The White group had relatively lower mean scores for Self-regulation and Prudence strengths (3.24 and 3.26) and higher mean scores for Humor, Gratitude and Spirituality strengths (3.90, 4.04 and 4.29). The Coloured group had relatively lower mean scores for strengths of Self-regulation and Prudence (3.34 and 3.39) and higher means scores for strengths of Love of learning and Appreciation of beauty (3.90), Gratitude (4.03) and Spirituality (4.13). The Muslim-Indian group had relatively lower mean scores for Self-regulation and Prudence strengths (3.11 and 3.12) and higher mean scores for strengths of Humor, Gratitude and Spirituality (3.90, 4.08 and 4.43). In Table 4 it was shown that the mean scores of the Total Multi Cultural Urban Group (MUG) compared well with those reported by Park and Peterson (2006), and that many strengths revealed similar or slightly higher scores. Similarly, the lowest mean scores were found in this group on Self-regulation (3.26) and Prudence (3.29) both Temperance strengths, and the highest scores on Spirituality (4.26), Gratitude (4.03) and Hope (3.90), all Transcendence strengths.

Validity of the VIA-Youth

Criterion-related validity

The correlations between the VIA-Youth and indices of psychological well-being and pathology, indicating criterion-related validity, are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Strengths measured by the VIA-Youth were found to be positively associated with indices of psychological well-being representing positive affect (PA), affect balance (AB), satisfaction with life (SWLS) and ego resilience (ERS), and negatively associated with indices of pathology such as general health symptoms (GHQ) and negative affect (NA). Notably no significant correlations were found with Modesty, and only one with Curiosity, Forgiveness and Appreciation of beauty. This may indicate that these facets are not related to moral character development in adolescents,

or that these facets are not relevant or good indicators of psychological well-being in adolescents. The most and the strongest correlations were found with Vitality and Hope, and to some extent with Love and Spirituality.

Construct validity

Testing structural equation models

Confirmatory factor analysis based on structural equation modeling and path analysis, conducted with the aid of the SEPATH option of Statistica, did not support the construct validity of the six virtue cluster model of the VIA-Youth in the case of the total multi-cultural urban group (MUG), where a RMSEA point estimate of 0.186 was found, with a 90% confidence interval of 0.184 to 0.189. Browne and Cudeck (1993) were of the opinion that a good RMSEA fit-index should be 0.05 or less, whereas Hu and Bentler (1999) recommended a point estimate value for RMSEA indices lower than 0.06. McCallum, Brown and Sugarawa (1996) viewed RMSEA values of 0.08 - 0.10 as indicating a mediocre fit, and those greater than 0.10 as indicative of a poor fit. As a model with the six virtue clusters as latent variables and their specific character strengths-subcales as manifest variables did not provide an acceptable fit, a model with one latent variable and 24 manifest variables (character strengths) was tested. This model proved to provide a slightly better, but still poor fit of the data, even after exclusion of the subscales with low reliability. Similar results were found for the four subgroups.

Factor analyses

A second order **confirmatory** (pre-specification of 6 factors) principal components factor analysis, using hierarchical oblique rotation on data of the total multicultural urban group (MUG), provided five factors with eigenvalues higher than 1 (see Table 6). No clear pattern of strengths emerged, and the six virtue clusters were not found as expected from the theory. However, all character strength-subcales loaded highly on one secondary factor suggesting a single character strength dimension.

Table 6

A second order **exploratory** factor analysis with principal components method of factor extraction and hierarchical oblique rotation, identified the same factor solution as found with the

confirmatory factor analysis. Second order exploratory factor analyses with principle components using oblique rotation on the VIA-Youth scores for the four urban cultural-contextual subgroups separately, also confirmed in all cases a strong unitary secondary higher order factor with loadings from all character strengths, but with no clear clustering of strengths according to theory, or in other interpretable manner as primary or unique factors. Many strengths also loaded on more than one factor.

DISCUSSION

The main finding of this study was that the VIA-Youth may be more a uni-dimensional scale than a multi-dimensional scale. Specific virtue clusters as distinguished in theory, could not be found in this multi-cultural urban group of South African learners, nor in any of the specific subgroups.

It was found that the English version of the VIA-Youth was not applicable in a rural African group of learners, probably because of language proficiency barriers, and/or other socio-economic and educational factors related to their rural context. These learners came from an impoverished rural area where traditional ways of living are still strong. Their only exposure to English was at school and even there most of their teaching was done by teachers who share their mother language and easily resort to the shared vernacular for tuition, although the formal language was supposed to be English. Future research should explore the validity of the VIA-Youth for use in this group of learners after translation of it into their mother tongue.

The *reliability* of the VIA-Youth as a whole in a multi-cultural urban group, as well as in the instances of specific subgroups, was acceptable as evidenced by the high reliability indices of 0.92 to 0.96 for the total scale's 198 items, and 0.93 to 0.94 for the scale's 24 strengths. The strengths of Love of learning, Creativity, Authenticity, Vitality, Leadership, Forgiveness, Appreciation of beauty and excellence, Gratitude, Hope and optimism and Spirituality or religiousness, obtained good (>0.75) reliability coefficients, but for Curiosity, Industry or perseverance (<0.70) and more so for Love, Kindness, Social intelligence, Self-regulation and Modesty (<0.65), low reliability coefficients were found. Although the reliability indices were not as high as those found by Park and Peterson (2006) in their validation study, the same strengths in both studies obtained high reliability coefficients and similarly for the lower reliabilities. Peterson and Seligman (2004) conceded that strengths of Temperance (self-regulation, prudence, modesty) were more difficult to measure reliably than the other strengths and this may explain the correspondence between the low reliability coefficients of this research

on self-regulation and modesty and the lower reliability indices for the same strengths, found by Park and Peterson (2006). This raised the question whether these Temperance strengths are measurable aspects of character. The very high inter-item and item-total correlations obtained supported the homogeneity of the VIA-Youth, but also indicated that there is some redundancy in items/strengths. This means that the scale can be shortened.

Mean scores and variances obtained in the current study corresponded to a great extent with those found by Park and Peterson (2006).

As far as *validity* was concerned, the six virtue clusters as specified by theory did not emerge in the current study, and therefore the construct validity thereof was not supported. However, some evidence was found for support of the VIA-Youth as a homogeneous or uni-dimensional scale. Secondary principal component factor analyses with hierarchical oblique rotation (as correlations among items could be expected), revealed a strong single higher order secondary factor with high loadings from all strength-subscales. Although some primary factors were identified, they did not reveal a meaningful interpretable pattern and many specific strength-subscales also loaded on more than one of the identified factors. Correlations between strengths measured with the VIA-Youth on the one hand, and indices of psychological well-being and pathology on the other hand, provided evidence for criterion related validity of the VIA-Youth. The fact that all strengths correlated significantly with ego-resilience may point to the important link between character strengths as measured with the VIA-Youth and self-esteem, self-efficacy beliefs, and healthy identity (ego) development in adolescents.

An implication of the current finding is that the VIA-Youth has potential for use in this multi-cultural urban group, but only as a total scale or with implementation of specific sub-scales (excluding those with low reliability indices, namely Modesty, Self-regulation, Love, Kindness and Social intelligence). No deductions can be made with regard to specific virtue clusters. It is however, interesting to note that the research of Peterson and Seligman (2004) and Park and Peterson (2006) also did not find the theoretically hypothesized six virtue clusters in their factor solutions for the VIA-Youth. These authors found five and four factors respectively, and in both cases strengths loaded across factors and strengths from different virtue clusters collapsed into one, thereby seemingly indicating a different virtue. The findings of the current study underscore the need for further research on the cross-cultural validation of the VIA-Youth, expressed by Park and Peterson (2006: 902) stating that *character strengths are complex constructs*. Future research

can opt to explore the nature of character strengths with qualitative methods in an African context, in order to identify possible unique strengths not included in the current version of the VIA-Youth. The VIA-Youth should be translated into the mother tongues of the various African groups to determine its applicability, especially in rural areas. Further research could also explore the nature of character strengths and psychological well-being, by determining the possible overlap in measurement, and consider the theoretical implications thereof. A first step would however be to eliminate redundancy as indicated by very high inter-item and item-total correlations.

In conclusion, this investigation of the psychometric properties of the VIA-Youth scale to measure character strengths revealed some support for its applicability in a multi-cultural group of South African learners, but only as a homogeneous total scale rather than a multi-dimensional (virtue cluster based) scale, and with reference to specific strengths that could be reliably measured. The fact that the theoretically hypothesized six virtue clusters could not be identified in this study and that this finding corresponded with that of Peterson and Seligman (2004) and Park and Peterson (2006), raised the question about the overall validity of the six-virtues-model of character strengths as claimed by the authors. There is a need for extensive further research on this conceptually socially relevant and potentially valuable scale. A limitation of the current study was that a convenience sample was used including all participants in a specific educational district in only one province in South Africa, and therefore findings cannot be generalized.

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Table 1: Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients of the VIA-Youth:
Total urban and rural group (N=1691)

Strengths	Mean	Min	Max	S.D.	Kurt.	α
Curiosity	3.68	1.4	5.0	0.57	-0.05	0.65
Love of Learning	3.75	1.3	5.0	0.62	-0.21	0.72
Judgment	3.61	1.3	5.0	0.55	0.32	0.67
Creativity	3.73	1.6	5.0	0.58	0.05	0.73
Wisdom	3.56	1.8	5.0	0.53	0.13	0.65
Bravery	3.67	1.1	5.0	0.58	0.03	0.68
Industry	3.60	1.4	5.0	0.55	0.16	0.55
Authenticity	3.36	1.1	5.0	0.61	0.29	0.71
Vitality	3.65	1.4	5.0	0.58	0.51	0.71
Love	3.69	1.7	5.0	0.58	-0.31	0.61
Kindness	3.66	1.4	5.0	0.54	-0.27	0.57
Social intelligence	3.54	1.4	5.0	0.49	0.50	0.62
Teamwork	3.82	1.6	5.0	0.54	0.05	0.69
Fairness	3.54	1.0	5.0	0.58	0.18	0.66
Leadership	3.41	1.4	5.0	0.60	0.00	0.72
Self-regulation	3.25	1.4	4.9	0.54	0.41	0.54
Prudence	3.25	1.4	5.0	0.59	0.27	0.68
Forgiveness	3.62	1.0	5.0	0.72	0.15	0.79
Modesty	3.58	1.6	5.0	0.50	0.44	0.52
Appreciation of beauty	3.78	1.5	5.0	0.64	-0.24	0.77
Gratitude	3.91	1.0	5.0	0.60	0.27	0.73
Hope	3.85	1.0	5.0	0.60	1.03	0.61
Humor	3.73	1.7	5.0	0.64	-0.56	0.70
Spirituality	4.11	1.1	5.0	0.69	0.41	0.77

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients of the VIA-Youth in separate cultural-contextual groups

Strengths	Youth Scores African (n = 778)			Youth Scores White (n = 536)		
	Mean	SD	□	Mean	SD	□
<i>Curiosity</i>	3.63	0.54	0.52	3.73	0.60	0.77
<i>Love of Learning</i>	3.68	0.60	0.67	3.78	0.64	0.77
<i>Judgment</i>	3.61	0.49	0.56	3.62	0.58	0.74
<i>Creativity</i>	3.73	0.53	0.66	3.72	0.62	0.80
<i>Wisdom</i>	3.53	0.48	0.55	3.59	0.55	0.75
<i>Bravery</i>	3.57	0.52	0.57	3.77	0.63	0.78
<i>Authenticity</i>	3.56	0.51	0.29	3.67	0.57	0.76
<i>Honesty</i>	3.20	0.54	0.60	3.61	0.58	0.78
<i>Vitality</i>	3.61	0.53	0.64	3.68	0.61	0.78
<i>Love</i>	3.53	0.54	0.52	3.81	0.59	0.69
<i>Kindness</i>	3.49	0.51	0.47	3.83	0.51	0.65
<i>Social intelligence</i>	3.57	0.47	0.57	3.54	0.50	0.69
<i>Teamwork</i>	3.74	0.50	0.60	3.89	0.54	0.77
<i>Fairness</i>	3.47	0.57	0.61	3.62	0.54	0.70
<i>Leadership</i>	3.46	0.53	0.62	3.35	0.65	0.81
<i>Self-regulation</i>	3.28	0.50	0.48	3.24	0.53	0.64
<i>Prudence</i>	3.25	0.52	0.58	3.27	0.64	0.77
<i>Forgiveness</i>	3.40	0.69	0.75	3.81	0.69	0.83
<i>Modesty</i>	3.50	0.48	0.44	3.65	0.50	0.59
<i>Appreciation of beauty</i>	3.74	0.61	0.73	3.82	0.70	0.83
<i>Gratitude</i>	3.76	0.60	0.70	4.04	0.55	0.76
<i>Hope</i>	3.86	0.54	0.32	3.85	0.64	0.82
<i>Humor</i>	3.58	0.63	0.66	3.90	0.60	0.74
<i>Spirituality</i>	3.90	0.69	0.73	4.29	0.65	0.83
Strengths	Youth Scores Coloured (n = 156)			Youth Scores Muslim-Indian (n = 221)		
	Mean	SD	□	Mean	SD	□
<i>Curiosity</i>	3.58	0.60	0.66	3.77	0.59	0.75
<i>Love of Learning</i>	3.90	0.65	0.73	3.81	0.63	0.78
<i>Judgment</i>	3.66	0.56	0.65	3.58	0.67	0.81
<i>Creativity</i>	3.71	0.56	0.65	3.75	0.68	0.81
<i>Wisdom</i>	3.56	0.49	0.56	3.57	0.63	0.76
<i>Bravery</i>	3.75	0.55	0.59	3.70	0.63	0.75
<i>Authenticity</i>	3.65	0.56	0.62	3.56	0.64	0.75
<i>Honesty</i>	3.48	0.59	0.66	3.26	0.69	0.80
<i>Vitality</i>	3.63	0.55	0.63	3.74	0.65	0.78
<i>Love</i>	3.82	0.59	0.60	3.84	0.58	0.64
<i>Kindness</i>	3.63	0.47	0.45	3.83	0.53	0.66
<i>Social intelligence</i>	3.49	0.49	0.53	3.49	0.55	0.70
<i>Teamwork</i>	3.89	0.57	0.69	3.88	0.58	0.78
<i>Fairness</i>	3.58	0.58	0.59	3.60	0.66	0.75
<i>Leadership</i>	3.47	0.61	0.69	3.34	0.69	0.79
<i>Self-regulation</i>	3.34	0.53	0.50	3.11	0.68	0.50
<i>Prudence</i>	3.39	0.57	0.60	3.12	0.65	0.74
<i>Forgiveness</i>	3.74	0.79	0.79	3.87	0.65	0.79
<i>Modesty</i>	3.53	0.49	0.38	3.68	0.56	0.66
<i>Appreciation of beauty</i>	3.90	0.61	0.71	3.69	0.63	0.77
<i>Gratitude</i>	4.03	0.61	0.72	4.08	0.55	0.75
<i>Hope</i>	3.87	0.65	0.74	3.82	0.64	0.80
<i>Humor</i>	3.59	0.53	0.51	3.90	0.67	0.76
<i>Spirituality</i>	4.12	0.67	0.73	4.43	0.51	0.74

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for African urban and rural groups on the VIA-Youth

Strengths	African urban group: n = 449			African rural group: n = 329		
	Mean	Std.Dev.	α	Mean	Std.Dev.	α
Curiosity	3.77	0.57	0.55	3.45	0.42	0.45
Love of Learning	3.93	0.58	0.74	3.33	0.41	0.37
Judgment	3.71	0.54	0.62	3.48	0.37	0.37
Creativity	3.81	0.61	0.77	3.64	0.38	0.43
Wisdom	3.58	0.53	0.68	3.47	0.41	0.42
Bravery	3.66	0.58	0.70	3.46	0.39	0.31
Industry	3.64	0.57	0.53	3.44	0.39	0.34
Authenticity	3.25	0.64	0.75	3.13	0.36	0.19
Vitality	3.68	0.58	0.73	3.52	0.44	0.52
Love	3.73	0.59	0.63	3.27	0.33	0.10
Kindness	3.71	0.50	0.57	3.18	0.33	0.10
Social intelligence	3.58	0.50	0.65	3.56	0.43	0.51
Teamwork	3.84	0.53	0.71	3.60	0.42	0.41
Fairness	3.65	0.58	0.67	3.22	0.46	0.45
Leadership	3.46	0.61	0.75	3.46	0.41	0.43
Self-regulation	3.34	0.57	0.62	3.21	0.36	0.16
Prudence	3.36	0.59	0.69	3.10	0.36	0.16
Forgiveness	3.56	0.80	0.81	3.18	0.41	0.44
Modesty	3.58	0.49	0.50	3.40	0.44	0.36
Appreciation of beauty	4.02	0.57	0.75	3.36	0.43	0.52
Gratitude	3.98	0.60	0.75	3.44	0.43	0.48
Hope	4.01	0.57	0.75	3.65	0.40	0.50
Humor	3.83	0.64	0.71	3.24	0.42	0.35
Spirituality	4.25	0.61	0.76	3.42	0.45	0.48

Table 4: Descriptive statistics and reliability coefficients for the VIA-Youth scale for the total multi-cultural, urban group (MUG)

Strengths	N = 1362				
	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std.Dev.	α
Curiosity	3.73	1.38	5.00	0.59	0.68
Love of Learning	3.85	1.25	5.00	0.62	0.76
Judgment	3.65	1.25	5.00	0.58	0.71
Creativity	3.75	1.63	5.00	0.62	0.78
Wisdom	3.58	1.75	5.00	0.55	0.71
Bravery	3.72	1.13	5.00	0.61	0.73
Industry	3.64	1.44	5.00	0.58	0.67
Authenticity	3.42	1.13	5.00	0.64	0.77
Vitality	3.68	1.38	5.00	0.60	0.75
Love	3.79	1.67	5.00	0.59	0.65
Kindness	3.77	1.44	5.00	0.51	0.60
Social intelligence	3.54	1.38	5.00	0.51	0.66
Teamwork	3.87	1.63	5.00	0.55	0.74
Fairness	3.62	1.00	5.00	0.58	0.70
Leadership	3.40	1.38	5.00	0.64	0.77
Self-regulation	3.26	1.44	4.89	0.58	0.59
Prudence	3.29	1.38	5.00	0.62	0.73
Forgiveness	3.73	1.00	5.00	0.74	0.81
Modesty	3.62	1.56	5.00	0.51	0.55
Appreciation of beauty	3.88	1.50	5.00	0.65	0.79
Gratitude	4.03	1.00	5.00	0.58	0.75
Hope	3.90	1.00	5.00	0.63	0.78
Humor	3.84	1.67	5.00	0.62	0.72
Spirituality	4.28	1.13	5.00	0.62	0.78
Total scale (strengths)	3.70	1.00	5.00	0.64	0.93
Total scale (items)	3.50	1.00	5.00	1.08	0.93

Table 5: Correlations between VIA-Youth subscales and measures of psychological well-being and psychopathology for the total multi-cultural urban group (MUG) (N=1362)

Strengths	GHQ-Som	GHQ-Anx	GHQ-SosD	GHQ-Dep	GHQ-Gen	AFM-PA	AFM-NA	AFM-AB	SWLS	ERS
Curiosity										0.28
Love of Learning						0.24		0.24		0.33
Judgment						0.27		0.26	0.19	0.35
Creativity						0.23		0.22		0.32
Wisdom						0.29	-0.19	0.28	0.22	0.38
Bravery						0.24		0.23		0.32
Industry						0.33	-0.21	0.31	0.28	0.35
Authenticity						0.22	-0.23	0.27	0.23	0.26
Vitality	-0.20	-0.20	-0.22	-0.21	-0.26	0.46	-0.31	0.45	0.34	0.46
Love		-0.20	-0.22	-0.26	-0.26	0.37	-0.30	0.40	0.33	0.29
Kindness							-0.21	0.24		0.29
Social intelligence						0.32	-0.25	0.34	0.26	0.36
Teamwork						0.25	-0.24	0.29	0.22	0.31
Fairness							-0.24	0.26		0.24
Leadership						0.28		0.25	0.21	0.35
Self-regulation						0.22		0.22		0.25
Prudence						0.27	-0.19	0.27	0.26	0.26
Forgiveness										0.21
Modesty										
Appreciation of beauty										0.21
Gratitude				-0.22	-0.21	0.35	-0.29	0.38	0.33	0.29
Hope				-0.23	-0.21	0.44	-0.29	0.43	0.35	0.39
Humor								0.19		0.24
Spirituality			-0.20	-0.21	-0.19	0.27	-0.23	0.30	0.22	0.24

Note: GHQ = General Health Questionnaire; Som = Somatic; Anx = Anxiety; SosD = Social dysfunction; Dep = Depression; Gen = General;

AFM-PA = Affectometer: Positive Affect; AFM-NA = Affectometer: Negative Affect; AFM-AB = Affectometer: Affect Balance;

SWLS = Satisfaction With Life Scale; ERS = Ego Resilience Scale

Table 6: Exploratory factor analysis of the VIA-Youth with scores of the total multi-cultural urban group (MUG)

Strengths	Secondary Factor	Primary Factors				
	1	1	2	3	4	5
Curiosity	0.50	0.46	0.30	0.23	0.23	
Love of Learning	0.68	0.30				0.33
Judgment	0.69			0.24	0.21	
Creativity	0.60	0.28		0.26	0.32	
Wisdom	0.69			0.26	0.26	0.20
Bravery	0.64					
Industry	0.70				0.26	
Authenticity	0.58	0.36	0.24			0.22
Vitality	0.63		0.21		0.35	
Love	0.55	0.41		0.37	0.21	
Kindness	0.67	0.22	0.34			
Social intelligence	0.66	0.28			0.25	
Teamwork	0.71					
Fairness	0.66	0.21		0.24	0.21	0.24
Leadership	0.60			0.33		0.22
Self-regulation	0.44	0.20	0.41	0.21		0.34
Prudence	0.53	0.25	0.44		0.24	0.26
Forgiveness	0.54	0.23	0.22		0.33	0.27
Modesty	0.41			0.30	0.44	0.25
Appreciation of beauty	0.55	0.35	0.26			0.24
Gratitude	0.69	0.22		0.27		0.29
Hope	0.66				0.43	0.22
Humor	0.42		0.45			0.47
Spirituality	0.57		0.28	0.38		0.29
Eigenvalue		9.82	1.83	1.33	1.16	1.01
Cumulative %		40.93	48.57	54.09	58.91	63.10

Afdeling 4: Artikel 3

**Convergence and diversity of character strengths in various groups of
South African learners**

Sal voorgelê word aan die

South African Journal of Education

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South African Journal of Education

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Citizen 1996. Education for all, 22 March.

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Violence and discipline problems in US schools 2001. Available at
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4.2 Manuskrip

CONVERGENCE AND DIVERSITY OF CHARACTER STRENGTHS IN VARIOUS GROUPS OF SOUTH AFRICAN LEARNERS.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore possible differences and similarities in the manifestation of character strengths in various groups of South African learners. The Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth), (Park & Peterson, 2006) was completed by African (n=449), White (n=536), Coloured (n=156) and Muslim-Indian (n=221) participants from eight schools. The total group (N=1362) included 561 males and 801 females and all learners were between 13 and 17 years of age. A MANOVA, t-tests and Cohen's practical effect sizes, were used to determine possible significant differences among African, White, Coloured and Muslim-Indian learners as well as between males and females. The main findings were firstly, that there were many significant differences in magnitude of the various character strengths among the cultural-contextual groups involved, but very few differences were of large practical significance; secondly, that girls scored significantly higher than boys on all measured character strengths, but showed large effect size practical significances only for Kindness and Appreciation of beauty, and thirdly, that all sub-groups had above average mean scores on all strengths. Recommendations for further research were made, and some suggestions provided to facilitate the development of character strengths in school settings as part of Life Orientation Programmes.

Keywords: Character strengths; convergence; cultural-contextual; diversity; practical significance; South African learners; Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth; VIA-Youth.

The focus of this study was the convergence and divergence in manifestation of character strengths in various groups of South African learners. The character strengths construct was introduced by Seligman (2002a), as a core concept of the emerging Positive Psychology perspective in the scientific field of Psychology. However, soon related fields especially those in the human sciences, realized the relevance of the “character” concept in their scientific contexts and currently Education, Theology, Sociology and Criminology have incorporated the construct into some research questions. In the field of Education, correctional guidance (discipline) and moral (character) development are burning issues at the moment and therefore a theoretical construct like character strengths, that also has empirical and application significance, may open new perspectives on old challenges in the context of Value Education. According to Park and Peterson (2006), good character is at the core of moral competence.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000:5) presented the Positive Psychology framework for science and practice to the scientific world in 2000 in a special issue of the *American Psychologist*, in which they stated that “the aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities”. Positive Psychology focuses on three related topics: The study of positive emotions and subjective experiences; the study of positive individual traits, and the study of institutions such as schools that enable positive experiences and positive traits. Peterson and Seligman (2004) associated strengths of character with the second topic of research and application, namely that of positive traits.

In order to conceptualize character strengths, Peterson and Seligman (2004) reviewed pertinent literature from universal theoretical disciplines, philosophies, religions and diverse cultural writings that addressed good character. They identified, what according to them were six universal and ubiquitous virtue clusters, namely wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence, and further conceptualized 24 manifestations of the virtues called character strengths. Peterson and Park (2004), stated that character strengths are the psychological ingredients (the processes or mechanisms) that define these virtues. Together the virtues and strengths are the building blocks of psychological health and well-being, and a fulfilled life. The virtue clusters and their embodying strengths are:

Wisdom and knowledge – cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge: Curiosity, Love of learning, Open-mindedness, Creativity, Perspective;

Courage – emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal: Valor or Bravery, Persistence, Integrity or Authenticity, Zest or Vitality;

Humanity – interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others:
Love, Kindness, Social intelligence;

Justice – civic strengths that underlie healthy community life: Citizenship, Fairness, Leadership;

Temperance – strengths that protect against excess: Self-regulation, Prudence, Forgiveness and Mercy, Modesty and Humility, and

Transcendence – strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning: Appreciation of beauty and excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humor and Playfulness, Spirituality or Religiousness (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Criteria applied in the selection of strengths were such that the traits should be: Ubiquitous, fulfilling, morally valued, not diminishing of others, can be measured, should have obvious antonyms, may be strikingly found in some individuals and not in others, be precociously displayed by some children or youth, and some social institutions like schools, deliberately attempt to cultivate these traits in people (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The character strengths construct was operationalized with the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths and the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Park & Peterson, 2006).

Although Dahlsgaard, Peterson and Seligman (2005) claimed that the classification of six virtues and 24 character strengths is ubiquitous and universal, the character strengths model in the Positive Psychology framework may still be only a western concept. The assumption of the global or universal value (for practical and research purposes) of the character strengths model was called into question by authors like Constantine and Sue (2006) and Smith (2006) who stated that cultural and other contextual variables play a determining role in the development and manifestation of people's strengths in general and the same would apply to strengths of character. According to Constantine and Sue (2006) socio-cultural values serve as blueprints by which behaviours, thoughts and feelings are defined and deemed normal or abnormal and which guide the development and

manifestation of strengths (also of character). Jorgensen and Hafstad (2004) emphasized that the predominant values and power structures of culture find expression in the determining and maintaining of certain developmental goals, rather than of others, and therefore in the development of certain strengths (e.g. collective) rather than others (e.g. individualistic). Possibly in response to statements like the above and recent research of Biswas-Diener (2006), who found differences between and within cultures in terms of gender and the perceived importance of specific strengths, Park and Peterson (2006) expressed the necessity for cross-cultural research, to understand the differences and similarities in how strengths are manifested and the consequences and correlates of strengths in different cultures. It is notable that the African cosmology was not included in the initial search for universal values and descriptors of good character, done by Peterson and Seligman (2004). In the South African context relatively more individualistic as well as relatively more collectivistic cultural orientations as well as combinations thereof, can be distinguished (cf Allik & McCrae, 2004; Wissing, Wissing, Du Toit & Temane, 2006). The White groups tend to be more individualistic, and the African groups are relatively more collectivistically inclined. Furthermore, the Muslim-Indian groups can be viewed as having a distinct cultural orientation and tradition, and their preferences and valuing of specific strengths may vary from that of the above-mentioned two groups. The same may, or may not, apply to the historically distinguished Coloured group. It was therefore decided to explore possible differences in manifestation of character strengths for these four socio-historical or cultural- contextual groupings distinguished in the South African context, namely African, White, Coloured, and Muslim-Indian. Broadly viewed, participants in these groups have shared patterns of behavioural readiness, attitudes, beliefs, self-definitions, norms, rituals, historical background and language preferences.

From a developmental perspective differences in manifestations of moral character strengths may be expected between boys and girls, as girls tend to mature earlier (Rathus, 2006; Sigelman & Rider, 2006). Gender differences may, however, also reflect patterns of socialization resulting in females tending to have a caring orientation while males tend towards a justice orientation in moral issues (Rathus, 2006). Peterson and Park (2003, in Peterson and Seligman, 2004) found some significant gender differences between boys and girls, with higher mean scores for girls on kindness and love, justice, wisdom and knowledge, and transcendence strengths in an American group. Therefore it was decided to also explore the existence of possible gender differences in character strengths in a South African group of learners. To date little research was found on character strengths in young

people from about 12 to 17 years of age, except for the initial work of Park and Peterson (2006).

Seligman (2002a) called for character strengths to be developed and/or enhanced in young people for prevention purposes. He also stated (Seligman, 2002b:5) “there is a set of buffers against psychopathology: the positive human traits.....” and “.....by identifying, amplifying, and concentrating on these strengths in young people at risk, we will do effective prevention”. Young people who are future-minded, interpersonally skilled, involved in constructive work and recreational activities and have learned persistence under adversity (all character strengths), are resilient and much less at risk for pathological problems. The idea of implementing character strengths in youth for prevention purposes resonated well with the call by South African educators for moral (character) development and regeneration in South African youth, to prevent their involvement in social problems like crime, substance abuse, school and gang violence, promiscuity and more. Park and Peterson (2006) equated good character with moral competence and thus the development of character strengths and moral competence could be linked.

The aim of this investigation was therefore to explore possible differences and similarities in the manifestation of character strengths in various groups of South African learners, with a view to obtain some baseline information that could be used in efforts to enhance character development as part of Life Orientation Programmes in schools. Larson et al. (2004) called for young people to learn to bridge differences – to understand, respect and forge relationships across religious, ethnic and other dimensions. Schools, according to Asmal (2003), create an overall environment, a social, intellectual and emotional space that engenders values of respect, tolerance and acceptance across socio-cultural boundaries. Psycho-educational activities and interventions aimed at such value education could benefit from research like the current study on diverse cultural orientations toward aspects of character, as well as on commonalities shared by young people.

METHOD

Design

A cross-sectional survey design was used.

Participants

This research project took place in the urbanized Vaal Triangle of the Gauteng Province, an area often seen as a micro cosmos of the South African demographic context. All the grade 8 to 11 learners of eight selected schools (N=1362) were included, and the ages ranged from 13 to 17 years old. Schools from the Sedibeng-East Educational District were selected to ensure that learners from African (n=449), White (n=536), Coloured (n=156) and Muslim-Indian (n=221) groups are represented. Both genders, males (n=561) and females (n=801) were included. Schools were approached by the District Office of the Department of Education to participate in the research project as part of the Life Orientation Programme of the Department.

Measuring instruments

Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth): Peterson, Dahlsgaard and Park (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Park & Peterson, 2006).

The VIA-Youth is a 198-item self-report questionnaire that uses a 5-point Likert scale. It has 24 sub-scales (strengths) and provides an indication of character traits constituting the VIA-classification, for respondents of 10 to 17 years of age. Respondents report the degree to which statements in the scale apply to them. Scores are calculated by reverse scoring of certain items and then averaging responses for each sub-scale, with higher numbers reflecting more of the strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

In this study, a hard-copy version of the English VIA-Youth, similar to the internet version, was employed. At the time of this investigation, the VIA-Youth was still in the final stages of development and had to be obtained from, scored by, and used with the permission of Prof. C. Peterson for the Values in Action Foundation (Peterson, 2004/2005: Personal communication). Peterson and Seligman (2004:635) reported “close to satisfactory alphas (>0.65)” for all subscales and Park and Peterson (2006) found reliability coefficients of 0.72 to 0.91. Reliability coefficients of strength-subscales for the total multi-cultural group included in the current study, ranged from 0.55 to 0.81 (see manuscript two), with 21 of the 24 strength-subscales obtaining Cronbach alpha coefficients above 0.65 and 17 above 0.70. The Modesty and Self-regulation subscales manifested low reliability indices (lower than 0.60) and were excluded from analyses for purposes of this study. Criterion-related validity was established for the VIA-Youth, but construct validity for the six virtue clusters was not found. Therefore this study will rather refer to the specific character strengths than to virtue clusters.

Procedure

The research proposed for this study was deemed relevant and in line with current curricula of the Life Orientation Programme of the Department of Education. According to the District Director who authorized the research, character strengths development was the primary aim of policies of the Department of Education (2003; 2005) such as Values in Education, Moral regeneration of learners and Religion in Education. After consultation with and approval by the school principals involved, the empirical research was incorporated into the Life Orientation Programmes at the schools. The learners were informed by teachers, trained and acting as facilitators, about the purpose and nature of the research project, and their voluntary and anonymous participation was obtained. The questionnaires were completed in facilitated group sessions before or during the first class of the morning on a pre-arranged Friday for each school. The first author who is also a registered psychometrist, were present at all sessions and rendered assistance. Learners completed the English version of the VIA-Youth. English is the language of tuition at the schools involved and all the learners were assumed to have a fair language proficiency in English, although it was not the home language of most of the participants. Of the 1400 completed questionnaires, 1362 met the research requirements and could be processed. For the current analyses subscales with alphas lower than 0.60 were excluded (Modesty=0.55 and Self-regulation=0.57).

Data analysis

Multiple analyses of variance (MANOVA), t-tests and Cohen's practical effect size were used to investigate significance of differences among cultural and gender groups. For purposes of this study all levels of statistical and practical significance of differences were reported, but only differences with a large effect size practical significance were regarded as indicating real differences that should be taken note of.

RESULTS

Significance of differences in variance among four cultural groups

Table 1 contains the results of the multiple analyses of variance (MANOVA) for the VIA-Youth with African, White, Coloured and Muslim-Indian learners.

Table 1

The MANOVA results obtained with four cultural groups indicated significant differences among the four cultural groups on 19 of the 22 strengths included. This implied that the cultural groups differed significantly on character strengths and differences in mean scores were not due to coincidence.

Significance of differences in mean scores between specific cultural groups

In Table 2 the significance of differences (t-tests) between African learners and the White, Coloured and Muslim-Indian participants, are shown.

Table 2

On the VIA-Youth the African learners differed significantly from White learners on 12 of the 22 character strengths. The African learners obtained higher scores on the strengths of love of learning, judgment, creativity, leadership, prudence, appreciation of beauty and hope. The White learners obtained higher scores on the strengths of bravery, authenticity, love, kindness and forgiveness. On ten of the 22 character strengths there were no significant differences, indicating possible similarities or convergence.

On the VIA-Youth the African learners differed significantly from the Coloured learners on seven of the 22 character strengths. The African learners obtained higher scores on strengths of curiosity, appreciation of beauty, hope, humor and spirituality. The Coloured learners scored higher on strengths of authenticity and forgiveness. On 17 strengths there were no significant differences.

On the VIA-Youth the African learners differed significantly from Muslim-Indian learners on 12 of the 22 character strengths. The African learners obtained higher scores on strengths of love of learning, judgment, social intelligence, leadership, prudence, appreciation of beauty and hope. The Muslim-Indian learners scored higher on strengths of love, kindness, forgiveness, gratitude and spirituality. On 10 strengths there were no significant differences.

Table 3 displays the significant differences (t-tests) between White learners and Coloured and Muslim-Indian learners, and also between the Coloured and Muslim-Indian learners.

Table 3

On the VIA-Youth the White learners showed significant differences from Coloured learners on eight of the 22 character strengths. White learners scored higher on strengths of curiosity, honesty, kindness, humor and spirituality, while Coloured learners scored higher

on strengths of love of learning, leadership and prudence. On 14 of the character strengths there were no significant differences, indicating possible convergence.

On the VIA-Youth the White learners showed significant differences from Muslim-Indian learners on five of the 22 character strengths. White learners scored higher on strengths of industry, honesty, prudence and appreciation of beauty, while Muslim-Indian learners scored higher on spirituality. On 18 strengths there were no significant differences.

On the VIA-Youth there were significant differences on seven of the 22 character strengths between the Coloured and the Muslim-Indian learners. Coloured learners scored higher on strengths of honesty, prudence and appreciation of beauty, while Muslim-Indian learners scored higher on strengths of curiosity, kindness, humor and spirituality. On 15 strengths there were no significant differences, indicating possible convergence.

An overview of the mean scores of the four subgroups on the six virtues of the VIA-Youth is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Significance of differences in mean scores between genders for the total group

Significant gender differences as manifested in the total group are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

The scores of the total group on the VIA-Youth showed significant gender differences on 19 of the 22 character strengths utilized. Female learners scored significantly higher on all these strengths than the males.

DISCUSSION

The main findings of this study were firstly, that there were many significant differences in magnitude of the various character strengths among the cultural-contextual groups involved, but only few were of a large practical significance; secondly, that girls scored significantly higher than boys on all measured character strengths, but showed large effect size practical significances only for Kindness and Appreciation of beauty, and thirdly, that all sub-groups had above average mean scores on all strengths.

Of the many significant differences among cultural groups, very few were of a large practical significance as indicated by Cohen's effect sizes. No specific pattern could be

detected in the significant differences among the different cultural groups. All groups showed similar tendencies with higher scores on Spirituality, Hope, Appreciation of beauty, and in some instances, Gratitude. The African and Muslim-Indian groups had significantly (large effect size) lower mean scores on Authenticity. This may be explained by the collectivistic cultural orientation that is universally shared by African and Asian cultures, and in which the individual's values are directed towards the interests of the collective or group rather than pursuing individualized values for which one alone would be accountable. The other large effect size difference was found for Appreciation of beauty where the African group had the highest mean score. A possible explanation may be sought in the African group's expressiveness and a more tempered attitude in the Muslim-Indian group. An alternative explanation was that this observation was an artefact of unknown origin that must be explored further. However, it was notable that Appreciation of beauty manifested in all subgroups with relatively high mean scores, and that this was the second highest score for the African group (Spirituality was the highest). The large effect practically significant difference on humour, where the Coloured group scored lower than the White and Muslim-Indian groups was contrary to traditional assumptions/stereotypes. As a closer inspection of data revealed a low reliability index for humour in the case of the Coloured group (but good in the instances of other groups), no interpretation of this finding could be made. As far as the different cultural groups were concerned it could thus be concluded that most of the significant differences found did not manifest a specific pattern, and were not highly practically significant.

The female learners in this study scored significantly higher than the males on 19 of the included 22 character strengths. A clear pattern of differences was thus found. These findings corresponded to some extent with those of Peterson and Park (2003, in Peterson & Seligman, 2004) who found higher scores for girls on some wisdom and knowledge, kindness and love, justice and transcendence strengths, and very few significant differences on the other strengths. These authors came to the conclusion that gender differences are more gender role-, gender identity- and gender-stereotype related than truly biophysiological. The fact that girls obtained higher scores than boys in all instances in the current study and not only on the typical female-role associated strengths, may have indicated that not only socialization factors were relevant in explaining the findings. It may be that general developmental tendencies were also reflected. It is known that girls mature earlier than boys (Gardiner, Mutter & Kosmitzki, 1998; Lefrancois, 2001; Rathus, 2006). It was, however, important to note that only in two instances, i.e. Kindness and Appreciation

of beauty, large practical significant effects were found, and in these instances the strengths involved were more associated with typical female orientations in which socialization may have played a role. As far as the gender differences found were concerned, it could be concluded that they manifest to some extent a developmental trend in which girls mature earlier, but that the only practical significant differences were probably associated with socialization practices. Future research should, however, also explore gender differences within cultural subgroups to obtain a more detailed picture of possible gender and cultural interactions.

Findings indicated that all cultural and gender subgroups had above average mean scores on all character strengths measured. This suggested a positive and hopeful picture for the moral development of this group of South African learners, as far as was reflected in self-reported character strengths.

It could be concluded that although many significant differences were found among cultural and gender groups, most of them were not of a large practical significance. Therefore these differences may not be that important in designing programmes to facilitate character development in learners, and similar programmes may be implemented for all groups – with sensitivity to individual and group preferences. School contexts where young people share a socio-educational space have been identified as potentially unique and favourable opportunities for youth to develop and enhance character competencies or strengths (Larson, 2000). Interventions need to be sensitive towards developmental differences, as well as for diverse gender and socio-cultural preferences, but the main thrust towards development of character strengths may be a convergent process. Programmes that enhance the understanding of their own and other people's strengths in a multi-cultural context could encourage young people to rethink their perception of other cultures and so promote cross-cultural tolerance and destereotyping. Value and character education serve this purpose. This investigation was however done in the Vaal Triangle of the Gauteng Province and the results cannot be generalized to similar cultural groups in other areas of South Africa.

Some suggestions to facilitate development of character strengths in practice as part of Life Orientation Programmes in schools, are as follows (these could be combined and applied in several variations and over several sessions): (i) Provide learners with a list of character strengths as conceptualized in the VIA-Youth. Let them discuss the definitions provided for each of these strengths in small groups, and try to identify other possible strengths not included in this list; (ii) Learners could nominate role models manifesting

specific strengths, and explain with reference to specific behaviours of those people why they are exemplars of those strengths; (iii) Inform learners about research that identified the best developed strengths in adolescents/young people as Spirituality, Hope, Appreciation of beauty and Gratitude, and ask them to describe and discuss in small groups in what behaviours they can observe this in themselves and others; (iv) Learners could complete the VIA-Youth and identify their own “signature strengths” (i.e. five strongest strengths). Thereafter they discuss these strengths in small groups and reflect on how this could be related to the ways they were brought up. Next they could devise new ways to practice those strengths more often in the following week(s). Such a task may be followed up over some time with another measurement to evaluate their strengths development, and whether satisfaction with life and other aspects of psychological well-being improved as could be expected; (v) Learners could be asked to work in small groups and identify a community activity that they would like to be involved in to facilitate character strengths. They could develop a procedure to do so as part of their school’s active community outreach actions.

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Table 1: Analyses of variance of the VIA-Youth on mean scores of the four subgroups: N = 1362

Strengths	df Effect	MS Effect	F	p
Curiosity	3	2.14	6.60	***
Love of Learning	3	2.99	7.81	****
Judgment				
Creativity				
Wisdom				
Bravery	3	4.61	14.03	****
Industry	3	1.62	5.30	**
Authenticity	3	19.41	58.11	****
Vitality	3	1.07	3.23	*
Love	3	11.72	36.51	****
Kindness	3	15.50	59.64	****
Social intelligence				
Teamwork	3	3.23	11.39	****
Fairness	3	2.65	8.03	****
Leadership	3	1.77	4.90	**
Self regulation				
Prudence	3	2.25	6.64	***
Forgiveness	3	23.90	49.45	****
Modesty				
Appreciation of beauty	3	1.99	4.83	**
Gratitude	3	12.23	36.31	****
Hope				
Humor	3	13.78	36.27	****
Spirituality	3	25.64	60.21	****

Note:

* = $p < 0.05$ ** = $P < 0.01$ *** = $P < 0.001$ **** = $p < 0.0001$

Table 2: Significance of differences in mean scores of African and White, Coloured and Muslim-Indian learners

Culture group	VIA-Youth				VIA-Youth				VIA-Youth			
	African N	White 449	White 536		African 449	Coloured 156			African 449	Mus. Ind. 221		
Strengths	Mean	Mean	P	Effect size	Mean	Mean	p	Effect size	Mean	Mean	p	Effect size
Curiosity					3.77	3.57	****	□□				
Love of Learning	3.93	3.78	****	□□					3.93	3.81	*	□□
Judgment	3.71	3.62	**	□					3.71	3.58	**	□□
Creativity	3.81	3.72	*	□								
Wisdom												
Bravery	3.66	3.77	**	□								
Industry												
Authenticity	3.25	3.61	****	□□□	3.25	3.48	****	□□				
Vitality												
Love	3.73	3.81	*	□					3.73	3.84	*	□□
Kindness	3.71	3.84	****	□□					3.71	3.83	**	□□
Social intelligence									3.58	3.49	*	□
Teamwork												
Fairness												
Leadership	3.46	3.36	**	□					3.46	3.34	*	□□
Self regulation												
Prudence	3.36	3.26	*	□					3.36	3.12	****	□□
Forgiveness	3.56	3.81	***	□□	3.56	3.74	*	□□	3.56	3.87	****	□□
Modesty												
Appreciation of beauty	4.02	3.82	***	□□	4.02	3.90	*	□□	4.02	3.69	****	□□□
Gratitude									3.98	4.08	*	□
Hope	4.01	3.85	****	□□	4.01	3.87	*	□□	4.01	3.82	****	□□
Humor					3.83	3.59	****	□□				
Spirituality					4.25	4.13	*	□□	4.25	4.43	****	□□

P-values:
 * = $p < 0.05$
 ** = $p < 0.01$
 *** = $p < 0.001$
 **** = $p < 0.0001$

Effect Size:
 □ Small
 □□ Medium
 □□□ Large
 □□□□ High

Convergence and diversity

Table 3: Significance of differences in mean scores of White and Coloured, and Muslim-Indian learners, and Coloured and Muslim-Indian learners

Culture Group	VIA-Youth				VIA-Youth				VIA-Youth			
	White		Coloured		White		Mus/Ind		Coloured		Mus/Ind	
	Valid N	536	156		536	221			156	221		
Strengths	Mean	Mean	p	Effect Size	Mean	Mean	p	Effect size	Mean	Mean	p	Effect size
Curiosity	3.73	3.58	**	□□					3.58	3.76	**	□□
Love of Learning	3.78	3.90	*	□								
Judgment												
Creativity												
Wisdom												
Bravery												
Industry					3.67	3.55	*	□□				
Authenticity	3.61	3.48	*	□□	3.61	3.26	****	□□□	3.48	3.26	**	□□
Vitality												
Love												
Kindness	3.83	3.63	****	□□					3.63	3.83	***	□□
Social intelligence												
Teamwork												
Fairness												
Leadership	3.35	3.47	*	□								
Self regulation												
Prudence	3.27	3.39	*	□	3.27	3.12	**	□□	3.39	3.12	***	□□
Forgiveness												
Modesty												
Appreciation of beauty					3.82	3.69	*	□	3.90	3.69	**	□□
Gratitude												
Hope												
Humor	3.90	3.59	***	□□□					3.59	3.89	****	□□□
Spirituality	4.29	4.12	**	□□	4.29	4.43	**	□□	4.12	4.43	***	□□

P-values:

* = p < 0.05

** = p < 0.01

*** = p < 0.001

**** = p < 0.0001

Effect Size:

□ Small

□□ Medium

□□□ Large

□□□□ High

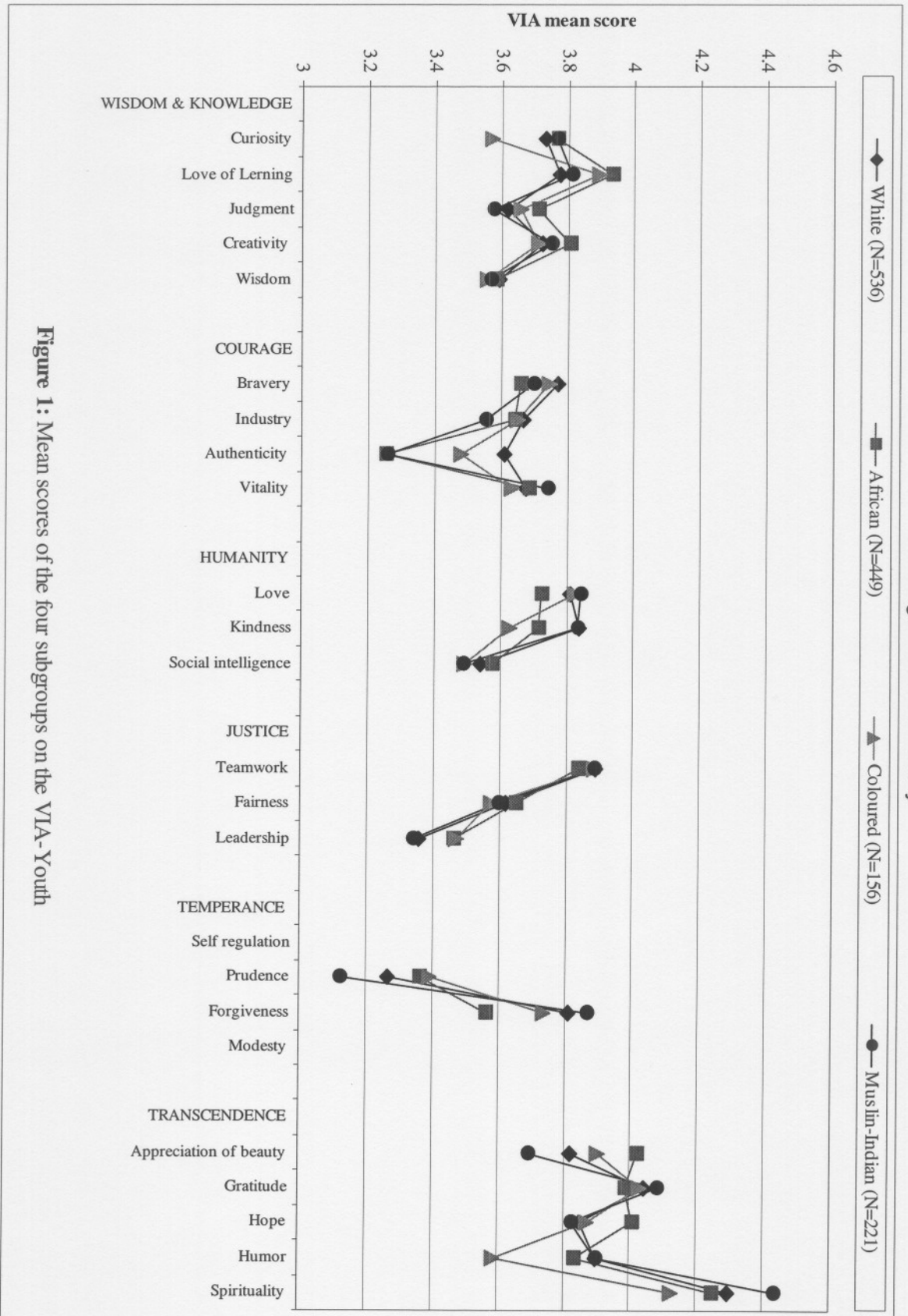


Figure 1: Mean scores of the four subgroups on the VIA-Youth

Table 4: Significance of differences between male and female learners on the VIA-Youth

Strengths	Male Mean n=561	Female Mean n=801	p	Effect size
Curiosity	3.69	3.76	*	□
Love of Learning	3.77	3.90	***	□□
Judgment	3.59	3.69	**	□
Creativity				
Wisdom	3.49	3.65	****	□□
Bravery	3.65	3.77	***	□
Industry	3.57	3.68	***	□□
Authenticity	3.32	3.49	****	□□
Vitality	3.62	3.73	**	□
Love	3.71	3.85	****	□□
Kindness	3.59	3.90	****	□□□
Social intelligence	3.48	3.58	***	□□
Teamwork	3.76	3.95	****	□□
Fairness	3.50	3.70	****	□□
Leadership	3.33	3.45	**	□
Self regulation				
Prudence				
Forgiveness	3.53	3.86	****	□□
Modesty				
Appreciation of beauty	3.65	4.03	****	□□□
Gratitude	3.94	4.09	****	□□
Hope				
Humor	3.76	3.90	****	□□
Spirituality	4.14	4.38	****	□□

p-values:

* = $p < 0.05$
 ** = $P < 0.01$
 *** = $P < 0.001$
 **** = $p < 0.0001$

Effect size:

□ Small
 □□ Medium
 □□□ Large
 □□□□ High

Afdeling 5: Gevolgtrekkings en aanbevelings

Die doel van hierdie navorsing was om die manifestasie van karaktersterktes in 'n multi-kulturele groep Suid-Afrikaanse hoërskool-leerders te bestudeer. Karaktersterktes is 'n nuwe teoretiese konstruk in die Psigologie, wat ook navorsing- en toepassingsmoontlikhede inhou.

Deur die jare het teoretici, navorsers en praktisyns in die Psigologie dikwels probeer om geestesgesondheid vanuit 'n positiewe hoek te benader en begrippe soos die volwasse persoonlikheid, selfaktualisering, optimale funksionering, psigiese gesondheid, psigologiese welstand, menslike veerkragtigheid, hanteringsvermoëns, kreatiewe denke, emosionele intelligensie en veel meer, het die lig gesien. Die kernfokus het egter gebly op psigologiese afwykings, versteurings en siektetoestande wat onder die wetenskap van psigopatologie bekend was. Geestesgesondheid is gedefinieer deur die afwesigheid van simptome eerder as deur die teenwoordigheid van gesonde kenmerke van kognisie, emosie of gedrag. In 2000 het Seligman en Csikszentmihalyi egter die voortou geneem en deur die bekendstelling van Positiewe Sielkunde (Positive Psychology) as 'n nuwe denkrigting in die Psigologie, 'n alternatiewe benadering tot teorie, wetenskap en praktyk daargestel (Peterson, 2006). Karakter, nog 'n konsep waarvoor navorsers in die Psigologie baie teensinnig was vanweë die moreel-etiese- of waarde oriëntasie daarvan, is deur Seligman (2002a) voorgestel as kernkonsep van die nuwe wetenskapveld van die Positiewe Sielkunde. Om die karakterkonsep te operasionaliseer vir navorsing- en toepassingdoeleindes, het Peterson en Seligman (2004) 'n omvattende ondersoek gedoen deur meer as 200 godsdienstige en filosofiese tekste wêreldwyd en oor al die mees prominente (na hul mening) kulture heen, te bestudeer. Sodoende is ses alomteenwoordige (ubiquitous) deugde geïdentifiseer wat deur die navorsers as universeel verteenwoordigend beskou is naamlik, wysheid en kennis, dapperheid of waagmoedigheid, medemenslikheid en liefde of deernis, geregtigheid, gematigdheid en transendering. Hierna is 'n klassifikasiestelsel of taksonomie genoem die Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths daargestel, in 'n poging om as 'n wetenskaplike teenpool vir die Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders van die APA (1994) te dien en om 'n verwysingsbron vir psigologiese wetenskap en praktyk te wees (Lopez & Snyder, 2004 in Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

In die klassifikasie word aangetoon dat die ses deugde gemanifesteer word in 24 karaktersterktes, wat ook beskou is as die boublokke vir psigologiese gesondheid en 'n

vervulde lewe (Park & Peterson, 2004). Hierdie karaktersterktemodel van Peterson en Seligman (2004) is geoperasionaliseer deur die Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) vir volwassenes en die Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth) (Park & Peterson, 2006). Die VIA-Youth is in hierdie navorsing gebruik om die karaktersterktes van 'n multikulturele groep hoërskool-leerders te ondersoek.

Na aanleiding van 'n aanvanklike literatuurstudie oor karaktersterktes as nuwe navorsingsterrein binne die opkomende Positiewe Sielkunde, en waarvan die bogaande 'n sinopsis is, blyk dit dat:

- Afrika as kontinent en die Afrikakosmologie as denkraamwerk vir inheemse mense van dié wêrelddeel, nie ingesluit is in die universele konteks van Peterson en Seligman (2004) se ondersoek na verteenwoordigende deugde en karaktereienskappe nie. Die aanname van universele bruikbaarheid van die karaktersterkte konstruk word dus bevraagteken ten aansien van die Afrikakonteks.
- Die vraag ontstaan of multi-kulturele populasies in Afrika die ses deugde op dieselfde wyse beskou en die karaktersterktes op soortgelyke wyse sal manifesteer as in Peterson en Seligman (2004) se ondersoekgroepe. Die vermoede is dat daar belangrike konseptuele verskille sal wees.

Heelwat navorsingsvrae kan uit die bogaande voortspruit, maar vir die doel van hierdie studie het die volgende vrae ontstaan: Hoe word karaktersterktes gemanifesteer in 'n multi-kulturele Suid-Afrikaanse groep jong mense; hoe vergelyk die bevindinge van sodanige navorsing met die van die oorspronklike ondersoekgroepe van Peterson en Seligman (2004), en is die VIA-Youth 'n betroubare en geldige meetinstrument vir gebruik in 'n multi-kulturele Suid-Afrikaanse jeugkonteks? Die navorsing en resultate van die ondersoek word in drie artikels aangebied. Die eerste is *Karaktersterktes herontdek in die Sielkunde*, tweedens is *Validation of the Values in action inventory of strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth) in a group of South African learners*, en derdens is *Convergence and diversity of character strengths in various groups of South African learners*.

Die eerste artikel was 'n literatuuoroorsig oor karaktersterktes in die Psigologie en het 'n historiese oorsig, 'n evaluasie van die karaktersterktemodel se huidige status en 'n vooruitskouing van toepassing en navorsing behels. Gevolgtrekkings vanuit die literatuurondersoek was:

- Die karaktersterktemodel het baie potensiaal om tot andersoortige navorsingsvrae te lei en om meer positief georiënteerde intervensies in al die toepassingsvelde van die

Psigologie te inspireer. Ten spyte van die twyfelagtige stand van die karakterkonsep in die Psigologiewetenskap van die verlede, het nuwe navorsingsmetodes en inligtingverwerkingstegnieke mettertyd na vore gekom en dit, tesame met die aard van menslike problematiek wat die studieterrein van die Psigologie is, het gelei tot die heringebruikneem van karakter as moreel-etiese konsep, geoperasionaliseer deur die VIA-IS en VIA-Youth.

- Hoewel Peterson en Seligman (2004) wou waak teen kulturele vooroordele (biases) in hul klassifikasie deur uiteenlopende filosofiese en kulturele perspektiewe te benut, is dit nog onduidelik hoe universeel toepaslik die VIA-model sal wees. Die Afrika perspektief op die ses deugde is nie verken nie en die verkose en gemanifesteerde karaktersterktes in Afrika se multi-kulturele konteks is onbekend.
- Daar bestaan ook verskille tussen die konseptualisering van menslike sterktes en karaktersterktes. In Europa word verkies om aandag te gee aan 'n breër konseptualisering van menslike sterktes wat verwys na alle aspekte van positiewe menslike funksionering. Ook in Suid-Afrika word die begrip Psigofortologie verkies wat fokus op alle bio-psigo-sosio-spirituele sterktes, wat nie alleen die individu raak nie, maar ook geld in alle kontekste waarin mense funksioneer. Karaktersterktes daarenteen verwys net na spesifieke positiewe trekke wat met karakter verband hou.
- Baie min is bekend oor sosio-kulturele invloede op die ontwikkeling en manifestasie van karaktersterktes en eweneens is dit onbekend hoe en waardeur karaktersterktes in kinders, adolessente en volwassenes ontwikkel en gevorm word.
- Dit is onseker of karaktersterktes varieer in verskillende ontwikkeling-, omstandigheid- en idiosinkratiese kontekste, en of dit stabiel bly oor tyd en kontekste heen.
- Dit is nog onduidelik of die VIA-IS en die VIA-Youth slegs positiewe karaktereienskappe meet, en of dit onderliggend ook aspekte van psigologiese welstand en/of gesonde persoonlikheid meet. Heelwat konseptuele verskille en ooreenkomste mag bestaan tussen die begrippe.
- Die vraag ontstaan of die deugde en die karaktersterktes konseptueel 'n noue verband hou? Is daar deugde wat meer behels as net die sterktes wat daaraan toegeskryf word, en is daar karaktersterktes in mense wat nie met die ses deugde verband hou nie?

Die tweede artikel het die validering van die VIA-Youth vir gebruik in jongmense in die multi-kulturele Suid-Afrikaanse konteks beskryf. Gevolgtrekkings na aanleiding van sodanige valideringsondersoek was:

- Die uiters lae betroubaarheidsindekse wat op die VIA-Youth verkry is deur 'n landelike groep Swart (African) leerders, het aangedui dat hierdie (of enige ander) meetinstrument vertaal moet word in die inheemse tale van deelnemers, alvorens dit in sulke groepe aangewend kan word.
- Die redelik aanvaarbare betroubaarheidsindekse wat op die VIA-Youth vir die totale stedelike groep leerders en die spesifieke subgroepe verkry is, asook die feit dat hierdie bevindinge ooreenstem met die van Park en Peterson (2006) dui daarop dat die VIA-Youth vraelys of sekere subskale met goeie betroubaarheid, wel bruikbaar kan wees in 'n groep soos die huidige. Die subskale van self-regulering en nederigheid se insluiting in die VIA-Youth moet egter heroorweeg word vanweë hul lae betroubaarheidsindekse. Die meetinstrument mag ook verkort word soos aangedui is deur die oortolligheid van sekere items of sterktes weens hul hoë inter-item en item-totaal korrelasies.
- Wat die geldigheid van die VIA-Youth aanbetref, dui die bevindinge van die ondersoek daarop dat hoewel kriteriumgeldigheid aanvaarbaar was, konstruk geldigheid nie ondersteun kon word nie. Die ses-deugde teoretiese model kon nie deur die resultate van hierdie ondersoek geïdentifiseer word nie en die VIA-Youth het geblyk 'n homogene of een-dimensionele eerder as multi-dimensionele meetinstrument te wees. Hierdie bevinding mag die vermoede ondersteun dat die ses-deugde benadering in 'n multi-kulturele konteks soos die huidige een heroorweeg moet word vanweë konseptuele verskille. Die feit dat Peterson en Seligman (2004) en Park en Peterson (2006) ook nie 'n goeie passing van die teoretiese ses-deugde model in hul navorsing kon vind nie, mag sodanige teoretiese heroorweging noodsaak.

Artikel 3 het beduidende verskille en ooreenkomste in karaktersterktes tussen vier kultuurgroepe en twee geslagsgroepe, ondersoek. Gevolgtrekkings vanuit hierdie verkenning van kultuur- en geslagsverskille was die volgende:

- Die feit dat daar heelwat beduidende verskille in gemanifesteerde karaktersterktes tussen kultuurgroepe was, maar dat slegs enkele sterktes praktiese beduidendheid getoon het, asook die feit dat daar nie 'n patroon in die verskille gevind kon word nie, mag impliseer dat die verskille oppervlakkig (idiosinkraties) is en nie wesenlik van aard nie.
- Die bo-gemiddelde tellings van al die subgroepe op al die karaktersterktes van die VIA-Youth het gewys op 'n relatief hoë mate van ontwikkeling in karaktersterktes in hierdie groep leerders. Hierdie groep weerspieël nie die algemene pessimistiese beeld van jongmense wat tans in die openbare mening bestaan nie, maar eerder 'n hoopvolle

indruk dat die jeug wel oor kernsake (soos deur die karaktersterktes verteenwoordig word) nadink.

- Die feit dat die gemiddelde tellings van hierdie subgroepe ook goed vergelyk het met die tellings wat deur Park en Peterson (2006) gerapporteer is, mag daarop dui dat hierdie Suid-Afrikaanse groepe se response op die VIA-Youth ooreenstem met die universele tendens en dat die aanname van alomgeldigheid (ubiquitousness) van die karaktersterktes, vir hierdie spesifieke groepe ondersteun kan word.
- Die geslagsverskille wat gevind is word verklaar deur ontwikkeling- en sosialiseringinvloede. Dit is bekend dat kulture verskil wat ontwikkeling- en sosialiseringveranderlikes ten aansien van geslagte aanbetref. Die feit dat dogters van seuns verskil op soveel van die karaktersterktes en nie net op enkeles nie, soos deur Peterson en Park (2003, in Peterson & Seligman, 2004) bevind is, het moontlik met rypingsverskille in die groep te make. Sosialiseringinvloede het oënskynlik 'n rol gespeel in die verskille ten aansien van Kindness en Appreciation of beauty sterktes, waarop die dogters hoër tellings van praktiese beduidendheid behaal het. Omvattende binne- en tussengroep geslagsverskille moet nagevors word om die aard van geslag- en kultuurinteraksies te verstaan.

Aanbevelings

- Verdere navorsing oor die betroubaarheid en geldigheid van die VIA-Youth in diverse Suid-Afrikaanse kontekste, kulture en groepe word aanbeveel. Vertaling van die VIA-IS en die VIA-Youth in die tale van groepe waarin dit gebruik word, is 'n voorvereiste vir verdere navorsing.
Ondersoeke na konstruk geldigheid van die VIA-Youth (asook die VIA-IS) moet uitklaring van konstruk-ekwivalensie insluit om vas te stel of die deugde en karaktersterktes deur uiteenlopende respondente gekonseptualiseer word soos wat dit teoreties bedoel is. Met kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodes kan vasgestel word of Afrika-spesifieke deugde en sterktes wel geïdentifiseer kan word.
- Navorsing met jongmense in verskillende fases van ontwikkeling kan met behulp van die VIA-Youth asook deur middel van fokusgroepbesprekings en ander kwalitatiewe navorsingsmetodes, inligting verskaf oor faktore wat karakterontwikkeling beïnvloed, bevorder of belemmer. Dieselfde kan gedoen word met betrekking tot diverse geslagte en kulture. Die invloed van kulturele- en ontwikkelingsinvloede het geblyk uit hierdie ondersoek maar die volle dinamika van die interaksie tussen hierdie faktore en die

invloed daarvan op die ontwikkeling en manifestering van karaktersterktes, vereis omvattende navorsing.

- Wat praktiese toepassing betref kan die VIA-Youth benut word om jongmense te help met die ontdekking van hul eie sterktes, wat kan lei tot verhoogde self-insig en verbeterde selfbeeld. Morele ontwikkeling aan die hand van morele bevoegdhede kan met behulp van die VIA-Youth begelei word. In risikogroepe soos jeugmisdadigers, straatkinders, kinders wat deur MIV-VIGS geraak word, dwelmgebruikers en veral jeug in kontekste van armoede, kan met behulp van die karaktersterktemodel jongmense bemagtig word en gelei word om lewenskeuses gebaseer op karaktersterktes te doen. Soos wat emosionele intelligensie voorheen gewild was en vir talle intervensies aangewend is, kan karaktersterktes 'n voorkomende en remediërende hulpmiddel wees wat jongmense se psigologiese welstand kan verhoog en lewenskwaliteit kan verbeter. Dit is per slot van rekening die doel van Positiewe Sielkunde. Intervensieprogramme moet egter altyd goed beplan word en voortdurend deur toepaslike navorsing geëvalueer word.

Ten slotte het hierdie verkenning van karaktersterktes by 'n multi-kulturele groep Suid-Afrikaanse leerders aangedui dat die karaktersterktekonsep baie potensiaal vir teoriebou, navorsing en toepassing in al die verskillende vakterreine van die Psigologie het, tot so 'n mate dat dit waarde kan toevoeg tot die kennisgeheel van die wetenskap. Dit het ook sosiale relevansie en kan van waarde wees vir die bevordering van eties-morele bevoegdhede van volwassenes en jeugdiges.

Die karaktersterktemodel is dus 'n aanwinst vir die menswetenskappe in die algemeen en Psigologie in besonder, mits dit voortdurend uitgebou, verfyn en verryk word deur voortgesette navorsing in uiteenlopende kulture, kontekste, groepe en gebeurlikhede.

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