

**EXPLORING SEX DIFFERENCES IN ASPECTS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL
STRENGTHS WITHIN A COLLECTIVISTIC CULTURE**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
MASTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCE DEGREE IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

IN THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY OF THE FACULTY OF HUMAN AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES AT THE NORTH WEST UNIVERSITY, MAFIKENG CAMPUS

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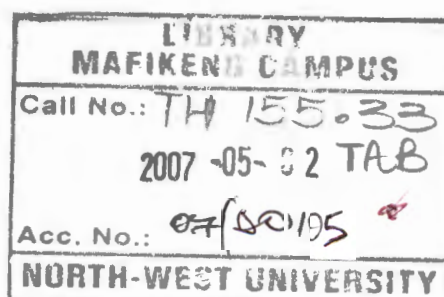


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SUMMARY

EXPLORING SEX DIFFERENCES IN ASPECTS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL STRENGTHS WITHIN A COLLECTIVISTIC CULTURE

Key words: Psychology; Social; Strengths; Well-being; Virtues; Collectivistic; Culture; Sex differences

The aim of this study is to explore sex differences of psychological strengths within a collectivistic culture. This study is part of a larger study to explore the validity of the Value in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) in an African context (cf. Khumalo, Wissing, & Temane, 2005). The consideration of sex differences and similarities is important to understand aspects of human behaviour (Eagly & Diekmann, 2003). This is especially so in regard to developing movements such as positive psychology which is a counterpoint to a psychology of deficits and pathology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Kite (2001) concluded that people believe that differences between the typical characteristics of men and women exist. Many efforts to understand and identify human strengths have focused on the individual level traits such as IQ, optimism, and self-efficacy (Stadinger & Pasupathi, 2000). Few, if any, studies have conceptually looked at sex differences in regard to psychological strengths as conceptualized by Peterson and Park (2003). This study seeks to determine the nature of strengths and virtues within sex differences in collectivistic cultures.

In a cross-sectional survey design, an availability sample of African students (N=164) completed the original English version of the VIA-IS and other criterion related measures of psychological well-being and health during facilitated group sessions. The

latter scales were Affectometer 2 (Kamman & Flett, 1983), the Fortitude Questionnaire (Pretorius, 1998), the Sens of Coherence Scale (Antanovsky, 1987), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al. 1985) and General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg & Hilier, 1979). Translation of the VIA-IS into Setswana and back translation were conducted and evaluated by a research evaluation committee.

Results indicated that mean scores of the VIA-IS subscales are relatively aligned with those in a Western context. Twenty of the 24 Via-subcales showed satisfactory Cronbach alphas reliability indices above .70. The VIA-IS satisfies criterion-related validity as indicated by positive correlation with life satisfaction, positive affect, fortitude and sense of coherence and negative correlation with negative affect and symptoms of ill health as measured by the General Health Questionnaire. The VIA-IS was found to be translatable with preservation of the original meaning but in some instances technical terms had to be borrowed. Results in this study indicated that there is a difference in five specific psychological strengths between males and females: (i) integrity (ii) Love (iii) Gratitude (iv) Spirituality (v) Forgiveness and mercy.

PREFACE

Article format

The article format, as described in the General Regulation A 13.7.3 of the North-West University, was chosen for purposes of this mini-dissertation that is part of the requirements for a professional masters degree.

Selected journal

The target journal for submission of the current manuscript is the *South African Journal of Psychology*.

Letter of Consent

Please see the letter of consent from co-authors on the next page by which co-authors provide permission that the manuscript *Sex difference in aspects of psychosocial strengths within a collectivistic culture* may be submitted for purposes of a mini-dissertation by first author, Sphiwe B. Thabethe.

Page numbering

For purposes of this mini-dissertation, page numbers run through for the whole document.

Letter of consent

We, the undersigned, hereby give consent that Sphiwe B. Thabethe may submit the manuscript *Sex differences in aspects of psychosocial strengths within a collectivistic culture*, for purposes of a mini-dissertation as part of a masters degree.

Q.M. Temane

Date:

S. Niemand

Date:

SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGY

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P.O. Box 1087, Lenasia, 1820. E-mail: sajp@unisa.ac.za.

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MANUSCRIPT

**SEX DIFFERENCES IN ASPECTS OF PSYCHOSOCIAL STRENGTHS WITHIN
A COLLECTIVISTIC CULTURE**

Sex differences in aspects of psychosocial strengths within a collectivistic culture

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Abstract

The study is aimed at exploring sex differences of psychological strengths within a collectivistic culture. An availability sample of African students (N=164) after informed consent completed the VIA-IS and other criterion-related measures of well-being in a cross sectional survey format. Most of the VIA-IS subscales yielded internal consistencies well-over 0.70. Criterion-related validity was found as indicated by positive correlations with life satisfaction, positive affect, fortitude and sense of coherence and negative correlations with negative affect and symptoms of pathology. Most importantly, the results of the study indicated that there are differences between males and females in regard to five specific psychological strengths namely (i) Love (ii) Gratitude (iii) Integrity (iv) Spirituality and (v) Forgiveness and mercy.

Keywords: Psychology; Social; Strength; Well-being; Virtue; Collectivistic; Culture; Sex differences.

Sex differences in aspects of psychosocial strengths within a collectivistic culture

Introduction

Social constructionist perspective emphasizes variation in sex differences across societies and across contexts within societies (Astin et al, 1997). The preferred perspective in this article is social role theory. It is an interactionist approach which draws explicitly on both essentialist and constructionist ideas. Sex differences in social behaviour arise from the distribution of men and women into social roles within a society. In current industrial and post-industrial economies, these roles are organized so that women are more likely to assume roles in the paid economy and to be primary family providers. The different positions of men and women in the structure yield sex-differentiated behaviour through a variety of proximal, mediating processes. One such process is the formation of gender roles, by which people of each sex are expected to have characteristics that equip them for the tasks that they typically carry out. Gender roles, along with the specific roles occupied by men and women, guide social behaviour. This guidance is mediated by sex-typed socialization practices, as well as processes detailed in social psychological theory and research.

Psychosocial strengths and virtues fall within the field of positive psychology (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Positive psychology seeks to find the nature of the effectively functioning human being, who successfully applies evolved adaptations and learned skills (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000). It focuses on strengths as modes of in-building the best things in life, the so-called criteria goods (Ryff & Singer, 1998) as repairing the worst, and as concerned with fulfilling the lives of healthy people and healing the wounds of the distressed (Seligman, 2003). It is becoming increasingly clear

that normal functioning of human beings cannot be accounted for within purely (or problem focused) frames of reference. In fact, the majority of the human race, achieve a state of thriving, rating themselves happy and satisfied with their lives (Meyers, 2000). Frederickson (2001) outlined that positive emotions facilitate the creation of important skills and resources. Cultivated positive emotions not only counteract negative emotions, but also broaden individual's habitual modes of thinking and build their personal resources for coping. The domain of concern in this study is not psychological illness but rather psychological health. Thus Wissing and van Eeden (2002) refer to this as psychofortology (i.e a science of psychological strengths).

Given that the conception of human strengths differ within and across individuals and cultures, there is likely to be considerable disagreement about what human strengths are in different cultural groups, gender and age groups (Eisenberg et al., 2000). Positive psychology's VIA classification describes character strengths as positive traits reflected in thoughts, feelings and behaviour (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Strengths embody virtues, which are core values identified by philosophers and religious thinkers (Peterson & Park, 2003). It is known that gender differences exist between males and females in terms of various socio-demographic indicators including psychological well-being (Roothman, Kirsten & Wissing, 2003). The aim of this study is to establish whether differences exist between females & males in terms of their psychosocial strengths, especially in an African context.

The VIA – IS measures 24 strengths, categorized under 6 virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Virtue clusters and their embodying strengths are: (i) *Wisdom and knowledge*: curiosity love of learning, open mindedness, creativity, perspective; (ii)

courage: Valour / Bravery, Persistence, Integrity, Zest / Vitality; (iii) *human and love*: Love, Kindness, Social Intelligence; (iv) *Justice*: Citizenship, Fairness, Leaderships; (v) *Temperance*: Self-regulation, Prudence, Forgiveness and Mercy, Modesty and Humility; (vi) *Transcendence*: Appreciation of beauty and excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humour and playfulness, spirituality. Criteria applied in the selection of strengths, is such that traits should be ubiquitous, fulfilling, morally valued, not diminishing others, can be measurable and it should have obvious autonyms be strikingly found in some individuals and not in others. Some children or youth may display these strengths precociously some social institutions deliberately attempt to cultivate these traits in people (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In terms of the present study, only the differences between males and females were investigated with regard to these psychological strengths.

Khumalo et al. (2005) found that the VIA-IS of Peterson and Seligman (2004) is not completely valid in an African context however, it is not without merit. Khumalo et al. (2005) found that out of the six theoretically expected virtue clusters, only three (1. Wisdom, knowledge, and courage; 2. Horizontal and vertical relatedness and 3. Integrity in a group context) were emic in an African context. This clustering of virtues reflects a socio centric, collectivistic African cultural value system. This is in accordance with other researchers who highlighted that culture is a powerful influence an effort to characterize the positive side of human experience (Ryff & Singer, 1998). However gender differences are not specifically mentioned in this study. According to Eagly, (1994) gender is used to think about ways in which boys and girls or men and women differ.

The possible influence of cultural differences should also be taken into account. The individual's life content must be considered to determine whether an association exists between strengths and culture. Ryff and Singer (1998) have noted that culture and context are powerful influences in efforts to characterize the positive side of human experience. Christopher (1999) instructively argued that definitions of well-being are inherently culturally rooted and further that there can be no such a thing as value-free assessment of well-being. According to Christopher, all understandings of well-being are essentially moral visions, based on individual's judgments about what it means to be well. What counts to someone as good character can be influenced by contextual factors like culture, religion or political persuasion (Peterson & Park, 2003). Although the classification of strengths needs to be commonly recognized (Peterson & Seligman 2003), Georgas, van de Vijver and Berry (2004) acknowledge that culture is a complex phenomenon and its elements are interrelated.

According to Triandis (1995) roughly two thirds of the world's population lives in collectivistic cultures, where the distinction between self and others is blurred. In these cultures, the major normative task is to maintain harmony with others by coming to terms with their needs and expectations. Individuals are expected to subordinate their personal feelings and wishes to the goals of their in-group (e.g family). Whereas authenticity to one's inner feelings is often regarded as a virtue in individualist cultures, in many cases it is construed as a sign of personal immaturity or selfishness in collectivistic cultures. In such settings, individuals' thoughts and feelings acquire full meaning only in reference to the thoughts and feelings of others who are crucially important in the very definition of the self (Markus and Kitiyama, 1994).

Mayer and Salovey (1993) stated that individuals differ in terms of how well they can identify and use the information provided by their feelings in social behaviour. Findings suggest that even with cultures, emotional experience, may have a stronger impact on life satisfaction judgments in the case of some individuals than of others. Suh et al (1998) outlined that for the collectivist, perceived norms about whether one should be satisfied, have a strong influence on whether life is thought to be good. In contrast to the individualist, the key to whether life is good is found internally in one's happiness. Thus the "good life" cannot be defined universally but has different locus, depending on one's culture. Given the theoretical significance of studying the relationship of person to group across cultures, these empirical findings favour the decision to study this dimension intensively. The psychological correlates of individualism-collectivism have as yet been studied very little.

Gender differences in human strengths are also important because of the many efforts being made in contemporary society to empower all individuals to achieve self-actualisation and utilize their full potential. Few if any studies have conceptually looked at sex differences with regard to psychosocial strengths as conceptualized by Peterson & Park (2003). Crosse et al., (1992) believe that gender differences exist in almost every aspect of health and health care. Roothman, Kirsten, & Wissing (2003) found that differences between men and women were only of small to medium practical significance and were not found on all operationalisations of a specific facet of psychological well-being. Their study indicated some differences in the self-evaluated psychological well-being of men and women. The practical effects of this study are largely in line with traditional, stereotypical beliefs pertaining to gender roles. The results suggest that

women find meaning and purpose in their lives in a different way than men. They obtain strength and control through their interpersonal relationships and faith. No gender differences were found with regard to social aspect or sense of coherence, affecting balance and satisfaction with life. These findings could reflect traditional perceptions of masculinity according to which man defines his manhood through qualities such as independence, socially endorsed success (occupational status, prestige, material wealth), competitiveness, fearlessness and invincibility or a lack of vulnerability (Sheldon & King, 2001), which are all traits of an individualistic identity (Nolen, Hoeksema & Rusting, 1999).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) empirically found that character strengths are associated with other indices of well-being. Park, Peterson and Seligman (2004) found that hope, zest, gratitude, love and curiosity strongly correlate with life satisfaction.

Current studies on the existence of gender differences, including those related to psychological well being reflect contradictory results and a distinct lack of consensus (Ryff & Singer, 1998; Strumpfer, 1995). All people are equal but not identical and the possible differences between people need to be considered in order to empower all individuals to achieve self-actualization and fulfill their potential whilst being offered equal opportunities (Roothman, Kirsten & Wissing, 2003).

AIM

The aim of this study is to establish if there are differences in psychosocial strengths of male and female students in a collectivistic culture.

METHOD

Design

A survey design was utilized to attain the aim of the study. The specific design used was the cross-sectional design in line with the aim of the study. A translation and back-translation of the VIA-IS was also utilized to determine translatability into Setswana (cf. Khumalo et al., 2005).

Participants

A sample of 168 students (comprising of 57 males and 107 females) from the North West University, (Mafikeng campus) was drawn for the purpose. These students come from a relatively culturally homogeneous group that can be characterized as collectivistic. All participants were undergraduate psychology students, accessed through their lecturers. Informed consent was obtained from the participants. They were assured of confidentiality and that feedback would be available to individuals on request. Questionnaires were completed in English.

Data collection

Quantitative survey: measuring instruments

VIA Inventory of strengths (VIA-IS) (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

The VIA-IS is a face valid self report questionnaire that uses a five point Likert style items to measure the degree to which respondents endorse items reflecting the various strengths of character that comprise the VIA classification. It has 24 strengths and there are 10 items per strength (240 total). Almost all of the strengths in the VIA classification have been subject o empirical research using various strategies of assessment (Peterson &

Seligman, 2004). Scores are calculated by averaging responses for each sub-scale with higher numbers, reflecting more of the strength (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). All scales have satisfactory Cronbach alphas above .70. Test-retest correlations for all scales over a four month period are substantial .70. Park & Peterson (2004) report a satisfactory internal consistency.

Affectometer (AFM) (Kamman & Flett, 1983).

This is a self-report scale that assesses general happiness or a sense of well-being, based on measuring the positive and negative feelings (Kamman & Flett, 1983). It contains 20 items and it was described as a five-minute inventory with high reliability, high validity and slight contamination by current mood and social desirability. Kamman & Flett (1983) reported an alpha of .95 on reliability and its validity has been tested by comparison with 12 other well-being and related scales. In the Setswana speaking sample, Moroeng (2001) found a Cronbach alpha of .68 for PA and .77 for NA.

Sense of Coherence Scale (SOC) (Antonovsky, 1987,1993)

The SOC is a 29 item scale which measures an individual's way of experiencing the world and his/her life in it. It has 3 components: Comprehensibility, Manageability and Meaningfulness. Antonovsky (1993) reported Cronbach alphas of .82 to .95.

Antonovsky further reported good content and criterion validity. In a study of a Setswana speaking group Thekiso (1999) attest to the applicability of this scale and reported a Cronbach of .70.

Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) (Diener, Emmons, Griffin & Larsen, 1985)

The (SWLS) is a five-item scale that measures a person's assessment of his/her quality of life according to his/her own criteria. The degree of life satisfaction is measured on a cognitive judgmental level (Diener, et al., 1985) report a test retest reliability of .82 and an alpha reliability of .87. Thekiso (1999) found an alpha of .87 in a Setswana speaking group.

General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) (Goldberg & Hillier, 1979).

The (GHQ) is considered a screening questionnaire to detect a diagnosable psychiatric disorder and is a scale measuring well-being from a pathogenic perspective. It consists of 4 scales measuring somatic symptoms, anxiety and insomnia, social dysfunction and severe depression (Goldberg & Hillier, 1979; Verneke, Goldberg, Yalcin & Ustun, 2000). In a Setswana speaking sample, Thekiso (1999) reported a Cronbach of .91 for the total scale.

Procedure

Permission to obtain research data was granted by both the Head of Department and the relevant psychology lecturers who formed the ethics committee of the Department.

Undergraduate psychology students from the North West University (Mafikeng campus) were recruited by their lecturers. Some of the data was collected from students at the end of their lecture period, and others were given as homework for completion. The English version of the VIA-IS was translated into Setswana, back translated and then evaluated and approved by the research committee.

Analysis of data

Descriptive statistics and Cronbach reliability indices were computed for VIA-strength-scales. Correlations between the VIA-strengths and well-being measures were determined in order to explore criterion-related validity. Student's t-tests were computed to test the differences between males and females with regard to their experiences of psychological strengths.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and reliability indices of the VIA-IS

Descriptive statistics of strengths for the total sample (n: 164)

Table 1 on page 24 presents the descriptive statistics of the 24 strengths as conceptualized by Seligman & Peterson (2004). Strengths yielding the highest means were Love, Fairness, Leadership, Persistence, Gratitude and Kindness. Strengths with lower means were Love of Learning, Self-regulation and bravery. The table shows strengths such as social intelligence, Love and Appreciation of beauty had the widest ranges and a negative skewness. Overall, the VIA-IS had a Cronbach alpha of 0.969 indicating that the scale is reliable.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of strengths for the total sample (N = 164)

Variable	Mean	Range		SD	Skewness	Inter-item correlation	Cronbach
		Min	Max				
Curiosity	38.46	23.75	50.00	5.25	-.172	0.75	0.96
Love of learning	36.15	21.11	50.00	5.87	-.168	0.70	0.96
Open-mindedness	39.68	25.00	50.00	5.28	-.156	0.82	0.96
Creativity	39.23	23.00	50.00	5.28	-.134	0.79	0.96
Social-intelligence	38.28	18.75	50.00	5.47	-.173	0.81	0.96
Perspective	39.27	27.00	50.00	4.94	-.050	0.78	0.96
Bravery	37.57	21.00	50.00	5.82	-.177	0.81	0.96
Persistence	40.55	25.00	50.00	5.51	-.327	0.78	0.96
Integrity	39.59	20.00	50.00	5.51	-.645	0.77	0.96
Kindness	40.35	22.22	50.00	5.63	-.333	0.75	0.96
Love	42.13	18.75	50.00	5.09	-.975	0.76	0.96
Citizenship	39.97	20.00	50.00	5.81	-.621	0.67	0.96
Fairness	41.05	17.50	50.00	5.14	-.1,06	0.77	0.96
Leadership	40.73	21.00	50.00	5.76	-.603	0.74	0.96
Self-regulation	36.63	22.50	50.00	4.83	-.116	0.62	0.96
Prudence	38.30	20.00	50.00	5.95	-.313	0.64	0.96
Appreciation-Beauty-excellence	37.95	17.14	50.00	6.30	-.429	0.67	0.96
Gratitude	41.95	26.66	50.00	4.87	-.602	0.77	0.96
Hope	43.98	17.77	50.00	4.77	-.135	0.75	0.96
Spirituality	41.94	25.00	50.00	5.54	-.790	0.64	0.96
Modesty-and Humility	38.25	20.00	50.00	5.15	-.403	0.61	0.96
Humor	39.40	23.75	50.00	5.33	-.205	0.79	0.96
Vitality	38.62	20.00	50.00	5.33	-.208	0.80	0.96
Forgiveness-and mercy	37.86	22.50	50.00	5.57	-.195	0.71	0.96

Descriptive statistics of well- being measures

Criterion related validity

Well being measures were also employed in the study to establish the criterion validity of the psychological strengths measures. Strengths were found to be associated with well-being indices such as SWLS, SOC, GHQ, and AFM- PA. Initially, the descriptive aspects of the measures were investigated yielding the estimates in Table 2 below

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of well-being measures

Variable	Mean	Range		SD	Kurtosis	Skewness
		Min	Max			
SWLS	24.42	11.00	35.00	5.04	-.373	-.383
SOC	13.41	87.00	20.00	21.82	.275	.511
GHQ	5.97	0.00	26.00	4.91	2.10	1.20
AFM-PA	39.12	27.00	50.00	5.24	-.041	-.159

Note: SWLS = Satisfaction with Life Scale; SOC = Sense of Coherence Scale; GHQ = General Health Questionnaire; AFM-PA = Affectometer – Positive Affect.

Criterion validation of strengths

Psychological strengths were correlated with some established measures of psychological well-being to establish criterion validity as indicated previously. Table 3 on page 27, shows that psychological strengths, in the main, are positively correlated with measures of positive psychological well-being except in the case of General Health Questionnaire which measures negative aspects of well-being. Psychological strengths such as open-mindedness, gratitude, spirituality, creativity, humour and vitality were highly correlated with measures of positive psychological well-being.

Table 3 Criterion validity of strengths

Strength	GHQ	SOC	SWLS	AFM-PA
Curiosity	-0.069	.226**	.333**	.359**
Love of Learning	-.179*	.216**	.351**	.373**
Open-mindedness	-.056	.194*	.358**	.520**
Creativity	.002	.194*	.327**	.430**
Social intelligence	.019	.172*	.289**	.470**
Perspective	-.117	.265*	.375**	.492**
Bravery	-.052	.170*	.249**	.411**
Persistence	-.029	.291**	.266**	.442**
Integrity	-.075	.272**	.316**	.436**
Kindness	.042	.182**	.300**	.381**
Love	-.026	.271**	.406**	.341**
Citizenship	-.119	.315**	.268**	.396**
Fairness	-.092	.272**	.246**	.373**
Leadership	.049	.238**	.143	.345**
Self-regulation	-.082	.179*	.197*	.415**
Prudence	-.078	.257**	.218**	.411**
Appreciation-beauty- Excellence	-.062	.050	.235**	.243**
Gratitude	-.108	.248**	.445**	.402**
Hope	-.015	.279**	.385**	.373**
Spirituality	.001	.303**	.402**	.363**
Modesty-and – humility	-.089	.233**	.208**	.265**
Humor	-.089	.295**	.323**	.459**
Vitality	-.102	.327**	.327**	.424**
Forgiveness – and – mercy	-.144	.196*	.259**	.354**

Note: GHQ = General Questionnaire; SOC = Sense of Coherence Scale;
SWLS = satisfaction with Life Scale; AFM-PA = Affectometer-Positive Affect.

Correlations of significant strengths

When psychological strengths were correlated, only, Integrity, Love, Gratitude, Spirituality, and Forgiveness and mercy were found to be significant. Table 4 below presents a summarized version of the correlations of these psychological strengths. Love and gratitude were highly correlated ($r=0.683$), followed by love and integrity ($r=0.634$), integrity and gratitude ($r=0.623$) and spirituality and love ($r=0.602$).

Table 4 Correlations of significant strengths

	Integrity	Love	Gratitude	Spirituality	Forgiveness & mercy
Integrity	1.00	.634**	.623**	.529**	.563**
Love	.634**	1.00	.683**	.602**	.523**
Gratitude	.623**	.683**	1.00	.615**	.576**
Spirituality	.529**	.602**	.615**	1.00	.406**
Forgiveness And mercy	.563**	.523**	.576**	.406**	1.00

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Independent samples test

The differences between males and females in terms of the significant psychological strengths were investigated using the student's t-test. Significant differences were obtained in terms of integrity, love, gratitude and spirituality as shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5 Independent samples test

Variable	t	df	p
Integrity	-2.621	162	.010
Love	-2.282	162	.024
Gratitude	-2.750	162	.007
Spirituality	-3.742	162	.000
Forgiveness			
And mercy	-1.804	162	0.73

DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicated that there are differences between males and females with regard to the following specific psychological strengths Integrity, Love, Gratitude, Spirituality and Forgiveness and Mercy. Fredrickson's (2001) "broaden and build" model of positive emotional, provides a framework for understanding how gratitude might have salutary effects on well-being. In a USA study gratitude was shown to be a common emotion following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and stronger feelings of gratitude were related to less psychological distress (Fredrickson et al, 2003). Gender differences in human strengths are important because of the many efforts being made in society to empower all individuals to achieve self-actualisation and utilize their full potential. Crosse et al., (1992) believe that gender differences exist in almost every aspect of health and health care. In another study Rothman, Kirsten and Wissing (2003) found that differences between men and women were only of small to medium practical significance, and were not found on all operationalisations of a specific facet of psychological well-being. The finding also indicated that there is a difference in 5 specific psychological strengths between males and females namely (i) Integrity (ii) Love (iii) Gratitude (iv) Spirituality (v) and Forgiveness and mercy.

Measurements of psychological strengths seem reliable based on Cronbach alphas obtained for all the 24 psychological strengths. However, no study has indicated full content validity of the VIA-IS in the African context. Khumalo, Wissing and Temane (2005) found that the VIA-IS in a small sample of 256 in an African context measures a more socio-centric, collectivistic form of psychological strengths. Most VIA-IS

subscales (20 of the 24) demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with cronbach alpha reliabilities above .70. Peterson and Seligman (2003) reported Cronbach alphas of .75 and above for all subscales.

In another study, Park, Peterson and Seligman (2004) report alphas above .70 for all strengths. The current findings are thus in line with others for 19 strengths but not for five. No significant difference in magnitude was found between means of the strengths. Peterson and Seligman (2003) reported mean scores comparable to the current study's findings. In the current study, the highest mean scores were found for curiosity, creativity (Wisdom and knowledge), Gratitude, Hope and Spirituality (Transcendence). Curiosity, Kindness, Fairness, Love, Gratitude, and Judgment scored consistently high in a longitudinal study by Peterson and Seligman (2003).

On the whole the VIA-IS indicated good criterion validity when it was correlated with some measures of psychological well-being. Positive psychology's VIA – classification describes character strengths as positive traits reflected in thoughts, feelings and behaviour (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). Yearley (1990: 13) defined character strengths as a disposition to act, desire and feel that involves the exercise of judgment and leads to a recognizable human excellence or instance of human flourishing. Seligman (2003) contends that increased use of strengths and virtues in the major realms of people's lives should enhance the experience of quality of life.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) empirically found that character strengths are associated with other indices of well-being. Park, Peterson and Seligman (2004) found that Hope, Zest, Gratitude, Love and Curiosity correlate with life satisfaction (SWLS). The authors concluded that VIA – strengths are on the whole associated with life-

satisfaction. After the New York September 11th attack in 2001, it was found that seven strengths showed an increase among Americans, namely Gratitude, Hope, Leadership, Spirituality, Love, and Citizenship / Teamwork (Peterson & Seligman, 2003)

It thus seems that character strengths, as conceptualized and measured by the VIA – IS, are related to other important facets of psychological well-being and quality of life. When the 24 strengths of VIA – IS were correlated, only the following were found to be significant: Integrity, Love, Gratitude, Spirituality, and Forgiveness and Mercy. Based on a confirmatory factor analysis conducted by Khumalo et al (2005), the VIA – IS of Peterson & Seligman (2004) is not completely valid in an African context, but however it is not without merit. Khumalo et al found that out of the six theoretically expected virtue clusters, only three were emic in an African collectivistic African – cultural value system.

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