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Assessing Observed Character Strengths in Groups using Streamed Video and Video iPods

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Positive psychology is a developing trend in modern psychological studies. Among the many facets of positive psychology are the values in action signature strengths, a collection of 24 positive attributes that are related to basic good character traits in all people (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). These strengths were recognized and researched as a way in which to cultivate good character through examining the positive side of individuals (Snyder & Lopez, 2005). The research examined the effectiveness of the values in action signature strengths survey as an evaluation tool to be used in group development activities.

The roots of positive psychology though present prior to World War II were cut by this world altering event. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) note that following the Second World War, psychology became a science dedicated to healing disease and not one interested in understanding what it is that makes life pleasant or worth living. Positive psychology however, is almost exactly the opposite. Positive psychology is about a paradigm shift that focuses less on fixing problems and more about creating the optimal conditions within society to amplify the strengths and virtues that people need to thrive (Carruthers, Hood, & Parr, 2005). Though this shift could be one of great importance, it seems that the field of psychology is hesitant to move towards it due to the limited use of positive psychology up to this point in time.

The Values in Action (VIA) Character Strengths Survey was originally researched and developed by Seligman and Peterson (2004). Seligman (2002) notes that the survey was meant to determine one's *signature strengths*, the few strengths of the 24 most present in any one individual. While no one has officially stated that the 24 character strengths are universal, research across all 50 U.S. states and over 40 countries seems to support such a theory (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). However, questions still exist about whether or not the 24 character strengths are not already rep-

resented in the big five personality trait model (Harvey & Pauwels, 2004). Nansook, Peterson and Seligman (2004) reciprocate with the notion that the 24 strengths of character are based on more than just personality, noting factors such as positive traits related to a fulfilling life.

The idea of positive psychology mixed with the study of the 24 character strengths leads to many new or at least less popular ideas on growth and development. For instance, Berman and Davis-Berman (2005) note that in outdoor education, a field that rather consistently uses risk in order to stimulate development, positive psychology would emphasize reducing the perception of risk to ease participants' sense of threat and instability. Seligman (2002) notes the importance of building on and playing to one's signature strengths rather than emphasizing complete development of the lesser prevalent strengths. How can we assess an individual's development within the character strengths over time and is such assessment even possible? While several assessment models and measures based on positive psychology currently exist, none directly focus on the VIA character strengths (Lopez & Snyder, 2003). The present study attempts to develop the VIA character strength survey into a behavioral, observational assessment. This study also investigates whether the VIA character strength survey coupled with an ongoing assessment of the presence of the 24 character strengths within individuals will prove to be a useful observational tool for groups.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

This study included 21 participants. They were college students in an undergraduate group dynamics class at Georgia College and State University. There were nine male and twelve female participants. Students worked within three groups of eight, seven and six participants, respectively for the duration of one semester.

DESIGN

Beginning with the spring 2006 semester, all 21 students met and held group meetings during class every Monday of the semester where they were

assigned group activities. These activities were facilitated by one of three graduate students, video taped and monitored by the course instructor. Each week the students watched streaming video of the group work in using password protected course tools software available through the internet. Students looked for evidence of character strengths present in their cohort's actions using definitions of character strengths from Peterson (2003) and Seligman and Peterson (2004). If they noticed evidence of character strengths present they recorded this on an instrument provided by the course instructor for use in this research. This instrument was available on the internet within the same course tools software where the streaming video was found. In addition, two other instruments were used by group members and graduate students to assess the same group experiences. Only one third of the group members assessed their group each week. Graduate students, serving as facilitators of the group experiences, surveyed three of the eleven weeks. Each graduate student assessed all three groups using only the assessment instrument that was the focus of their study. Graduate students assessed via streaming video and the video iPods. They coded their findings on the same internet database as the participants.

INSTRUMENT

Using Peterson's (2003) observational survey for parents as a model, a basic template for the survey of character strengths was designed by the course instructor for this research. The survey included 21 of the 24 character strengths used in this research along with a brief description of each of the individual strengths. The excluded character strengths were spirituality, bravery, and love. If one such strength was apparent in the streaming video or on the facilitator's video iPod, then it was rated on a Likert scale that included "Not Observed", "Rarely", "Occasionally", "Half the time", "Usually", and "Always". Completion time for the survey ranged from 30 minutes to two hours.

RESULTS

Data was examined in several ways. First this study examined the basic descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) in relation to the

group mean and to the graduate student facilitator's assessment. These results showed differences between facilitator assessment and participant assessment. Secondly an effect size was calculated to investigate the level of difference between the group member's assessment and the facilitator's assessment. The third form of evaluation was a factor analysis used to determine if the scale might be reduced into something more user friendly and efficient.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1 lists the means and standard deviations from the survey for the facilitator and each of the three groups across all eleven weeks of data. Open mindedness, Citizenship and Persistence were the highest rated character strengths.

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations

Character Strength		N	M	SD
Creativity	Facilitator	6	2.29	0.62
	Group 1	25	2.53	1.14
	Group 2	13	3.12	1.03
	Group 3	13	2.26	1.04
	Total	57	2.58	1.07
Curiosity	Facilitator	6	0.68	0.40
	Group 1	22	2.47	1.26
	Group 2	12	2.82	1.41
	Group 3	17	2.61	1.09
	Total	57	2.40	1.31
Open-mindedness	Facilitator	6	1.87	0.96
	Group 1	21	3.02	1.45
	Group 2	15	3.86	1.14
	Group 3	17	2.66	1.22
	Total	59	3.01	1.37

Table 1 (con't)

Character Strength		N	M	SD
Love of learning	Facilitator	3	1.22	1.13
	Group 1	15	2.30	1.20
	Group 2	6	1.98	0.69
	Group 3	13	2.83	1.20
	Total	37	2.35	1.18
Perspective	Facilitator	5	1.81	0.66
	Group 1	21	2.35	1.16
	Group 2	11	3.08	1.12
	Group 3	10	2.03	1.04
	Total	47	2.40	1.13
Persistence	Facilitator	6	1.23	1.06
	Group 1	19	2.75	1.14
	Group 2	12	3.94	1.30
	Group 3	12	2.74	1.32
	Total	49	2.85	1.42
Integrity	Facilitator	9	1.66	0.79
	Group 1	17	2.61	1.17
	Group 2	15	4.09	0.83
	Group 3	10	2.85	1.06
	Total	51	2.92	1.29
Vitality	Facilitator	3	0.65	0.27
	Group 1	21	2.28	0.95
	Group 2	6	3.00	1.18
	Group 3	14	3.00	1.18
	Total	44	2.49	1.18
Kindness	Facilitator	6	0.89	0.65
	Group 1	25	2.62	1.44
	Group 2	12	4.06	0.89
	Group 3	17	2.84	1.26
	Total	60	2.80	1.47

Table 1 (con't)

Character Strength		N	M	SD
Social intelligence	Facilitator	5	0.94	0.74
	Group 1	18	2.77	0.89
	Group 2	6	3.45	0.85
	Group 3	10	2.88	1.29
	Total	39	2.67	1.19
Citizenship	Facilitator	4	2.76	0.51
	Group 1	15	2.15	1.31
	Group 2	10	4.46	0.92
	Group 3	15	3.49	1.23
	Total	44	3.19	1.43
Fairness	Facilitator	4	1.45	1.13
	Group 1	19	2.34	1.53
	Group 2	14	4.41	1.06
	Group 3	13	2.79	1.23
	Total	50	2.97	1.60
Leadership	Facilitator	5	2.12	0.49
	Group 1	22	1.92	0.91
	Group 2	15	3.08	1.09
	Group 3	11	2.45	0.86
	Total	53	2.38	1.03
Forgiveness and mercy	Facilitator	3	1.06	0.86
	Group 1	15	2.49	1.25
	Group 2	2	1.71	1.01
	Group 3	8	1.92	1.55
	Total	28	2.12	1.32
Humility/Modesty	Facilitator	4	0.40	0.15
	Group 1	17	2.55	1.18
	Group 2	9	3.78	0.86
	Group 3	8	2.92	1.52
	Total	38	2.69	1.44

Table 1 (con't)

Character Strength		N	M	SD
Prudence	**Facilitator**	4	1.10	1.00
	Group 1	15	2.07	0.94
	Group 2	5	3.44	0.86
	Group 3	10	2.63	1.19
	Total	34	2.32	1.17
Self-regulation	**Facilitator**	7	1.57	0.80
	Group 1	17	2.60	1.06
	Group 2	8	3.41	1.39
	Group 3	9	3.33	1.12
	Total	41	2.74	1.25
Appreciation of beauty and excellence	**Facilitator**	2	0.29	0.06
	Group 1	11	2.27	0.95
	Group 2	1	0.29	.
	Group 3	7	3.17	0.94
	Total	21	2.29	1.26
Gratitude	**Facilitator**	3	0.76	0.84
	Group 1	17	2.44	1.12
	Group 2	9	4.02	1.22
	Group 3	5	2.20	1.73
	Total	34	2.67	1.50
Hope	**Facilitator**	4	1.57	0.86
	Group 1	13	2.83	0.96
	Group 2	7	3.69	1.21
	Group 3	10	2.15	1.08
	Total	34	2.66	1.20
Humor	**Facilitator**	9	2.43	0.51
	Group 1	21	2.97	1.30
	Group 2	14	3.29	1.00
	Group 3	13	2.54	1.18
	Total	57	2.87	1.13

EFFECT SIZE

To measure the difference between scores, an effect size was calculated between the facilitator and the facilitator's group of eight participants (Group 1). The mean of the group was subtracted from the facilitator's mean and divided by the group's standard deviation. This scale would have been applied to all three groups but the other two groups had non-existent standard deviations due to low survey response making it impossible to acquire an effect size. Small effect sizes (less than 0.5) were marked by double asterisks below as well as medium effect sizes (less than 1.0) marked by single asterisks.

Table 2

Effect Size

Character Strength	Week 3	Week 6	Week 9
Creativity	1.19	5.53	0.52*
Curiosity	1.93	2.45	3.67
Open-mindedness	2.42	0.23**	1.76
Love of learning	15.32	4.80	0.71*
Perspective	10.10	2.06	0.47**
Persistence	0.25**	2.69	2.44
Integrity	2.41	2.62	0.92*
Vitality	2.82	1.53	2.12
Kindness	1.54	1.01	3.66
Social intelligence	2.90	0.79*	1.24
Citizenship	1.07	0.06**	0.27**
Fairness	1.11	1.44	1.30
Leadership	0.82*	0.10**	0.13**
Forgiveness and mercy	1.53	2.00	2.72
Humility/Modesty	1.35	4.68	2.65
Prudence	1.25	N/A	0.74*
Self-regulation	1.62	2.13	1.16
Appreciation of beauty and excellence	2.36	0.85*	19.56
Gratitude	2.12	4.99	3.76
Hope	19.96	0.86*	1.63
Humor	0.11**	1.34	1.19

Across three weeks of facilitator and group assessment, 16 effect sizes less than 1.0 can be observed in Table 2. Eight scores are below the 0.5 mark and eight are between 0.5 and 1.0. There are 47 scores over 1.0. It should be noted that the first week scored (week 3) has the fewest number of low effect sizes and that the last week scored (week 9) has the most. The implications of this phenomenon will be investigated later.

COMPONENT MATRIX

A factor analysis was conducted on all available data to determine relationships between character strengths. The data suggests that inherit within the 21 tested character strengths are three components that could possibly predict 20 of them. The only character strength not included within the three components is the character strength "kindness". The connections between each individual component and the character strengths that it accounts for will be discussed further in this research. The results are as follows:

Table 3

Component Matrix: Principal Component Analysis

Character Strength	Component 1	2	3
Hope	.892	-.293	
Integrity	.887		.417
Vitality	.881	-.258	-.121
Leadership	.874	-.323	-.232
Fairness	.869	-.280	
Creativity	.806	.418	-.172
Citizenship	.778	-.580	
Humor	.775	-.157	.457
Humility/Modesty	.752	.535	.267
Forgiveness and mercy	.750		-.127
Curiosity	.705	.232	-.187
Open-mindedness	.685	.594	-.186
Persistence	.673		-.359

Table 3 (con't)

Character Strength	Component		
	1	2	3
Social intelligence	.663	-.560	
Appreciation of beauty and excellence		.857	-.222
Gratitude	.593	.723	
Love of learning	.128	.696	-.609
Perspective	.500	.618	.139
Prudence	.270	.204	.854
Self-regulation		.505	.760
Kindness	.549	-.297	-.213

DISCUSSION

The results of this research offered several key insights as to using character strengths as a group observation assessment tool. While the group assessment differed from the facilitator assessment, there were some key connections that could influence future studies. Also, there may be three key components inherit within the character strengths themselves that could explain a majority of the individual scores. Finally and on a tangent of this research, knowledge was acquired about the use of video iPods in the assessment of group behavior. The character strength survey does have potential to be a viable assessment tool in the world of group dynamics; however, more research will be necessary to refine its design and use.

The effect size is very telling in this research. For three weeks of the semester both the participants of the eight person group and that group's facilitator coded the group activity. It was noted earlier that the first time this happened there were only three character strengths in which the facilitator's coding and the groups were even close. On the second week of double coding there were six instances where the facilitator assessment and the group assessment were somewhat close. Finally on the last week of double coding there were eight instances in which the facilitator's assessment was close to that of the group.

Three factors could warrant this progression of similar scores across the weeks. The most obvious is that as the group spent more time together their

coding as well as that of their facilitator got more and more accurate. The second factor is directly based on technology. As groups were meeting and working on activities there were technical problems that limited the length of activity that was actually captured on video. Therefore, for the first week there was less than seven minutes of video, almost eight minutes for the second week and over fifteen minutes for the final week. This limitation could affect the accuracy of findings and the number of character strengths identified. In using the character strengths as an assessment tool, there are times where a coder is more likely to see strengths being exhibited. If, for instance four minutes of a seven minute video is a facilitator giving instructions, then very few character strengths will be recognized. While group discussion proved to be a potential area to observe character strengths, only the activity was assessed. In the activity, as the facilitator observes in vivo, participants appear to become more relaxed. This observation, coupled with the tasks to be preformed, proved to be an ideal way to observe character strengths in action.

The final factor to consider involves the facilitator directly. Video iPods were used only by the facilitators in conducting this research. When coding the first two weeks, the facilitator used a video iPod for group assessment. When coding the final week, the video was accessed via streaming video from a website provided by the course instructor. While the IPod video was identical in quality, the streaming video offered a larger viewing screen and therefore was somewhat easier to recognize which participants were speaking or performing certain activities. In this particular research the effect size data should not be impacted by screen size because the facilitator was familiar with all members of the group. However, in evaluating groups where the researcher was unfamiliar with the participants, the iPod's screen was too small to determine exactly who was speaking at times. This difficulty was enhanced by the marginal quality of video recorded due to technology limitations when converting analog video to a digital format.

METHOD AND DESIGN MODIFICATIONS

With all of the above points considered, there are some facets of this research related to effect size that suggest further examination. Considering that only one group coded enough data to create an across the board effect

size, data cannot be compared between groups that the facilitator was familiar with and those that they were not. In future research if multiple groups and facilitators are used one might be able to determine if character strengths analysis is easier if the coder has prior knowledge of the group. This would be a limiting factor because it would mean that the survey would not be as accurate if used by an outside coder or facilitator. Also while some effect sizes were very small (as low as 0.10) some were also very high (as high as 19.96). Understanding why such a drastic range of scores were present might offer new insight as to limitations or drawbacks of using the character strengths as an assessment tool.

Taking the general data into account, several additional factors should be noted about this research. There were some differences in the standard deviation of results among the groups, in the end it seems that most of the individual character strengths were related in some way. Interviews with members of the researcher's group noted that even amongst their group, participants were unsure as to how to code some of the character strengths. Such a lack of knowledge interfered with this study's inter-rater reliability. However, when examining their group's individual data across 11 weeks, the group decided the data might not be accurate to one individual week, but across all of the weeks it was proportionately accurate to their actions.

Other issues emerged in group discussions. It was noted that not all respondents put fourth their best effort in group evaluation and that some scores might be suspect. Two of the three groups in this study had no standard deviations almost across the board because only one participant was coding each week. Choosing an undergraduate class as a convenience sample might be a reason for this problem, but there could be other reasons as well. One such issue might include the instrument used to measure character strengths in this research.

The original instrument for this research included 24 potential character strengths, a short description and five point Likert scale for rating. Along the course of the research it was realized that some character strengths were not obvious in the type of situations participants were experiencing and the total number was dropped to 21. Even after dropping some character strengths the instrument was very time consuming and difficult to use. Rating one group might require watching a video up to eight times so that the coder could focus on each participant individually and even then they were looking for 21 sepa-

rate character strengths. The time factor could have led to coders not spending as much time evaluating the group as necessary or simply rushing through the coding process. A suggestion would be to shorten the character strength survey. This might not necessarily require dropping more character strengths but perhaps similar ones could be grouped together.

INSTRUMENT MODIFICATIONS

With this in mind a component matrix was used to see if collapsing character strengths was even possible (Table 3). This analysis suggests that three components seem to be able to account for all but one of the studied character strengths. Further research might be able to make the survey more user-friendly and less time consuming. In examining the component matrix, it is possible to collapse certain character strengths into larger groups within their component. It seems possible to create an instrument containing as few as six categories. While a much more detailed description of each category and its contents would be required, this could still make the instrument more user-friendly and a little less time-consuming for coders. Future research might include half of the group coding on the original instrument and the other half of the group coding on a version of the proposed collapsed instrument. This would allow for an easy comparison of the two to be made. Further research might be able to identify the three main components inherit within the 21 character strengths used in this research and it also might be able to include the three that were removed from the instrument as well.

Table 4
Proposed Collapsed Instrument

New Category	Character Strengths Encompassed
Task Orientation	Prudence
	Self Regulation
Optimism	Hope
	Vitality
	Humor
	Open-mindedness
	Persistence

Social Interaction	Integrity
	Fairness
	Citizenship
	Humility/Modesty
	Forgiveness and Mercy
	Social Intelligence
	Leadership
Creative Interest	Creativity
	Curiosity
Task Prerogative	Appreciation of Beauty
	Love of Learning
	Gratitude
	Perspective
Kindness	Kindness

In examining these proposed assessment categories, it can be seen that strengths were combined based on their relation to a single component as well as through the researcher's idea of which strengths appeared similar in observation. Prudence and self-regulation were collapsed because they are directly related to ones ability to stay on task and work more effectively. Optimism is a broad category that encompasses strengths like hope, humor and even persistence that could lead to an optimistic outlook. Social interaction is by far the largest of the new groups and it is directly about participant attributes in relation to the rest of the group. While it is hard to judge the level of integrity inherit within an individual person, when viewed against the group standard it becomes more obvious. This is true for the strengths within this category. Another example would be leadership, a trait impossible to see within an individual unless they are in a social setting where they can display those attributes. Social interaction might include kindness because it is most easily recognized within a social context. However, since kindness fell under a different component it was excluded from social interation. Curiosity and creativity were combined because of their similar characteristics. The final category, task prerogative, refers to how individuals view and act in context of the situation or activity. This group is the hardest to explain and also seems to be the most difficult to code. This category's components have some

of the largest effect sizes of all character strengths speaking to the difficulty of this category.

LIMITATIONS

Beyond the instrument, there are several other general limitations to this research that should be acknowledged. The first threat to validity has to do with selection bias. Using a convenience sample from a single class led to having a non-randomized group. There are also limitations with regard to the instrumentation used in this research. Interviews with one of the participant groups lead to the discussion about the many different ways to interpret individual character strengths. This leads to inter-rater reliability issues within the whole data set. Though a brief description of all character strengths was available to coders, as stated earlier, a training session could have assisted in helping all coders better understand the survey.

The final piece to this research has been a pleasant side-effect of modern technology. The use of video iPods seems to have taken standard video based assessment to a new level. The video iPod allows a coder to have group information instantly at their finger tips and its portability and ease of use could greatly increase the amount of video coders are willing to review. IPods have been finding their way into the academic world for several years now but are rarely used for anything on the assessment level. This aspect of the research was very valuable and most likely worthy of its own specific future research.

Using the video iPods weekly to offer group feedback allowed the facilitators to become very familiar with their use and strengths as assessment tools. One major benefit to using the iPod is obviously its portability. Being able to review footage while discussing the group with the instructor or while comparing notes with colleagues was much more than a simple convenience, it increased the quality of those conversations and assessments. Another benefit of the iPods included being able to create voice-blogs (podcasts) to offer feedback to groups. Each week all group members completed a written blog that discussed what was going on in the group, their assessment of the group, and their plan for the group. These were posted on a password protected course tools website available only to members of that group. After reading these blogs, facilitators took the group's comments and included them in a voice blog recorded directly to an iPod and then posted to a course tool site.

In using iPods, the facilitator was available to watch footage of the group, make notes, and then record a voice blog about the group that could easily be downloaded and listened to by the students. The facilitator had the benefit of being able to use tone of voice, inflection and emotion in their private feedback. These elements of voice hopefully increased the student's interest and led to them being much more likely to listen to the voice blog and take the comments about their group into consideration.

There are also some noted drawbacks to the use of the iPod as an assessment tool. The level of technology which was used to record the video for the video iPod was not at a level of quality for what the device could take. This meant that the video quality was greatly diminished and reviewing group work on the iPod proved difficult, especially when the facilitator was not familiar with the group members they were watching. However it should be noted that this was the same quality of video that was used on the streaming video website. It was easier to see footage on a computer screen when compared to the iPod screen. The iPod also requires an amazing supporting cast of equipment to facilitate video uploading. Cameras that can transfer images to computers that can in turn upload images to the iPod are all required, and the process can be quite time consuming. These technical problems will hopefully be resolved as the technology behind the iPod grows. Further research of the use of video iPods in such studies is strongly suggested

In conclusion, the study of character strengths and the use of video iPods could prove to be a valuable tool for assessment of group dynamics in the future. Comparing the effect size of a facilitator and group assessment to estimate the scale's level of accuracy is beneficial as long as the coders all go into the research with the same understanding of what the individual character strengths look like. Developing an instrument that encompasses and collapses the character strengths and allows coders to record them in an easy, less time consuming way would be a great advantage to the research. Looking for the big picture, determining how individual character strengths affect group dynamics, and being able to measure character strengths on a group level would also be of great value. Had all three groups completely coded this research, it could have offered new insights as to whether or not the character strengths assessment works for groups that the facilitator is not familiar with. Future research with multiple related groups is suggested.

Finally as discussed above, future research regarding the use of video

iPods in group assessment is suggested. The video iPods and regular iPods used in this research for group assessment and voice-blogging proved to be valuable tools to the facilitators. Participants were responsive to the voice blogs and appeared as a result more connected to the research. Facilitators, on the other hand, were able to review footage anywhere they wanted and able to pick up on the nuances of the group that could have been missed as they focused on offering directions and processing the activity. Though the participants were not directly using the iPods, the devices still had an impact on their experiences within the groups. As new technology develops, the iPod becomes a viable assessment tool; it is simply held back by the speed at which video transfer technology is catching up to its capabilities. The iPod's future as an assessment tool could be just as promising as potential research into action signature strengths.

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