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The Role Of Character, Confidence, And Connection On Contribution And Subjective Well-Being

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Abstract

The main question of this research is to establish if adolescents differ according to different constructs of Positive Youth Development (PYD), i.e. Character, Connection, and Confidence; and if there are different groups according to these aspects, so do those groups differ in various aspects of well-being, i.e. subjective well-being and contribution. 1723 students (47.1 % boys), of age 14-19 years (M=17.12, SD=0.93) from high schools in one administrative region participated. This study revealed that Lithuanian adolescents differ with regard to their Character, Connection, and Confidence – six groups with distinct patterns of PYD can be identified. These groups differ from each other in both satisfaction with life and contribution. Adolescents who perceive all PYD aspects positively report highest levels of satisfaction with life and contribution.

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1. Introduction

As developmental systems theories propose, the positive youth development (PYD) perspective emphasizes that every young person has strengths and a potential for successful, healthy development (Lerner, 2002). Based on both the experiences of practitioners and on reviews of the adolescent development literature (Jelicic et al., 2007; Lerner, 2006; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003), "Five Cs" – Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring – were hypothesized as a way of conceptualizing PYD. A key idea associated with the PYD perspective is that, given mutually beneficial individual ↔ context relations, PYD should have benefits for both the individual and his or her

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context. There are theoretical and empirical propositions maintaining that positive youth development predicts higher youth contributions (Jelicic et al., 2007). As well, there are theoretical and empirical propositions maintaining that positive youth development influences the well-being and health outcomes of an individual (Caprara & Steca 2005; Paxton et al. 2006; Sun & Shek, 2010; Sun & Shek, 2012; and others). Most of those studies focus on individual indicators of well-being, such as subjective well-being conceptualized as satisfaction with life - the overall judgment that one's life is a good one (a cognitive appraisal) (Diener et al, 1995). Studies of children and adolescents find that intrapersonal and interpersonal environmental variables account for a greater amount of variance in youth life satisfaction (Huebner, 1991).

Within the field of positive youth development different constructs related to satisfaction with life and contribution of adolescents were identified, but their role on satisfaction with life and contribution was studied mostly separately. Also, the role of PYD constructs on satisfaction with life and contribution of adolescents was studied without considering individual differences in perceived aspects of PYD constructs. This study aims at verifying how the positive youth development constructs (Character, Connection, and Confidence) are related to satisfaction with life and contribution of adolescents using a person-oriented approach. According to a holistic paradigm (Magnusson & Cairns, 1996), human person is seen as an organized whole which cannot be described by single aspects. Bergman et al. (2003) indicate that the system of interrelated variables is of primary interest while studying different aspects of a person's life.

Therefore, three different constructs of PYD (Character, Connection, and Confidence) were examined together in this study. *The main purpose* of this study is to explore if adolescents differ according Character, Connection, and Confidence, and if there are different groups according to these aspects, do those groups differ in satisfaction with life and contribution. *Two research questions* were addressed in the present study: (1) what combinations of perceived aspects of Character, Connection, and Confidence are likely to appear among study participants? (2) are there any differences in terms of satisfaction with life and contribution among adolescents with differing perceived PYD profiles?

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The data used is from an ongoing longitudinal research project "Mechanisms of promoting positive youth development in the context of socio-economical transformations (POSIDEV)" in Lithuania. Student participants were drawn from five high schools in one administrative region in Lithuania. There were 1787 students (9-12 grades) in the first assessment (participation rate – 98.9%). For this particular study, only the participants who filled all relevant measures were included in the analyses. Thus the sample size for this study was N=1723 (47.1% boys and 52.9% girls). The age of participants range from 14-19 (M=17.12, SD=0.93). Families that reside in the neighborhoods' in which these schools are located have a broad range of income levels and are relatively homogeneous in terms of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds. All respondents were born in Lithuania and spoke Lithuanian at home.

2.2. Procedure

Each school was visited before the assessment took place in order to inform school administration and prospective participants about the date and time of the assessment. During the introductory meeting adolescents were informed that participation is voluntary. Parents were informed about the study by the letter. Parents were asked to contact the school or investigators if they did not want their children to participate. Electronically questionnaires were completed via computers in class during regular class hours. During the assessment teachers were not present in the classroom. Students were not paid for participation, but received a small gift.

2.3. Measures

PYD constructs. To measure positive youth development we used three scales from *Measure of PYD* (*Institute for*

Applied Research in Youth Development, http://ase.tufts.edu/iaryd/researchPositive4HpydResources.htm): (1) *Character scale* (Cronbach's α was 0.69), (2) *Connection scale* (Cronbach's α was 0.69), and (3) *Confidence scale* (Cronbach's α was 0,85). The Lithuanian version was developed by project authors.

Well-being. To measure subjective well-being we used *Satisfaction with life scale (Diener et al., 1995).* All the five items were rated on a seven points Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) where the higher points indicated higher subjective well-being. Cronbach's α was .82. To measure contribution we used a *Contribution scale* (Cronbach's α =.82) from *The Positive Youth Development Inventory Full Version*, Oregon State University (Arnold, M.E., Nott, B. D., & Meinhold, J. L., 2012) .

2.4. Data analyses

PYD according to cluster analysis. The cluster analysis was accomplished using a modified LICUR procedure from the statistical package SLEIPNER (Bergman et al., 2003). *Multivariate analysis of variance*. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed in order to establish differences in satisfaction with life and contribution among PYD clusters.

3. Results

3.1. Cluster Analysis of PYD

The LICUR procedure revealed that two students must be removed as outliers. The main criteria in finding an appropriate number of clusters to extract indicated that a six-cluster solution was acceptable. For that solution, the cluster analysis explained 62.3 % of the total error sum of squares, which is enough to ensure fairly homogeneous clusters. The inspection of the cluster profiles (see Figure 1) provided a meaningful and distinct classification for the six-cluster solution, because all patterns differed from each other in shape and magnitude.
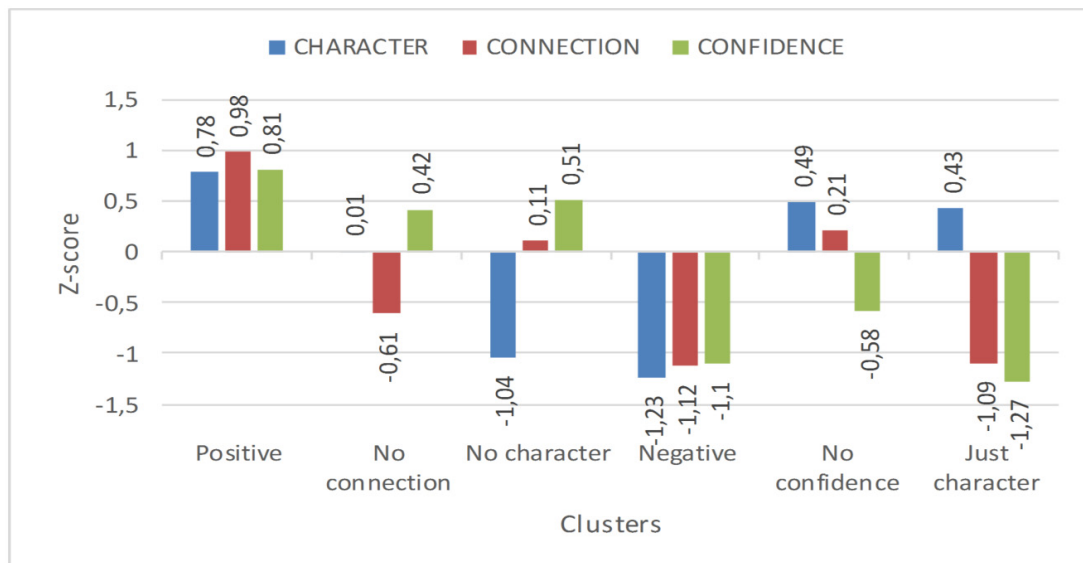

Figure 1. The cluster means of the six-cluster solution

The clusters below are described by number of participants and homogeneity coefficient: Cluster 1: *Positive* cluster (n=471, hc=0.67). The cluster centroids indicate relatively high character, connection, confidence to other clusters; Cluster 2: *No connection* cluster (n=214, hc=0.5). The cluster centroids indicate average character, low connection, and average confidence relatively to other clusters; Cluster 3: *No character* cluster (n=339, hc=.93). The

cluster centroids indicate low character, average connection, and high confidence relatively to other clusters; Cluster 4: *Negative* cluster (n=198, hc=0.98). The cluster centroids indicate low character, connection, and confidence relatively to other clusters; Cluster 5: *No confidence* cluster (n=310, hc=0.50). The cluster centroids indicate average character, connection, and low confidence relatively to other clusters; Cluster 6: Just character cluster (n=189, hc=1.11). The cluster centroids indicate average character and low connection and confidence relatively to other clusters.

3.2. Comparison of well-being among six PYD clusters

Differences among six clusters in well-being were examined with a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). Two dependent variables were used: subjective well-being and contribution. The independent variables were cluster assignment and gender. There was a statistically significant difference among the six clusters $(F(10,3418)=109,412, p<.001$; Pillai's Trace=.485; partial eta squared =.24) and between boys and girls $(F(2,1708)=7,263, p<.005$; Pillai's Trace=.008; partial eta squared=.01) on the combined dependent variables. The interaction between cluster assignment and gender was non-significant. When the results for the dependent variables were considered separately there were several differences to reach statistical significance using a Games-Howell post hoc test with adjusted alpha level of .025 (In this study we had two dependent variables to investigate, therefore we divided .05 by 2, giving a new alpha level of .025).

Differences of subjective well-being. The MANOVA results for the dependent variable "Satisfaction with life" revealed significant multivariate effect due to cluster assignment $(F(5,1709)=178,808, p<.001$; partial eta squared=.34), but non-significant effect due to gender $(F(1,1709)=0,621, p>.05$; partial eta squared=.000). The interaction between cluster assignment and gender was non-significant $(F(5,1709)=0,958, p>.05$; partial eta squared=.003) either.

Post hoc comparisons indicated (see Figure 2) that adolescents from "Positive" cluster have higher life satisfaction (M=5.55, SD=0.79) than adolescents from "No connection" (M=4.71, SD=1.05), "No character" (M=4.92, SD=0.99), "Negative" (M=3.42, SD=1.04), "No confidence" (M=4.51, SD=0.97), and "Just Character" clusters (M=3.65, SD=1.16), (p<.001). Adolescents from "No connection", "No character", and "No confidence" clusters have higher life satisfaction than adolescents from "Negative" and "Just Character" clusters (p<.001). Adolescents from "No character" cluster have higher life satisfaction than adolescents from "No confidence" cluster.
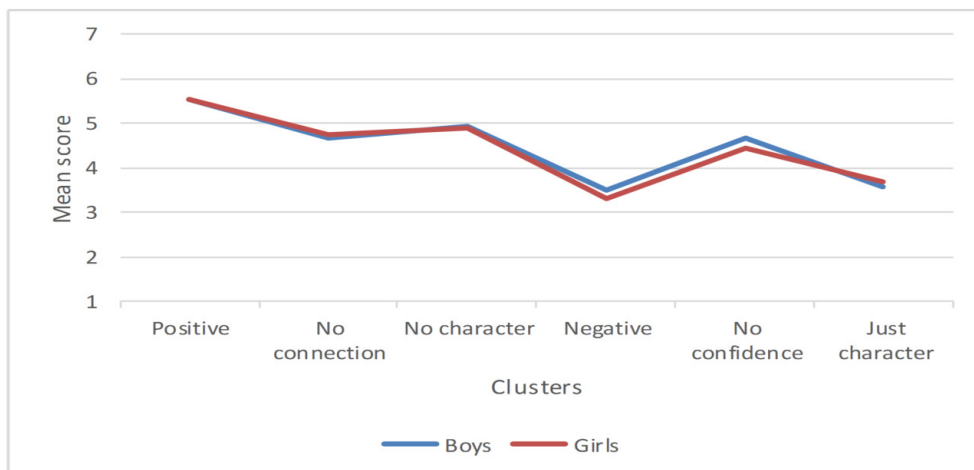

Figure 2. Differences of Satisfaction with Life among clusters

Differences of contribution. The MANOVA results for the dependent variable "Contribution" revealed significant multivariate effect due to cluster assignment $(F(5,1709)= 97,199, p<.001$; partial eta squared=.22) and to gender $(F(1,1709)=12,711, p<.001$; partial eta squared=.007). The interaction between cluster assignment and gender was

non-significant ($F(5,1709)=0,208$, $p>.05$; partial eta squared$=.001$).

Post hoc comparisons indicated (see Figure 3) that adolescents from "Positive" cluster are more contributing (M=3.03, SD=0.41) than adolescents from "No connection" (M=2.64, SD=0.45), "No character" (M=2.5, SD=0.43), "Negative" (M=2.29, SD=0.52), "No confidence" (M=2.85, SD=0.43), and "Just Character" clusters (M=2.74, SD=0.42), (p<.001). Adolescents from "No confidence" cluster are more contributing than adolescents from "No connection", "No character", and "Negative" clusters. Adolescents from "No connection" and "Just Character" clusters are more contributing than adolescents from "No character" and "Negative" clusters, and "No character" than "Negative" cluster. An inspection of the mean scores indicated that girls are more contributing (M=2.72, SD=0.02) than boys (M=2.63, SD=0.02).
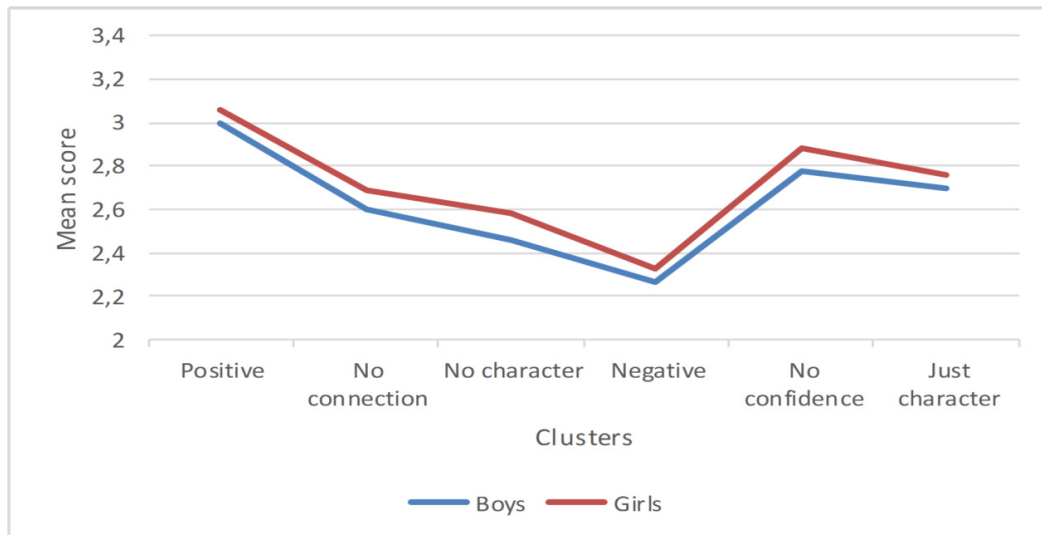

Figure 3. Differences of Contribution among clusters

4. Discussion and conclusions

This study revealed that Lithuanian adolescents differ with regard to their Character, Connection, and Confidence– six groups with distinct patterns of PYD can be identified. These groups differ from each other in both satisfaction with life and contribution. Adolescents who perceive all PYD aspects positively report highest levels of satisfaction with life and contribution. At the other extreme – the configuration of low Character, low Connection, and lack of confidence appears to be a marker of low satisfaction with life and contribution. We conclude that the person-oriented approach must be taken into account when effects of PYD constructs as Character, Connection, and Confidence on satisfaction with life and contribution are discussed and programs for positive development are prepared and implemented. Experience of a positive youth development constructs is important not only for a subjective appraisal of an individual's quality of life, but for an acceptability of nature, structure and relationships in a society as well.

Acknowledgements

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