

Spectrum and Parameter: Constructing a Taxonomy of Character

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Author Note

This research was begun to fulfill course requirements for awarding the PhD degree and as part of a dissertation study.

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Abstract

With no validated taxonomy defining its core traits, character training has no direct means of assessment. Lists of traits from Positive Psychology, Positive Youth Development, and Character Education are compiled in a frequency grid to compare language and conceptual similarities. The derived construct, called the Character Taxonomy, can be used collaboratively by the three fields to produce a unified list of character strengths and a valid character measure.

Keywords: Positive Psychology, Positive Youth Development, Character Education, character traits, character strengths

Introduction

The quest for happiness and well-being is universal. Character has long been considered the primary cause of *eudiamonia* (right action that produces well-being) and studying character traits was a common pursuit of the ancients (Aristotle, 1953; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Character seemed to fall out of favor with the social sciences in the last 150 years (Seligman, 2011) but interest has recently been renewed. Character educators, moral philosophers, along with developmental, social, and positive psychologists agree that character development is a primary means to well-being (Baumeister, 2012; Berkowitz, Sherblom, Bier, & Battistich, 2006; Lippman, Moore, & McIntosh, 2011; Narvaez & Nucci, 2008; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

The modern character education (CE) movement began in the early 1990's (Lickona, 2000) and was funded by both Clinton and G.W. Bush administrations to pursue character training (USDE, 2007). Numerous organizations were started to promote CE (CEP, 2011; Characterplus, 2013; Josephson Institute, 2009). Higher education got involved, research began, and CE became a field of study (Josephson, 2011; Lickona, 2004; Williams, 2000).

Those in foundational educational disciplines (e.g. math, communication arts) have clearly defined what constitutes their fields through a unified construct or taxonomy (Gierl, 1997; Mellon, 1975). Educators in these fields have valid measures by which they can assess student learning (Carpenter, 1981; Mellon, 1975). According to many scholars, character training is currently obscured by the lack of a taxonomy or clearly-delineated core traits that define its parameters (Berkowitz & Bier, 2006; Hanson, Dietsch, & Zheng, 2012; Lippman, Moore, & McIntosh, 2011; Person, Moiduddin, Hague-Angus & Malone, 2009; SCDRC, 2010).

As a result, CE program evaluation has struggled and CE assessment has had no valid scale capable of measuring character growth (Lippman, Moore, & McIntosh, 2011; Liston, 2014; Person, Moiduddin, Hague-Angus & Malone, 2009; SCDRC, 2010). Until recently (Liston, 2014), the only brief, broad, and valid measure of character strength for adolescents was the 96-item *VIA Youth Survey* (VIA-YS; Park & Peterson, 2006, 2007; Peterson & Park, 2009). It is not designed or available for educators to measure individual student character and has structural issues. Dr. Ryan Niemiec of Values In Action states that the *VIA Youth Survey* is “not optimal for measuring character growth” due to insensitivity to variations in character trait use, a “ceiling effect” when one scores high in a trait initially, and the VIA’s ordinal design (rank-ordering of strengths rather than measuring the level of each strength for later comparison to measure growth; personal correspondence, February 27, 2013; Liston, 2014).

The inability to measure student character may be partially responsible for the 2009 federal defunding of CE (Hague-Angus & Malone, 2009; SCDRC, 2010; USDE, 2013). In their massive study of CE programs, Hague-Angus and Malone (2009) cite, “The multi-faceted nature of character development and many possible ways of conceptualizing it...” as a primary reason (along with the diverse programs and the newness of research efforts) that CE program evaluation has produced such mediocre results (p. xvi). Since government and private funding are granted largely due to a measurable “return on investment” (Carpenter, 1981), it can be hypothesized that the field is losing resources due to its inability to evidence its outcomes.

In summary, four CE deficits are noticeable: 1) Without a character taxonomy, educators and curriculum developers create non-validated lists of character traits (Beland, 2003; CharacterPlus, 2013; Josephson Institute, 2009); 2) Researchers struggle to find valid means to evaluate character programs (Hanson, Dietsch, & Zheng, 2012; Lippman, Moore, & McIntosh,

2011; Person, Moiduddin, Hague-Angus & Malone, 2009; SCDRC, 2010); 3) Individual assessment of student character is difficult and cannot be accomplished through a validated measure (Lippman, Moore, & McIntosh, 2011; Person, Moiduddin, Hague-Angus & Malone, 2009; SCDRC, 2010); and 4) funding for CE has suffered and thus hindered the field's development and ability to help students.

Method

To take a step to remedy these CE deficits, this article creates a taxonomy from the best available conceptualizations of character. The method is to select the best available trait lists and build a grid to find and exhibit conceptual similarities. The grid is then analyzed to determine what traits should be named, retained, converged, or removed to create a taxonomy of character.

Trait lists. Though numerous lists of character traits exist, CE has no primary source (Bulach, 1996; Johns, 2001; Lickona, personal correspondence, April 22, 2013). The best lists are the product of extensive individual research and study (Bulach, 1996; Davidson & Lickona, 2005; Huitt, 2011; Rosebush, 2012) or collaboration of character experts (CASEL, 2012; Josephson, 2011). Others outside the CE field combine collaboration of experts with literature review (Park & Peterson, 2006; Search Institute, 1997; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In order to find the best sources for a character education taxonomy, we used the following criteria: (a) the best constructs based on literature review; (b) the lists most widely distributed in the field of Character Education; (c) the most exhaustive constructs; and/or (d) the lists upon which the most comprehensive measures of character strength are based (Haynes, Richard, & Kubany, 1995; Leffert et al., 1998; Trochim, 2006).

Table 1 shows the lists that qualified:

Table 1: Criteria for Inclusion and Qualifiers

Criterion:	Qualifying Lists:
The best lists based on literature review	Positive Psychology's 24 Search Institutes 20 IDAs
The lists most widely distributed in CE	Character Counts' Six Pillars Lickona & Davidson's trait lists
The most exhaustive lists	Lickona & Davidson's trait lists Positive Psychology's 24
The lists upon which the most comprehensive measures of character strength are based.	Positive Psychology's 24 Bulach's 16 Character Traits

The following experts and organizations provide the five lists used in the grid.

Positive Psychology. Positive Psychology (PP) emerged in 1997 due largely to Martin Seligman's efforts (Peterson, 2006). Seligman and Christopher Peterson edited the definitive handbook of PP and classified its salient features in *Character Strengths and Virtues* (CSV; 2004). As a result, PP has the most extensive theory of character with an explicit, detailed conceptualization and system of classification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). PP is "the science of good character" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 9) and Table 2 provides its list of strengths.

Table 2: Positive Psychology's Construct

Virtues	Character Strengths	
Wisdom	Creativity	Perspective/Wisdom
	Curiosity	Love of Learning

	Open-mindedness/Judgment
Courage	Authenticity/Integrity Bravery Persistence Zest/Vitality
Humanity	Kindness Love Social/Emotional Intelligence
Justice	Fairness Prudence Self-Control Leadership Citizenship/Teamwork/Loyalty
Temperance	Forgiveness/Mercy Modesty/Humility
Transcendence	Wonder and Excellence Humor Gratitude Hope/Optimism Spirituality/Faith

Positive Youth Development’s 20 Internal Assets. Search Institute and cohorts combined sociological, educational, and psychological concepts to create Positive Youth Development (PYD), a movement to help youth acquire the knowledge and skills needed for healthy and productive lives (Lerner et al., 2005). Their broad construct includes twenty external and twenty internal assets. Most of the internal assets could be viewed as behaviors that result from internalized values and thus termed character traits (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Lerner et al., 2005; Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2001; Scales & Leffert, 2004). Like Bulach's list, the Internal Assets have no identified categories. Table 3 lists these:

Table 3: PYD 20 Internal Assets

Internal Asset:	Definition:
1. Achievement Motivation	Motivated to do well in school
2. School Engagement	Actively engaged in learning
3. Homework ^a	Reports doing at least 1 hour of homework every school day
4. Bonding to school ^b	Cares about her or his school
5. Reading for Pleasure	Reads for pleasure three or more hours per week
6. Caring	Places high value on helping other people
7. Equality and social justice	Places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty
8. Integrity ^a	Acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs
9. Honesty	“Tells the truth even when it is not easy”
10. Responsibility	Accepts and takes personal responsibility
11. Restraint	Believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs
12. Planning / decision making	Knows how to plan ahead and make choices
13. Interpersonal Competence	Has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills
14. Cultural Competence	Has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds
15. Resistance skills	Resists negative peer pressure and dangerous situations
16. Peaceful conflict resolution	Seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently
17. Personal power	Feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me”
18. Self-esteem	Reports having a high self-esteem

19. Sense of purpose	Reports that “my life has a purpose”
20. Positive view of personal future	Is optimistic about her/his personal future

^a This item is considered a partial match and contributes half a point to the grid trait.

^b This item does not meet this article’s criteria as a character trait.

Character Counts. Michael Josephson, former law school professor and entrepreneur, started the Josephson Institute “to formulate a nonpartisan, non-sectarian framework for character development” (Josephson, 2009, n.p.). In 1992, they sponsored a conference of select scholars who produced the Aspen Declaration and “a list of shared ethical values...” (Josephson, 2009, n.p.). The thirty invited scholars and advocates crafted by consensus what they believed to be the six primary character traits “...that transcend cultural, religious, and socioeconomic differences” (Josephson, 2011, n.p.). Josephson launched Character Counts (CC) to promote what he eventually called “the Six Pillars of Character.”

These six serve as meta-traits (broad traits serving as categories that encompass a group of more specific traits) with 24 related traits. These are detailed in CC resources (Josephson, 2011) and Table 4 as:

Table 4. Character Counts “Six Pillars” and Related Traits

Six Pillars	Traits Related to Each Pillar				
Trustworthiness	Honesty	Reliability	Courage	Integrity	Loyalty
Respect	Tolerance	Courtesy	Consideration	Patience	

Responsibility	Diligence	Perseverance	Self-control	Prudence	
Caring	Kindness	Compassion	Gratitude	Generosity	Forgiveness
Fairness	Cooperation		Open-mindedness		
Citizenship	Cooperation	Initiative	Obedience	Serving	Teamwork

(The literature does not explain why cooperation is used in both Fairness and Citizenship).

Lickona and Davidson's Character = Values In Action. Thomas Lickona is an iconic figure in Character Education due to his conceptualization and practical application of character to elementary and secondary education (character.org; Davidson & Lickona, 2009; Lickona, 2000, 2004; Lickona & Davidson, 2005). In his writings, Lickona creates three lists that represent a conceptual progression. He states that his partnership with Matthew Davidson contributed significantly to this construct (Davidson & Lickona, 2005; Lickona, personal correspondence, April 22, 2013).

First, from his book *Character Matters* (Lickona, 2004) are Ten Essential Virtues:

1. Wisdom
2. Justice
3. Fortitude
4. Self-Control
5. Love
6. Positive Attitude
7. Hard Work
8. Integrity

9. Gratitude

10. Humility

Lickona and Davidson developed a list of Eight Strengths of Character that “operationalize” character traits (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). In reviewing their writings, it appears that these eight are similar to PP's six virtues, Character Counts Six Pillars, and to numerous SI's Internal Assets:

1. Lifelong learner and critical thinker
2. Diligent and capable performer
3. Socially and emotionally skilled person
4. Ethical thinker
5. Respectful and responsible moral agent
6. Self-disciplined person who pursues a healthy lifestyle
7. Contributing community member and democratic citizen
8. Spiritual person engaged in crafting a life of noble purpose

His third trait list is the longest published – over 65 – called *Character = Values In Action* (Davidson & Lickona, 2009). It provides a comprehensive, nuanced group. Rather than reproduce all 65, the Grid of Character Trait Lists (Table 4) shows which traits from Lickona's three lists correlate with the other experts.

Bulach's 16 Character Traits. Dr. Clete Bulach was a school superintendent and an associate professor of education who developed one of the few attempts to measure character comprehensively. It is the only measure on the Character Education Partnership website under their “Individual Assessment” list that specifically says it is a measure of character

(<http://www.character.org/more-resources/assessment-tools/individual/>).

To develop this instrument, Dr. Bulach asked 130 teachers what they would see or hear if one of the 16 character traits were present. He then used the behaviors they identified to form the survey's items. Called simply *Character Traits*, the scale “consists of 96 behaviors used to measure students’ perceptions of their peers’ behavior on 16 character dimensions” (The measure has not been factor analyzed or validated but is reliable; Bulach, 1996).

1. Respect for self/others/ and property
2. Honesty
3. Responsibility/Dependability/Accountability
4. Kindness
5. Cooperation
6. Self-Control/Discipline
7. Forgiveness
8. Integrity/Fairness
9. Perseverance
10. Diligence
11. Humility
12. Compassion/Empathy
13. Patriotism/Citizenship
14. Tolerance/Diversity

15. Courtesy/Politeness

16. Sportsmanship

Bulach's list had no categories like those identified by PP and Character Counts.

Grid of Character Trait Lists. The preceding lists of traits come from three separate but highly-correlated fields: PYD, CE and PP. Despite their commonality, they appear to have scarcely connected and rarely collaborated (Liston, 2014). It seems prudent to pool their research through a frequency grid to create a unified taxonomy.

Design. Positive Psychology's 24 strengths were used as the standard of comparison for the grid (Table 4) because they have the strongest criteria and rationales for list inclusion (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Each strength was compared with the other four expert's lists to determine homogeneity. Four traits not identified by PP were added: Respect and Responsibility were on all four of the other lists, Peace on three lists, and Confidence on two lists. The resulting 29 character traits are listed in the first column.

Lastly, the traits were scored, compiled in order of score, and color-coded for convenience. Trait values listed in the last column were assigned according to the following criteria:

- If a trait was one of Character Counts' Six Pillars, it received a point. If a trait was specifically mentioned in CC's explanation of the Six Pillars, it was given half a point.
- If a trait was specifically mentioned in Lickona's Ten Essential Virtues or Eight Strengths of Character, it was given a point. If it was one of the 65 "Character = VIA," it received half a point. If similar or closely-related traits were in the 65, each received one-fourth of a point.

- If a Developmental Asset applied to only one trait, it counted as a point. If it applied to two traits, each trait was given half a point.

Table 4: Grid of Character Trait Lists

Authorities =	Positive Psychology	Character Counts ^a	Lickona & Davidson ^b	Bulach's 16	Pos. Yth Dev.'s 20 Internal Assets ^c	Total:
Popular Traits:						
Love/Care	x	x	x	x	x	5
Responsibility	Prudence	x	x	x	x	5
Fairness	x	x	Justice	x	Equality/justice*	4.5
Honesty	x	#	Integrity	x	x	4.5
Self-control	x	#	x	x	Restraint	4.5
Kindness	x	x Knd/Gnrsty	x Knd/Mercy	x	Intrprsnl emptnc *	4.5
Citizenship	#	x	x	x	School Bond*	4
Open-minded	x	#	Ethical thinker	Toler/divers	Equality/justice*	4
Perseverance	Persistence	#	Hard work	x	Homework*	4
Teamwork	#	#	x	Sportsmshp	Cultural comptnce*	3.5
Humility	x	#Srvng/Obdc	x	x		3.5
Diligence		#	x	x	Achievement	3.5
SE Awarens.	Social intell	Trustworthy	Soc-emo skill		Intrprsnl emptnc *	3.5
Courage	Bravery	#	Fortitude		Resistance skills	3.5
Respect		x	x	x	Cultural comptnce*	3.5
Spirituality	x		Spirit'l, Purps.		Purpose	3
Forgiveness	x	#	^^	x		3
Learning	Love lrn'g		Life learner		x (Engage., Read)	3
Optimism	x		Pos. Attitude		Positive Future	3
Wisdom	x		x		Plan'g/ decsnmkg	3
Gratitude	x	#	x			2.5
Leadership	x	#Initiative	x			2.5
Peace		#Patience	^^		Pers Pwr/Confl Rs	2
Confidence			^^		Self-esteem	1.5
Creativity	x		^^			1.5
Curiosity	x		^^			1.5
Joy	Zest		^^			1.5
Wonder/Excel	x					1
Humor	x					1

Coding Explanation:

Note. Some cells contains a similar word that the expert used to represent that trait. x means the expert's trait name is similar or identical to the collective trait name (1 point). If the cell is blank, the expert did not include the trait.

^a # means the trait is taught as an aspect of one of the Six Pillars (½ point).

^b ^^ means the trait is on Lickona and Davidson's larger list of over 65 strengths (½ point).

^c * means the trait is an aspect of one of the 20 Assets (½ point).

Results

The Grid of Character Traits is primarily a synthesis based on 1) an examination of each qualifying experts' theory; 2) discussion and/or correspondence with the authors or researchers (Chris Peterson, Martin Seligman, Tom Lickona, Clete Bulach, and Rich Lerner); and 3) discussion and/or correspondence with other character experts (Marvin Berkowitz, Robert Biswas-Diener, Angela Duckworth, P. Paul Heppner, William Huitt; Rich Lerner; Shane Lopez, Wade Rowatt, Alesha Serozynski, and Hal Urban). Decisions regarding the grouping of traits of varying names were a product of these discussions and were ultimately made by the researcher.

Trait list. One trait is a primary one on every list: Love/Care. Love or Care seems to be the cardinal virtue as it is the only trait specifically named by all five theorists. Perhaps this is expected since love is the primary theme of much ancient, religious, poetic, and contemporary literature. Both Jewish and Christian scriptures state that the greatest commandments are to love God and to love one another (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22: 37-40). Some have said that all other moral character traits are aspects of love (Kittel, Friedrich, & Bromiley, 1964).

The score for Responsibility equaled Love/Care but with a significant caveat. Four lists make Responsibility a primary trait but PP doesn't use the term even as a subtrait. Lickona elevates Responsibility further, calling it and Respect (also ignored by PP) "synchronizing" traits

(Lickona, personal correspondence, 4/26/13) and “the fourth and fifth R’s” of education (in addition to “reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic;” Lickona, 2000, 2004).

Chris Peterson (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) was asked about PP's omission of Responsibility and Respect from its list. Peterson said that the group of scholars conceptualizing the 24 strengths determined both Responsibility and Respect were well-represented by aspects of other traits: Responsibility was covered by Prudence and Perseverance and Respect was represented by Social Intelligence, Forgiveness, and Humility (Personal correspondence, July 22, 2007). For this reason, PP’s Prudence (“Being careful about one’s choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted;” Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 30) represents Responsibility in the grid and contributes one point.

Four have the third-highest score: Fairness, Honesty, Self-Control, and Kindness. All but Kindness are nearly as homogenous among the five experts as Love/Care. PP, CC, and Bulach all use these specific terms. Lickona and Davidson’s concept of Justice is interpreted as Fairness and his Integrity as Honesty. PYD also uses Justice for Fairness, has Honesty as a primary trait, and its Restraint is synonymous with Self-Control. Its conceptualization of “Equality and Social Justice” contributes half a point to Fairness.

While Kindness would seem to be the essence of moral character, it was only identified as a primary trait by PP and Bulach. CC conceptualizes Kindness alongside Compassion and Generosity as a subtrait of Caring. These three subtraits are counted together as one point. Davidson and Lickona’s conceptualization is similar. They only specify Kindness in their list of 65 traits but also include Mercy, Compassion, Courtesy, and Graciousness. These also combine for a point. PYD has a partial correlate in its Interpersonal Competence.

Traits with the third-highest frequency are Citizenship, Open-mindedness and

Perseverance. All have many synonyms that overlap other traits. Citizenship is a primary character strength for CC, Lickona and Davidson, and Bulach. PP gives four synonyms for Citizenship: social responsibility, loyalty, and teamwork (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.30). This seems conceptually to express both Citizenship and Teamwork so PP contributes one-half point to each. CC includes five Citizenship subtraits: Cooperation, Initiative, Obedience, Serving, and Teamwork. The grid credits CC with one point for Citizenship and half a point for Teamwork. The Developmental Asset named School Bonding contributes half a point.

Open-mindedness is the term used by PP and CC. Lickona and Davidson's concept of Ethical Thinking correlates with Open-mindedness because it combines cognition with morality or "smart and good". Bulach's trait of Tolerance / Diversity is equivalent. The PYD asset Equality/Justice contributes half a point.

Though CC and Bulach call this trait Perseverance, the other three theorists use synonyms. PP's strength is called Persistence, Lickona and Davidson use Hard Work, and PYD's asset Homework is credited with half a point.

Six traits had the fourth-highest frequency: Humility, Teamwork, Diligence, Social-Emotional Awareness, Courage, and Respect. Each has many synonyms and shades of meaning. Humility is a primary trait in PP, Lickona and Davidson, and Bulach but it is scarcely present in the other two groups. CC's Citizenship contains Serving and Obedience that could be viewed as aspects of Humility. PYD's 20 assets have no correlates.

As mentioned above, variants and subtraits of Teamwork cited by the theorists are often connected to Citizenship. Lickona and Davidson's list of 65 has four correlates: Cooperation, Adaptability, Civility, and Loyalty. Bulach uses both Cooperation and Sportsmanship as primary traits. PYD's Cultural Competence contributes half a point.

Diligence seems conceptually similar to Perseverance (tied for 7th) and thus has no PP correlate. CC identifies Diligence as a subtrait of Responsibility. Lickona and Davidson's Hard Work and PYD's Achievement are considered equivalents. Bulach identify it as a primary trait.

Social-Emotional Awareness is also very broad, including empathy and compassion, being a trustworthy person, discerning other's motives and trustworthiness, social flexibility, and willingness to trust. PP's Social Intelligence, CC's Trustworthiness, and Davidson and Lickona's Social and Emotional Skill sufficiently define this trait. Bullach is the only expert to list Empathy/Compassion and Courtesy/Politeness as primary traits. Both seem to fit here. PYD's Interpersonal Competence contributes one-half point.

Courage is a complex trait that has many applications. Philosophers and scholars have disagreed upon its definition since Plato and Aristotle (Biswas-Diener, 2012; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Factor analysis of the validation study of the *Character Growth Index* determined that Courage items factored well if they focused on brave acts when in crisis or danger (Liston, 2014). CC says it is a subtrait of Trustworthiness. PP uses the term Bravery whereas Davidson and Lickona call it Fortitude. PYD's Resistance Skills is an adolescent version of Courage: "Resists negative peer pressure and dangerous situations."

As mentioned above, PP omits Respect while Lickona emphasizes it. CC and Bulach list it as a primary trait. PYD's Cultural Competence is related and contributes half a point.

Spirituality, Forgiveness, Love of Learning, Optimism, and Wisdom have the fifth-highest frequency. Four of five strengths are more specific and thereby easier to define (excepting Wisdom). Four of five also are ignored by CC and Bulach while Forgiveness is only omitted from PYD.

PP's Spirituality includes faith and religiosity but also can be expressed by atheists and

agnostics who have "...coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe..." (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 30). Davidson and Lickona and PYD's definitions seem to agree.

Forgiveness is surprisingly low-rated for a trait so emphasized in literature and psychology and necessary to healthy relationships (Tutu, 2000; Worthington & Wade, 1999). Love of Learning was important to PP and Davidson and Lickona and PYD had two assets that correlate (School Engagement and Reading for Pleasure). Optimism is represented by PP as Hope, by Davidson and Lickona as a Positive Attitude, and by PYD as Positive Future ("Is optimistic about her/his personal future").

Wisdom is the less specific trait in this group. This classic trait was valued throughout history above all others, especially by Greek philosophers and Hebrew writers (Aristotle, 1953; Kittel, Friedrich, & Bromiley, 1964). In PP, Wisdom is seen as a virtue that embraces Perspective, Prudence, Love of Learning, Curiosity, and Creativity (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In the grid, Perspective is utilized with Wisdom because Peterson and Seligman (2004) entitle this strength Wisdom/Perspective. PYD's Planning/Decision-Making is the developmentally-appropriate definition of adolescent wisdom (Heppner, Witty, & Dixon, 2004).

The remaining traits are less commonly mentioned. PP scholars and therapists will be surprised that Gratitude is not in the top twenty. They have done much research on the efficacy of Gratitude in boosting well-being and remitting depression (Brdr, & Kashdan, 2010; Seligman, 2002). Leadership's low score is more understandable as some question whether it is truly a character trait or rather a personality trait and/or a learned skill (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Liston, 2014).

Peace stands alone in the 22nd place, appearing on three lists with three different names:

Peace, patience and personal power. It seems curious that this classic trait, so valued by Eastern religions, Judaism, and Christianity and so essential for well-being, is so poorly represented in PP and CE. Within PYD, Peace is represented by Peaceful Conflict Resolution (peaceful action) and Personal Power (the inner sense of peace).

Confidence, Creativity, Curiosity, and Joy appear on only two lists. Wonder/Excellence and Humor are cited only by PP.

The Character Taxonomy: Hypothesized categories and traits. A primary challenge in creating a taxonomy is its conceptualization. Each of the many character strengths has not only its distinction from other strengths but also their correlation. The following conceptualizations are open for discussion and are an initial attempt to clarify each trait's uniqueness and its complementarity with the others.

The Character Taxonomy (CT) is the product of the trait grid and was developed through a similar process. Trait names and definitions provided by the five experts' were reviewed. When questions arose, the expert or other character experts (Marvin Berkowitz, Robert Biswas-Diener, Angela Duckworth, P. Paul Heppner, William Huitt, Rich Lerner, Shane Lopez, Wade Rowatt, Alesha Serozynski, and Hal Urban) were consulted via email. Decisions regarding trait names, merging, and categorization were a product of these discussions but were ultimately made by the researcher.

To clarify each trait's distinction from and complementarity with the others, traits were merged and categorized to form the taxonomy. This section describes that process.

Trait merging. It was determined that, if traits were too similar, test items created to measure each in a character assessment would factor together. Therefore each trait's

conceptualization distinguished it from other traits and overlapping traits were merged. Traits were removed that scored low on the grid or had difficulty factoring in exploratory factor analysis of existing character measures. These conclusions resulted in the following decisions:

- Twelve traits were retained as listed in the grid: Honesty, Self-Control, Kindness, Humility, Social-Emotional Awareness, Courage, Spirituality, Forgiveness, Wisdom, Gratitude, Peace, and Creativity.
- Optimism, Joy, and Confidence are merged into one trait called Optimism (Liston, 2013, 2014; Rashid, 2011);
- Citizenship, Teamwork, and aspects of Fairness are merged into one trait called Cooperation (Josephson, 2011; Davidson & Lickona, 2005)
- Diligence is merged into Perseverance and Responsibility;
- Open-mindedness, Respect, and aspects of Fairness are merged into one trait called Respect;
- Love/Care is called Love;
- Leadership, Love of Learning, and Curiosity were dropped due to expert opinion and literature review indicating they had difficulty factoring with reliable items (Liston, 2011, 2013; Park & Peterson, 2006; 2007; 2009; Peterson and Park, 2009; Rashid, 2011; Rosebush, 2012; Steen, Kachorek, & Peterson, 2003);
- Wonder and Humor were dropped due to their low score on the CT.

These decisions reduced the traits from 29 to 18. Table 6 displays the 18 character traits that comprise the *Character Taxonomy*.

Table 6: 18 Traits of the Character Taxonomy

Honesty	Responsibility	Forgiveness
Humility	Wisdom	Cooperation
Respect	Creativity	Spirituality
Courage	Peace	Gratitude
Perseverance	Love	Social-Emotional Awareness
Self-Control	Kindness	Optimism

Categorizing CT's 18 traits. Both PP's six core virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and Character Counts' Six Pillars (Josephson, 2011) are used to categorize character strengths. Lickona suggests a type of categorization when stating that his 10 Essential Virtues are necessary for each of his and Davidson's (2005) 8 Character Strengths. He conceptualizes virtues as character traits while character strengths operationalize the trait. For example, Wisdom is a virtue while "Lifelong Learner and Critical Thinker" is a character strength. Wisdom could be thought of as operationalized through lifelong learning and critical thinking. Put another way, one who is a Lifelong Learner and Critical Thinker will exhibit Wisdom (Davidson & Lickona, 2005; Lickona, personal correspondence, April 22, 2013).

Factor analysis of *VIA Inventory of Strengths* (VIA-IS), the most-used validated measure of character, can contribute to trait categorization (Peterson & Park, 2009; Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Factor analyses of the VIA-IS (Brdr & Kashdan, 2010; Liston, 2014; Peterson & Park,

2009; Snyder & Lopez, 2007) provide a number of options to categorize PP’s 24 character strengths.

Arguably the best indicates five categories: Strengths of Restraint, Intellectual Strengths, Interpersonal Strengths, Emotional Strengths, and Theological Strengths. (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Two of PP’s six virtues – courage and temperance – seem to be subsumed into Strengths of Restraint. Of Character Counts’ Six Pillars, Respect and Trustworthiness could be grouped similarly. Davidson and Lickona’s 8 Strengths of Character consolidate easily into five corresponding categories. When aligned in this manner, these four experts produce five conceptually-sound, similar trait categories as seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Aligned Character Trait Categories

PP Virtues	VIA-IS Factor Analysis	Lickona & Davidson	Character Counts
Humanity	Emotional	Social Emotional Skills	Caring
Temperance/ Courage	Restraint	Diligent/ Disciplined	Respect/ Trustworthiness
Wisdom	Intellectual	Critical & Ethical Thinker	Responsibility
Justice	Interpersonal	Respectful and Responsible Citizen	Fairness
Transcendence	Theological	Spiritual/Purpose	Citizenship

Categorization of the Character Taxonomy traits was based on the four sources in Table 5. The CT category names in Table 7 were selected as the best terms to represent the traits contained in that category.

Table 7: Expert and Character Taxonomy Categories

PP Virtues	VIA-IS Factor Analysis	Lickona & Davidson	Character Counts	Character Taxonomy
Humanity	Emotional	Social Emotional Skills	Caring	Social-Emotional Intelligence
Temperance/ Courage	Restraint	Diligent/ Disciplined	Respect/ Trustworthiness	Regulation
Wisdom	Intellectual	Critical & Ethical Thinker	Responsibility	Insight
Justice	Interpersonal	Respectful and Responsible Citizen	Fairness	Integrity
Transcendence	Theological	Spiritual/Purpose	Citizenship	Transcendence

The Character Taxonomy. Table 8 is the complete Character Taxonomy. The 18 hypothesized traits are designated in their matching categories. Integrity contains Honesty and Humility as internalized moral values. Respect is grouped here also because it is similarly conceived. Rather than being defined primarily as a behavior such as courtesy or social deference, Respect is viewed as an internalized value of human worth expressed in thought, attitude, word, and behavior.

Regulation is comprised of Courage, Perseverance, Self-Control, and Responsibility. Each trait reflects the autonomous capacity to alter one's behaviors based on beliefs and motives stemming from internal or societal expectations (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Zimmerman, 2000).

Insight includes Wisdom, Creativity, and Peace. Though it could have been included under Regulation, Social Intelligence, or Transcendence, Peace was included here because it is a

prudent perspective on one’s circumstances, capacities, and choices.

Traits in Social-Emotional Intelligence directly relate to treatment of others.

Transcendence traits include a sense of connection to God, Providence, collective humanity, or “the larger universe and thereby provide meaning to” life (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 519).

Table 8: The *Character Taxonomy*

5 Hypothesized Categories	18 Hypothesized Traits
Integrity	Honesty Humility Respect
Regulation	Courage Perseverance Self-Control Responsibility
Insight	Wisdom Creativity Peace
Social-Emotional Intelligence	Love Kindness Social-Emotional Awareness Forgiveness Cooperation
Transcendence	Spirituality

	Gratitude
	Optimism

Discussion

This article's goal was to create a taxonomy from the best available conceptualizations of character. The resulting Character Taxonomy provides the following insights.

CT shows homogeneity. The grid's top 10 traits are recognized by all five experts quoted. The next five plus Forgiveness are mentioned in some form by four experts. Seven are included by three. Thus 23 of the 29 traits are very close in frequency of citation.

CT melds the expert opinion into greater homogeneity. Twelve of its 18 strengths come directly from the grid. The other six synthesize similar traits in one distinct strength. Only five of the 29 grid traits are eliminated and this is due to the experts' lack of consensus.

CT is comprehensive. The grid and the Character Taxonomy provide thorough coverage of the character spectrum and parameters. PP's rationale for its classification of virtues and character strengths supports an extensive collection of traits: "...Our categories bring with them *rich psychological content and strategies of measurement and hence explanatory power* out of the realm and reach of philosophy" (italics added). Virtues are the "core characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers" while character strengths are the psychological "processes or mechanisms that define the virtues" (Seligman & Peterson, 2004, p. 13). Thus a *comprehensive* taxonomy will be broad and extensive while a *useful* taxonomy will be concise and structured. The *Character Taxonomy* balances these two in order to define both character's spectrum and parameters.

CT provides a starting point. Perhaps more work is needed for the field to reach consensus regarding a comprehensive character taxonomy. If PP, CE, and PYD scholars agree to begin with the *Character Taxonomy*, they could improve, refine, and validate it. Factor analysis of measures created with CT conceptualization can show certain strengths and weaknesses that assist in differentially defining character strengths. Perhaps they will add, delete, restructure, or redefine traits as they collaborate.

CT could be refined. Other types of research should be conducted to provide more information. For example, factor analyses of broad character measures such as the *VIA Inventory of Strengths* (Peterson, Seligman, & Park, 2003) are good sources. The recently-validated *Character Growth Index* (Liston, 2014) was based on Character Taxonomy conceptualization. Three to six items were created for each of the 18 CT strengths. Its factor analysis produced 11 factors: Honesty, Humility, Courage, Perseverance, Wisdom, Peace/Self-Regulation, Love, Kindness, Forgiveness, Spirituality, and Optimism (Liston, 2012, 2013, 2014).

Limitations. Any study attempting to define an elusive and abstract concept such as character and to converge expert opinion across disparate fields of study contains limitations. Tom Lickona stated, “Clearly, it’s a challenge, with either words or images, to accurately and completely convey the real complexity and subtlety of psychological phenomena. We invariably fall short” (Lickona, personal correspondence, April 26, 2013). Limitations include:

Study structure and grid scoring. Allowing three CE experts but only one from each of the two other highly-regarded fields may have skewed the grid’s results. The researcher limited the grid to Davidson and Lickona’s lists and the results not alter the grid’s list of traits.

Researcher bias. Despite attempted objectivity and peer review, the decisions made to construct the taxonomy were largely done by the researcher. Bias is unavoidable. Creating a

project team of experts from each of the three fields would have provided a more objective, expert process to construct the grid and taxonomy.

Questions. While this study may have answered some questions, it has raised others.

Interpretation of the Grid to create the Character Taxonomy. Are the grid's groupings of divergent terms under each trait accurate? For example, is PP Prudence equivalent to PYD Achievement and Lickona & Davidson's Diligence? Should some of the paired traits not be combined? Should more traits be merged for brevity or convenience? Should the list of 29 traits be the proper starting point and similar traits united as sub-groups? Answering these questions would be an excellent task for a team of experts from each of the three fields.

Grid weighting of traits. If the expert uses the specific trait name, should it be worth more? Should more weight be granted to PP's list because it was developed through a more extensive process? Should Character Counts' Six Pillars be worth two points? Should trait scoring determine a trait hierarchy or impact level? Perhaps a more extensive weighting system would be developed.

Definition of "comprehensive character." What qualifies a taxonomy of character as complete? Will character training be comprehensive if it includes traits cited by three of the five experts or are four required?

Conclusions. The *Character Taxonomy* could be a significant finding. By collating conceptualization of experts in the field of character, the trait grid indicates the most valid traits. Reviewing the experts' groupings of strengths reveals their best categorization. CT synthesizes these to create a reasonably valid construct and provide a conceptual starting point for character educators and researchers to produce a definitive taxonomy.

Such a source can be one of the "conceptual tools" (Seligman & Peterson, 2004, p. 13) to

help produce “empirical tools” (Seligman & Peterson, 2004, p. 13) such as curricular resources and individual character measures. These enable and facilitate character research. CT has begun this effect, being utilized to create the *Character Growth Index* (CGI; Liston, 2014), a valid multidimensional assessment of character strengths available for popular use by researchers, schools, and character training programs.

This is what USDE character education and youth development studies recommend and what researchers agree must happen to energize and develop the character field (Hanson, Dietsch, & Zheng, 2012; Lippman, Moore, & McIntosh, 2011; Person, Moiduddin, Hague-Angus, & Malone, 2009; USDE, 2007). The *Character Taxonomy* provides a conceptual step forward and a launching point for future research.

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