

Executive Summary:

Conceptualizing and Validating the Character Growth Index (CGI)

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This study's research question is: *Can a valid, reliable measure of multi-dimensional adolescent character be developed?* Its goals were:

1. To construct a grid of trait lists by experts in Positive Psychology (PP; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), Character Education (CE; Bulach, 1996; Davidson & Lickona, 2005; Josephson, 2011), and Positive Youth Development (PYD; Lerner et al., 2005) to create the *Character Taxonomy* as a conceptual basis;
2. To construct the *Character Growth Index* (CGI) as a brief measure of the *Character Taxonomy's* traits; and
3. To validate CGI.

The *Character Taxonomy* produced 18 traits that were hypothesized to cover the various dimensions of character. Two CGI field tests involving over 1000 middle school students produced a reliable measure with 11 factors for a validation study.

The validation study involved 784 Midwest US middle school students. Average administration time was 17 minutes. Cronbach's alpha for the 55 CGI items was .944 and test/retest was correlated at .720 indicating CGI is a reliable measure (Diener, Inglehart, & Tay, 2012; Gay & Airasian, 2000).

Exploratory factor analysis produced all 11 hypothesized factors with Eigenvalues >1.0 and explained 58.5% of the total variance. Coefficient alphas for ten of the eleven were >.7. Traits defined as Courage, Kindness, and Peace showed unique conceptualization and differentiating elements that could inform and contribute to character research.

The measure by which CGI was compared for validation was a collection of 52 items from the 96-item *VIA Youth Survey* that were conceptually closest to CGI's 11 factors. Spearman's Rho set the overall CGI correlation with the *VIA Youth Survey* at .851. Paired sample correlations of CGI's hypothesized 11 character traits and the corresponding subscales of the *VIA Youth Survey* produced significant correlations ranging from .405-.806.

The 52 items from the 96-item *VIA Youth Survey* had not been subjected to reliability and validity measurement. A post-hoc EFA of its data showed strong reliability, produced 11 factors (ten that were identical to CGI factors), and had acceptable structural coefficients.

When independent EFAs of CGI and the 52 items from the 96-item *VIA Youth Survey* produced 11 factors each, the questions arose: Can a multidimensional character measure contain even more than 11 distinct, interpretable factors? Could items intending to measure traits defined by differing fields (PP, CE, and PYD) support the same factor?

To answer these questions, a third post-hoc study combined all CGI and VIA-YS items for a conjoint EFA. Data from the 107 items revealed 19 factors with Eigenvalues > 1.0 accounting for 63.4% of variance. Eighteen factors were easily interpretable and sixteen had items that created $>.7$ coefficient alphas. 80% of items factored. CGI items factored together with and independent from VIA items. Future studies could add traits deemed essential to make CGI a comprehensive measure of character.

Limitations involve the need for future studies (1) to improve factoring, discriminant, convergent, and predictive validity, (2) to conduct confirmatory factor analysis for improved conceptualization, and (3) to be experimentally designed to indicate longitudinal outcomes that determine CGI's ability to measure character growth.