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Character strengths in fifty-four nations and the fifty US states

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Abstract

In a web-based study of 117,676 adults from 54 nations and all 50 US states, we investigated the relative prevalence of 24 different strengths of character. The most commonly-endorsed strengths in the USA were kindness, fairness, honesty, gratitude, and judgment, and the lesser strengths included prudence, modesty, and self-regulation. The profile of character strengths in the USA converged with profiles based on respondents from each of the other nations. Except for religiousness, comparisons within the US sample showed no differences as a function of state or geographical region. Our results may reveal something about universal human nature and/or the character requirements minimally needed for a viable society.

Keywords: *Character strengths; human nature; cross-national comparisons; within-US comparisons*

After all there is but one race—humanity.

Moore (1900)

Introduction

Good character is essential for individuals and societies to thrive. After detours through the narcissism of the 1970s, the materialism of the 1980s, and the apathy of the 1990s, people in the USA today believe that character indeed is important. However, according to national polls, the contemporary USA is facing a character crisis on many fronts, from the playground to the classroom to sports to entertainment to politics (Public Agenda, 1999). The details of this crisis seem to depend on the observer.

Political pundits speak about a cultural war being waged in the world today, referring to a clash between traditional (conservative and/or religious) and contemporary (liberal and/or secular) values. Within the USA, the cultural war is framed in terms of the competing beliefs of those who live in the red (Republican) versus blue (Democratic) states that entered public awareness in the aftermath of the 2000 US presidential election (e.g., Greenberg, 2004; White, 2003). Within the larger world, the cultural war is variously depicted as involving US versus European sensibilities or Judeo-Christian versus Islamic value systems (e.g., Adams, 2003; Pells, 1997; Qureshi & Sells, 1993).

Regardless of the battlefield, participants in the cultural war make judgments about their own character and those of their opponents. One's own side in this conflict is of course good, and the opposing side is bad. But whatever the evaluation, the other side is regarded as morally different. To judge from best-selling books in the USA, for example, conservatives see liberals as permissive hedonists who are intent on plunging the country into "evil" (Hannity, 2004), whereas liberals see conservatives as narrow-minded bigots who are "lying liars" (Franken, 2003). This name-calling is echoed across international divides as well. We hear US leaders characterize the country's opponents as cowards who hate freedom, whereas these same US leaders are branded by their opponents as satanic warmongers.

Another point of view holds that we are neither as polarized nor as morally dissimilar as polemics suggest (Fiorina, Abrams, & Pope, 2005). Instead, it is the leaders and pundits who have become increasingly extreme in their words and deeds. What about the facts of the matter? Do geopolitical distinctions (i.e., red versus blue states, USA versus Europe versus other regions) cleave people at the level of basic character strengths, as many commentators have argued, or is there an essential set of virtues shared by most people in most places?

Psychology's interest in strengths of character has been rekindled by positive psychology, and we see growing research literatures devoted to a variety of

Table I. Classification of character strengths.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wisdom and knowledge: cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • creativity: thinking of novel and productive ways to do things • curiosity: taking an interest in all of ongoing experience • judgment: thinking things through and examining them from all sides • love of learning: mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge • perspective: being able to provide wise counsel to others 2. Courage: emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • honesty: speaking the truth and presenting oneself in a genuine way • bravery: <i>not</i> shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain • persistence: finishing what one starts • zest: approaching life with excitement and energy 3. Humanity: interpersonal strengths that involve “tending and befriending” others. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • kindness: doing favors and good deeds for others • love: valuing close relations with others • social intelligence: being aware of the motives and feelings of self and others 4. Justice: civic strengths that underlie healthy community life. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fairness: treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice • leadership: organizing group activities and seeing that they happen • teamwork: working well as member of a group or team 5. Temperance: strengths that protect against excess. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • forgiveness: forgiving those who have done wrong • modesty: letting one’s accomplishments speak for themselves • prudence: being careful about one’s choices; <i>not</i> saying or doing things that might later be regretted • self-regulation: regulating what one feels and does 6. Transcendence: strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • appreciation of beauty and excellence: noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life • gratitude: being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen • hope: expecting the best and working to achieve it • humor: liking to laugh and joke; bringing smiles to other people • religiousness: having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life 	<hr/>
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positive traits (McCullough & Snyder, 2000). For the past several years, guided by the perspective of positive psychology, we have been involved in a project that attempts to identify ubiquitously-acknowledged strengths of character and ways of measuring them (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). We have become concerned with how each of the strengths is ranked in different societies. Our project has several notable features.

First, we approached good character as a family of positive traits, each of which exists in degrees. Our classification includes 24 different strengths of character classified under six core virtues and makes possible nuanced descriptions (Table I).

Second, we arrived at this family of character strengths by identifying core virtues recognized across world cultures and throughout history. Strengths of character that are arguably culture-bound were excluded, and conclusions of some generality can potentially be drawn.

Third, we devised measures of character strengths that have demonstrable reliability and promising validity (Park & Peterson, 2005, in press; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005, 2006). These measures ask individuals to endorse character strengths as more versus less descriptive of their own thoughts, feelings, and actions. *All* of the strengths are ubiquitously

valued, which means that comparisons across strengths are not confounded by a global response set of social desirability. We can score our measures ipsatively, which allow comparisons within the individual among greater and lesser strengths. We can also score them absolutely, and we can therefore rank order them within a nation or state.

The present paper describes what we have learned about character strengths and their geographical distribution. Which strengths were most prevalent in different regions of the USA and which were least prevalent was determined. The profiles of character strengths in other nations was examined, those physically and/or culturally close to the USA as well as those more distant.

Our own examination of widely influential religious and philosophical traditions found that certain core virtues were widely valued (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005). Within these traditions, there was near universal acceptance of the virtues of wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. In focus groups with the nonliterate Maasai (in Western Kenya) and Inughuit (in Northern Greenland), Biswas-Diener (in press) confirmed that instances of these same core virtues were recognized and esteemed. A non-arbitrary, empirically-grounded classification of

ubiquitously-recognized character strengths thus seems possible (Bennett, 1993; Comte-Sponville, 2001; MacIntyre, 1984; Rozin, 2003).

These studies establish that certain virtues and strengths are widely recognized, but this is a different issue than which of these character strengths are relatively common or relatively rare in terms of a respondent's self-description. One perspective posits a pervasive human nature, shown in a handful of common values and virtues displayed by most people in most societies because these dispositions are needed for a group to survive and thrive (Bok, 1995; Schwartz, 1994). This perspective suggests that not only will a set of strengths be ubiquitously recognized, but that their rank order of prevalence within a setting will be much the same from place to place.

Another perspective holds that different strengths come to the fore in different places for idiosyncratic cultural and historical reasons. We speak of national character (Inkeles & Levinson, 1969; Peabody 1985) and may believe for example that collectivist Asian cultures are comprised of individuals who are excellent teammates, whereas individualistic Western cultures are densely populated by leaders (whether or not anyone follows them). Within the USA (and other nations), regional stereotypes concerning strengths of character are also held nearly and dearly by many of us. We speak approvingly of small town kindness as well as big city sophistication.

It is obvious that people in different parts of world differ from one another on a host of specific values, attitudes, and behaviors. Anthropologists, political scientists, sociologists, economists, and cross-cultural psychologists have amply demonstrated such differences, although in many cases there are strong disciplinary inclinations to stress what is culturally specific over what is common. Researchers in these traditions are no more likely than the rest of us to highlight effect sizes, which means that the magnitude of statistically significant differences in cultural specificity receives little emphasis.

In terms of regional similarities or differences within the same nation, we know very little. Although the possibility of regional variation in psychological characteristics is sometimes acknowledged, these are rarely the focus of explicit investigation¹. The almost universal reliance by psychology researchers on samples from single settings precludes regional comparisons within the same study. Meta-analyses might allow samples from different parts of the USA to be compared and contrasted across studies, except for the convention of identifying the source of research participants only in vague terms: e.g., "a large state university" or "an urban community

mental health center." In their search for general principles and basic processes, investigators seem to regard their samples not simply as convenient but ultimately as interchangeable.

The purpose of this study was to determine which components of character are most and least commonly endorsed and to see whether this pattern is different or similar across geographical and cultural contexts.

Method

Research participants

The sample consisted of all adult respondents who completed the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) on the Authentic Happiness website (www.authentichappiness.com) between September 2002 and December 2003. After completing the VIA-IS on-line, a respondent received immediate feedback about his top five strengths, and we believe that this feature may motivate participants. We presume that respondents come to the website to learn more about positive psychology as well as about themselves. The VIA-IS is presented on this website only in English, which means that respondents needed to be English readers.

For the relatively small number (~1%) of respondents who completed the measure more than once, only the first set of scores was used. The resulting sample was 71% from the USA ($N = 83,576$). Also represented were 34,887 respondents from about 200 other nations. Only respondents from the 54 nations with at least 20 respondents were included in the analyses reported here ($N = 117,676$) (Table II).

Among our US adult respondents, there were more females than males (72% versus 28%). The typical age of US respondents was 40 years of age, ranging from 18 to 65 plus. The typical level of educational attainment for US respondents was a few years of college, ranging from less than high school to post-baccalaureate. Relative to the US population as a whole, respondents were more educated, and many had college degrees (26%). The non-US respondents were also predominantly female (62%); on average, they were about 40 years of age, and most were college-educated (68%).

Measure

Intended for use by English-reading adults, the VIA-IS is a self-report questionnaire that uses a 5-point Likert-scale to measure the degree to which respondents agree that strength-relevant statements describe themselves (from 1 = "very much unlike me" to 5 = "very much like me"). There are 10 items for each of the 24 strengths of character in the VIA

Table II. Strengths profiles.

Nation	Weighted						
	US	US	UK	CA	AU	NZ	NL
<i>N</i>	83576	83576	11125	9504	5977	1491	1481
ρ with weighted US profile	–	0.94	0.84	0.91	0.86	0.84	0.81
ρ with US profile	0.94	–	0.94	0.99	0.97	0.96	0.92
kindness	1 (3.99)	5 (3.96)	5 (3.82)	5 (3.97)	5 (3.93)	5 (3.90)	6 (3.74)
fairness	2 (3.98)	1 (4.00)	2 (3.92)	1 (4.03)	1 (4.03)	3 (3.98)	3 (3.84)
honesty	3 (3.98)	4 (3.97)	6 (3.77)	4 (3.98)	6 (3.91)	6 (3.90)	5 (3.77)
gratitude	4 (3.94)	6 (3.96)	14 (3.59)	7 (3.89)	8 (3.81)	10 (3.77)	14 (3.50)
judgment	5 (3.91)	2 (3.99)	1 (3.94)	2 (4.01)	2 (4.03)	2 (4.00)	2 (3.88)
love	6 (3.87)	7 (3.91)	7 (3.71)	8 (3.86)	7 (3.83)	7 (3.82)	6 (3.74)
humor	7 (3.87)	9 (3.82)	11 (3.64)	12 (3.79)	14 (3.71)	14 (3.68)	12 (3.60)
curiosity	8 (3.86)	3 (3.99)	3 (3.90)	3 (3.99)	3 (4.03)	1 (4.01)	1 (3.92)
beauty	9 (3.76)	10 (3.82)	9 (3.67)	9 (3.85)	9 (3.81)	8 (3.81)	10 (3.65)
creativity	10 (3.75)	11 (3.77)	8 (3.69)	11 (3.80)	10 (3.79)	9 (3.78)	8 (3.70)
perspective	11 (3.74)	12 (3.77)	13 (3.61)	10 (3.81)	12 (3.76)	11 (3.73)	11 (3.63)
social intelligence	12 (3.74)	13 (3.75)	12 (3.63)	14 (3.76)	13 (3.73)	13 (3.70)	9 (3.66)
leadership	13 (3.71)	14 (3.74)	10 (3.65)	13 (3.78)	11 (3.78)	12 (3.72)	15 (3.50)
teamwork	14 (3.68)	15 (3.66)	17 (3.51)	15 (3.68)	16 (3.65)	17 (3.62)	18 (3.43)
learning	15 (3.67)	8 (3.89)	4 (3.87)	6 (3.92)	4 (3.94)	4 (3.92)	4 (3.82)
bravery	16 (3.67)	16 (3.65)	15 (3.54)	16 (3.68)	17 (3.65)	15 (3.66)	13 (3.58)
forgive	17 (3.65)	17 (3.65)	16 (3.54)	17 (3.67)	15 (3.69)	16 (3.65)	16 (3.49)
hope	18 (3.61)	19 (3.60)	20 (3.33)	20 (3.58)	19 (3.55)	19 (3.56)	20 (3.38)
industry	19 (3.59)	18 (3.62)	18 (3.41)	18 (3.61)	18 (3.59)	20 (3.56)	17 (3.49)
religiousness	20 (3.55)	21 (3.53)	24 (2.87)	23 (3.36)	24 (3.25)	24 (3.23)	24 (3.01)
zest	21 (3.48)	20 (3.57)	19 (3.37)	19 (3.59)	20 (3.55)	18 (3.57)	19 (3.43)
prudence	22 (3.47)	22 (3.50)	21 (3.30)	21 (3.52)	21 (3.45)	21 (3.41)	21 (3.32)
modesty	23 (3.46)	23 (3.40)	22 (3.21)	22 (3.41)	22 (3.35)	22 (3.32)	23 (3.18)
self-regulation	24 (3.27)	24 (3.27)	21 (3.17)	24 (3.32)	23 (3.30)	23 (3.30)	22 (3.24)
Nation	IE	DE	ZA	ES	BE	SG	SE
<i>N</i>	515	490	323	261	190	172	170
ρ with weighted US profile	0.85	0.80	0.93	0.83	0.81	0.68	0.79
ρ with US profile	0.95	0.91	0.92	0.94	0.92	0.79	0.90
kindness	5 (3.83)	7 (3.75)	3 (4.05)	5 (3.91)	5 (3.80)	8 (3.79)	5 (3.79)
fairness	2 (3.91)	4 (3.80)	1 (4.06)	3 (3.98)	3 (3.86)	3 (3.87)	1 (3.91)
honesty	6 (3.81)	6 (3.77)	2 (4.06)	6 (3.85)	6 (3.79)	4 (3.86)	7 (3.76)
gratitude	11 (3.66)	14 (3.53)	6 (4.02)	9 (3.75)	14 (3.58)	12 (3.68)	16 (3.53)
judgment	1 (3.93)	2 (3.94)	4 (4.03)	4 (3.98)	1 (3.94)	1 (3.98)	2 (3.86)
love	8 (3.68)	9 (3.65)	7 (3.99)	8 (3.77)	8 (3.74)	9 (3.73)	6 (3.78)
humor	9 (3.68)	10 (3.61)	12 (3.84)	10 (3.75)	11 (3.62)	15 (3.65)	11 (3.70)
curiosity	4 (3.84)	1 (3.96)	5 (4.02)	2 (3.99)	4 (3.85)	7 (3.79)	3 (3.85)
beauty	7 (3.71)	5 (3.80)	9 (3.93)	7 (3.83)	7 (3.77)	6 (3.83)	13 (3.62)
creativity	10 (3.68)	8 (3.72)	8 (3.94)	11 (3.73)	9 (3.66)	10 (3.72)	8 (3.74)
perspective	12 (3.66)	12 (3.59)	10 (3.91)	13 (3.68)	12 (3.62)	11 (3.70)	9 (3.74)
social intelligence	13 (3.66)	11 (3.60)	11 (3.85)	15 (3.65)	10 (3.63)	16 (3.64)	10 (3.71)
leadership	14 (3.66)	13 (3.54)	16 (3.80)	12 (3.69)	15 (3.58)	13 (3.68)	14 (3.62)
teamwork	17 (3.53)	16 (3.48)	21 (3.65)	14 (3.67)	16 (3.51)	14 (3.66)	17 (3.53)
learning	3 (3.85)	3 (3.90)	13 (3.83)	1 (4.00)	2 (3.89)	5 (3.84)	4 (3.83)
bravery	16 (3.59)	15 (3.53)	14 (3.83)	17 (3.57)	13 (3.59)	17 (3.60)	12 (3.66)
forgive	15 (3.61)	17 (3.45)	19 (3.73)	16 (3.61)	19 (3.45)	18 (3.56)	15 (3.57)
hope	19 (3.38)	20 (3.39)	17 (3.78)	18 (3.50)	20 (3.37)	19 (3.52)	20 (3.43)
industry	18 (3.42)	19 (3.40)	18 (3.75)	21 (3.45)	17 (3.48)	20 (3.50)	18 (3.48)
religiousness	24 (3.12)	24 (3.08)	15 (3.82)	24 (3.15)	24 (3.01)	23 (3.38)	24 (3.08)
zest	20 (3.37)	18 (3.42)	20 (3.67)	20 (3.49)	18 (3.47)	2 (3.91)	19 (3.47)
prudence	21 (3.34)	21 (3.32)	23 (3.50)	19 (3.50)	21 (3.36)	21 (3.48)	22 (3.28)
modesty	22 (3.30)	23 (3.13)	22 (3.53)	23 (3.37)	22 (3.22)	22 (3.41)	23 (3.15)
self-regulation	23 (3.22)	22 (3.25)	24 (3.42)	22 (3.39)	23 (3.21)	24 (3.30)	21 (3.30)

(continued)

Table II. Continued.

	Weighted						
Nation	FR	IN	FI	HK	CH	AT	IT
<i>N</i>	156	135	132	115	110	107	100
ρ with weighted US profile	0.79	0.76	0.79	0.86	0.81	0.81	0.77
ρ with US profile	0.90	0.84	0.90	0.95	0.92	0.93	0.90
kindness	5 (3.88)	8 (3.97)	5 (3.79)	7 (3.75)	6 (3.83)	6 (3.92)	6 (3.87)
fairness	3 (3.94)	1 (4.11)	1 (3.91)	5 (3.78)	2 (4.01)	1 (4.10)	2 (4.04)
honesty	8 (3.76)	2 (4.06)	7 (3.76)	2 (3.81)	4 (3.90)	5 (3.97)	8 (3.82)
gratitude	11 (3.68)	6 (4.03)	16 (3.53)	10 (3.66)	7 (3.83)	14 (3.70)	10 (3.76)
judgment	6 (3.86)	4 (4.04)	2 (3.86)	1 (3.84)	3 (3.94)	4 (4.02)	4 (3.98)
love	9 (3.75)	14 (3.86)	6 (3.78)	6 (3.76)	5 (3.88)	7 (3.85)	11 (3.72)
humor	13 (3.57)	16 (3.79)	11 (3.70)	13 (3.61)	12 (3.75)	13 (3.73)	13 (3.65)
curiosity	2 (4.05)	3 (4.04)	3 (3.85)	3 (3.80)	1 (4.11)	3 (4.04)	3 (4.02)
beauty	4 (3.90)	7 (4.00)	13 (3.62)	8 (3.68)	15 (3.73)	8 (3.84)	5 (3.94)
creativity	7 (3.78)	11 (3.96)	8 (3.74)	16 (3.54)	11 (3.77)	10 (3.82)	7 (3.84)
perspective	15 (3.54)	9 (3.97)	9 (3.74)	9 (3.67)	13 (3.74)	11 (3.82)	12 (3.66)
social intelligence	12 (3.65)	17 (3.77)	10 (3.71)	11 (3.61)	10 (3.78)	12 (3.75)	16 (3.55)
leadership	10 (3.70)	12 (3.93)	14 (3.62)	12 (3.59)	8 (3.80)	9 (3.83)	9 (3.77)
teamwork	17 (3.47)	15 (3.85)	17 (3.53)	15 (3.56)	19 (3.60)	16 (3.67)	14 (3.65)
learning	1 (4.06)	5 (4.03)	4 (3.83)	4 (3.80)	3 (4.01)	2 (4.06)	1 (4.11)
bravery	14 (3.55)	18 (3.76)	12 (3.66)	14 (3.57)	16 (3.67)	17 (3.64)	17 (3.53)
forgive	16 (3.48)	21 (3.70)	15 (3.57)	17 (3.46)	14 (3.74)	15 (3.67)	15 (3.59)
hope	20 (3.29)	13 (3.87)	20 (3.43)	18 (3.45)	17 (3.67)	19 (3.56)	21 (3.35)
industry	19 (3.38)	19 (3.72)	18 (3.48)	19 (3.45)	20 (3.58)	18 (3.60)	20 (3.39)
religiousness	24 (2.84)	10 (3.97)	24 (3.08)	20 (3.38)	24 (3.23)	24 (3.19)	24 (3.20)
zest	18 (3.42)	22 (3.70)	19 (3.47)	22 (3.36)	18 (3.63)	20 (3.56)	18 (3.49)
prudence	21 (3.28)	20 (3.72)	22 (3.28)	21 (3.37)	21 (3.47)	21 (3.50)	19 (3.45)
modesty	22 (3.25)	23 (3.64)	23 (3.15)	24 (3.33)	23 (3.34)	23 (3.28)	22 (3.30)
self-regulation	23 (3.24)	14 (3.50)	21 (3.30)	23 (3.33)	22 (3.44)	22 (3.43)	23 (3.25)
Nation	HU	AR	MX	JP	NO	UY	CV
<i>N</i>	98	91	88	79	77	74	66
ρ with weighted US profile	0.77	0.80	0.79	0.79	0.71	0.83	0.86
ρ with US profile	0.86	0.92	0.88	0.92	0.84	0.95	0.95
kindness	7 (3.60)	8 (3.87)	8 (3.87)	7 (3.75)	9 (3.71)	6 (3.80)	4 (3.94)
fairness	2 (3.73)	3 (4.01)	1 (4.12)	3 (3.86)	4 (3.90)	4 (3.85)	1 (4.11)
honesty	8 (3.60)	7 (3.88)	5 (3.95)	5 (3.79)	6 (3.80)	5 (3.85)	5 (3.91)
gratitude	14 (3.33)	5 (3.91)	7 (3.94)	9 (3.74)	18 (3.53)	8 (3.72)	9 (3.83)
judgment	1 (3.94)	4 (4.01)	3 (4.06)	4 (3.85)	2 (3.94)	1 (3.95)	2 (4.05)
love	11 (3.47)	9 (3.87)	4 (3.97)	6 (3.76)	8 (3.78)	9 (3.69)	7 (3.87)
humor	9 (3.58)	16 (3.66)	22 (3.62)	14 (3.63)	11 (3.70)	14 (3.59)	12 (3.79)
curiosity	4 (3.71)	1 (4.13)	2 (4.09)	1 (4.01)	1 (4.02)	2 (3.91)	6 (3.88)
beauty	6 (3.67)	6 (3.90)	10 (3.84)	10 (3.74)	14 (3.57)	7 (3.77)	10 (3.82)
creativity	3 (3.72)	10 (3.82)	14 (3.79)	8 (3.75)	5 (3.82)	10 (3.67)	14 (3.76)
perspective	10 (3.53)	12 (3.76)	13 (3.80)	11 (3.73)	7 (3.80)	12 (3.64)	8 (3.85)
social intelligence	15 (3.33)	14 (3.70)	12 (3.81)	12 (3.64)	10 (3.71)	13 (3.61)	16 (3.71)
leadership	17 (3.32)	13 (3.74)	9 (3.85)	13 (3.63)	12 (3.64)	11 (3.66)	11 (3.81)
teamwork	16 (3.33)	11 (3.77)	11 (3.83)	20 (3.44)	16 (3.54)	17 (3.53)	13 (3.78)
learning	5 (3.70)	2 (4.07)	6 (3.95)	2 (3.90)	3 (3.92)	3 (3.89)	3 (3.95)
bravery	13 (3.35)	15 (3.69)	17 (3.75)	18 (3.48)	13 (3.61)	15 (3.55)	17 (3.69)
forgive	12 (3.41)	20 (3.61)	16 (3.76)	19 (3.46)	15 (3.55)	18 (3.43)	15 (3.72)
hope	20 (3.18)	18 (3.63)	15 (3.79)	15 (3.57)	19 (3.51)	21 (3.36)	19 (3.56)
industry	22 (3.10)	19 (3.62)	19 (3.72)	16 (3.55)	20 (3.49)	16 (3.54)	18 (3.59)
religiousness	24 (2.93)	21 (3.48)	18 (3.75)	24 (3.15)	23 (3.03)	24 (3.04)	24 (3.25)
zest	19 (3.20)	17 (3.64)	20 (3.65)	21 (3.41)	17 (3.54)	20 (3.40)	21 (3.48)
prudence	18 (3.29)	24 (3.34)	21 (3.63)	17 (3.49)	22 (3.36)	19 (3.42)	20 (3.50)
modesty	21 (3.11)	23 (3.39)	23 (3.53)	22 (3.38)	24 (2.98)	22 (3.35)	22 (3.45)
self-regulation	23 (3.01)	22 (3.42)	24 (3.45)	23 (3.32)	21 (3.41)	23 (3.31)	23 (3.28)

Table II. Continued.

	Weighted						
Nation	IL	KY	HR	PH	GR	DK	MY
<i>N</i>	60	57	56	55	53	52	49
ρ with weighted US profile	0.80	0.80	0.76	0.71	0.87	0.69	0.73
ρ with US profile	0.93	0.92	0.87	0.84	0.93	0.82	0.84
kindness	7 (3.86)	5 (4.00)	6 (3.86)	14 (3.85)	3 (3.90)	9 (3.79)	8 (3.68)
fairness	2 (3.96)	4 (4.00)	4 (3.90)	2 (4.09)	1 (3.99)	6 (3.81)	1 (3.92)
honesty	9 (3.79)	7 (3.93)	8 (3.77)	7 (3.95)	8 (3.82)	7 (3.81)	4 (3.86)
gratitude	10 (3.75)	8 (3.90)	15 (3.59)	5 (4.02)	9 (3.81)	12 (3.72)	9 (3.68)
judgment	4 (3.95)	2 (4.06)	2 (3.97)	1 (4.10)	2 (3.91)	4 (3.94)	2 (3.90)
love	5 (3.95)	10 (3.82)	13 (3.64)	8 (3.92)	7 (3.86)	5 (3.87)	12 (3.59)
humor	14 (3.66)	14 (3.75)	11 (3.69)	17 (3.75)	10 (3.68)	13 (3.71)	14 (3.54)
curiosity	1 (4.04)	1 (4.07)	3 (3.97)	4 (4.06)	6 (3.86)	1 (4.16)	5 (3.80)
beauty	8 (3.82)	9 (3.88)	7 (3.85)	6 (4.01)	4 (3.89)	14 (3.70)	7 (3.69)
creativity	6 (3.88)	6 (3.95)	5 (3.88)	12 (3.88)	11 (3.67)	2 (4.04)	6 (3.72)
perspective	11 (3.73)	11 (3.79)	9 (3.75)	9 (3.92)	14 (3.60)	8 (3.80)	13 (3.58)
social intelligence	13 (3.68)	17 (3.62)	12 (3.65)	16 (3.77)	12 (3.63)	11 (3.75)	20 (3.47)
leadership	12 (3.69)	12 (3.76)	10 (3.74)	10 (3.92)	13 (3.61)	18 (3.55)	10 (3.62)
teamwork	16 (3.62)	19 (3.61)	16 (3.56)	11 (3.89)	18 (3.51)	20 (3.45)	11 (3.60)
learning	3 (3.96)	3 (4.02)	1 (4.01)	3 (4.08)	5 (3.86)	3 (4.00)	3 (3.88)
bravery	17 (3.62)	13 (3.76)	14 (3.62)	19 (3.74)	19 (3.49)	15 (3.64)	23 (3.41)
forgive	15 (3.66)	16 (3.65)	17 (3.52)	18 (3.75)	20 (3.47)	16 (3.64)	21 (3.45)
hope	19 (3.59)	20 (3.55)	19 (3.49)	15 (3.85)	16 (3.52)	17 (3.61)	15 (3.53)
industry	20 (3.47)	15 (3.66)	18 (3.51)	22 (3.59)	17 (3.52)	19 (3.45)	19 (3.48)
religiousness	22 (3.34)	23 (3.30)	23 (3.33)	13 (3.86)	23 (3.21)	23 (3.11)	17 (3.50)
zest	18 (3.60)	18 (3.62)	21 (3.47)	20 (3.64)	15 (3.55)	10 (3.76)	22 (3.44)
prudence	21 (3.44)	21 (3.52)	20 (3.49)	23 (3.52)	21 (3.41)	22 (3.25)	16 (3.53)
modesty	24 (3.14)	22 (3.41)	22 (3.35)	21 (3.61)	22 (3.35)	24 (3.04)	18 (3.49)
self-regulation	23 (3.31)	24 (3.27)	24 (3.27)	24 (3.45)	24 (3.17)	21 (3.26)	24 (3.38)
Nation	VE	UZ	AZ	BR	AE	CN	BS
<i>N</i>	47	46	44	41	39	36	34
ρ with weighted US profile	0.79	0.69	0.82	0.66	0.71	0.72	0.84
ρ with US profile	0.90	0.79	0.93	0.94	0.84	0.78	0.94
kindness	8 (3.87)	6 (3.83)	5 (3.94)	11 (3.80)	8 (3.89)	14 (3.64)	5 (3.94)
fairness	1 (4.12)	4 (3.90)	1 (4.08)	4 (4.01)	5 (3.95)	2 (3.86)	6 (3.90)
honesty	5 (3.99)	10 (3.73)	6 (3.88)	9 (3.81)	7 (3.92)	9 (3.77)	8 (3.83)
gratitude	7 (3.90)	17 (3.51)	10 (3.79)	7 (3.88)	3 (4.03)	8 (3.78)	4 (3.95)
judgment	2 (4.08)	1 (4.02)	4 (3.98)	5 (4.01)	2 (4.03)	1 (3.94)	1 (3.99)
love	9 (3.84)	13 (3.68)	7 (3.85)	12 (3.75)	11 (3.77)	4 (3.83)	9 (3.80)
humor	17 (3.69)	12 (3.69)	12 (3.71)	17 (3.63)	20 (3.51)	16 (3.61)	11 (3.79)
curiosity	4 (4.02)	3 (3.93)	2 (4.06)	3 (4.07)	4 (4.02)	12 (3.70)	2 (3.98)
beauty	10 (3.80)	9 (3.76)	9 (3.79)	6 (3.95)	6 (3.95)	3 (3.86)	7 (3.87)
creativity	6 (3.92)	7 (3.79)	8 (3.82)	2 (4.10)	9 (3.87)	10 (3.71)	10 (3.80)
perspective	11 (3.80)	11 (3.71)	14 (3.68)	10 (3.81)	10 (3.81)	5 (3.82)	14 (3.74)
social intelligence	15 (3.75)	8 (3.79)	15 (3.66)	14 (3.68)	18 (3.54)	6 (3.81)	16 (3.63)
leadership	18 (3.64)	15 (3.67)	16 (3.65)	13 (3.69)	12 (3.73)	13 (3.65)	12 (3.78)
teamwork	12 (3.78)	18 (3.47)	17 (3.63)	15 (3.66)	19 (3.52)	17 (3.58)	13 (3.75)
learning	3 (4.07)	2 (3.98)	3 (4.03)	1 (4.11)	1 (4.13)	7 (3.80)	3 (3.95)
bravery	13 (3.78)	14 (3.67)	13 (3.70)	8 (3.82)	13 (3.71)	19 (3.51)	18 (3.55)
forgive	20 (3.61)	5 (3.90)	11 (3.75)	20 (3.59)	17 (3.55)	15 (3.61)	15 (3.71)
hope	16 (3.75)	21 (3.29)	20 (3.54)	18 (3.63)	14 (3.69)	11 (3.71)	17 (3.59)
industry	14 (3.78)	16 (3.54)	19 (3.54)	19 (3.63)	16 (3.60)	22 (3.44)	21 (3.37)
religiousness	22 (3.57)	24 (3.07)	24 (3.20)	21 (3.47)	22 (3.46)	20 (3.48)	24 (3.26)
zest	19 (3.63)	19 (3.38)	18 (3.63)	22 (3.44)	15 (3.68)	21 (3.46)	19 (3.48)
prudence	21 (3.59)	20 (3.34)	21 (3.37)	16 (3.64)	21 (3.46)	18 (3.55)	20 (3.45)
modesty	24 (3.27)	23 (3.25)	23 (3.21)	24 (3.12)	23 (3.37)	23 (3.44)	23 (3.28)
self-regulation	23 (3.37)	22 (3.28)	22 (3.24)	23 (3.33)	24 (3.28)	24 (3.39)	22 (3.29)

(continued)

Table II. Continued.

	Weighted						
Nation	CF	TR	CL	TW	IS	NG	VU
<i>N</i>	32	27	25	24	24	24	23
ρ with weighted US profile	0.85	0.70	0.72	0.72	0.83	0.80	0.65
ρ with US profile	0.93	0.80	0.83	0.84	0.88	0.81	0.73
kindness	7 (3.82)	4 (3.97)	9 (3.96)	9 (3.50)	6 (3.82)	4 (4.01)	12 (3.64)
fairness	2 (4.01)	8 (3.90)	3 (4.15)	7 (3.58)	1 (4.03)	1 (4.15)	11 (3.65)
honesty	5 (3.88)	2 (4.02)	4 (4.06)	8 (3.54)	5 (3.84)	2 (4.09)	3 (3.82)
gratitude	9 (3.78)	14 (3.79)	11 (3.89)	5 (3.62)	4 (3.84)	14 (3.78)	14 (3.61)
judgment	1 (4.06)	3 (4.00)	1 (4.21)	4 (3.69)	3 (3.90)	3 (4.03)	6 (3.71)
love	8 (3.81)	7 (3.92)	16 (3.83)	6 (3.59)	2 (4.03)	6 (3.94)	8 (3.67)
humor	11 (3.74)	16 (3.70)	14 (3.86)	12 (3.40)	15 (3.52)	20 (3.62)	15 (3.61)
curiosity	3 (3.97)	5 (3.94)	5 (4.06)	3 (3.73)	8 (3.80)	8 (3.87)	2 (3.83)
beauty	15 (3.66)	11 (3.83)	7 (3.98)	2 (3.78)	7 (3.81)	7 (3.87)	7 (3.69)
creativity	5 (3.88)	6 (3.93)	6 (4.02)	11 (3.45)	19 (3.40)	10 (3.87)	1 (3.89)
perspective	10 (3.76)	9 (3.86)	10 (3.95)	10 (3.48)	13 (3.63)	9 (3.87)	9 (3.67)
social intelligence	12 (3.72)	13 (3.81)	15 (3.84)	14 (3.36)	14 (3.54)	11 (3.85)	10 (3.67)
leadership	13 (3.71)	15 (3.71)	12 (3.88)	23 (3.15)	11 (3.65)	12 (3.84)	13 (3.61)
teamwork	17 (3.61)	18 (3.59)	17 (3.80)	18 (3.32)	12 (3.64)	16 (3.75)	16 (3.54)
learning	6 (3.86)	1 (4.10)	2 (4.20)	1 (3.85)	9 (3.78)	13 (3.79)	5 (3.72)
bravery	14 (3.68)	10 (3.85)	8 (3.97)	13 (3.38)	16 (3.51)	5 (3.95)	4 (3.79)
forgive	16 (3.65)	22 (3.33)	22 (3.57)	16 (3.36)	10 (3.73)	15 (3.78)	22 (3.19)
hope	19 (3.51)	19 (3.41)	18 (3.77)	15 (3.36)	23 (3.30)	18 (3.65)	20 (3.30)
industry	22 (3.40)	17 (3.68)	13 (3.87)	21 (3.23)	18 (3.47)	19 (3.64)	17 (3.53)
religiousness	23 (3.21)	24 (3.19)	21 (3.63)	22 (3.20)	24 (2.95)	21 (3.56)	21 (3.25)
zest	21 (3.41)	12 (3.83)	20 (3.66)	19 (3.29)	20 (3.38)	17 (3.65)	18 (3.44)
prudence	18 (3.59)	23 (3.31)	19 (3.69)	20 (3.26)	17 (3.50)	24 (3.42)	24 (3.19)
modesty	20 (3.43)	20 (3.41)	24 (3.46)	24 (3.11)	21 (3.37)	22 (3.48)	19 (3.38)
self-regulation	24 (3.19)	21 (3.41)	23 (3.52)	17 (3.33)	22 (3.32)	23 (3.45)	23 (3.19)
Nation	BH	CZ	NI	PL	ZW	PT	
<i>N</i>	21	21	21	21	21	20	
ρ with weighted US profile	0.68	0.71	0.74	0.64	0.78	0.81	
ρ with US profile	0.83	0.82	0.85	0.75	0.90	0.88	
kindness	8 (3.89)	7 (3.74)	6 (3.88)	6 (3.79)	7 (3.62)	5 (3.98)	
fairness	4 (3.99)	4 (3.83)	1 (4.03)	4 (3.96)	4 (3.71)	1 (4.10)	
honesty	5 (3.93)	12 (3.61)	4 (3.96)	16 (3.46)	5 (3.68)	4 (3.98)	
gratitude	9 (3.81)	15 (3.57)	16 (3.63)	8 (3.73)	8 (3.60)	11 (3.81)	
judgment	1 (4.06)	5 (3.83)	2 (4.00)	1 (4.09)	1 (3.82)	3 (3.98)	
love	6 (3.91)	8 (3.73)	8 (3.77)	17 (3.42)	11 (3.49)	15 (3.77)	
humor	16 (3.58)	11 (3.63)	17 (3.59)	14 (3.50)	16 (3.40)	10 (3.82)	
curiosity	3 (4.01)	1 (3.98)	5 (3.94)	5 (3.90)	2 (3.82)	8 (3.85)	
beauty	7 (3.90)	6 (3.75)	9 (3.74)	3 (4.04)	6 (3.66)	6 (3.92)	
creativity	12 (3.73)	3 (3.86)	7 (3.79)	7 (3.78)	10 (3.57)	9 (3.85)	
perspective	10 (3.76)	14 (3.58)	10 (3.74)	10 (3.65)	9 (3.60)	7 (3.87)	
social intelligence	21 (3.49)	9 (3.64)	11 (3.73)	11 (3.62)	13 (3.42)	13 (3.79)	
leadership	15 (3.64)	13 (3.60)	15 (3.64)	9 (3.70)	12 (3.42)	14 (3.78)	
teamwork	23 (3.43)	18 (3.50)	19 (3.55)	15 (3.50)	14 (3.42)	17 (3.52)	
learning	2 (4.04)	2 (3.97)	3 (4.00)	2 (4.05)	3 (3.72)	2 (4.03)	
bravery	18 (3.53)	10 (3.64)	13 (3.71)	18 (3.40)	17 (3.40)	12 (3.81)	
forgive	17 (3.57)	19 (3.47)	14 (3.67)	12 (3.58)	21 (3.31)	16 (3.56)	
hope	13 (3.71)	16 (3.56)	18 (3.57)	19 (3.14)	15 (3.42)	20 (3.33)	
industry	11 (3.75)	20 (3.33)	12 (3.73)	24 (3.09)	20 (3.35)	21 (3.32)	
religiousness	20 (3.51)	21 (3.23)	22 (3.46)	20 (3.13)	24 (3.07)	24 (2.92)	
zest	19 (3.72)	17 (3.51)	23 (3.40)	22 (3.12)	22 (3.22)	18 (3.45)	
prudence	14 (3.66)	23 (3.07)	20 (3.55)	13 (3.51)	18 (3.39)	19 (3.38)	
modesty	22 (3.48)	24 (3.06)	21 (3.53)	23 (3.10)	19 (3.37)	22 (3.28)	
self-regulation	24 (3.41)	22 (3.19)	24 (3.32)	21 (3.13)	23 (3.20)	23 (3.21)	

Notes: Figures in parentheses are raw mean scores. Ranks shown in table do not reflect tie scores, although ties were used in calculating the reported ρ coefficients. Country abbreviations are as follows: AE = United Arab Emirates, AR = Argentina, AT = Austria, AU = Australia, AZ = Azerbaijan, BE = Belgium, BH = Bahrain, BR = Brazil, BS = Bahamas, CA = Canada, CF = Central African Republic, CH = Switzerland, CL = Chile, CN = China, CV = Cape Verde, CZ = Czech Republic, DE = Germany, DK = Denmark, ES = Spain, FI = Finland, FR = France, GR = Greece, HK = Hong Kong, HR = Croatia, HU = Hungary, IE = Ireland, IL = Israel, IN = India, IS = Iceland, IT = Italy, JP = Japan, KY = Cayman Islands, MX = Mexico, MY = Malaysia, NG = Nigeria, NI = Nicaragua, NL = Netherlands, NO = Norway, NZ = New Zealand, PH = Philippines, PL = Poland, PT = Portugal, SE = Sweden, SG = Singapore, TR = Turkey, TW = Taiwan, UK = United Kingdom, US = United States, UY = Uruguay, UZ = Uzbekistan, VE = Venezuela, VU = Vanuatu, ZA = South Africa, ZW = Zimbabwe.

Classification (total 240 items). Details concerning the reliability and validity of the VIA-IS are presented elsewhere (Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2005; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Briefly: (a) reliability, all scales have good reliabilities ($\alpha > 0.70$); (b) stability, test–retest correlations for all scales over a 4-month period are substantial and in almost all cases approach their internal consistencies ($r_s \cong 0.70$); (c) validity, self-nomination of strengths correlate substantially with the matching scale scores ($r_s > 0.5$); and (d) validity, ratings by friends or family members of a respondent's top strengths correlate moderately with the matching scale scores for most of the 24 strengths ($r_s \cong 0.3$).

Procedure

Respondents first registered on the website, providing basic demographic information, including age, gender, educational level, nationality, and, if from the USA, postal zip code. Because this website was intended for international use, we did not ask respondents about their ethnicity.

Zip codes were used to classify US respondents as residing in one of the 50 states. The number of respondents from a state correlated highly with the actual state population ($r = 0.95$, $p < 0.001$). We excluded respondents from American Samoa, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, the United States of America Virgin Islands, and those with APO (military) zip codes. We weighted the US sample by state of residence, age, gender, and educational attainment to agree with population estimates for adults (age 18 and over) from the 2000 US Census (www.census.gov), adjusting the weighted sample size to be equal to the unweighted sample size. We did not weight the samples from other nations.

Results

What strengths of character are most and least common? The first column of Table II presents weighted mean scores for each strength, arranged from highest to lowest, for the 83,576 US respondents.² Given the size of the sample, any two means that differ by 0.01 or more are statistically different ($p < 0.001$). Although we weighted scores by a respondent's state of residence, gender, age, and educational attainment, much the same relative rankings were found using raw scores, as shown in the second column of Table II. The correlation between the ranking of the 24 weighted and unweighted mean scores, estimated by Spearman's ρ (rank-order) correlation coefficient, was 0.94. The differences in the rankings were mostly the result of

relatively lower scores for curiosity and for love of learning in the weighted sample, because these two character strengths are the ones most highly correlated with education ($r_s = 0.19$ and 0.27 , respectively).

Higher (weighted) strength scores were found for kindness, fairness, honesty, gratitude, judgment, love, and humor, and lower scores were found for strengths of temperance: prudence, modesty, and especially self-regulation. How unique is this particular rank-order profile when compared to other nations? We computed profiles of strengths, from top (= 1) to bottom (= 24), for the 53 other nations in our sample, and then compared these to the US profile, both weighted and unweighted, again using Spearman's ρ correlations. All of the resulting Spearman ρ coefficients were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$), ranging from a low of 0.64 for the US–Poland comparison to several that exceeded 0.90 (Table II). Coefficients using the unweighted US profile in all cases exceeded those using the weighted profile, perhaps because the unweighted US sample more closely approximated the typical educational level found in the other samples. Regardless, the rank order of self-attributed strengths of character was similar across all nations in these comparisons.

Inspection of the raw scores in Table II shows that there were overall (cross-strength) differences in the scores from nations, as we have found in other comparative studies (Matthews, Eid, Kelly, Bailey, & Peterson, 2006; Shimai, Otake, Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006). It is not plausible to take these differences at face value and conclude that nations differ in their overall virtue. Rather, we believe that they reflect national idiosyncrasies in how respondents treat the anchors of rating scales. More interesting were the occasional departures of a given strength for a given nation from the typical ranking of strengths found worldwide (e.g., the high ranking of zest for Singapore), but these may well be random and in any event need to be investigated more systematically in future studies before any conclusions are warranted.

We tried to cluster the nations in our study using both raw and ranked scores, with a variety of clustering algorithms and different end rules, but none of these analyses suggested a right or even a reasonable number of clusters. Specific groupings of nations of course emerged that made intuitive sense. For example, Scandinavian nations were marginally more similar to one another than they were to other nations, and the same was true for the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. But the data as a whole lead us to stress the similarity among the nations in our study.³

Does the incidence and rank order of character strengths differ across the 50 US states? The rank

order of character strengths was highly similar across the 50 states, as shown by the ρ coefficients among the rank orderings of strengths for the 50 states. All exceeded 0.70, and most were above 0.90 (all $p < 0.001$).

We took a closer look at strength scores across states in a series of one-way ANOVAs with state as the independent variable and each of the 24 strengths in turn as the dependent variable. In each case, we found statistically significant differences ($p < 0.001$). Considering the very large sample size, these results are not surprising. However, effect sizes were uniformly very small (median η square = 0.007). The only effect size greater than 0.01 was for religiousness (η square = 0.018). Slightly higher scores for religiousness were found for states in the southern USA, whereas slightly lower scores were found for states in the northeastern and western USA.

When we grouped states into larger geographical regions (Zelinsky, 1992) and repeated these analyses, the largest effect size was again for religiousness but still extremely small (η square = 0.011). Respondents from Southern, Midwestern, and Rocky Mountain states had somewhat higher scores than those from New England, Middle Atlantic, and Pacific states.

Red state (Republican in 2000) versus blue state (Democratic in 2000) comparisons revealed differences (again, extremely small) only for religiousness (η square = 0.010). Red state respondents scored somewhat higher on religiousness than did blue state respondents.⁴

We looked at the longitude (north–south) and latitude (east–west) correlates of the different strengths for respondents from the 48 states in the continental USA by assigning average values for each state corresponding to the geographical balancing-point for that state. The largest correlation was $r = -0.06$, between religiousness and longitude, meaning, again, that respondents from more southern states scored somewhat higher than did respondents from more northern states. We repeated the longitude analyses by partialling out latitude and the latitude analyses by partialling out longitude. We also looked at the longitude–latitude interaction as a predictor of each character strength. No new conclusions were suggested.

Discussion

For the USA as a whole, there are greater and lesser strengths of character. The most commonly self-described strengths are, in order, kindness, fairness, honesty, gratitude, and judgment, and the lowest in order from the bottom are prudence, modesty, and self-regulation. The US profile converged with those of 53 other nations in our sample. Rank order profiles also converged across the 50 US states,

eclipsing minor regional differences in religiousness. In contrast to the frequently expressed idea that a culture war is being waged in the world today, our results suggest that we are all on the same side, at least as far as moral self-description goes. People everywhere see themselves as possessing the same interpersonal strengths yet relatively lacking the same strengths of temperance.

Our results may reveal something about pervasive human nature. The consistently highest strengths, from nation to nation and from region to region within the USA, correspond to what Bok (1995) identified as the universal values minimally necessary for a viable society: (a) positive duties of mutual care and reciprocity; (b) negative injunctions against deceit and betrayal; and (c) norms for fairness and procedural justice in cases of conflict regarding positive duties and/or negative injunctions. The character strengths of kindness, love, and gratitude embody positive duties; the strength of honesty enables negative injunctions; and the strengths of judgment and fairness underlie norms for evenhandedness and procedural justice.

The entries in the VIA classification were intentionally tilted toward ubiquitously recognized strengths. The present patterns confirm our intuitions, but they go beyond our initial supposition that these strengths are widely acknowledged to show that they are rank ordered to similar degrees within the USA and around the world. Although this is the first study of its kind to provide insights about strengths of character across all states of USA and dozens of countries around the world, there are several possible limitations to be considered.

One obvious limitation is our use of Internet samples. Although increasingly common in psychological research, samples obtained from the Internet may have problems with generalizability. However, a study by Gosling, Vazire, Srivastava, and John (2004) found that Internet methods were as reliable and valid as more traditional strategies of gathering data, and furthermore that Internet samples were usually more diverse. Considering that over 70% of the US population uses the Internet (Lebo, 2003), we believe that our findings may generalize at least as well as those from studies using typical psychology subject pool samples, which are necessarily drawn from the smaller subset (<50%) of the US population that has ever attended college.

Researchers today accept that the magnitude of correlation coefficients has little intuitive meaning, although discussion has usually focused on correlations that “seem” small but are really not (Meyer et al., 2001). Are we committing a different sort of error by regarding the ρ coefficients reported here as apparently more substantial than they are (cf. Ozer & Gjerde, 1989)? We believe not. In a study of ipsative

(within-subject) stability over time of Big Five profiles, Robins, Fraley, Roberts, and Trzesniewski (2001) concluded on the basis of rank-order correlations uniformly smaller than the ones we found that there was “considerable” continuity.

Nevertheless, our conclusion that nation profiles are similar does not mean that individual people across (or even within) nations are interchangeable with respect to their strengths. For context, consider these analyses that focused on the USA and nine other nations chosen randomly from our sample (Argentina, Bahamas, Cape Verde, Cayman Islands, Chile, Greece, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Sweden). From each of these 10 nations, we chose randomly 10 respondents. Then we computed the rank-order correlations among all 100 of these individuals. Profiles of respondents from the same country showed a modicum of consistency. Of the 450 unique within-nation ρ coefficients, 73% were positive (range from -0.63 to 0.78 ; mean = 0.15 , median = 0.17). But the within-nation consistency did not appreciably differ from the between-nation consistency. Of the 9,000 unique between-nation ρ coefficients, 71% were positive (range from -0.75 to 1.00 ; mean = 0.15 , median = 0.15).

The generalization of current findings across nations may be limited due to the small sample sizes in some countries, the fact that respondents needed to read English, and the over-representation of well-educated respondents. So, the current results may simply tell us that English-reading computer users around the world have similar profiles of character strengths. However, the present findings survive translation of the VIA-IS into other languages and paper-and-pencil administration. Comparisons between the weighted US profile here and the profiles of a Japanese sample ($\rho = 0.74$) (Shimai et al., 2006) and a German-speaking Swiss sample ($\rho = 0.67$) (W. Ruch, personal communication, March 17, 2004) completing paper-and-pencil versions of the VIA-IS in their native languages showed similar results.

Furthermore, the highest scores within our samples included strengths such as kindness, fairness, gratitude, and love, a pattern at odds with the notion that Internet users are socially isolated and indifferent (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). Additional studies with non-English readers and those with more diverse educational backgrounds are nevertheless needed to confirm our current findings.

We regard the strengths of character we studied as trait-like, but they are not relentlessly shown in all situations. They are deployed mainly within one’s own moral circle, which means that the real challenge of the twenty-first century lies not in building virtue from scratch, because it is already there, but much more in extending the moral circle beyond

one’s family, tribe, religion, state, or nation (Singer, 1981, 1993). What would then be found, if our results are valid, is a common humanity.

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Notes

1. Among the scattered exceptions are studies that compare IQ scores across US regions (Kaufman & Doppelt, 1976), investigations of suicide and homicide rates in the USA as a function of longitude and latitude (Lester, 1986), comparisons of subjective well-being (happiness) across different parts of the USA (Campbell, 1981; Crider, Willits, & Kabagy, 1991), surveys of the prevalence of psychological disorders—like obesity and schizophrenia—in different regions (Mokdad, Serdula, Dietz, Bowman, Marks, & Koplan, 1999; Torrey & Bowler, 1990), and work by Nisbett and Cohen (1996) on the southern USA “culture of honor,” which predisposes southern (as opposed to northern) White males to respond to insults with violence.
2. Although not a focus of the present research, we also looked at the US scores as a function of gender, age, and educational attainment. There were some modest differences (e.g., females scored higher than males for the interpersonal strengths of gratitude, kindness, and love effect sizes $\cong 0.04$; older adults scored higher than younger adults on strengths of temperance effect sizes $\cong 0.03$; respondents with more education scored higher on love of learning than those with less education effect size = 0.08), but the relative rank orderings nonetheless agreed considerably across these contrasts. We created profiles of strengths, from top (=1) to bottom (=24), within demographic strata, and then compared their similarity by computing Spearman correlations. All ρ coefficients were sizeable (between males and females, $\rho = 0.84$, $p < 0.001$; across different decades of age, median $\rho = 0.88$, $p < 0.001$; across different levels of education, median $\rho = 0.91$, $p < 0.001$).
3. Further supporting this conclusion were analyses done at the level of individual respondents. Strengths scores for an individual were assigned ipsative ranks, from 1 (highest) through 24 (lowest) and analysed in an ANOVA with strengths as a within-subjects factor and country as a between-subjects factor. Strengths accounted

for more of the variance in scores (partial η square = 0.083) than did the strengths by country interaction (partial η square = 0.005). Because we used ipsative scores, there was no effect of country per se (partial η square = 0.000).

4. In case the reader needs to be reminded, the 2000 red–blue classification of the USA overlaps with the geographical regions already examined, although not perfectly. New England, Middle Atlantic, and Pacific States were blue (except for New Hampshire and Alaska), Southern and Rocky Mountain states were red (except for New Mexico), whereas Middle Western states were mixed, with those bordering the Great Lakes more likely to be blue.

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