3 Classifications and Measures of Strengths and Positive Outcomes

Let us imagine that one could set up a kind of scale or yardstick to measure the success of life—the satisfactoriness to the individual and the environment in their mutual attempts to adapt themselves to each other. Toward the end of such a yardstick, positive adjectives like "peaceful," "constructive," "productive," might appear, and at the other end such words as "confused," "destructive," "chaotic." These would describe the situation in general. For the individual himself there might be at one end of the yardstick such terms as "healthy," "happy," "creative," and at the other end "miserable," "criminal," "delirious."

—Menninger, Mayman, & Pruyser (1963, p. 2)

Karl Menninger, one of the brothers who helped build the world-renowned Menninger Clinic, attempted to change the way that health care professionals viewed the diagnosis, prevention, and treatment of mental illness. As part of his mission, he encouraged clinicians and researchers to dispense with the old, confusing labels of sickness. Then, he called for the development of a simple diagnostic system that described the life *process* rather than *states* or *conditions*. Finally, he reminded us of the power of the "sublime expressions of the life instinct" (Menninger et al., 1963, p. 357), specifically hope, faith, and love. Over the last 50 years, psychology and psychiatry have busied themselves with the confused and miserable aspects of human nature, and, as a result of maintaining the pathology focus, health care providers have helped millions of people relieve their suffering. Unfortunately, too few professionals have engaged in the entire exercise in imagination described earlier, and this has resulted in the unmet needs of millions more people. We continue to add complexity to an ever-growing diagnostic system (American Psychiatric Association, 2000); we know little about the process of living; and we

Karl Menninger

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spend far too little time and energy making sense of the intangibles of good living—hope, faith, and love. If Menninger were alive, we think he would consider our professional acumen and knowledge lacking in utility and out of balance. Most important, he probably would ask, "What about the productive and healthy aspects of personal functioning?"

Although the missions of many positive psychologists bear similarities to Dr. Menninger's ideas, there is a long way to go in measuring human strengths. (We subscribe to Linley and Harrington's [2006] definition of strength as a capacity for feeling, thinking, and behaving in a way that allows optimal functioning in the pursuit of valued outcomes.) In this regard, the argument can be made that work on the classification of illnesses had a 2,000-year head start on the more recent efforts to classify strengths and positive outcomes. Therefore, it is easy to understand why we have better understandings of weaknesses than we do of strengths. In the Menninger et al. (1963) review of the history of classifying disorders, it is noted that the Sumerians and the Egyptians drew distinctions between hysteria and melancholia as early as 2600 BC. The earliest attempt to define a set of virtues is contained in Confucian teachings dating to 500 BC, where Confucius systematically addressed *jen* (humanity or benevolence), *li* (observance of rituals and customs), *xin* (truthfulness), *yi* (duty or justice), and *zhi* (wisdom) (Cleary, 1992; Haberman, 1998; see Chapter 2 for a discussion of Confucian philosophy and other Eastern perspectives on positive psychology).

In the 21st century, two classifications of illness have attained worldwide acceptance. First, the World Health Organization's (1992) *International Classifications of Diseases* (ICD) is in its 10th edition and continues to evolve. Second, the American Psychiatric Association's (2000) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM) now is in its 6th iteration as the *DSM-IV-TR* (Text Revision). The *ICD* is broader in scope than the *DSM* in that it classifies all diseases, whereas the *DSM* describes only the mental disorders. Currently, no classification of strengths or positive outcomes has achieved worldwide use or acceptance. Some classifications and measures, however, have been created, refined, and broadly disseminated in the last decade. In this chapter, we discuss the following three classification systems:

1. The Gallup Themes of Talent (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001) as measured by the Clifton StrengthsFinder and the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer

2. The Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) as measured by the adult and youth versions of the VIA Inventory of Strengths

3. The Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets (Benson, Leffert, Scales, & Blyth, 1998) as measured by the Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors

Then, we explore the dimensions of well-being commonly used to describe mental health. Next, we call for greater attention to the development of broader descriptions and more sensitive measures of positive outcomes. Finally, we emphasize the need for a comprehensive and culturally competent classification of behavior.

Classifications and Measures of Strengths

Whether for positive traits and behaviors or for negative ones, the development of classification systems and measures is influenced by the values of society and the professionals who create these values. As cultures change over time, it is important that these tools be revised regularly to remain applicable to their targeted groups. We now discuss the present three frameworks, along with measures of strengths and their psychometric properties (the measurement characteristics of the tools). Specifically, we comment on the reliability (the extent to which a scale is consistent or stable) and the validity (the extent to which a scale measures what it purports to measure) of these recently designed tools.

GALLUP'S CLIFTON STRENGTHSFINDER

Over his 50-year career at the University of Nebraska, Selection Research Incorporated, and Gallup, Donald Clifton[1] studied success across a wide variety of business and education domains (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton & Anderson, 2002; Clifton & Nelson, 1992). He based his analysis of success on a simple question: "What would happen if we studied what is right with people?" Furthermore, he focused on straightforward notions that stood the test of time and empirical scrutiny. First, he believed that talents could be operationalized, studied, and accentuated in work and academic settings. Specifically, he defined talent as "naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied" (Hodges & Clifton, 2004, p. 257) and manifested in life experiences characterized by yearnings, rapid learning, satisfaction, and timelessness. He considered these trait-like "raw materials" to be the products of normal, healthy development and successful childhood and adolescence experiences. Likewise, Clifton viewed strengths as extensions of talent. More precisely, the strength construct combines talent with associated knowledge and skills and is defined as the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a specific task.

Donald Clifton

Second, Clifton considered success to be closely allied with personal talents, strengths, and analytical intelligence. Based on these beliefs, he identified hundreds of personal talents that predicted success in work and academics. Moreover, he constructed empirically based (grounded in theory and research findings), semistructured interviews for identifying these talents. When developing these interviews, Clifton and his colleagues examined the prescribed roles of a person (e.g., student, salesperson, administrator), visited the job site or academic setting, identified outstanding performers in these roles and settings, and determined the long-standing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with situational success. These interviews also were useful in predicting positive outcomes (Schmidt & Rader, 1999) and subsequently were administered to more than 2 million people for the purposes of personal enrichment and employee selection. When considering the creation of an objective measure of talent in the mid-1990s, Clifton and his colleagues systematically reviewed the data in these interviews and identified about three dozen themes of talent involving enduring, positive personal qualities. (See Table 3.1 for a listing and description of the 34 themes in the Gallup classification system.)

Table 3.1   The 34 Clifton StrengthsFinder Themes

Achiever: People strong in the Achiever theme have a great deal of stamina and work hard. They take great satisfaction from being busy and productive.

Activator: People strong in the Activator theme can make things happen by turning thoughts into action. They are often impatient.

Adaptability: People strong in the Adaptability theme prefer to "go with the flow." They tend to be "now" people who take things as they come and discover the future one day at a time.

Analytical: People strong in the Analytical theme search for reasons and causes. They have the ability to think about all the factors that might affect a situation.

Arranger: People strong in the Arranger theme can organize, but they also have a flexibility that complements that ability. They like to figure out how all of the pieces and resources can be arranged for maximum productivity.

Belief: People strong in the Belief theme have certain core values that are unchanging. Out of those values emerges a defined purpose for their life.

Command: People strong in the Command theme have presence. They can take control of a situation and make decisions.

Communication: People strong in the Communication theme generally find it easy to put their thoughts into words. They are good conversationalists and presenters.

Competition: People strong in the Competition theme measure their progress against the performance of others. They strive to win first place and revel in contests.

Connectedness: People strong in the Connectedness theme have faith in links between all things. They believe there are few coincidences and that almost every event has a reason.

Consistency: People strong in the Consistency theme are keenly aware of the need to treat people the same. They try to treat everyone in the world with consistency by setting up clear rules and adhering to them.

Context: People strong in the Context theme enjoy thinking about the past. They understand the present by researching its history.

Deliberative: People strong in the Deliberative theme are best characterized by the serious care they take in making decisions or choices. They anticipate the obstacles.

Developer: People strong in the Developer theme recognize and cultivate the potential in others. They spot the signs of each small improvement and derive satisfaction from those improvements.

Discipline: People strong in the Discipline theme enjoy routine and structure. Their world is best described by the order they create.

Empathy: People strong in the Empathy theme can sense the feelings of other people by imagining themselves in others' lives and in others' situations.

Focus: People strong in the Focus theme can take a direction, follow through, and make the corrections necessary to stay on track.

Futuristic: People strong in the Futuristic theme are inspired by the future and what could be. They inspire others with their vision of the future.

Harmony: People strong in the Harmony theme look for consensus. They don't enjoy conflict; rather, they seek areas of agreement.

Ideation: People strong in the Ideation theme are fascinated by ideas. They are able to find connections between seemingly disparate phenomena.

Includer: People strong in the Includer theme are accepting of others. They show awareness of those who feel left out and make efforts to include them.

Individualization: People strong in the Individualization theme are intrigued with the unique qualities of each person. They have a gift for figuring out how people who are different can work together productively.

Input: People strong in the Input theme have a craving to know more. Often they like to collect and archive all kinds of information.

Intellection: People strong in the Intellection theme are characterized by their intellectual activity. They are introspective and appreciate intellectual discussions.

Learner: People strong in the Learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to improve continuously.

Maximizer: People strong in the Maximizer theme focus on strengths as a way to stimulate professional and group excellence. They seek to transform strengths into something superb.

Positivity: People strong in the Positivity theme have an enthusiasm that is contagious. They are upbeat and can get others excited about what they are going to do.

Relator: People who are strong in the Relator theme enjoy close relationships with others. They find deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.

Table 3.1 (Continued)

Responsibility: People strong in the Responsibility theme take psychological ownership of what they say they will do. They are committed to stable values such as honesty and loyalty.

Restorative: People strong in the Restorative theme are adept at dealing with problems. They are good at figuring out what is wrong and resolving it.

Self-Assurance: People strong in the Self-Assurance theme feel confident in their ability to manage their own lives. They possess an inner compass that gives them confidence that their decisions are right.

Significance: People strong in the Significance theme want to be very important in the eyes of others. They are independent and want to be recognized.

Strategic: People strong in the strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.

WOO: WOO stands for "winning others over." People strong in the WOO theme love the challenge of meeting new people and winning them over. They derive satisfaction from breaking the ice and making a connection with another person.

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The first step in developing the Clifton StrengthsFinder as an online measure (see www.strengthsfinder.com) was to construct a pool of more than 5,000 items. Selection of items was based on traditional construct, content, and criterion validity evidence suggesting that the tool tapped underlying attributes, the full depth and breadth of content, and the shared relationships and predictive powers, respectively. A smaller pool was derived subsequently on the basis of item functioning. More specifically, the evidence used to evaluate the item pairs was taken from a database of more than 100 predictive validity studies (Schmidt & Rader, 1999). Factor and reliability analyses were conducted in multiple samples to produce maximal theme information in an instrument of minimal length. Many sets of items were pilot tested, and those with the strongest psychometric properties were retained.

In 1999, an online version of the Clifton StrengthsFinder was launched. That version had 35 themes. After several months of collecting data, the researchers decided on the 180 item pairs (360 items, 256 of which are scored) and the 34-theme version currently available. Although some theme names have changed since 1999, the theme definitions and 180 item pairs have not been altered. See Figure 3.1 for a summary of the signature themes of one of this textbook's authors (SJL).

Figure 3.1   Clifton StrengthsFinder Signature Themes for Shane Lopez

Your Signature Themes

Many years of research conducted by The Gallup Organization suggest that the most effective people are those who understand their strengths and behaviors. These people are best able to develop strategies to meet and exceed the demands of their daily lives, their careers, and their families.

A review of the knowledge and skills you have acquired can provide a basic sense of your abilities, but an awareness and understanding of your natural talents will provide true insight into the core reasons behind your consistent successes.

Your Signature Themes report presents your five most dominant themes of talent, in the rank order revealed by your responses to StrengthsFinder. Of the 34 themes measured, these are your "top five."

Your Signature Themes are very important in maximizing the talents that lead to your successes. By focusing on your Signature Themes, separately and in combination, you can identify your talents, build them into strengths, and enjoy personal and career success through consistent, near-perfect performance.

Futuristic

"Wouldn't it be great if. . . ." You are the kind of person who loves to peer over the horizon. The future fascinates you. As if it were projected on the wall, you see in detail what the future might hold, and this detailed picture keeps pulling you forward, into tomorrow. While the exact content of the picture will depend on your other strengths and interests—a better product, a better team, a better life, or a better world—it will always be inspirational to you. You are a dreamer who sees visions of what could be and who cherishes those visions. When the present proves too frustrating and the people around you too pragmatic, you conjure up your visions of the future, and they energize you. They can energize others, too. In fact, very often people look to you to describe your visions of the future. They want a picture that can raise their sights and thereby their spirits. You can paint it for them. Practice. Choose your words carefully. Make the picture as vivid as possible. People will want to latch on to the hope you bring.

Maximizer

Excellence, not average, is your measure. Taking something from below average to slightly above average takes a great deal of effort and in your opinion is not very rewarding. Transforming something strong into something superb takes just as much effort but is much more thrilling. Strengths, whether yours or someone else's, fascinate you. Like a diver after pearls, you search them out, watching for the telltale signs of a strength. A glimpse of untutored excellence, rapid learning, a skill mastered without recourse to steps—all these are clues that a strength may be in play. And having found a strength, you feel compelled to nurture it, refine it, and stretch it toward excellence. You polish the pearl until it shines. This natural sorting of strengths means that others see you as discriminating. You choose to spend time with people who appreciate your particular strengths. Likewise, you are attracted to others who seem to have found and cultivated their own strengths. You tend to avoid those who want to fix you and make you well rounded. You don't want to spend your life bemoaning what you lack. Rather, you want to capitalize on the gifts with which you are blessed. It's more fun. It's more productive. And, counterintuitively, it is more demanding.

Figure 3.1 (Continued)

Arranger

You are a conductor. When faced with a complex situation involving many factors, you enjoy managing all the variables, aligning and realigning them until you are sure you have arranged them in the most productive configuration possible. In your mind, there is nothing special about what you are doing. You are simply trying to figure out the best way to get things done. But others, lacking this theme, will be in awe of your ability. "How can you keep so many things in your head at once?" they will ask. "How can you stay so flexible, so willing to shelve well-laid plans in favor of some brand-new configuration that has just occurred to you?" But you cannot imagine behaving in any other way. You are a shining example of effective flexibility, whether you are changing travel schedules at the last minute because a better fare has popped up or mulling over just the right combination of people and resources to accomplish a new project. From the mundane to the complex, you are always looking for the perfect configuration. Of course, you are at your best in dynamic situations. Confronted with the unexpected, some complain that plans devised with such care cannot be changed, while others take refuge in the existing rules or procedures. You don't do either. Instead, you jump into the confusion, devising new options, hunting for new paths of least resistance, and figuring out new partnerships—because, after all, there might just be a better way.

Ideation

You are fascinated by ideas. What is an idea? An idea is a concept, the best explanation of the most events. You are delighted when you discover beneath the complex surface an elegantly simple concept to explain why things are the way they are. An idea is a connection. Yours is the kind of mind that is always looking for connections, and so you are intrigued when seemingly disparate phenomena can be linked by an obscure connection. An idea is a new perspective on familiar challenges. You revel in taking the world we all know and turning it around so we can view it from a strange but strangely enlightening angle. You love all these ideas because they are profound, because they are novel, because they are clarifying, because they are contrary, because they are bizarre. For all these reasons, you derive a jolt of energy whenever a new idea occurs to you. Others may label you creative or original or conceptual or even smart. Perhaps you are all of these. Who can be sure? What you are sure of is that ideas are thrilling. And on most days this is enough.

Strategic

The Strategic theme enables you to sort through the clutter and find the best route. It is not a skill that can be taught. It is a distinct way of thinking, a special perspective on the world at large. This perspective allows you to see patterns where others simply see complexity. Mindful of these patterns, you play out alternative scenarios, always asking, "What if this happened? Okay, well what if this happened?" This recurring question helps you see around the next corner. There you can evaluate accurately the potential obstacles. Guided by where you see each path leading, you start to make selections. You discard the paths that lead nowhere. You discard the paths that lead straight into resistance. You discard the paths that lead into a fog of confusion. You cull and make selections until you arrive at the chosen path—your strategy. Armed with your strategy, you strike forward. This is your Strategic theme at work: "What if?" Select. Strike.

In the last decade, extensive psychometric research on the Clifton StrengthsFinder was conducted by Gallup researchers (and summarized in a technical report by Lopez, Hodges, & Harter, 2005, and Asplund, Lopez, Hodges, & Harter, 2007) and StrengthsFinder 2.0 was released in 2007 (Rath, 2007). Across samples, most scales (i.e., themes) on StrengthsFinder 2.0 have been found to be internally consistent (despite containing as few as four items) and stable over periods ranging from 1 week to 6 months. Specifically, the coefficient alphas have ranged from .52 to .79 (.70 or above is a desirable psychometric standard) with WOO having the highest internal consistency (.79) and Individualization, Input, and Relator having the lowest (all below .60). Regarding the stability of scales, most test–retest correlations were above .70 (considered appropriate for a measure of a personal trait).

Regarding construct validity, the theme score intercorrelations support the relative independence of themes, thereby showing that the 34 themes provide unique information. Finally, a study correlating Clifton StrengthsFinder themes with the Big 5 personality constructs (openness, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism; McCrae & Costa, 1987) provided initial evidence for the measure's convergent validity (i.e., they were correlated, but not at such a high level suggesting redundancy). To date, there are no published studies examining the intercorrelations between the 34 theme scores and personality measures (other than the Big 5 measure).

Today, the Clifton StrengthsFinder is available in 17 languages, and it is modifiable for individuals with disabilities. It is appropriate for administration to adolescents and adults with reading levels at 10th grade or higher. Although it is used to identify personal talents, the related supporting materials (e.g., Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton & Anderson, 2002; Clifton & Nelson, 1992; Rath, 2007) can help individuals discover how to build on their talents to develop strengths within their particular life roles. It should be noted, however, that this instrument is not designed or validated for use in employee selection or mental health screening. Another caveat also is warranted: namely, given that Clifton StrengthsFinder feedback (presented as your "Five Signature Themes") is provided to foster intrapersonal development, using it for comparisons of individuals' profiles is discouraged. (A respondent's top five themes, in order of potency, are included in the feedback. Remaining themes are not rank ordered and shared with respondents. This is also the case with the strengths feedback that results from the Values in Action measure, to be discussed subsequently.) Furthermore, the Clifton StrengthsFinder is not sensitive to change and, as such, it should not be used as a pre–post measure of growth.

Gallup developed a new talent classification system and a measure that is appropriate for children and youth (ages 10 to 14). This is called the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer and was released in 2006.

StrengthsExplorer developers believe that knowledge about young people's strengths will help in directing their energies to maximize their potentials (personal communication, Pio Juszkiewicz, November 7, 2005). The version of the StrengthsExplorer tested in the summer of 2005 taps 10 themes (Achieving, Caring, Competing, Confidence, Dependability, Discoverer, Future Thinker, Organizing, Presence, and Relating). (The psychometric report for the measure will be available upon its release.) When respondents complete the measure, they receive a Youth Workbook summarizing their top three themes and including action items and exercises that, if completed, could help youth capitalize on their strengths. Parent and educator guides also are available so that caregivers can help youth in developing their positive characteristics.

THE VIA CLASSIFICATION OF STRENGTHS

The VIA (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) Classification of Strengths serves as the antithesis of the *DSM*, and it holds promise for fostering our understanding of psychological strengths. Peterson and Seligman make the point that we currently have a shared language for speaking about the negative side of psychology, but we have no such equivalent terminology for describing human strengths. The VIA Classification of Strengths provides such a common language, and it encourages a more strength-based approach to diagnosis and treatment (treatment manuals focused on enhancing strengths may one day accompany the diagnostic manual). As these pioneering positive psychologists write, "We . . . rely on the 'new' psychology of traits that recognizes individual differences . . . that are stable and general but also shaped by the individual's setting and thus capable of change" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 5).

The VIA classification system, originally commissioned by the Mayerson Foundation, was generated in response to two basic questions: "(1) How can one define the concepts of 'strength' and 'highest potential,' and (2) how can one tell that a positive youth development program has succeeded in meeting its goals?" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. v). These questions led to more philosophical and practical questions about character. Ultimately, Peterson and Seligman and many colleagues decided that components of character included virtues (core characteristics valued by some moral philosophers, religious thinkers, and everyday folk), character strengths (psychological processes and mechanisms that define virtues), and situational themes (specific habits that lead people to manifest strengths in particular situations).

The generation of entries for the classification system first was attempted by a small group of psychologists and

Christopher Peterson

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psychiatrists after dozens of inventories of virtues and strengths and perspectives of character were reviewed. Upon applying 10 criteria for strength (e.g., a strength is morally valued in its own right; a person's display of a strength does not diminish other people) to a long list of potential constructs, 24 strengths were identified and then organized under 6 overarching virtues (wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence) thought to "emerge consensually across cultures and throughout time" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 29). Table 3.2 lists and describes the 6 virtues and 24 strengths. Peterson and Seligman state that their classification approach is sensitive to the developmental differences in which character strengths are displayed and deployed.

Table 3.2   The VIA Classification of Virtues and Strengths

Wisdom and Knowledge—Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge

Creativity: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things

Curiosity: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake

Open-mindedness: 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

Courage—Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external and internal

Bravery: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain

Persistence: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles

Integrity: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way

Vitality: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing anything halfheartedly

Humanity—Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others

Love: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which caring is reciprocated

Kindness: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them

Social intelligence: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself

Table 3.2 (Continued)

Justice—Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life
  Citizenship: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to a group
  Fairness: Treating all people the same according to the notions of fairness and justice
  Leadership: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done

Temperance—Strengths that protect against excess
  Forgiveness and mercy: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting others' faults
  Humility/Modesty: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves
  Prudence: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks
  Self-regulation: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined

Transcendence—Strengths that forge connections to the larger universe and provide meaning
  Appreciation of beauty and excellence: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life
  Gratitude: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen
  Hope: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it
  Humor: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people
  Spirituality: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe

Source: From Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P., *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification,* Table 1.1: Classification of Character Strengths, copyright © 2004 by Values in Action Institute. Used by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

The measure of this system of virtues and strengths, the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS), was designed to describe the individual differences of character strengths on continua and not as distinct categories. The development of the measure was influenced by a tool once known as the "wellsprings" measure (Lutz, 2000), and it "took inspiration from the Gallup's StrengthsFinder measure . . . by wording items in extreme fashion ("I *always* . . .") and by providing feedback to respondents concerning their top—not bottom—strengths of character" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 628).

To date, the VIA-IS has been refined several times, and the current version appears reliable and valid for the purposes of identifying strengths in adults (based on summary information presented in Peterson & Seligman [2004], which is referenced heavily in this paragraph). Regarding the reliability of the measure, all scales have satisfactory consistency and

stability across a 4-month period. Correlations among scales are higher than expected given that the inventory was designed to measure 24 unique constructs. Women score higher on humanity strengths than men, and African Americans score higher than members of other racial and ethnic groups on the scale of the spirituality strength. Evidence of the measure's validity includes the following three sets of findings:

1. Nominations of strengths by friends and family correlate at about a .50 level with matching scales' scores for most of the 24 strengths.

2. The majority of the scales correlate positively with scores on measures of life satisfaction.

3. Factor analyses provide some support for the existence of 6 virtues.

The results from the factor analysis conducted on existing data, however, actually suggest 5 factors (strengths of restraint, intellectual strengths, interpersonal strengths, emotional strengths, theological strengths) instead of the 6 proposed virtues. Peterson and Seligman (2004) described studies comparing strengths across groups of people, and they reason that the VIA-IS is an outcome measure that is sensitive to change. The researchers at the VIA Institute plan additional examinations of the psychometric properties of the measure.

The 6th iteration of the VIA-IS currently is available as an online (www.positivepsychology.org) and paper-and-pencil measure in English and several other languages. The 240 items (10 for each strength), answered with a 5-point Likert scale, can be completed in about 30 minutes. The feedback report consists of the top 5 strengths, which are called signature strengths. See Figure 3.2 for the summary of one of this textbook's author's (SJL) findings from the VIA-IS.

An adolescent version of this measure, referred to as the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths for Youth (VIA-Youth), has been developed. Preliminary validation of the VIA-Youth, which contains 198 items (6 to 12 items for each of the 24 strengths with a 5-point Likert scale), suggested that internal consistency of the scales is adequate for most and that the basic structure of the measure may be best described by 4 factors rather than 6 (Peterson & Park, 2003). Child and youth versions of a strengths cardsort (Lopez, Janowski, & Quinn, 2004; Quinn, 2004;), based on the 24 VIA strengths, have been developed, initially validated, and widely used by practitioners.

THE SEARCH INSTITUTE'S 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

The Search Institute's Developmental Assets (Benson et al., 1998), which originally were conceptualized in the 1980s in response to the question, "What protects children from today's problems?" considers

Figure 3.2   VIA-IS Signature Strengths for Shane Lopez

Version 6.8.2004

VIA Strengths Scale

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Its goal is to measure the extent to which people see themselves possessing various human strengths (for details see http://www.psych.upenn.edu/seligman/classification.htm).

Please take these tentative results with a grain of salt, but we would be interested in knowing your reactions to this assessment.

—Christopher Peterson
chrispet@umich.edu

Feedback

You completed a preliminary version of this questionnaire. Here is the feedback we promised you. If you would like to save a copy, use File–Save As in your browser's menu and save it as Feedback.html on your computer.

We are just beginning the process of ascertaining the reliability and validity of the questionnaire. However, if we go simply by the face validity of the questions you answered, your five most notable strengths are as follows:

1. Gratitude

   You are aware of and thankful for the good things that happen. You take time to express thanks.

2. Perspective [Wisdom]

   You are able to provide wise counsel to others. You have ways of looking at the world that make sense to yourself and to other people.

3. Curiosity [Interest, Novelty-Seeking, Openness to Experience]

   You take an interest in all of ongoing experience for its own sake. You find subjects and topics fascinating. You explore and discover.

4. Hope [Optimism, Future-Mindedness, Future Orientation]

   You expect the best in the future and work to achieve it. You believe that a good future is something that can be brought about.

5. Vitality [Zest, Enthusiasm, Vigor, Energy]

   You approach life with excitement and energy. You don't do things halfway or halfheartedly. You live life as an adventure. You feel alive and activated.

Source: © 2004 Values in Action Institute.

internal and external variables that contribute to a child's thriving. The Search Institute researchers, headed by Peter Benson, conducted numerous research projects and also held informal discussions and focus groups to ensure that the developmental assets included in their framework were applicable to all people, cultures, and settings in America.

The Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets are considered commonsense, positive experiences and qualities and are identified as reflecting primary contributors to the thriving of young people. The Developmental Assets framework categorizes assets according to external and internal groups of 20 assets each. The 20 external assets are the positive experiences that children and youth gain through interactions with people and institutions; the 20 internal assets are those personal characteristics and behaviors that stimulate the positive development of young people. (See Table 3.3.)

Table 3.3   The Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets

External Assets	
Support	
Family support	Family life provides high levels of love and support.
Positive family communication	Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parent(s).
Other adult relationships	Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
Caring neighborhood	Young person experiences caring neighbors.
Caring school climate	School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
Parent involvement in schooling	Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.
Empowerment	
Community values youth	Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
Youth as resources	Young people are given useful roles in the community.
Service to others	Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
Safety	Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.

(Continued)

Table 3.3 (Continued)

External Assets	
Boundaries and Expectations	
Family boundaries	Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
School boundaries	School provides clear rules and consequences.
Neighborhood boundaries	Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
Adult role models	Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
Positive peer influence	Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
High expectations	Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.
Constructive Use of Time	
Creative activities	Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
Youth programs	Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.
Religious community	Young person spends one hour or more per week in activities in a religious institution.
Time at home	Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.
Internal Assets	
Commitment to Learning	
Achievement motivation	Young person is motivated to do well in school.
School engagement	Young person is actively engaged in learning.
Homework	Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
Bonding to school	Young person cares about her or his school.

Reading for pleasure	Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
Positive Values	
Caring	Young person places high value on helping other people.
Equality and social justice	Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
Integrity	Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
Honesty	Young person tells the truth even when it is not easy.
Responsibility	Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
Restraint	Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
Social Competencies	
Planning and decision making	Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
Interpersonal competence	Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
Cultural competence	Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
Resistance skills	Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
Peaceful conflict resolution	Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.
Positive Identity	
Personal power	Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."
Self-esteem	Young person reports having high self-esteem.
Sense of purpose	Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."
Positive view of personal future	Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

The 156-item survey, Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors, was developed in 1989 and revised in 1996 (see Benson et al., 1998, for a review). The measure (appropriate for children and youth) describes the respondent's 40 Developmental Assets, along with 8 thriving indicators, 5 developmental deficits, and 24 risk-taking behaviors. Unfortunately, there is little information in the public domain about its psychometric properties.

Additional lists of developmental assets (for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, etc.) have been created by Dr. Benson and the Search Institute researchers. Parents and other caregivers are directed to observe the assets manifested by children and available in the environment.

DISTINGUISHING AMONG THE MEASURES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL STRENGTH

Although the Clifton StrengthsFinder, the VIA-IS, and the Search Institute Profiles of Student Life were created for different reasons, they currently are used for similar purposes. Namely, they identify a person's primary strengths. Table 3.4 illustrates some of the similarities and differences among the measures. This information may help in the selection of the correct instrument for specific purposes, but more data should be solicited from the developers of the measures before making the final choice.

It should be noted that each of these scales of measurement has been created within a Western framework. As such, different cultural groups may not define these concepts in the same way and may not respond to

Table 3.4   Characteristics of Measures of Human Strengths

Measure	Cost $	Online	Completed < in 45 Minutes	Multiple Age-Specific Versions	Direct Focus on Environment
Gallup's Clifton StrengthsFinder	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Values in Action–Inventory of Strengths	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Search Institute Profiles of Student Life	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

questions about the various constructs using the same signifiers. For example, it could be the case that a member of a culture that values modesty and humility may not self-endorse certain strengths as strongly as members of a culture that does not, in order avoid coming to come across as "bragging" or being self-promoting (negative qualities in this culture). Cross-cultural research has begun to be conducted with the VIA-IS (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2006), but data on race and ethnicity within the U.S. sample was not collected. This type of information regarding status within the country of origin is important, as it could be that these data are comparing majority groups across countries (e.g., majority groups in Japan or China to majority groups within the U.S. [i.e., White Americans]) and these profiles of groups who enjoy privilege within a country could be different from groups who have racial or ethnic minority status. Descriptions thus far may not provide the most complete picture of the within-group heterogeneity that may exist. This research gives us an important starting place for more culturally competent understandings of strengths, but the types of measurement issues mentioned here must be addressed, perhaps via qualitative research and studies that specifically sample various racial and ethnic minority groups. In addition, these measures do not address manifestation or definition of these various traits, and thus more research in the areas of cultural equivalence (in addition to metric and linguistic equivalence) must be conducted (Pedrotti, Edwards, & Lopez, 2009; see Chapter 4 of this volume for further discussion).

IDENTIFYING YOUR PERSONAL STRENGTHS

Over the years, we have asked hundreds of clients and students about their weaknesses and strengths. Almost without exception, people are much quicker to respond about weaknesses than strengths. (See the Personal Mini-Experiments to examine this issue and to explore your strengths by taking the measures discussed in this chapter.) We also have observed that people struggle for words when describing strengths, whereas they have no shortage of words or stories that bring their weaknesses to life.

Personal Mini-Experiments: Discovering and Capitalizing on Your Strengths

In this chapter, we have discussed classifications and measures of strengths. We encourage you to learn more about your personal strengths as they exist within your own cultural framework and to share them with friends, family, teachers, and coworkers.

(Continued)

(Continued)

Getting to Know Your Friend's Weaknesses and Strengths: Ask a friend (or several friends), "What are your weaknesses?" and note how quickly they respond to the question, how many weaknesses they identify, and how descriptive they are when telling the story of weaknesses. Then, ask that friend, "What are your strengths?" Make similar mental notes about reaction time, number of strengths, and descriptiveness. If you are asking these questions of more than one friend, alternate between asking the weakness question first and the strength question first. In turn, share your thoughts about your strengths (before or after you complete the measures presented in this chapter), and ask for your friend's feedback on your self-assessment.

Discovering Your Strengths: In just over an hour, you can identify 10 of your personal strengths by completing the Clifton StrengthsFinder (www.strengthsfinder.com) and the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (www.positivepsychology.org). We encourage you to take both inventories and share the results with people close to you.

Capitalizing on Your Strengths: There are numerous strategies for capitalizing on your strengths (see www.strengthsquest.com, www.reflectivehappiness.com). For now, we would like you to capitalize on one strength. Pick 1 of your 10 strengths and try to use that strength 5 times a day for 5 days. Your 25 attempts to capitalize on that strength have the potential to bolster it and create a habit of using that strength more each day.

Viewing Your Strengths Within Your Personal Context: As stated above, and in subsequent chapters in this text, strengths must be viewed within a cultural context. They can also be derived from your personal cultural facets (e.g., gender, race, nation of origin, etc.). For example, a Latino/a individual's heritage of collectivism might imbue her with natural strength in caring for others and any individual born in the U.S. might find that the nation's ideal of possessing a "can-do" attitude has helped him to develop the strengths of perseverance and determination. What strengths might your cultural facets provide for you?

We hope that readers take advantage of the opportunity to discover their strengths and that in several decades people will have as much to say about their strengths as they do about their weaknesses. Our observations of people upon the completion of a strengths measure suggest that the new or validated information about your personal strengths will give you a slight, temporary boost in positive emotions and confidence. Also, you will want to share the results with people around you.

THE CASE OF SHANE

As positive psychologists, we have committed ourselves to the development of the positive in others and, of course, we try to practice

what we preach. We both have identified our strengths through formal and informal assessment, and we try to capitalize on our strengths every day. Here is a brief account of how one of us (SJL) uses his strengths in daily life.

When I received the results of the Clifton StrengthsFinder (see Figure 3.1) and the VIA-IS (see Figure 3.2), I reflected on the findings and tried to figure out how I could put them to immediate use. Then, I realized that I have been using these strengths every day . . . that is why they are my strengths! Nevertheless, I decided to be more intentional in my efforts to make my strengths come alive. That goal of intentionality addressed *how* I would capitalize on my strengths, but I hadn't addressed *why*. It turns out, however, that it was pretty simple—I wanted to make my good life even better. That was the outcome I desired, and I thought that these "new" strengths would provide pathways to that goal.

Admittedly, my initial efforts to intentionally use my strengths every day were not that successful. Although I thought the findings were accurate, and I was excited to receive the strengths feedback, I was overwhelmed by the idea of refining my use of 5 or 10 strengths at the same time. For that reason, I decided to capitalize on the strengths that I thought would help me the most in making my life better. I chose the top two themes (Futuristic and Maximizer) from the Gallup feedback and the top strength (Gratitude) from the VIA results. Right away, focusing on three strengths seemed doable.

With those "three strengths that matter most" (as I began to refer to them) in hand, I consulted the action items (shared in a printable form as a supplement to the Signature Themes presented in Figure 3.1) associated with my Futuristic and Maximizer themes. For Futuristic, I settled on one daily activity that might spark my tendency to project into the future: Take time to think about the future. Pretty straightforward, but reading this action item made me realize that I would go for a considerable time without thinking about the future, and this led to dissatisfaction with how my life was going. Putting this guidance into action has involved taking daily walks dedicated to thinking about the future. Often, I walk in the evening, and I chat with my wife about the future of our work and our family. At other times, I leave the office around midday and walk through the campus reflecting on some of my aspirations. These walks have turned into a cherished time that yields exciting ideas and considerable satisfaction.

Regarding my Maximizer theme, I believe this talent of making good ideas, projects, and relationships better contributes greatly to my success at work. Through examining my habits at home and work, I realized I was doing a fairly good job of systematically using this strength. This left me feeling unsure about how to proceed in my efforts to capitalize on this strength. Then, one day I encountered a person who prided herself on playing "the devil's advocate" every time an idea was presented during a meeting. I thought about the many devil's advocates whom I have encountered over the years, and I concluded that these people were not necessarily providing constructive feedback that made a good idea better.

They also were not offering alternative ideas that would work better. In my opinion, all they were doing was undercutting my creativity and enthusiasm (or that of other people). To maximize, I realized that I had to surround myself with people who knew how to make good ideas better. That criterion has become a critical one when I select friends, colleagues, and students, and I believe it has boosted my creativity and the quality of my work.

I have used Futuristic and Maximizing themes both at work and at home, and I think my efforts have helped me in both domains. I believe that capitalizing on these strengths has led to more creativity and productivity at work and greater sense of purpose for my family and me. Using gratitude (my third "strength that matters most") with more intentionality has not generated more productivity or greater clarity in my personal mission, but it has been rewarding in that it brings joy and a sense of closeness to people. To make the most of my gratitude, I decided to spend part of most Friday afternoons writing thank-you notes (handwritten and mailed the old-fashioned way) to people who have touched my life that week, and at other times I thank people who have done something nice for me that week. Occasionally, I write to a person who did a good deed for me years ago (and whom I had never thanked or whom I wanted to thank again). Finally, I also write to people who have done good works (I may or may not know them personally) to express my gratitude for their efforts. This practice has enriched my emotional life, and it has strengthened many of my relationships.

By focusing on three of my strengths, I have been successful at making an already good life even better. Over time, I have become more facile at capitalizing on other strengths, particularly ideation, hope, and wisdom. Living my strengths has become a way of life for me, and I look forward to finding out how this will influence the futures of my loved ones and me.

Positive Outcomes for All

DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING

The pursuit of happiness has been the topic of discussion in religious writings, philosophical texts, and proclamations of the United States forefathers. Most recently, magazine articles and trade books have positioned happiness as the de facto central outcome of positive psychology research and practice. Yet, as described in this text, the pursuit of happiness is only one aspect of positive psychology. As positive psychology researchers and practitioners, we certainly want our participants and clients to be happy, but we also are interested in whether they are realizing their potentials, pursuing their interests, nurturing

others, and leading authentic lives. To date, however, happiness (spontaneous reflections of pleasant and unpleasant feelings in one's immediate experience) and life satisfaction (a sense of contentment and peace stemming from small gaps between wants and needs) are of major interest in the positive psychology field. In this section of the chapter, we discuss happiness and life satisfaction as components of emotional well-being but not as the single or most important outcome in positive psychology. (This chapter provides a basic description of happiness as a meaningful life outcome. The basic research on happiness is discussed in Chapter 6. It is also important to consider that happiness is not necessarily a major goal for individuals from all cultural backgrounds; see discussion of this in Chapter 4).

Theories of *subjective* well-being (also referred to as emotional well-being and happiness), such as the emotional model posited by Diener and others (Diener, 1984; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), suggest that individuals' appraisals of their own lives capture the essence of well-being. *Objective* approaches to understanding psychological well-being and social well-being have been proposed by Ryff (1989) and Keyes (1998), respectively. Our view is that psychological and social well-being provide useful frameworks for conceptualizing positive functioning. Taken together, subjective descriptions of emotional well-being (i.e., happiness) and objective descriptions of psychological and social well-being constitute a more complete portrayal of mental health (Keyes, 2009; Keyes & Lopez, 2002). Table 3.5 presents the descriptions of the three types of well-being and sample items that tap these components of positive functioning.

Emotional well-being consists of perceptions of avowed happiness and satisfaction with life, along with the balance of positive and negative affects. This threefold structure of emotional well-being consists of life satisfaction, positive affect, and the absence of negative affect, and it has been confirmed in numerous studies (e.g., Bryant & Veroff, 1982; Lucas, Diener, & Suh, 1996; Shmotkin, 1998). Indeed, the coupling of satisfaction and affect serves as a meaningful and measurable conceptualization of emotional well-being.

Ryff (1989) posits that some of the favorable outcomes described by positive psychologists can be integrated into a model of psychological well-being (see Table 3.5). Self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others are the six components of Ryff's conceptualization of positive functioning. This model of well-being has been investigated in numerous studies, and the findings reveal that the six dimensions are independent, though correlated, constructs of well-being. Specifically, Ryff and Keyes (1995) conducted an analysis of the six-part well-being model and found that the multidimensional model was a superior fit over a single-factor model of well-being.

Carol Ryff

Source: Reprinted with permission of Carol Ryff.

Table 3.5 Elements of Psychological, Social, and Emotional Well-Being

Psychological Well-Being	Social Well-Being	Emotional Well-Being
Self-Acceptance: Possess positive attitude toward the self; acknowledge and accept multiple aspects of self; feel positive about past life. • *I like most parts of my personality.* • *When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out so far.* • *In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life. (-)*	**Social Acceptance:** Have positive attitudes toward people; acknowledge others and generally accept people, despite others' sometimes complex and perplexing behavior. • *People who do a favor expect nothing in return.* • *People do not care about other people's problems. (-)* • *I believe that people are kind.*	**Positive Affect:** Experience symptoms that suggest enthusiasm, joy, and happiness for life. • *During the last 30 days, how much of the time did you feel cheerful; in good spirits; extremely happy; calm and peaceful; satisfied; and full of life?**;*
Personal Growth: Have feelings of continued development and potential and are open to new experience; feel increasingly knowledgeable and effective. • *For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth.* • *I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how I think about myself and the world.* • *I gave up trying to make big improvements/ changes in my life a long time ago. (-)*	**Social Actualization:** Care about and believe society is evolving positively; think society has potential to grow positively; think self/society is realizing potential. • *The world is becoming a better place for everyone.* • *Society has stopped making progress. (-)* • *Society hasn't improved for people like me. (-)*	**Negative Affect:** Absence of symptoms that suggest that life is undesirable and unpleasant. • *During the last 30 days, how much of the time did you feel so sad nothing could cheer you up; nervous; restless or fidgety; hopeless; that everything was an effort; worthless?**;*
Purpose in Life: Have goals and a sense of direction in life; past life is meaningful; hold beliefs that give purpose to life.	**Social Contribution:** Feel they have something valuable to give to the present and to society; think their	**Life Satisfaction:** A sense of contentment, peace, and satisfaction from small discrepancies between

Psychological Well-Being	Social Well-Being	Emotional Well-Being
	daily activities are valued by their community.	wants and needs with accomplishments and attainments.
• Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them. • I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future. (-) • I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life. (-)	• I have something valuable to give to the world. • My daily activities do not create anything worthwhile for my community. (-) • I have nothing important to contribute to society. (-)	• During the past 30 days, how much of the time did you feel satisfied; full of life?** • Overall these days, how satisfied are you with your life? (0–10, where 0 = terrible and 10 = delighted) • Satisfaction may be measured in life domains such as work, home, neighborhood, health, intimacy, finances, and parenting or it is measured globally (see the Satisfaction With Life Scale, Diener et al., 1985).
Environmental Mastery: Feel competent and able to manage a complex environment; choose or create personally suitable community.	**Social Integration:** Feel part of community; think they belong, feel supported, and share commonalities with community.	**Happiness:** Having a general feeling and experience of pleasure, contentment, and joy.
• The demands of everyday life often get me down. (-) • In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live. • I am good at managing the responsibilities of daily life.	• I don't feel I belong to anything I'd call a community. (-) • I feel close to other people in my community. • My community is a source of comfort.	• Over all these days, how happy are you with your life?*** • How frequently have you felt (joy, pleasure, happiness) in the past week, month, or year?
Autonomy: Are self-determining, independent, and regulated internally; resist social pressures to		

Table 3.5 (Continued)

Psychological Well-Being	Social Well-Being	Emotional Well-Being
think and act in certain ways; evaluate self by personal standards. • I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions. (-) • I have confidence in my own opinions, even if they are different from the way most other people think. • I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others think is important.		
Positive Relations With Others: Have warm, satisfying, trusting relationships; are concerned about others' welfare; capable of strong empathy, affection, and intimacy; understand give-and-take of human relationships. • Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me. (-) • People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with others. • I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others. (-)		

Note: A negative sign in parenthesis indicates that the item is reverse scored. Response options range from strongly disagree (1), moderately disagree (2), or slightly disagree (3) to neither agree nor disagree (4), slightly agree (5), moderately agree (6), or strongly agree (7).

** Indicates response range from all the time (1), most of the time (2), some of the time (3), a little of the time (4), none of the time (5).

*** Indicates response range from worst possible situation (0) to best possible situation (10).

Keyes (1998) suggests that, just as clinicians categorize the social challenges that are evident in an individual's life, so should they assess the social dimensions of well-being. On this point, he proposes that the dimensions of coherence, integration, actualization, contribution, and acceptance are the critical components of social well-being.

Keyes (2009; Keyes & Lopez, 2002) also suggests that complete mental health can be conceptualized via combinations of high levels of emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being. Individuals with these high levels are described as flourishing (see the criteria in Table 3.6). Accordingly, individuals who have no mental illness but who have low levels of well-being are described as languishing. (We have found that informal assessment of levels of well-being provides valuable information about the range of functioning between flourishing and languishing.) This conceptualization of mental health describes a syndrome of symptoms that might be amenable to intervention techniques aimed at increasing levels of emotional, social, and psychological well-being. Conceptualization and treatment are well connected in this model.

A new, integrative theoretical perspective on well-being may provide additional assistance in bridging the gap between our research-based understanding of living well and the ability to promote it (Lent, 2004). By describing one model that explains our capacity for positive functioning during normative life conditions and one that provides direction for restoring well-being during difficult life circumstances, Lent highlights numerous treatment alternatives (e.g., setting goals, enhancing efficacy, building social support) that promote this much-prized life outcome.

Ong and Zautra (2009) discuss ways that well-being might be evaluated using empirical methods using a variety of research and analysis techniques. Longitudinal methodology may be a particularly important avenue toward getting a more accurate view of well-being in its complex manifestation in everyday life. Ong and colleagues (Ong & van Dulmen, 2007; Ong & Zautra) note that researchers must make use of techniques that explicate *nomothetic* (between-person) and *idiographic* (within-person) differences so as to avoid extra sources of error.

TOWARD A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF POSITIVE OUTCOMES

As discussed in this chapter and suggested elsewhere throughout this book, we believe that character strengths are the active ingredients of positive living. This belief can be tested empirically in everyday life and in research studies if, and only if, the definitions and measures of strengths capture the true essence of the best in people. Therefore, we submit information in this chapter about three classifications of strengths and their respective measures for your critical evaluation.

Table 3.6   Diagnostic Criteria for Flourishing

Flourishing in Life

A. Individual must have had no episodes of major depression in the past year.

B. Individual must possess a high level of well-being as indicated by the individual's meeting all three of the following criteria:

1. High emotional well-being, defined by 2 of 3 scale scores on appropriate measures falling in the upper tertile.
   a. Positive affect
   b. Negative affect (low)
   c. Life satisfaction

2. High psychological well-being, defined by 4 of 6 scale scores on appropriate measures falling in the upper tertile.
   a. Self-acceptance
   b. Personal growth
   c. Purpose in life
   d. Environmental mastery
   e. Autonomy
   f. Positive relations with others

3. High social well-being, defined by 3 of 5 scale scores on appropriate measures falling in the upper tertile.
   a. Social acceptance
   b. Social actualization
   c. Social contribution
   d. Social coherence
   e. Social integration

Most of the remaining chapters of this text focus on the science of strengths (some of these strengths are not listed in the classification systems) that is being developed by clinical, counseling, developmental, health, evolutionary, personality, school, and social psychologists. Numerous chapters address the practice of leading a good life and how you and your friends and family capitalize on strengths and build on positive emotions to attain positive life outcomes. Notice that we do not address the "science of good living." Positive psychology research initiatives have done little to describe and measure outcomes other than those associated with happiness and life satisfaction, or "the pleasant life" (Seligman, 2002). Although we encourage a focus on objective aspects of well-being, we contend that a more expanded conceptualization of living well is needed to guide our efforts at change and positive growth. Here, in

the remaining portion of this chapter, we dream a little about the future of positive psychology, one where romantic and agapic love, rewarding school and work and civic contributions, and resource-producing play share the spotlight with happiness.

Positive Outcomes Associated With Love

Agape is a spiritual love that reflects selflessness and altruism. This type of love involves concern for another's welfare and being relatively undemanding for oneself. Although this is not the most celebrated form of love, it may be the most beneficial. Our view is that we could use our strengths to be more giving and to build relationships founded on selflessness.

Romantic love, especially passionate romantic love (described further in Chapter 12), is much desired and talked about by people of all ages. There is little celebration, however, of *resilient* romantic love or *sustained* romantic love. What strengths does it take to make a relationship work despite hard times and thereafter flourish for 10 years, 30 years, and 50 years? We could determine this through more systematic study of couples who report high levels of romantic love many years into their relationships.

Positive Outcomes Associated With School, Work, and Civic Contributions

Schools are becoming more accountable for the educational outcomes of their students, and businesses continue to keep a close eye on the bottom line. Although desired outcomes for students and employees are fairly well articulated as learning and productivity, respectively, there must be other positive outcomes associated with these important activities that occupy us for our entire lives.

Certainly the meaningfulness of academic pursuits and work can be described. But could we measure the extent to which positive schooling (see Chapter 15) and gainful employment (see Chapter 16) stimulate psychological growth? And what about distal outcome measures of school and work? Civic contributions of students and employees could be linked to developmental gains attained early during important periods in school or work.

Positive Outcomes Associated With Play

Play introduces us to the social, emotional, and physical skills needed to make the most out of life. Indeed, play is regarded as a "form of practice, or proximal growth, or mastery of skills" (Lutz, 2000, p. 33). The positive outcomes of childhood play are undeniable ... yet we do not

value the role of play in adulthood. The benefits of competitive and noncompetitive adult play have not been delineated, and this topic is ripe for more research.

Identifying Strengths and Moving Toward a Vital Balance

The staid view of mental illness as progressive and refractory was challenged by the noted psychiatrist Karl Menninger (Menninger et al., 1963). He called for psychiatrists to view mental illness as amenable to change. Thus, this new view of mental illness would bring the old view into balance. Positive psychologists now call for a different type of balance—a view of human life that gives attention both to weaknesses and to strengths, but that is presented with consideration of cultural context. Although there is no question that we presently know much more about fallibilities than about assets, a strong culturally competent science and robust applications aimed at strengths will yield not only a more thorough but also a more accurate view of the condition of our world's inhabitants.

Note

1. In January 2003, Dr. Clifton was awarded an American Psychological Association presidential commendation in recognition of his pioneering role in strengths-based psychology. The commendation states, "Whereas, living out the vision that life and work could be about building what is best and highest, not just about correcting weaknesses, [Clifton] became the father of Strengths-Based Psychology and the grandfather of Positive Psychology."

KEY TERMS

Agape: A spiritual love that reflects selflessness and altruism.

Construct validity: The extent to which a scale measures the underlying attributes it intends to measure. Construct validity can be achieved by comparing your measure to other measures that assess a similar construct.

Content validity: The extent to which the actual content of the scale represents the domain it is intended to address. In other words, a content-valid measure covers all aspects of the construct it is trying to measure.

Criterion validity: The extent to which scores on a scale can predict actual behavior or performance on another, related measure.

Emotional well-being: A type of well-being consisting of perceptions of affirmed happiness and satisfaction with life, along with a balance of positive and negative affect.

Empirically based: Developed using available research knowledge.

Flourishing: A term pertaining to individuals who have simultaneously high levels of social, emotional, and psychological well-being.

Languishing: A term pertaining to individuals who do not have a mental illness but who are low in social, emotional, and psychological well-being.

Life satisfaction: A sense of contentment and peace stemming from small gaps between wants and needs.

Psychological well-being: A type of well-being that consists of six elements: self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery, autonomy, and positive relations with others.

Psychometric properties: The measurement characteristics of a scale that include its reliability, validity, and statistics on items of the measure.

Reliability: The ability of a scale to produce consistent and reliable results over a number of administrations or after the passage of time.

Social well-being: A type of well-being that consists of coherence, integration, actualization, contribution, and acceptance by others.

Strength: A capacity for feeling, thinking, and behaving in a way that allows optimal functioning in the pursuit of valued outcomes (Linley & Harrington, 2006).

Talent: Naturally recurring patterns of thought, feeling, or behavior that can be productively applied and manifested in life experiences characterized by yearnings, rapid learning, satisfaction, and timelessness.

Validity: The ability of a scale to measure what it is intended to measure.