

Symposium Title:**The Interplay of Character strengths and Relationships: Insights, and Effects on Well Being****Abstract:**

Character strengths and interpersonal relationships are two pillars of human flourishing. Character strengths, defined as durable, positive attributes, provide the personality basis for thriving and well being. Relationships are among the most robust predictors of different aspects of thriving, including well-being. Character strengths and their use can provide a basis for the creation and maintenance of healthy, satisfying relationships – leading to well-being. And relationships can provide the social context which promotes, supports and enables development and use of strengths – which also lead to fulfillment and well-being. The present symposium includes three presentations, which address different aspects of the interplay of character strengths and relationships, and explore the effects of this interplay in various contexts, in different countries.

The first presentation, based on a longitudinal intervention study, focuses on compassion as a key contributor to relationships. The study demonstrates how acknowledging and developing character strengths can promote development of compassion and other interpersonal skills and attitudes, for the benefit of individuals and organizations in which they work.

The second presentation, based on a relatively large dyadic diary study, shows how character strengths are associated with married couple relationship quality, and point to the special contribution of specific strengths (women's forgiveness and love and men's social intelligence and prudence) to relationship quality.

The third presentation describes four studies, which demonstrate two ways in which character strengths and their perception are underlie satisfying, fulfilling relationships, and two ways in which relationships can lead the way to individuals' fulfillment by enhancing their use of strengths. The studies focus on couple relationships, work relationships, and general, unspecified relationships (including various kinds of relationships).

Taken together, the studies delineate the interplay of character strengths with interpersonal relationships and portray different ways in which it promotes well being for individuals, dyads and groups. The studies suggest mechanisms underlying the effects of character strengths on interpersonal relationships and their quality, and suggest character strengths as a path by which relationships promote thriving.

Presentation 1

Character strength interventions to foster compassion

Lotta Uusitalo-Malmivaara, lotta.uusitalo-malmivaara@helsinki.fi, University of Helsinki, Teacher education, Special education (corresponding author)

Kaisa Vuorinen, kaisa.vuorinen@helsinki.fi, University of Helsinki, Teacher education, Special education

Keywords: compassion, character strengths, intervention, organizations

Abstract

Compassion means noticing, feeling and taking action in order to alleviate suffering in others. Furthermore, it also comprises concepts of co-celebrating and sharing positive feelings with each other. Compassion is the basis for social well-being and for flourishing co-existence of heterogeneous groups. Compassionate behavior is mutually beneficial. It gives one the deepest feeling of meaning, it adds to social cohesion, increases trust and positive energy.

Compassion skills can be trained. Learning to know what is strong and intact in every person helps in building trustworthy, respectful relationships where empathy and compassion can flourish. Character strengths provide a powerful tool to have a positive view toward others and a fruitful starting point for cultivating compassion. In our multidisciplinary CoPassion project (copassion.fi), we have exploited three kinds of interventions to foster compassionate culture. These are learning about 1) character strengths, 2) emotion skills, and 3) self-compassion. In this presentation, we

describe two character strength interventions: the first one, conducted in 2015, and the second one that will be run in spring 2016.

In 2015, 30 kindergarten head teachers participated in a two-month 6x3 h intervention focused on learning about (VIA) character strengths and how to apply them in their daily jobs in order to promote compassionate behavior. The intervention was interactive with the participants having their say on practical exercises tailored to kindergarten context.

A classic design was applied with pre-post measurements for the test and a matching control group. Our questionnaire consisted of scales for global compassion, compassion in organizations, fear of compassion, scales for positive and negative affect, work engagement, character strength identification, self-determination, and calling, flourishing, and meaning in work. Also, open-ended questions were applied to tap individual views on compassion and its role in organizations.

In all measurements, the test group had made progress over the control group. In global compassion, the difference almost reached statistical significance, $F(1, 48) = 3.49, p = .068$. Also, in character strength identification, the difference came close to statistical significance, $F(1, 48) = 3.30, p = .075$. The qualitative data was extremely encouraging. “A total change in attitude” and “a new, empowering approach to face the work community” are quotes that well represent the feedback.

In spring 2016, we are repeating the character strength intervention and new data will be pooled together with the data from the first intervention. These results will be presented in ECPP2016.

Presentation 2

Character Strengths and Marital Satisfaction

Maayan Boiman-Meshita, Department of Behavioral Sciences and Psychology, Ariel University, 40700 Ariel, Israel, boimanma@gmail.com

Introduction: Character strengths are 24 positive human traits that have been associated with diverse positive outcomes, such as life satisfaction and relationship

satisfaction. Despite the significant potential impact that character strengths have on relationship satisfaction, only few researchers have empirically tested character strengths in the relationship context. For example, some studies have investigated the strengths we seek in a spouse, while others have examined the association between partners' character strengths to their marital or life satisfaction. However, to the best of our knowledge, the question of which of the 24 individuals' and partners' character strengths have the most significant contribution to individuals' marital satisfaction has yet to be considered. The present study sought to fill this gap. **Method:** The sample consisted of 176 heterosexual couples, who were married for 6 months to 45 years ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 8.41$). About half of them (44%) had children. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, each partner received an e-mail containing two electronic links to webpages through which they submitted demographic information on-line and completed two questionnaires: 1) Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), assessing marital satisfaction, and 2) The short version of the Value in Action Inventory (VIA-120), assessing character strengths. Each participant completed the questionnaire battery individually. **Results:** In order to determine which of the individuals' and partners' 24 character strengths make the most meaningful contribution to the individual's marital satisfaction, we conducted 24 hierarchical regressions twice, with one set of the 24 strengths predicting the husbands' marriage satisfaction and a second set of the 24 strengths predicting the wives' marriage satisfaction. In each regression, individuals' strengths score was entered as a predictor in step one, and partners' strengths score was entered as a predictor in step two. Results indicated that most of the individuals' character strengths were associated with marriage satisfaction, both for males and for females. In addition, females' strengths of forgiveness and love, and males' strengths of social intelligence and prudence, contributed significantly to the explained variance of partners' marriage satisfaction, beyond the individuals' own character strengths. **Conclusions:** The present study's findings are consistent with Weber and Ruch's (2012) adolescent sample results, indicating that the contribution of females' forgiveness and males' social intelligence and prudence to partners' satisfaction is stable across age, status, and culture. Furthermore, based on previous evidence, our findings suggest that the strengths we seek in a spouse have a very little overlap with the strengths that actually contribute to marital satisfaction. Taken together, these findings help clarify the role of character strengths in the marital context.

Presentation 3

The Wind beneath my Wings: How Character Strengths and Relationships Promote Each Other to Facilitate Human Thriving

Shiri Lavy, Department of Leadership and Policy in Education, University of Haifa, 199 Aba Khoushy Av., Mount Carmel, Haifa, 3498838, Israel

Hadassah Littman-Ovadia, Department of Behavioral Sciences and Psychology, Ariel University, 40700 Ariel, Israel

Keywords: relationships, character strengths, interpersonal relationships, couple relationships, strengths use

Abstract

Satisfying interpersonal relationships are major predictors of human flourishing. They are evident in different life domains, apparent and influential across the life-span, and have a crucial contribution to physical and mental health, longevity, and well being. In this presentation we will examine two issues related to (1) establishment and maintenance of satisfying interpersonal relationships and (2) positive effects of interpersonal relationships on human thriving. The framework of character strengths will be used to address these issues: Character strengths have been identified as positive personality attributes which serve as the basis for human thriving, and their use- as a path for fulfillment. Thus, they are relevant for identifying mechanisms underlying maintenance and effects of relationships, as they pave the path to thriving. Specifically, in this presentation we will review a set of studies which provide initial evidence for (1) ways in which character strengths and their perception are underlie satisfying, fulfilling relationships, and (2) ways in which relationships can lead the way to individuals' fulfillment by encouraging them to use their strengths. Each question was addressed in two studies.

The first study addressing question 1 explored the individual and dyadic effects of relationship partners' strengths endorsement and use on relationship satisfaction. As expected, results indicated significant associations of endorsement and deployment of partners' strengths on relationship satisfaction. But, unexpectedly, the study also

revealed negative associations of men's idealization of their wives with relationship satisfaction. The second study which explored this question demonstrated how the use of specific strengths (with a focus on relationship-related strengths) can buffer the effects of individuals' difficulties in relationship on their well-being.

The third and fourth studies address the question 2 and demonstrate, using a diary method, how relationships enhance the use of character strengths, which in turn enhances well-being. The third study reveals how a short, daily relationship exercise facilitates strengths use following a negative mood, and increases its positive effects. The fourth study shows how supervisor support enhances daily use of strengths at work.

These studies highlight the ways in which the use and development of character strengths and of satisfying interpersonal relationships advance each other, and calls for further use of these frameworks in tandem.