THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION

CLIFTON YOUTH STRENGTHSEXPLORER™ TECHNICAL REPORT: DEVELOPMENT AND INITIAL VALIDATION

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Abstract

The Gallup Organization's Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer is an online assessment that identifies areas where a young person's greatest potential for building strengths exist. The 78-item assessment is based on the theory and research foundation associated with personal interviews conducted by Selection Research Incorporated and Gallup over the last 30+ years. The assessment, developed through rational and empirical processes, has been subjected to psychometric examination; a summary of reliability and validity evidence gathered to date is presented. The primary application of the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer, as the evaluation that initiates the StrengthsExplorer development process in home and academic settings, is discussed.

Development and Validation of the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer™

The Gallup Organization, widely known for its public opinion polls (Gallup, 2004; Newport, 2004) and employee selection research (Harter, Hayes, & Schmidt, 2004; Schmidt & Rader, 1999), developed numerous semi-structured interviews to identify the talents of youth and adults that could be enhanced and used to pursue positive outcomes in work and school. Under the leadership of educational psychologist Donald O. Clifton (Clifton & Anderson, 2002; Clifton & Nelson, 1992), The Gallup Organization made strengths measurement more accessible with the development of the Clifton StrengthsFinder (Hayes, 2000; Rath, 2007), a brief, objective, online measure of personal talent. Gallup's success with Web-based assessments coupled with 30 years of experience with the Youth Perceiver (a structured interview consisting of 81 open-ended questions), led to the development of the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer. The new measure and the supporting educational materials are appropriate for youth aged 10 to 14 years.[1] The purpose of this report is to describe the development and application of the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer (a talent assessment yielding Top 3 themes, associated action items, and youth, parent, and instructor workbooks) and to summarize its psychometric support to date.

Development of the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer™

Dr. Donald O. Clifton, over his 50-year career at the University of Nebraska, Selection Research Incorporated, and The Gallup Organization, based his success-focused research and practice on one simple question, "What would happen if we studied what is right with people?", and on the following straightforward notions that stood the test of time and empirical scrutiny. First, he believed that talents could be operationalized, studied, and capitalized upon in academic and work settings. Specifically, "talent" was considered "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. These trait-like "raw materials" are believed to be the products of normal healthy development and successful experiences over childhood and adolescence. "Strengths" are viewed 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 activity or role. Second, Clifton considered success to be closely

associated with personal talents and strengths in addition to the traditional constructs linked with intelligence. In accordance with those beliefs, he worked to identify hundreds of personal talents that predicted academic and work success, constructing empirically-based, structured interviews for identifying these talents. When developing these interviews, Clifton and analysts examined the prescribed roles of a person (e.g., student, athlete, salesperson, administrator), visited a personal setting (home, school, sports arena, or job site), identified outstanding performers in these roles and settings, and conducted observations, focus groups, and personal interviews to determine the long-standing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated with situational success. The interviews developed often provided useful predictions of positive outcomes (Schmidt & Rader, 1999). These interviews subsequently were administered by Gallup analysts to thousands of individuals for the purposes of personal development and employee selection.

In the mid-1990s, when considering the creation of additional methodologies for objective measures of talent, Clifton and colleagues systematically reviewed these interviews and the data they generated to capitalize on the accumulated knowledge and experience of Gallup's talent-based practice. The results included the development of the Clifton StrengthsFinder and the early work on the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer. After Dr. Clifton passed away in 2003, his efforts to develop an online assessment tool for youth were continued by a team of Gallup researchers and strengths experts in an attempt to realize the following benefits:

- Going beyond the deficit model of youth development (i.e., focusing on where children and youth are inadequate and attempting to remedy those deficiencies) creates a more holistic picture of the individual.
- Learning about children's strengths can better equip parents, educators, and the youth themselves in finding out which activities or endeavors might bring youth the most success.
- Giving youth positive labels and experiences of success encourages later successes, as well as improved self-esteem and confidence. By giving salience to human strengths by explicitly naming them, it is suggested to the person, and to those in the surrounding environment, that there is merit in these identified characteristics.

As part of a multi-phased approach to strengths identification and instrument development, qualitative and quantitative research was conducted. Initial qualitative research, completed in April 2004, involved four focus groups; three with parents of children ranging in ages from five to 17 years[2] and one focus group with teachers of grades 5 through 12. (One focus group with parents was conducted in-person, whereas the other three groups were conducted via teleconference.) The questions posed by the moderator were created by Gallup and were conversationally presented through the course of each focus group. The moderator asked the participants to describe their children in terms of their personal characteristics and how they behave in a variety of situations.

1.   Describe your child. Talk to us about the personal characteristics that you see as most descriptive of your child.
2.   Think about a time when you saw your child be very successful. Describe for us that success and tell us what behaviors led most to that success.
3.   Think about a time when you observed your child really being who they are, what were they like?
4.   What "attitude habits" do you see your child most often display?
5.   How does your child deal with conflict?
6.   How does your child take care of "their stuff," like their room?
7.   If you were to imagine your child acting very much out of character, what would they be doing, how would they behave?
8.   If your child is alone for a little while with no other children around, what would you expect they would do?
9.   Would you say that your child has changed much within the last two years? If they have changed, how would you describe these changes?

The content of each of the 90-minute focus groups was transcribed and analyzed with two goals in mind. The first goal was to examine the range of characteristics that were used in describing children; a list of 67 terms (e.g., caring, confident, forgetful, impatient, introverted, jokester, persuasive, resilient) was generated. The second goal of the analysis was to identify the themes that served to consolidate the range of descriptions; 23 themes appeared to capture the data.[3]

Based on the themes emerging from the focus groups (along with consideration of themes associated with the Youth Perceiver and Clifton StrengthsFinder), a set of 23 themes to be examined in quantitative pilot studies were identified and item pools for each theme were constructed. A panel of experts (including child development experts, Gallup associates, and strengths researchers) reviewed the 290 items. In Pilot 1, 47 youths completed the 290 items with a three-point response scale (1-yes; 2-sometimes; 3-no), and 58 youths completed the items with a four-point scale (1-almost always or always; 2.-often; 3.-sometimes; 4-almost never or never). Subsequently, the four-point scale was selected for the final version of the measure.[4] Data gathered from Pilot 1 were used to evaluate the psychometric properties of each item and the instrument as a whole. Specifically, researchers studied item means, standard deviations, correlations to hypothesized theme, and frequency of non-response; this analysis resulted in the reduction of the number of themes (from 23 to 18) and items (290 to 154).

In Pilot 2, 535 students from geographically, ethnically, and socio-economically diverse school districts in the country completed a version of the youth strengths measure that consisted of the 154 items believed to measure talent in 18 themes. Factor analysis (discussed in the validity section of this manuscript) and examination of item characteristics resulted in a 78-item instrument measuring 10 themes, which were labeled in a manner that reflects the general content of the items and is meaningful to youth and adults. Specifically, the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer measures talent in the following talent themes:

Achieving: Youths especially talented in the Achieving theme like to accomplish things and have a great deal of energy.

Caring: Youths especially talented in the Caring theme enjoy helping others.

Competing: Youths especially talented in the Competing theme enjoy measuring their performance against that of others and have a great desire to win.

Confidence: Youths especially talented in the Confidence theme believe in themselves and their ability to be successful in their endeavors.

Dependability: Youths especially talented in the Dependability theme keep their promises and show a high level of responsibility.

Discoverer: Youths especially talented in the Discoverer theme tend to be very curious and like

to ask "Why?" and "How?"

Future Thinker: Youths especially talented in the Future Thinker theme tend to think about what's possible beyond the present time, even beyond their lifetime.

Organizer: Youths especially talented in the Organizer theme are good at scheduling, planning, and organizing.

Presence: Youths especially talented in the Presence theme like to tell stories and be at the center of attention.

Relating: Youths especially talented in the Relating theme are good at establishing meaningful friendships and maintaining them.

Administration, Scoring, and Feedback

Youth receive a unique numeric code that provides access to the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer. The assessment consists of 78 items (with a Flesh-Kincaid Reading Level of 4.9) to which respondents indicate, on the four-point Likert scale (1-almost always or always; 2.-often; 3.-sometimes; 4-almost never or never), the degree to which they feel the statements do or do not apply to them. An additional option allows respondents to indicate that they do not know the meaning of the statements by selecting "*This question does not make sense to me.*" In nearly all administrations, the respondent receives a "Top 3" report and supporting materials. However, if more than 30% of questions are answered as *"This question does not make sense to me,"* the following message will appear in place of a report:

> We noticed that many of the questions did not make sense to you. We are sorry but the system cannot create your Top 3 report at this time. Please make sure that when you take this survey again, there is an adult around who can help you understand what the questions mean.

Youth can take as long as they wish to answer each item. However, a response to every question has to be indicated before the respondent is allowed to continue to the next question. Thus, when a respondent clicks on the *"Next"* button without indicating a selection of any the five choices on the current question, the following message will appear on the same screen: *"You must answer every question to continue. Please answer this question and click "*Next."

The Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer uses individual responses to measure talent in 10 themes,

then rank orders the themes via a proprietary formula. Immediately after the assessment is completed, respondents receive their Top 3 report of their talent themes and brief descriptions. Youths can then access more detailed descriptions of their top talent themes as well as "action items" (i.e., suggestions for concrete steps that the youths and their parents and teachers can take to further discover and build upon talents). (See Appendix A for the Organizer theme description and action items.) The code also provides access to the educational components of the StrengthsExplorer package, including the *Youth Workbook* and *Parent Guide*, which provide activities that can be used to further explore, understand, and build the youths' greatest talents. An educator/group leader activity book is also available from Gallup's Education Division at www.strengthsexplorer.com. The *Educator/Leader Activity Book*, designed specifically for small-group or classroom use, includes a reproducible classroom map, guided activities to promote theme-based interactions, and suggestions for highlighting the talents of students. Further, it includes an individual development plan that teachers — or anyone who works with youth in settings such as teams, church groups, or clubs — can use to guide the development of young people. Each document can be printed from the Web with the purchase of an access code or, in the case of the *Educator/Leader Activity Book*, with the purchase of a block of access codes from Gallup's Education Division.

<u>Reliability</u>

The number of items per talent theme ranges from 6 (Dependability) to 10 (Presence). Internal consistency, as reflected in coefficient alphas based on the responses of 535 students surveyed during Pilot 2, meets expectations for measures used in psychological practice (*coefficient alpha*=.70; AERA/APA/NCME, 1999). The alpha for half of the themes is .80 or above. The highest alpha (.87) and the lowest alpha (.72) are associated with the Caring theme and the Dependability theme, respectively. See Table 1 for the number of items per theme as well as the coefficient alpha for each theme. Internal consistency for each theme also is evident when data are disaggregated across age and ethnicity (see Table 1).

Table 1: *CYSE Theme Internal Consistencies*

Theme	# of Items	Total Sample n=535	9 and 10 yrs n=183	11 yrs n=208	12 to 15 yrs n=132	Caucasian Youth n=361	Minority Youth n=169
Achieving	7	0.79	0.77	0.80	0.80	0.80	0.75
Caring	8	0.87	0.87	0.85	0.89	0.89	0.81
Competing	7	0.83	0.82	0.83	0.85	0.84	0.81
Confidence	9	0.80	0.81	0.79	0.79	0.82	0.75
Dependability	6	0.72	0.75	0.68	0.72	0.74	0.66
Discoverer	9	0.82	0.84	0.80	0.82	0.81	0.84
Future Thinker	8	0.75	0.69	0.78	0.78	0.77	0.71
Organizer	7	0.74	0.71	0.72	0.79	0.76	0.68
Presence	10	0.80	0.78	0.79	0.81	0.81	0.77
Relating	7	0.77	0.75	0.78	0.79	0.80	0.71

A total of 56 eighth-grade students at Westside Middle School in Omaha, Neb. participated in the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer test-retest study. Thirty-four out of the 56 students (ages 13 to 14; 53% male and 47% female; 94% Caucasian, 3% Hispanic, and 3% other) were able to complete both the test and retest versions across a five- to seven-week interval (a 61% overall completion rate). Most of the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer themes have stability of .60 or above (considering score-to-score associations). The least stable of the themes were Competing (.44) and Discoverer (.49). See Table 2 for test-retest correlations.

Table 2: *CYSE Theme Test-Retest Reliabilities (n=34)*

Theme	Test-Retest Reliability	95% LCL	95% UCL
Achieving	0.73	0.52	0.86
Caring	0.88	0.78	0.94
Competing	0.44	0.12	0.68
Confidence	0.56	0.28	0.76
Dependability	0.68	0.45	0.83
Discoverer	0.49	0.18	0.71
Future Thinker	0.63	0.37	0.80
Organizer	0.61	0.35	0.79
Presence	0.69	0.45	0.83
Relating	0.66	0.42	0.82

Note: LCL=Lower Confidence Level, UCL=Upper Confidence Level

The stability of the Top 3 report for these 34 students also was considered. Given that changes in responses to a few items could change the order of the themes, it was hypothesized that two of the same top three would be listed on score reports from both administrations. Table 3 reveals 65% of the respondents had at least two themes in the Top 3 set from the first administration appear in the Top 3 set from the second administration. In contrast, only 6% of the respondents had at least two themes in the Top 3 set from the first administration appear in the bottom 3 from the second administration.

Table 3. *CYSE Theme Top 3 Report Stabilities (n=34)*

Condition	Observed Proportion	Chance Proportion	95% Confidence Limits for Observed Proportion (Binomial Proportion)
Same order in Top-3 set at Test appearing in Top-3 set at Retest	2/34=0.0588	0.0014	LCL=0.0072, UCL=0.1968
Same combination in Top-3 set at Test appearing in Top-3 set at Retest	7/34=0.2059	0.0083	LCL=0.0870, UCL=0.3790
Same Top1 theme at Test appearing in Top1 theme at Retest	17/34=0.5000	0.1000	LCL=0.3243, UCL=0.6757
Same Top2 theme at Test appearing in Top2 theme at Retest	3/34=0.0882	0.1000	LCL=0.0186, UCL=0.2368
Same Top3 theme at Test appearing in Top3 theme at Retest	7/34=0.2059	0.1000	LCL=0.0870, UCL=0.3790
At least one theme in Top-3 set at Test appearing in Top-3 set at Retest	30/34=0.8823	0.7083	LCL=0.7255, UCL=0.9670
At least two themes in Top-3 set at Test appearing in Top-3 set at Retest	22/34=0.6471	0.1833	LCL=0.4649, UCL=0.8025
Top1 theme at Test appearing in Top-3 set at Retest	26/34=0.7647	0.3000	LCL=0.5883, UCL=0.8925
Top2 theme at Test appearing in Top-3 set at Retest	14/34=0.4118	0.3000	LCL=0.2465, UCL=0.5930
Top3 theme at Test appearing in Top-3 set at Retest	19/34=0.5588	0.3000	LCL=0.3789, UCL=0.7281
At least one theme in Top-3 set at Test appearing in bottom 5 at Retest	13/34=0.3824	0.9167	LCL=0.2217, UCL=0.5644
At least one theme in Top-3 at Test appearing in bottom 3 at Retest	10/34=0.2941	0.7083	LCL=0.1510, UCL=0.4748
At least two themes in Top-3 at Test appearing in bottom 3 at Retest	2/34=0.0588	0.1833	LCL=0.0072, UCL=0.1968
Same combination in Top-3 set at Test appearing in bottom 3 at Retest	0/34=0.0000	0.0083	*LCL=0.0000, UCL=0.0882
Same order in Top-3 set at Test appearing in bottom 3 at Retest	0/34=0.0000	0.0014	*LCL=0.0000, UCL=0.0882

Approximate Clopper-Pearson Interval using mid-P-Value approach (see Agresti, 2002)

Regarding the frequency of the themes appearing on the Top 3 report of respondents, the Top 1 theme at test was Relating (32%) and the most frequent Top 1 theme at retest was Competing (35%). The most frequent theme appearing in the Top 3 set at test was Competing (59%) and the most frequent theme appearing in the Top 3 set at retest was Relating (59%).

Internal consistency and stability estimates were computed to examine the basic reliability of the Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer. The evidence suggests that the scales or themes are internally consistent (despite being comprised of as few as six items) and stable (with the possible exception of the Competing and Discoverer themes) over a 5- to 7-week period. Specifically, coefficient alphas range from .72. to .87 and most test-retest correlations were above .60.

Validity

In addition to studying the intercorrelations among the items in the assessment, and correlating each item to its respective theme, factor analyses were used during the final iterations of quantitative instrument development as a guide to reduce the redundancy of items in each theme and to maximize the independence of the measured constructs. Principal components factor analysis with both Varimax and Direct Oblimin rotation was used and the results of both rotations were very similar. Factor analysis conducted on the 78-item instrument indicated nine interpretable factors, all with Eigenvalues greater than one. The first factor was interpreted as consistent with the hypothesized "Caring" theme. The second factor was interpreted as consistent with the hypothesized "Competing" theme. The third factor was interpreted to contain items from both the "Dependability" and "Confidence" themes. Due to their conceptual uniqueness and independence when factor analyzed separately, researchers maintained them as separate themes, knowing there would be higher correlation between the two themes than other theme pairs. Separately, they appeared to measure distinguishable constructs. Two example items that distinguish between these two factors are "I do what is right" (Dependability) and "I have my own opinions" (Confidence). The fourth factor was interpreted to contain items from the "Relating" theme, the fifth factor, "Discoverer", the sixth factor, "Achieving", the seventh factor, "Organizer", the eighth factor "Presence", and the ninth factor, "Future Thinker." Therefore, the

factor analyses provided evidence of the construct validity of the assessment. Further construct validity studies should be conducted, studying the convergent and discriminant validity of the assessment by studying theme correlations with other measures of similar constructs or lack thereof with theoretically dissimilar constructs.

Applications

The Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer helps youth 10 to 14 years of age understand and apply the results of their talent assessment. Parent and instructor manuals provide additional activities to assist youth in further building upon their talents. The goals of StrengthsExplorer are to:

• Help youth identify their positive characteristics and improve their understanding of self.

• Stimulate youth development in their areas of greatest talent.

• Improve parents'/instructors' understanding of their children/students.

• Provide theme-based language that youths and parents/instructors can use to discover and describe positive characteristics.

• Create an opportunity for an important kind of communication between parents and their children (i.e., discussion of one's unique nature, the positive characteristics/gifts that one has, and how those can be developed).

StrengthsExplorer programming, grounded in traditional Gallup practices, will be refined based on the principles of Positive Psychology, the scientific study of and evidence-based promotion of optimal human functioning (as summarized in Keyes & Haidt, 2003; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Lopez & Snyder, 2003; Snyder & Lopez, 2002). The productive collaboration between Gallup and Positive Psychology will lead, it is hoped, to refined and new measures and programs (characterized by rigor and relevance) that will continue to generate more answers to the question "What would happen if we studied what is right with people?"

Closing Comments

The Clifton Youth StrengthsExplorer is a talent identification tool designed for use at home, in various academic institutions, and in other organizations dedicated to making the lives of young people better. For these purposes, the measure has adequate internal consistency, stability, and validity. Gallup researchers plan to continue to examine the psychometric properties of the

measure, specifically concurrent validity and cross-cultural applicability, and modify it based on research findings.

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Footnotes

[1]Self-report measures, if properly developed, can be a valid measure of children's strengths. As the reliability of children's self-report responses on diagnostic interviews is low before age nine (Ernst, Cookus, & Moravec, 2000), Gallup decided to first focus on developing instrument for children over 10 years old.

[2]It is recognized by the researchers that chronological age and developmental stage might substantially affect the characteristics described in the focus groups, as well as the nature of their expression. The developing or transitory quality of these characteristics, due to the ages involved, must be considered when interpreting these findings. Furthermore, developing characteristics described are very likely subject to inconsistent expression. It was reported by many of the parents participating in the focus groups that their child might display certain behaviors in one setting and show completely different or even contradictory behaviors in another, even when the situational characteristics were similar.

[3]The reference places or venues wherein descriptions of the children occurred were nearly without exception either school or sporting activities. Inherent to both of these situations is an expectation of performance and a standard of success by which the child is judged.

[4]Additionally, interviews with youths aged 10 to 14 were conducted to investigate their understanding of different types of response options being considered for use in the assessment.

Appendix A

Talent Theme: Organizer

Brief description: Scheduling, planning, and organizing your world makes life better. People count on you to get the details right and pull a plan together.

Detailed description: You like to create order in your world. Schedules help you feel in control of your life. Planning makes you comfortable and calm about what you are going to do. It is fun to think ahead, organize, and include all that you want to do in your plan so you don't leave anything out. You like to think about both the big ideas and the details. It feels good to make something absolutely perfect, whether it is as simple as your hair or as complicated as a big project for school. It is important to you to be on time or even early so you are ready to start whatever you are about to do. Not only do you like order and rules for yourself, you like them for other people too. You help yourself and others by pulling all the pieces together.

Action items for youth:

• You like to make a schedule and stick to it. Keep a calendar for yourself so you can look at what you want to do each day and also look ahead to the week, month, and year coming up. You will feel more in control of your life if you can see it on paper.

• Planning projects and events feels good to you. If you are working in a group, volunteer to be the planner and organizer. Keep a list of all the things that need to be done and who is supposed to do each one. Organize it by person or by due dates, and share your list to help everyone understand the plan.

• A list can help you keep track of what you need to do. Next to each activity on your list, draw a box to the left. Then, when you have finished a task, put a check mark in the box so you can easily see how many things are done and how many are left to do. You might be surprised at how good it feels to check that box and see what you've accomplished.

• You are good at creating neat, clean order. Find the best and most useful ways to organize your school supplies, your locker, or your bedroom. Creating neatness and then keeping up with it makes you feel good and helps you and others find what you need.

• Look around you — who could benefit from the way you like to organize? Could you help organize a family collection or event? Would a teacher appreciate the way you can help organize papers? Find a way to use your talent to help someone else.

Action items for adults:

• Ask this person about how he or she likes to schedule the day. Does this person feel the time is well-planned? Plant the seeds of thought by asking how someone could schedule the day, week, weekend, semester break, or summer. How can you help with these ideas and plans?

• Are there ways this person can be helpful to others by organizing things for you? For instance, could he or she organize the classroom, clubroom, or science lab, or manage the sports equipment? From a drawer to a family event, what would he or she feel is fun or important to plan and arrange? Offer ways that this person can organize things for you or others.

• Could you connect this person with someone who is at least two years older and is good at organizing? Find someone who can model the value of organization in a person's life. This will provide more ideas and examples of ways to put organization into action.