University of Pennsylvania, MAPP 800
Capstone Project, Professor Christopher Peterson

Exploring the Character Strengths of an Oral Tradition:
Vanuatu through analysis of its archived oral legends

Submitted by Virginia U. Millar, July 10, 2008

ABSTRACT: Psychology, education, and popular media have recently focused much attention on the identification and utilization of character strengths. This project explores the ubiquity of the 24 character strengths identified in Peterson & Seligman's 2004 Values in Action (VIA) classification, within a primarily oral tradition. Content and narrative analyses were used to study transcribed legends from the South Pacific country of Vanuatu. Coders recorded the presence or absence of the 24 VIA traits and identified other potential strengths not named in the VIA classification. All of the 24 VIA strengths were found to be mentioned in the legends ($n = 57$, average length = 1,315 words); some prevalence rankings differed from those reported in previous studies of literate traditions. Seven additional non-VIA strengths were identified as potential culturally-specific strengths. Awareness of and respect for culturally-bound character strengths becomes increasingly important as globalization broadens the impact of western, literate cultures on developing nations.

KEY WORDS: character strengths, oral tradition, content analysis, Vanuatu, prevalence ranking, universal, culturally-specific, western influence.

Introduction

The topic of character strengths is one that is currently gaining incredible momentum in both popular media as well as scientific research. Numerous programs that purport to identify and capitalize on human strengths exist in the US alone (e.g. Buckingham & Clifton, 2001, Fox, 2008, Lickona & Davidson, 2005, Rath, 2006, etc.) and are the subject of classroom curriculums and talk shows. Indeed the topic of character strengths and their relationship to human goodness and happiness has been explored through the centuries from the Buddha through Aristotle and by today's current researchers (Biswas-Diener, 2006, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). A more recent, comprehensive and systematic approach was undertaken by psychologists and researchers Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman in 2004 for the purpose of providing psychology with a more comprehensive view of humanity than the one that existed in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* – one that includes what's right with people. (DSM; American Psychiatric Association, 1994). The result was the 800 page *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* which provides criteria, thoroughly defines, and lists measurement instruments for 24 universal human strengths which fall within six basic categories of core virtues (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

In their thorough research to identify universal character strengths and virtues, Peterson, Seligman and other scientists examined numerous texts across cultures and ages to identify strengths ubiquitous to all cultures. The authors even found similar patterns of prevalence of the 24 strengths across 54 nations using self-report data from 117,676 adults who responded on the www.authentichappiness.org website (Park et al, 2006). The authors, however, acknowledged the limitations of "ubiquity," noting that even the six core values vary in relative importance across cultures and that all of the traditions surveyed for the classification were from "literate,

large, and long-lived societies with cities, money, law, and division of labor (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 51). They further expressed the desire to explore culturally-specific values and to maintain a frame of flexibility within the VIA classification (Park & Peterson, 2006).

It is toward that end that the current study seeks to embark. Recent data not only confirm the relative universality of character strengths, but their contribution to a happy and fulfilling life (Biswas-Diener, 2006, Park & Peterson, 2006). In *Flow,* Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1990) wrote that a society may be judged by the degree to which it permits the majority of its citizens to engage in activities in concordance with what is valued by that society. If this is so, the influential powers for that society must have a keen awareness and respect for the values of the society. In many developing countries such as the South Pacific island country of Vanuatu, the subject of this study, the native members of the society are under extreme exposure to western influence, whether in the form of humanitarian aid or commercial development (Country Report, 2008). As globalization gains momentum every day, it is essential that the larger, majority cultures have an awareness and appreciation for the societies on which they will undoubtedly leave their mark – societies that are not "literate, large, long-lived, with cities, money, law and division of labor." This study then takes a small step toward that awareness by examining the values of an oral tradition as expressed in their native legends.

Rationale for Exploration of Oral Legends:

The point of departure for this study (further discussed in the method section) is a collection of native legends from the Vanuatu oral tradition that have been transcribed into English. Although most certainly deflated in translation from oral presentation to written, such a collection offers a valuable cultural window not readily available to everyday western experience. Okafor (2004) stated that, "oral literature has functioned historically as a vital

medium of moral and civic education in non-literate societies the world over" (p. 410). He

purported that nations can adapt their oral traditions to current realities and use them as effective

instruments of civic education in this age of global village. Further, in his introduction to the oral

literature of Africa, Courlander (2002) stated that in their myths and legends, humans assert their

courage and worth, ponder what is just or unjust, and "capsulate the learnings of centuries about

human character" (p. 1). Equally important is the universality made evident through the

exploration of oral traditions; "We discern common desires, aspirations, strengths and

foibles…in the end the similarities of outwardly contrasting societies are more impressive than

the differences" (Courlander, 2002, p. 2).

Rationale for Use of Archived Materials, Content and Narrative Analysis

The utilization of archived materials and the methodologies of content and narrative analysis

are most appropriate for this study. Obviously, the transcribed legends of Vanuatu are archived

data, situated in a specific historical period and condition of collection that may be considered

limiting and open to third or 20th-hand interpretation. At the same time, as geographer Cole

Harris noted, it is only "through such work that many of the places, landscapes, and human-

environment relationships… can be more than superficially known. For that considerable reach

of time between the ethnographic present and near past and the much more distant archaeological

past, the archival record provides the bulk of available information. The world we live in is not

detached from its past. Much of it is largely incomprehensible unless we follow, at one scale, the

processes of modernity and colonialism that have made it what it is" (2001, p. 330) Additionally,

of particular concern to the study of values, Hoyle et al noted, "the way to study people at their

best is to focus on consensual paragons" (2002, p. 299). Certainly a collection of legends

provides such an assortment of paragons.

Many current researchers have also found considerable value in content and narrative analysis. C.P. Smith (2000) noted that language is a major and distinctive source for social and behavioral scientists that reveals development of both persons and cultures. Lee & Peterson (1997) emphasized that such methods may provide the only access to potential research participants such as, "the famous or the dead," and are the only feasible way to study earlier historical periods or large-scale social phenomena. The practical utility of content analysis was demonstrated in World War II in studies of propaganda techniques and enemy morale (Smith, 2000). Smith further noted that content analysis has unexpectedly uncovered similarities between disparate groups and other unanticipated information (2000). Complementing the content analysis approach is narrative analysis which although not quantitative, permits a holistic approach that considers "perspective, content, and frame" (Gee, 1991) - all important aspects to consider within archived materials. Indeed it will be seen in this report that the perspective and frame of the studied collection have a very direct impact on methodology and interpretation and are thus vital to any meaningful conclusions.

Rationale for Studying the Country of Vanuatu

Vanuatu is a rather isolated archipelago of 83 islands situated 1,750 km east of Australia. Over 1,000km separates the northernmost from the southernmost island and transportation between islands is very limited. Consequently over 100 native languages are maintained throughout the islands. Further discussed below, Australian planters and European missionaries arrived in the 1800's, imparting competing religious influences, the French and English languages, as well as facilitating the lingua franca of Bislama. Although cities developed on two of the islands, cash exchange, literacy, and development have remained alien to the majority of the population until recently (Lindstrom, 1994). Indeed, in Park & Peterson's 2006 internet

study of character strengths in 54 nations, there were 24 respondents from the country of

Vanuatu. It can be assumed, however, that all were from either the city of Port Vila (capital) or

Luganville, the few places where electricity and internet are available. In their discussion of

methodological issues within positive psychology, Park & Peterson noted that historical archives

and cultural products should also be considered, and that "constructs of concern should be

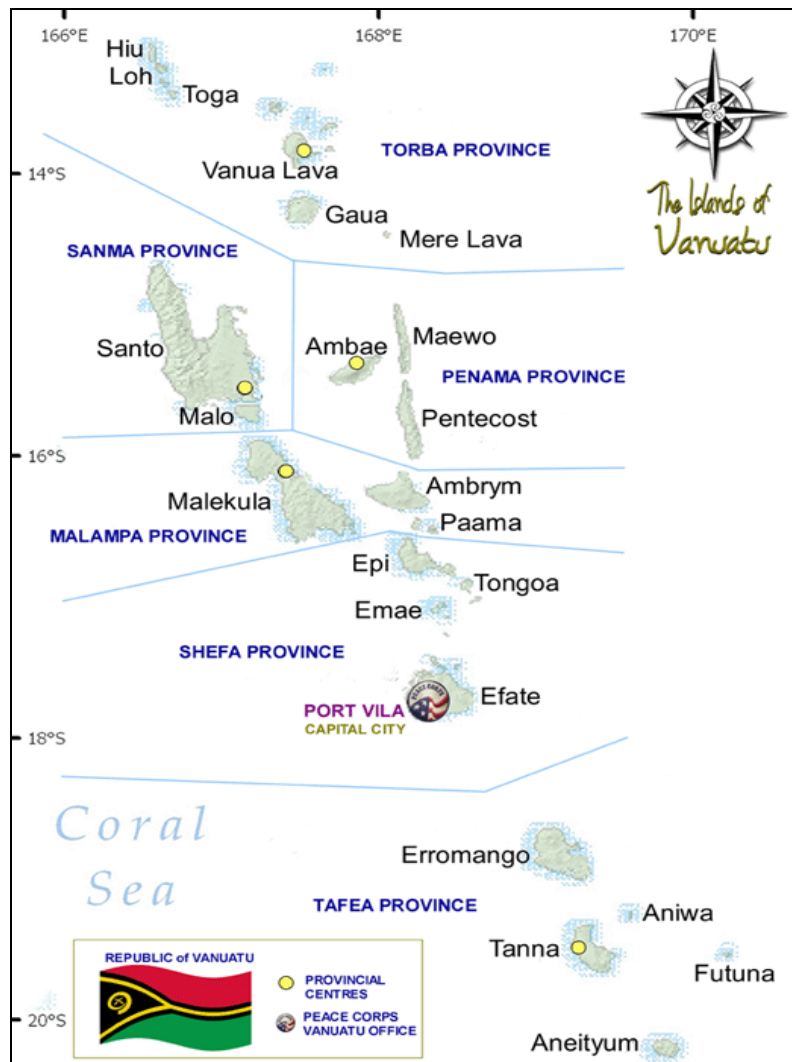exported from elsewhere to western cultures" (2006, p. 294).

Figure 1: **Map of Vanuatu Islands and Provinces (www.peacecorps.vu, 2008)**

Abbreviated History of Vanuatu

The original settlers of Vanuatu were of Melanesian origin and are believed to have migrated from southeastern Asia three thousand years ago. Spanish explorers arrived in the early 1600's followed by the French a century later. It was, however, Captain James Cook of England who gave many of the islands their present names back in 1774, and dubbed the entire archipelago "New Hebrides." Subsequent to the explorers came traders and missionaries. Manual labor was needed to service sugar plantations in Australia, and so New Hebridean men were taken as indentured servants in a process called "blackbirding" and later returned to their homeland introducing the pidgin English "Bislama" and limited exposure to cash economy (Shineberg, 1967).

In the 1800's, missionaries initiated a more lasting influence. Scottish Presbyterians were first, and although some were killed and reportedly eaten, they were followed by Anglicans and French Catholics, setting up a division of interests (Munro & Thornly, 1996). An unofficial demarcation evolved: Anglicans to the north, Presbyterians in the central, and Catholics to the southern islands; however the arrangement was very loosely followed, with many islands home to more than one variety (See Figure 2, Miles, 1998). And though missionaries were abundant, influence often affected only island perimeters (home to *mansolwata* – man salt water *)* due to rough terrain and dense vegetation and did not penetrate the inner islands (home to *manbus*- man bush). Consequently, traditional or *kastom* spirituality with its focus on ancestors was often seen at odds, even mutually exclusive to Christianity. Because the missionaries were also the initiators of formal schooling, education was also sometimes considered in opposition to *kastom* and is still boycotted today by some individual villages (Peace Corps workers, 2008).

The colonial Christian religious division reflected a larger national one, with both the British Empire, including Australia and New Zealand, and France coveting land in the South Pacific. The result was a very unusual joint custodianship version of colonialism called the Anglo-French Condominium of New Hebrides (*tufala gavman* in Bislama), conceived in 1906 and ending only in 1980. Unlike such locations as Saint Martin in the Caribbean, holdings were not divided geographically, but jointly administered with both Anglo and French police, judicial, medical services and schools (Mugnier, 2004). The influence of both, obviously very recent, is currently reflected in many realms, including the national language policy which recognizes Bislama and over 100 native languages but names English and French as the official language for all written documents and mode of communication within school systems (Gardisett, 2005, Henry, 1992, p. 13. in Lutero & Teasdale, 1993).

During World War Two, Americans were stationed on the large, north-central island of Santo, also affecting New Hebridean perception of the world. "Material hardware that literally fell from the sky thanks to the U.S. Air Force kindled some and bolstered some cargo cults, quasi-religious movements inspired by gifts sent from heaven," (Miles, 1998, p.19). Such cargo cults were particularly prominent and still exist on the southern island of Tanna. (Peace Corps workers, 2008).

Finally, spurred by fears of encroachment on *kastom*, or traditional "life of the people" (Bolton, 1998), land disputes, and proprietary infighting of French and English, native New Hebridians of both English and French influence led secessions, boycotts, and rebellions that eventually led to colonial disbanding of the condominium and Vanuatu independence in 1980. Despite its dual colonial history, Vanuatu has maintained a democratic system of government, with a unicameral legislature headed by a prime minister elected by parliamentary ballot and

overseen by a president elected by Electoral College. Certainly colonial allegiances and sensitivities remain, but a "re-Melanization" characterizes Vanuatu politics, and must be recognized in interaction with modern globalization and development to fully understand the country's present and future (Miles, 1998, p. 28).
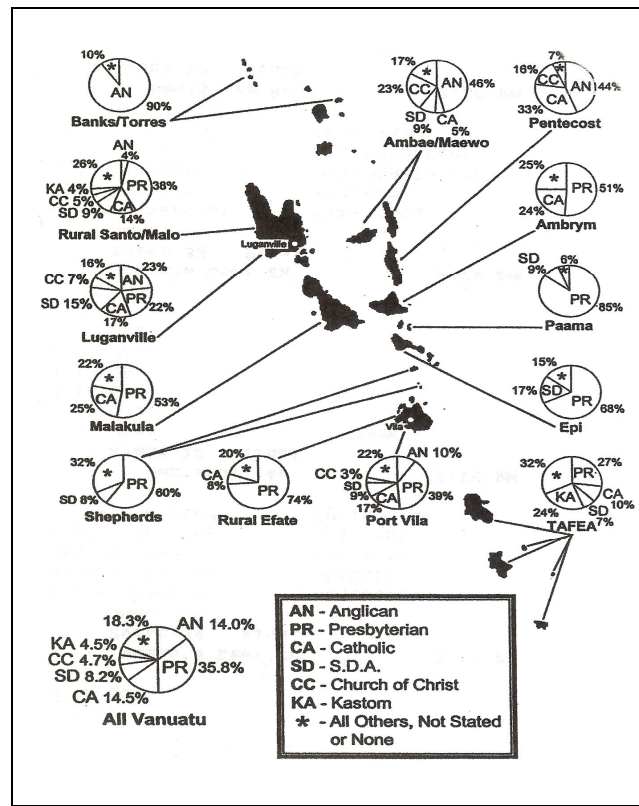

Figure 2: **Map showing regions of missionary influence (Miles, 1998)**

Modern Issues

Although beyond the scope of this paper, the relationship of historical influences and modern Vanuatu politics remains an area of heated debate. Some researchers believe that too much has been made of missionary influence in the region, thereby discounting the agency of indigenous people (Douglas, 1998). While others have noted that missionaries misinterpreted the Vanuatu division of manual labor, inferring that women were treated in a servile manner and attempted to reorganize their roles in the family/society, which only resulted in a perpetuated devaluation of

women in society (Douglas, 1998). Such lesser status relative to western perceptions is frequently observed in modern villages (Peace Corps workers, 2008).

Contemporary policy seeks to navigate the treacherous waters of acknowledgement and respect for tradition combined with sensitivity to colonial influence in the onslaught of technology, urbanization, and globalization. One example is admission of oral legends as legal evidence in land dispute cases, further illustrating the importance of their appropriate interpretation in all the national languages. According to Vanuatu anthropologist, Lamont Lindstrom, the term "culture" appears everywhere, often as a marker of difference; Melanesian governments have attempted to create cultural policy with regard to institutions, resources, promotion of culture, and tourism, with Vanuatu's considered one of the best. "The intent is a good one and is facilitated by specifically identifying the values of *kastom* & tradition, where both difference can be preserved and similarity be recognized and embraced. One can make a case for the utility of codifying cultural policy – of clarifying both the policies and the values that lie behind such policies." (Lindstrom & White, 1994, p.9).

Given the relevance of culturally-specific values to the evolution of a society and the potential influence of our own country's western value system on that evolution, it seems important for us to have some understanding of that society's values – how they compare and contrast with our own, how they weigh-out in importance and what we can learn from them to improve our own condition. The purpose of this study then is to explore the values of a "developing" South Pacific country using the VIA Classification as a point of departure. The pathway will be through the transcribed oral legends of the country – a method that offers wide universality as a first step toward understanding and that can be undertaken by any interested individual without ever crossing the ocean!

Method

Sample

The material studied was a collection of 57 Vanuatu legends translated into English. All

stories were part of *Nabanga: An illustrated anthology of the oral traditions of Vanuatu* (2004).

The anthology, a product of the Vanuatu Cultural Center's Oral Arts Project, consists of legends

that were collected for broadcast on Radio New Hebrides (former name of Vanuatu) or

publication in *Nabanga* and *Le Melanesian* newspapers. The legends, originally in specific

island language or the lingua franca of Bislama, were collected and translated into English and

French between 1975 and 1980, during the final years of Anglo-French colonial government in

order to preserve the *kastom* stories of the oral tradition (Gardissat, 2004). The stories represent

all of the country's six provinces and 31 of the 83 constituent islands. They range in length from

410 to 6,800 words, with an average length of 1,315 words, and include both male and female

protagonists. The content includes creation myths, heroic tales, and instructive parables.

Procedure

The stories were coded for the presence or absence of the 24 character strengths in the VIA

Classification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) in a content analysis approach as well as considered

through narrative analysis to study themes, consider situational and historic influences, and

nominate potentially relevant non-VIA character strengths. The coders consisted of recent

graduates of the Masters of Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) program at University of

Pennsylvania, who have substantial familiarity with the VIA Classification as well as Peace

Corps Volunteers currently serving in the country of Vanuatu. The non-MAPP coders were

provided with a history of the VIA Classification system (Park & Peterson, 2006) as well as

detailed descriptions of the character strengths from the *Character Strengths and Virtues: A*

Handbook and Classification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). MAPP coders were provided with a

brief history of the country including its fairly recent independent status, some socio-economic

information, and its history as an oral culture (only recently in transition). All coders were

provided with a list of the 24 strengths including synonyms and definitions based on the table in

Park & Peterson's "Methodological Issues" article (2006) and supplemented by Peterson's

MAPP class instruction (lecture notes, January, 2008). After the first group of coders nominated

additional non-VIA strengths, these were added to the list (see Appendix A). Coders were

provided with the following written instructions:

Directions:

1. Read the legend and **write a sentence at the end describing what you think the theme or lesson of the story is.**
2. Go back and **underline** any text that directly states or implies a character strength. A character strength may be:
    a. Explicitly stated in VIA language
    b. Indicated by a synonym of a VIA strength
    c. Demonstrated through a character's actions
    d. Implied by the obviously evil or foolish character who does the opposite Example: A character who boasts too much gets eaten, so the implied strength is modesty, or a character who deceives others ends up in ruin so the implied strength is honesty/authenticity.
    Some examples of actions and "negative opposites" considered to imply a strength are listed below in Tables I and II.
3. **Write** the named/implied strength near the underlined text
4. Highlight and name any additional character strengths you believe are represented in the story but are not part of the VIA classification.

The purpose of writing the theme was to assist western coders in understanding the "flavor"

of the legend before attempting to code for the values of another culture from our western

perspective. The procedure is supported by such practices as Bellak and Abrams' (1997) TAT

interpretation method which stated, "Writing summaries….is meant to ground the examiner and

reduce the chance of 'wild interpretations'. The present authors find that summarizing (TAT)

themes is very useful…renders repetitions and commonalities more salient to the examiner." (In

Aronow, Weiss, & Reznikoff, 2001, p.16)

Additionally, given the initial translated status of these stories, as well as the cultural

translation occurring in this exercise, it seemed appropriate to code strengths that were implied

by actions as well as "evil opposites." Other researchers have provided support for this view,

stating, "In the absence of explicit character traiting, we can also infer character from action,"

(Rimmons-Kenan, 1983, Toolan, 1988, in Franzosi, 1998, p.535). Kathleen Carley further

supported inference in her discussion of content analysis, stating that, "Implication is vital to

much research as meaning is lost when only explicit concepts are used," (1993, p. 86).

Table I
Examples of actions that implied a strength

Character strength	Action Example
Appreciation of Beauty	"took in the soft sand and blue saltwater"
Authenticity	"told the truth"
Bravery	" Kaniapnin wanted to run away…his brother held his arm, saying 'Don't be afraid'."
Creativity	"Natmunel came up with a plan"
Curiosity	"followed the unusual bird into the woods"
Fairness	"the chiefs shared the taro and yams"
Forgiveness	"He didn't hold a grudge."
Gratitude	"thanked them for having confidence in him"
Hope	"I was made to live with the stars, perhaps it is one of them that I will marry."
Humor	'laughed and played"
Kindness	raised the abandoned devil's child
Leadership	"They chose the young man as their chief"
Love	"carried his dear friend"
Love of learning	"He liked to teach his children about the different winds."
Modesty	"bowed his head" when recognized by their chief
Open-Mindedness	"listened while each person gave his opinion"
Perseverance	"she struggled with all her might"
Prudence	woman takes her child inside when she suspects a devil is near
Religiousness	"behind each tree is a life, a spirit, a devil"
Self-regulation	"waited for all of the fruit to ripen"
Social Intelligence	"greeted them with the appropriate kastom"
Teamwork	all of the villagers went looking for the missing wife
Zest	'couldn't wait to join the dance"
Non-VIA Strengths	
Ancestors/Kastom	villagers kill pigs to honor dead ancestors.
Listening/Mindfulness	child gains courage by explicitly following mother's instructions
Contentment	"Maraptit, the traveller" learns there is "no place like home"
Duty	Villagers attack well-intentioned dwarves who finish their work for them

Serenity   the calm man quiets the children to save them from the devil
Cleverness   the "clever" man outwits the "smart" man

Table II
Examples of strengths implied through negative opposites
(Not all strengths were represented this way)

Character strength	Negative Example
Authenticity	man lies to his friend and is killed
Fairness	a villager tries to keep all the food for himself and destroys entire village
Prudence	children venture too far into sea and drown
Self-regulation	greedy people eat laplap before it is cooked and turn into eels
Teamwork	the man who lives alone dies of sorrow
Non-VIA Strengths	
Contentment	"Muehu Katekale the unsatisfied" ends in ruin for seeking to venture into heavens
Duty	the man whose wife refuses to engage in household duties commits suicide
Listening/Mindfulness	the man who did not carefully follow instructions of "Tagarro" the creator caused a war

Prevalence rankings for VIA and other strengths were computed by assigning 1 or 0 for the mention or not of the strength within the legend, as identified by the coders. Inter-coder agreement was computed for each strength using McClelland's Index, and ranged from .75 to 1.00, with an overall average of .91, demonstrating a satisfactory level of agreement (Smith, 2000, p.325). As would be expected given the nature of the stories, both explicit and implied character strengths were abundant, ranging from a minimum of 2 to a maximum of 15 per story, with longer stories generally containing more, and an average of 6.4. Prevalence rankings and percentages are displayed in Table III below.

Story themes were agreed upon by coders and listed in the raw data table (Appendix B). Additionally, the themes were coded for the presence of VIA and non-VIA character strengths. It was thought that noting the strengths of the themes as well as those simply mentioned in the story might help to further clarify the relative importance of the strengths to the culture in which they were created. Written nominations for additional non-VIA strengths observed by coders in the stories were also tabulated (included in Table III). Further, because of limited contact

between the country's constituent islands, strengths were also sorted by prevalence within each

province and by region of overall missionary influence as delineated above in the work of

William Miles (1998). Results are shown in Figure 5.

Regarding coding methods, it was also initially considered to have coders identify characters

as good, neutral, or evil and identify the character strengths within each category. While this

seems a method to consider for future use, it was in this case confounded by the societal

difference in connotation of the word "devil" between Vanuatu and US cultures. Vanuatu

researcher Margaret Jolly (1996) described the varied intentions of the dead, or *manun,* whose

funerary ensures proper travel to the afterlife rather than malevolent hovering. The earliest

ancestors, or *adumwat*, are believed to still reside in the place they first cleared and can help or

harm. Early missionaries focused only on the evil aspects of these beings, terming them all

"devils" resulting in confusion in translation of meaning. While natives of Vanuatu might easily

categorize the devils as good or evil, the American coders noted confusion over a "devil doing

something nice" so the method was abandoned – also illustrating the importance of historical and

cultural influences on seemingly objective coding strategies.

Results

Overall

Table III represents the prevalence of VIA character strengths overall in the Vanuatu legends;

all VIA strengths were represented in some degree within the legends, contributing to their

notion of ubiquity. It also incorporates (in red ink) non-VIA, coder-nominated strengths into the

rankings - obviously the non-VIA strengths do not hold the tested empirical validity of the VIA

strengths and are included simply as "food for thought." The top five VIA strengths mentioned

in the legends were teamwork, love, spirituality, kindness, and perspective. When non-VIA

strengths were included, the top five overall were teamwork, love, spirituality, ancestors/*kastom,*

and listening/mindfulness. The "bottom five" mentioned strengths, whether including non-VIA

or not, were modesty, gratitude, hope, forgiveness, and open-mindedness. Non-VIA strengths

that were nominated by coders in order of prevalence were: ancestors/*kastom,*

listening/mindfulness, contentment, duty, physical strength, cleverness, and serenity.

Table III
Rank and prevalence of VIA strengths combined with non-VIA strengths overall and in themes

| Overall Rank	Strength	Overall Prevalence (%)	Rank & Prevalence in Themes (%)
1.	Teamwork	39.5 (69)	13 (23)
2.	Love	34 (60)	8 (14)
	Ancestors/*Kastom*	29 (51)	9 (14)
	Listening/Mind/Obey	28 (49)	6 (11)
3.	Spirituality	27.5 (48)	1 (2)
4.	Kindness	27.5 (48)	7 (13)
5.	Perspective	25 (44)	4 (7)
6.	Self-Regulation	23.5 (41)	9 (16)
7.	Appreciation of Beauty	23 (40)	0
	Contentment	22 (39)	7 (11)
8.	Authenticity	21.5 (38)	6 (11)
9.	Curiosity	20.5 (36)	0
	Duty	20 (35)	5 (9)
10.	Persistence	20 (35)	4 (7)
11.	Bravery	19.5 (34)	2 (4)
	Physical Strength	18 (32)	0
12.	Leadership	15.5 (27)	2 (4)
	Cleverness	15 (26)	5 (9)
13.	Creativity	14.5 (25)	1 (2)
14.	Prudence	13.5 (24)	8 (14)
15.	Social Intelligence	12 (21)	5 (9)
16.	Fairness	12 (21)	3 (5)
	Serenity	12 (21)	0
17.	Humor	7.5 (13)	0
18.	Zest	7.5 (13)	0
19.	Love of Learning	6.5 (11)	0
20.	Gratitude	6.5 (11)	0
21.	Hope	5.5 (10)	0
22.	Modesty	4 (7)	2 (4)
23.	Forgiveness	4 (7)	2 (4)
24.	Open-Mindedness	3.5 (6)	2 (4)
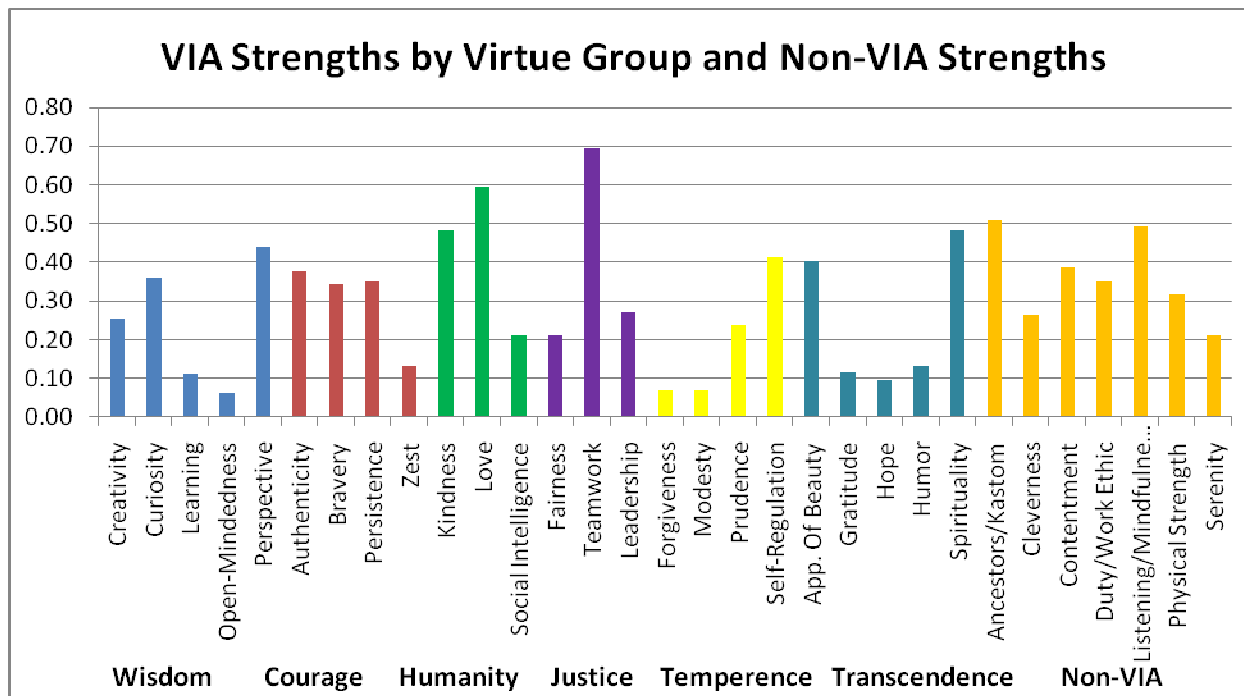
Figure 3: **Percentage prevalence of all strengths, grouped as core values and non-VIA**

The overall results of the archived Vanuatu oral legends may be contrasted (certainly apples to oranges!) with the contemporary self-report internet data obtained by Park et al (2006) in which the top reported strengths of Americans were kindness, fairness, honesty, gratitude, open-mindedness, love, and humor (*n*=83,576). In the same survey the top strengths of Vanuatu residents (*n*=23) were creativity, curiosity, honesty, bravery, learning, open-mindedness, and appreciation of beauty. Obviously, as the authors noted, these results represented English-speaking, literate, and computer-accessible respondents.

Story Themes

    Table III also shows the ranking and prevalence of character strengths represented in the agreed-upon themes of the legends. Not all character strengths were represented. As was the case for overall mention in the stories, teamwork garnered the top ranking, joined by love and kindness in the top five. Prudence, ranked 14th within VIA rankings for overall mention, moved up to number 3 when considered in themes. Prudence was often indicated within the story by the dire fate of the individual who didn't show it, frequently noted at the end of the story in the lesson, perhaps explaining the higher ranking of prudence within themes as opposed to overall mention. It is also interesting to note that while ancestry and spirituality had similar rankings in overall mention, within the themes, spirituality was only coded in one story while ancestry/*kastom* was coded for nine.

By Province

    The strengths were also ranked in prevalence for each Vanuatu province. To obtain an overall picture of strengths distribution across the provinces, the percentages within each core virtue group were averaged resulting in a single percentage of the core virtue for that province. For example, the percentages of characters strengths: kindness, love, and social intelligence were averaged together to get an overall prevalence of the core virtue of humanity for each province. The comparison is displayed in Figure 4 below. Aside from a spike in courage and humanity for Torba and Tafea provinces (these are the two outermost provinces, one to the extreme north, the other to the extreme south), the most striking feature is the relative consistency of distribution across the provinces, even within this very small sampling.
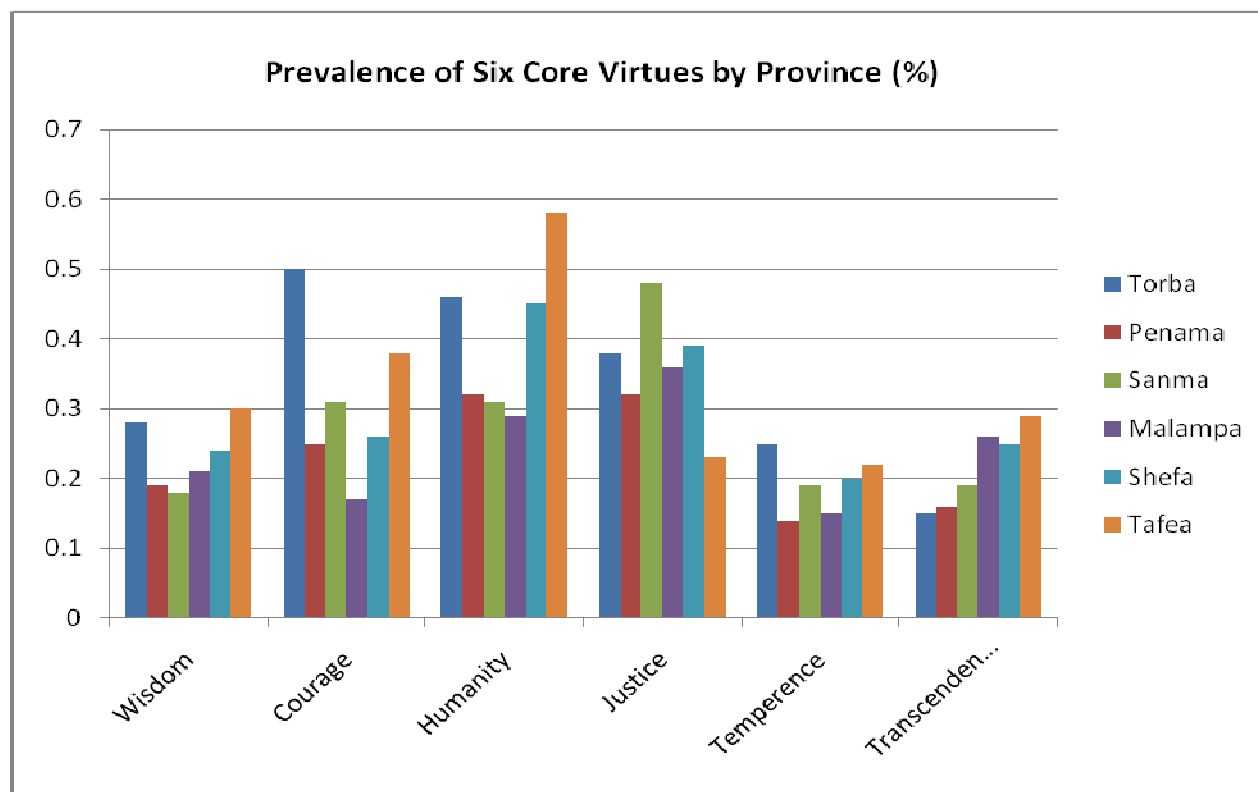
Figure 4: **Comparison of six Core Value prevalence across six Vanuatu provinces**

Strengths by Regions of Missionary Influence

The strengths were also ranked within the three geographical spheres of missionary influence (Anglican, Catholic, or Presbyterian) as reported by Miles (1998). As there were disproportionately fewer stories from the northern region of Anglican influence, the number of stories included for the other two realms was reduced so that word counts were approximately even, ranging from 10,150 to 10,300 words comprising 8-10 stories total for each region. Results for each group sometimes varied widely within a given strength, and it's tempting to conclude that the Presbyterian area was especially persistent and the Anglican region highly content, but Miles also noted that although there were general regional spheres of influence, most

islands had a presence in some degree from all three groups and therefore, though interesting, conclusions must be limited.
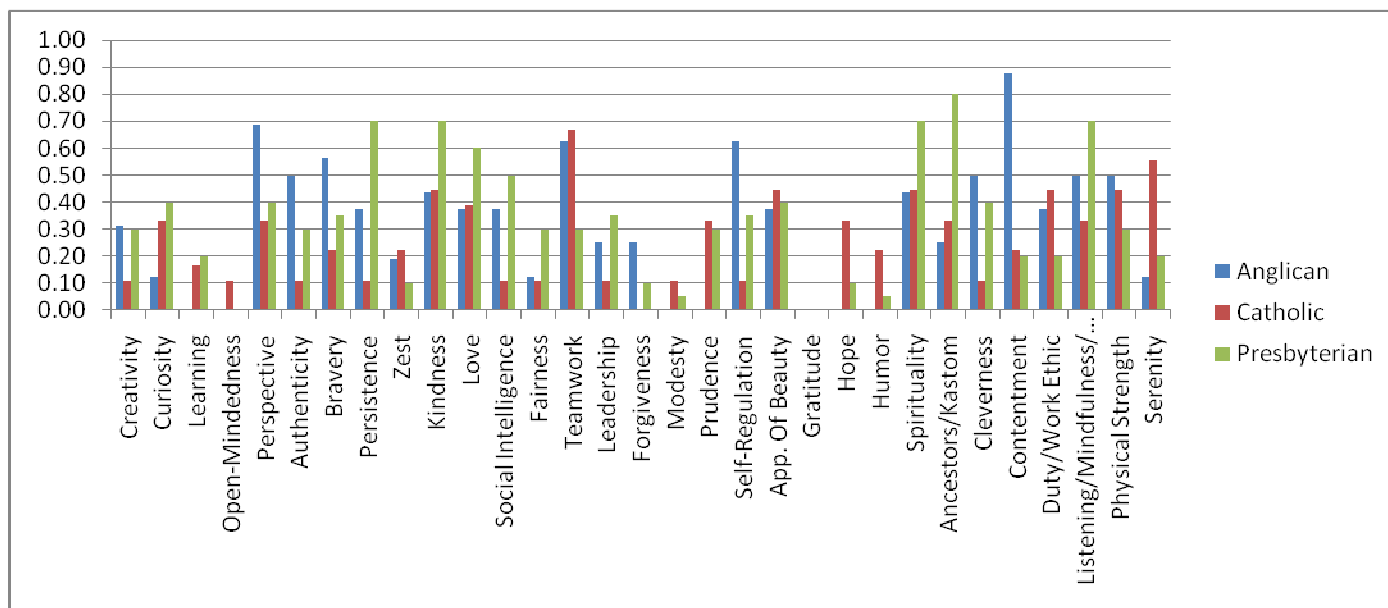

Figure 5: **Strengths distributions within missionary influence**

Discussion

This study examined the prevalence of specific character strengths in an anthology (*n*=57) of Vanuatu oral legends that were collected and transcribed into English through a project of the Vanuatu Cultural Center (Gardisett, 2004). The framework for analysis was the VIA Classification of Character Strengths developed by Peterson & Seligman (2004). The legends were coded (1) positive or (0) negative for the explicit or implied (see coder directions) mention of a character strength. Data was also collected on specific themes of the stories, character strength ranking within the themes, as well as coder nominations of character strengths not included in the VIA classification.

All of the VIA strengths were mentioned to some degree in the legends and the top five mentioned VIA strengths were in rank order: teamwork, love, spirituality, kindness, and self-regulation. When non-VIA strengths were included, the ranking was: teamwork, love, spirituality, respect for ancestors/*kastom,* and listening/mindfulness. The bottom five in both cases was modesty, gratitude, hope, forgiveness, and open-mindedness. When compared with Park et al's 2006 study of self-reported American character strengths, both the Vanuatu oral collection and the 2006 American internet data include kindness and love among the top strengths; both include modesty and zest among the bottom. In contrast, while teamwork, spirituality and self-regulation rank #1, #3, and #5 amongst the VIA in the oral collection, they rank 14, 20, and 24 respectively in the large American internet sample. One obvious observation is that such strengths are probably much more important in a collective, oral tradition and will be further explored below.

Top-mentioned VIA strengths in the Vanuatu Oral Collection

Teamwork

Mentioned in 63% of the Vanuatu stories and 23% of their themes, the strength of teamwork was the most prevalent. It should be noted that per Peterson & Seligman's definition of teamwork (2004), the concept of loyalty is a component of this strength, was highly prevalent in the stories and was coded as such in the scoring. The important ranking of teamwork in the legends is confirmed by Peace Corps workers living in present day Vanuatu villages who note that "no one does anything by herself." Being alone is in fact considered odd and villagers frequently express confusion and concern over Peace Corps volunteers who choose to live in their own private dwelling in the village (interviews, 2008). Indeed the importance of teamwork

to the society is exemplified in the subtitle of the National Anthem, *Nasonal Sing Sing Blong Vanuatu: Yumi, Yumi, Yumi* – We, We, We, (lyricsonline, 2008).

Love

Love was ranked 2ⁿᵈ in overall prevalence and tied for 3ʳᵈ (along with prudence) for ranking within story themes. Such a result is not surprising given love's place in survival and evolution. Bok (1995) cited Cicero noting that, "nature brings human beings together for the purposes of survival and implants in them 'a strangely tender love' for their offspring" (p. 13). Within a collective society in which teamwork ranks high, it seems that familial love would spill over to the entire community. It should be noted that per the VIA definition, the concept of love also includes friendship, and in discussing typologies of love, Peterson (2006) stated that, "relationships in different historical eras and cultures vary according to the society's dominant values" and cited Rapson (1993) in observing that "personal relationships around the world are becoming more similar as western culture is spread through global media" (p. 263). And although the western coders in this exercise noted many examples of love, interestingly, Peace Corps workers point out that in Bislama there is no word for love, but that people are increasingly using the English word "love" in describing relationships (interviews, 2008).

Culturally-Molded Forms of VIA Strengths

Spirituality and Ancestors/Kastom

The VIA strength of Spirituality was noted in 48% of the legends, while the separately-coded non-VIA Vanuatu concept of respect for ancestors and customs (*kastom)* was noted in 51%. As a theme, spirituality was observed in only 1% while ancestry was noted in 14%. However, when overall mentions of spirituality and ancestry are combined, with duplicates accounted for, the prevalence ranking rises to #1 at 82%. Ironically, during the times of the missionaries, the

practices of Christianity and the ancestral-honoring ceremonies of *kastom* were seen as mutually exclusive when in fact they seem to be different expressions of the same transcendent concept (Jolly, 1996). Indeed the oral legends were rife with the description of all-powerful creators, spirits, devils, and gods.

In his metaphorical analysis of Melanesian identity "The Metaphor of the Tree and the Canoe," Joel Bonnemaison (1994) likened man to a deeply rooted tree that draws depth, sustenance, and vibrancy from its roots – personal identity is tied to a specific place, location, ground, soil, or land; to be a *manples* (local person or native) is the highest mark of belonging. Ground roots also preserve the memory and therefore the existence of the ancestors. Others have noted that in the oral tradition, the goodwill of the ancestors is vital to the wellbeing of the living; the world exists at a "seen" and "unseen" level simultaneously. Christian influences have moderated such concepts, yet "both vouch for a world surrounded by spiritual forces," (Courlander, 2002, p. 3).

The spirituality of Vanuatu may differ from western tradition most significantly in this temporal frame of deep focus on the past. The spirits of one's ancestors are believed to reside in the land that they first inhabited, and the original ancestors or *manun* are given special status (Jolly, 1996). The National Anthem also acknowledges this temporal focus stating, "Many ways of the past are with us," (Miles, 1998, p. 73). Peace Corps workers note the frequent presence of ancestral references in the practice of *storian,* or community story-telling (interviews, 2008). And indeed, this retrospective temporal frame toward spirituality and life in general may account for the low prevalence of the strength of hope in the legends (further discussed below).

Creativity and Cleverness

Although weighing-in overall in mention at #14, creativity is discussed here due to the fact that many coders remarked on the notion of cleverness as a distinct and prevalent character strength in the stories. Peterson & Seligman (2004) described a "little c from of creativity" that does not involve masterpieces of art but is instead "an everyday form of creativity that we would refer to as ingenuity" (p. 110). This form of creativity seems highly important within the legends and would indeed be valuable in a society where one can't run down the street to buy duct tape every time something needs to be fixed. When combined, with duplicates accounted for, creativity (big C) and cleverness (little c) garner 26 mentions total and move up to #5 within the VIA rankings. Peace Corps workers concur with this observation, describing sometimes an unwillingness of locals to step outside of familiar bounds to produce a drawing or piece of creative writing, but admiration for particularly clever solutions to everyday problems (interviews, 2008). Indeed one legend told the tale of a man who succumbed because he "had been intelligent, but not clever," (Gardisset, 2004, p. 67).

Non-VIA Strength Nominations

Listening/Mindfulness

Listening or mindfulness would be described as a concentrated focus on the spoken words of another, demonstrated in ensuing actions- sometimes in the case of a child shown through obedience. This strength was also remarked on by many coders and when ranked with the VIA strengths and others for mention, had a rank order of 4 and prevalence rating of 49%. Such a strength seems uniquely suited to an oral tradition and was commented on by Lissent Bolton in her discussion of the radio format that led to Paul Gardissat's collection of the oral legends in Vanuatu. She noted that listening is an active function by which a person tunes into a particular

sound, filtering out the extraneous; "listening is the application of hearing" (1999, p. 282).

Bolton further stated, "In a primarily oral system, communication always involves a response,"

and indeed when radio finally became accessible to many Ni-Vanuatu with the advent of the

transistor and short-wave radio, it existed as a medium of interchange. Specific instructional

announcements that expected follow-up were broadcast to individuals, such as announcements of

funeral ceremonies or even to report at a designated time to serve a jail sentence. Especially

popular were shows that accepted requests for music, phoned or written, and when Paul

Gardissat was hired by Radio Vila to broadcast *kastom* material, the response to contribute

legends was overwhelming. Tape recorders and cassettes were sent out to the villages and an

even competitive spirit ensued as anxious contributors told their stories and listened faithfully to

hear them broadcast (p. 285). Anthropologist Margaret Jolly further noted that "hearing,

listening, and believing a message is intimately connected in the indigenous societies" (1996, p.

236).

Indeed it seems only natural that the spoken word and one's intense focus and appropriate

response would have incredible value as both a survival mechanism and character strength

within an oral tradition. Our western systems, legal and otherwise, put so much emphasis on the

written word – we are constantly told to "put it in writing" or it almost doesn't exist. Imagine

not having the written word and having to rely on comprehension and memory of what one

heard. This interactive connection of listening or mindfulness could easily be understood as a

top-ranked character strength.

Duty

The concept of a particular work ethic or sense of duty was also noted by many coders.

Peterson & Seligman (2004) described "duty" as a culture-bound virtue that was even "a

contender for core virtues status," but also clarified it as the "role-related or class-defined duty" of stratified cultures (p.51). Duty in the Vanuatu legends does often take a role-related form such as wife, husband, parent, child, or village member, but stratification only existed after the advent of missionaries, ex-patriots, and developers with their accompanying cash economy. Duty or work ethic then in the stories is not at all like the western notion of the same; time is not a relevant framework nor is an individual's worth defined by their occupational status or even if they have an occupation (Miles, 1998, Peace Corps interviews, 2008). Further, as previously mentioned, there is little orientation to the future, so once the day's needs have been provided for, there is no need to hoard or storehouse for upcoming days. Peace Corps workers express their western puzzlement over the parent who will take the considerable walk to a supply store to buy one or two diapers for their child. Duty rather is one's contribution to the collective or family, demonstrated by providing daily rations, participating in rituals and following traditional roles. The importance of such duty was demonstrated in one legend in which a husband, so demoralized over his new wife's unwillingness to engage in her duties as a wife, committed suicide (Gardissat, 2004).

Contentment/Satisfaction and Happiness…

While the concept of happiness was not the focus of this literature exploration, the fact that many coders noted the mention of satisfaction or contentment within the stories (22 times, 39%), combined with the concept's relationship to happiness bears some discussion. Indeed one parable urged contentment in its very title; "Muehu Katekale, the unsatisfied" is about a man who lives his life in quest beyond his current condition and ends up broken and without his ancestral connection. In another story, "Maraptit the traveler," the protagonist after much journeying concluded with "Dorothy-like" understanding that "there is no place like home"

(Gardissat, 2004, p. 21). In these cases, satisfaction is advocated as a choice rather than a resultant condition from "evaluation of life," that correlates highly with happiness (Diener et al, 2005).

In 2006, Vanuatu was identified by the New Economics Foundation's "Happy Planet Index" as the happiest country on earth. The index itself is highly values-laden, measuring happiness as a combination of life expectancy, ecological footprint, and well-being which it defines as "personal feelings, personal functionings, social feelings and social functionings" (HPI website, 2007). Although near the bottom of the UN's Human Development ranking (Country Report, 2007), few in Vanuatu go hungry due to the abundance of natural resources, warm climate and rich fertility of the land. William Miles noted the 1992 words of former Vanuatu Prime Minister Walter Lini, who with undisguised irony asked, "Who invented this development thing?" (1998, p. 179). There is little frustration among Ni-Vanuatu about being impoverished or underdeveloped. Indeed Peace Corps workers in the country note the ready abundance of natural resources and observe that the native people overtly display a demeanor of happiness, always laughing, teasing, and singing. They further note that with limited travel opportunities and contact with money and other outside influences, far reaching choices like those sought by Muehu Katekale, the unsatisfied are not readily apparent.

Many current researchers acknowledge both the affective and cognitive components of life satisfaction and happiness (e.g. Diener, 2005, Veenhoven 2006) but Barry Schwartz (2005) purports that the cognitive aspect increasingly erodes our happiness within the overwhelming choice now available in every level of western society. Schwartz also suggests contentment as a conscious choice, recommending that people become "satisficers" instead of "maximizers." He further notes the value of rules and frameworks in cutting down on decision-making as well as

the value of social ties which simultaneously "contribute most to happiness but bind us rather than liberate us" (p. 108). Vanuatu then does seem positioned for happiness within its traditional values and limited choices, as teamwork, love, kastom(with its dictating rituals), duty, and contentment figure prominently.

Finally this notion of satisfaction or contentment as a choice rather than a product may be reflected in more modern societies as well and not just in archived oral tradition. In a recent episode of "60 Minutes," Denmark, again ranked as the happiest planet on earth in a study conducted by the National Science Foundation, was examined to uncover its happiness attributes and secrets. At the close of the program one of the young Danish men interviewed for the program was questioned as to what Denmark had that permitted it to rank above affluent democracies like the US. He replied that he felt there was a general satisfaction with one's condition in Denmark that was lacking in the US, noting that it probably ran counter to the notion of "American Dream," yet led to a happier life in the somewhat less affluent Denmark (60 Minutes, June 2008). Indeed in modern-day Vanuatu, this satisfaction is exemplified in the common Bislama phrase, "*mi stap nomo*," - "I just live" or "I just am." (Miles, 1998). Although the subject of its own measurement instruments and often correlated with measurements of happiness and character strengths assessments, perhaps satisfaction is a key human strength that is morally valued and can be willfully chosen.

The Strengths at the Bottom of the Ranking

I will close the discussion with a brief review of the strengths that ranked at the bottom within the oral legends. *Humor* was mentioned in only seven stories, and usually in connection with children and one instance of mild sarcasm over missionary presence. Given the instructive and heroic nature of the legends, it may be that this genre is not conducive to coding for humor nor

representative. As previously noted, contemporary Vanuatu displays a penchant for humor with much laughing and gentle teasing. *Zest* is also noted in only seven stories, but it may be that this strength is mediated by the high prevalence of self-regulation and the potentially culturally-specific strengths of contentment and serenity. Peace Corps workers also observe the typically calm demeanor of the native people, for example maintaining a quiet tranquility even in the death of a loved one (interviews, 2008).

Gratitude also ranked surprisingly low given the high incidence of spirituality; however, it may be that the more prevalently-coded, non-VIA virtue of contentment may represent a less overt, more implicit form of gratitude. *Hope* though highly correlated in contemporary US with life satisfaction (Peterson, 2008), ranked quite low in the legends, mentioned in only 5 stories. Previously noted was the society's limited orientation to the future when compared to the deeply historic ancestral ties and the present-focused values of listening, teamwork, and contentment. In fact Bislama language structure has only limited markers for future tense and "if the surrounding context does not provide any clues about tense, then the verb will normally be interpreted as present or past rather than future (Crowley, 2004, p. 93). In *Authentic Happiness*, Seligman (2002), discussed happiness in terms of its relationship with the past, the present, and the future. Given Vanuatu's Happy Planet rating coupled with America's increasing levels of anxiety (Seligman, 2007), one wonders if abundance in two of the three realms might compensate the need for the other, or even if the orientation to the present counts more in the happiness formula.

Love of Learning ranked seven from the bottom and western Peace Corps workers assigned to education note their frustration in that "there doesn't seem to be much of a learning curve" in village culture. The workers described their desire to learn to use their new machetes to crack

coconuts like the locals – who immediately recognized their ineptitude. Rather than teach the skill, it was considered just fine to not know how, because someone else does and can take care of that task. Obviously this reflects the teamwork spirit of the collective culture, but also perhaps a reflection again of contentment with one's current state, and not such a need to maximize with self-improvement.

Forgiveness was also missing in the oral collection, ranked next to last in prevalence; revenge for wrong deeds was instead a common occurrence in the stories. Peace Corps workers concur that forgiveness does not seem to be a very common attribute in the modern society either. An explanation for this does not leap immediately to mind except that in a collective, transgressions may be considered against the entire group rather than just an individual, making them much more egregious and not subject to forgiveness.

Finally, *open-mindedness* and *modesty* were also in the bottom of the rankings. Perhaps these are implicit traits in a collective culture, or extreme open-mindedness might convey a lack of concurrence with the team philosophy. With regard to modesty in present-day villages, Peace Corps workers note a bit of unwillingness amongst school children to be singled out, even for accomplishment and good deeds; homework is not done unless everyone is doing it; and flashy, stand-out dressing is frowned upon (interviews, 2008). So perhaps as a culturally implicit strength, modesty was just not a topic of interest to the legend creators.

Limitations, Conclusions, and Applications

Limitations

A single anthology of 57 legends, situated in the frame of the past, is obviously not a terribly diverse sample; however when considering any society's pool of legends, 57 seems a fairly representative number. Indeed it was noted by the editor that many versions of the same stories

were offered by different islands (Gardissat, 2004). One can also question fullness and accuracy

of interpretation by western coders of written material that originally was intended to be

transmitted orally. Tedlock (1975) pointed out that text can convey only a piece of the message;

it may be that strengths and values are also delineated in the tone of voice, volume, and

placements of silences, as well as essential accompanying gestures. However, in addressing

similar concerns more recently, Robin Croft notes that "balanced against this weakness is the

pragmatic decision in an exploratory study to widen the pool of narratives available for analysis

through drawing down oral episodes gathered by popular authors and respected social scientists

alike" (2006, p. 1056). Using a literature collection such as the one studied permits a window of

exploration for western positive psychologists into a population that for the most part does not

have access to a website or in many cases literacy skills to complete a paper and pencil

questionnaire. While only a glimpse into the depth of the tradition, such exploration is a fairly

simple and low-cost method for westerners to attempt an understanding and honoring of a culture

which few outside of anthropological researchers or humanitarian aid workers will have the

opportunity to interact with. As Park and Peterson noted, content analysis of narrative in terms

of VIA strengths provides positive psychology with a "research strategy applicable…to all

individuals – the quick, the famous, or the dead – unwilling or unable to complete questionnaires

that are the most common research strategy in positive psychology" (2006, p. 337).

Conclusions

  Although worthwhile and interesting to broaden our horizons with perspectives on cultural

differences, it is equally important to note the similarities. Sissela Bok (1995) identified

universal values minimally necessary for a viable society: a) positive duties of mutual care

(support and loyalty per Bok) and reciprocity (kindness, love, and gratitude per Park et al 2006);

b) negative injunctions against deceit and betrayal (countered by honesty per Park et al); and c) norms of fairness and procedural justice in cases of conflict regarding positive duties and/or negative injunctions (shown in judgment/perspective and fairness per Park et al). In their 2006 study of 54 nations, Park et al observed that the consistently highest strengths across all nations studied corresponded to these three universal realms. The same may be observed in the rankings within the Vanuatu oral collection: with mutual care exemplified in teamwork, love, and kindness; negative injunctions by revenge themes and the lesson of authenticity; and fairness and justice borne out with high ranking perspective and self-regulation (particularly over selfishness and greed). Indeed it is notable that a modern American internet sampling and the collection of an oral, collective tradition both yielded love and kindness in their top five strengths!

Equally notable is the fact that all 24 VIA strengths were present in the Vanuatu legends, but often taking on a different, culturally unique form, such as the emphasis on cleverness as a form of creativity or the focus on ancestors and *kastom* within spirituality. And finally, this small study of the past combined with the more recent observations of researchers and individuals who currently live in Vanuatu provides additional evidence for the possibility of culturally-specific virtues that rank very highly within that particular society. In Vanuatu they may be closely related to the historically oral tradition as in the case of listening/mindfulness and ancestors/*kastom*; to the collective nature of the culture as in duty; to the temporal focus, as in the case of contentment and listening as well; or to connectedness and dependence on the land, as in cleverness, physical strength, and again ancestors and *kastom*. These attributes of the culture are also reflected in the relative importance levels observed in the legends which although similar in some respects to a contemporary American sampling, also show distinctions.

Applications

   As previously mentioned, the country of Vanuatu is in transition. An oral tradition is rapidly

changing with the advent of technology, development, education initiatives and general

globalization. It may be a frightening and uncomfortable condition when one's core belief

system appears to be potentially diminished by an onslaught of majority western values. There is

a concern that the notion of k*astom* is becoming cliché, associated only with drinking kava and

weaving grass mats, intended for tourists and pirated by political and commercial interests.

Under this condition it is essential that the true values of the people be properly recognized,

respected, and reflected in real world workings. Lamenting current changes, one man from

Malakula observed, "In times past there was obedience, respect, and honesty. Today people

have money but they are never satisfied with the amount they have… before men would work

together, now the young men are divided against themselves," (in Miles, 1998, p. 79). Indeed a

desire to maintain traditional *kastom* values and fear of change has been a prevalent theme since

Vanuatu's independence as shown in this table from a 1985 social studies text:

Table IV

Traditional	Western
Dependence on extended family, obligations	Personal independence
Communal ownership of property	Individual ownership
Time is not so important	Punctuality is important
Wealth consists of traditional items- money is not so important.	Money economy is of great importance.
Respect and success are based on human relationships.	Success is based on material gains, e.g. education, wealth.

Source: *Our Changing Society, Social Studies Unit,* 1985, p. 50.

   Although simple in method and potentially somewhat subjective, a content and narrative

analysis of the legends of an oral tradition can inform a majority western culture – illuminating

what we share as well as the differences of value systems that we may be having significant but uninformed impact upon. As inhabitants of the core values systems shared by all humanity, we bear responsibility to appreciate and honor both our similarities and differences. As Paul Gardissat says in his introduction to *Nabanga*, inviting Ni-Vanuatu, ex-pats, and foreigners all to delve in, "Bring back the wisdom of Titamol and approach the soul of Vanuatu" (2004, p. 9).

With formal coding of the values of other cultures, including archived materials, not only can we broaden our perspectives, but we can track a culture's evolution through time, assess the impact of various influences (such as the missionaries in Vanuatu), and most importantly be aware of and assess our own, sometimes unintended influence. To return to Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi's wise observation that a society might be judged by the degree to which it permits its people to engage in their valued strengths, awareness and respect for those strengths is paramount and may be better substantiated through structured analysis.

Appendix a

Values in Action (VIA) Classification of Character Strengths
Definitions and Synonyms

Strengths of Wisdom & Knowledge

- ◉ **Creativity** [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to do things; Includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it

- ◉ **Curiosity** [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in all of ongoing experience; finding all subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering

- ◉ **Love of learning**: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally. Obviously related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add *systematically* to what one knows

- ◉ **Open-Mindedness/Judgment** [critical thinking]: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; *not* jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly

- ◉ **Perspective** [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself and to other people

Strengths of Courage – Will to accomplish goals in the face of external or internal adversity

- ◉ **Authenticity/Integrity** [honesty]: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions

- ◉ **Bravery [valor]:** *Not* shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what is right even if there is opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; Includes physical bravery but is not limited to it

- ◉ **Persistence** [perseverance, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persisting in a course of action in spite of obstacles; "getting it out the door"; taking pleasure in completing tasks

- ◉ **Zest** [vitality, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly, living life as an adventure, feeling alive and activated

Strengths of Humanity

- ◉ **<u>Social intelligence</u>** [emotional intelligence, personal intelligence]: Being aware of the motives and feelings of other people and oneself; knowing what to do to fit in to different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick

- ◉ **<u>Kindness</u>** [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, "niceness"]: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them

- ◉ **<u>Love</u>**: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing and caring are reciprocated; being close to people

<u>Strengths of Justice-</u> Civic Strengths

- ◉ **<u>Fairness:</u>** Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness and justice; *not* letting personal feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance

- ◉ **<u>Leadership</u>**: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same maintain time good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen

- ◉ **<u>Teamwork/Citizenship</u>** [social responsibility]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share

<u>Strengths of Temperance –</u> Protect against excess

- ◉ **<u>Forgiveness</u> and mercy**: Forgiving those who have done wrong; giving people a second chance; *not* being vengeful

- ◉ **<u>Modesty and humility</u>**: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; *not* seeking the spotlight; *not* regarding oneself as more special than one is

- ◉ **<u>Prudence</u>**: Being careful about one's choices; *not* taking undue risks; *not* saying or doing things that might later be regretted

- ◉ **<u>Self-regulation</u>** [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions

<u>Strengths of Transcendence –</u> Connects to the larger universe & provides meaning

- ◉ **Appreciation of beauty and excellence** [awe, wonder, elevation]: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in all domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience

- ◉ **Gratitude**: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks

- ◉ **Hope** [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about

- ◉ **Humor** [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and joke; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes

- ◉ **Spirituality** [religiousness, faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort

Additional Strengths that may be part of the Vanuatu Oral Tradition:

- ◉ **Respect for Ancestry and Local Custom (Kastom)**
- ◉ **Cleverness –** Distinct from intelligence or creativity, almost like "street smarts"
- ◉ **Contentment/Satisfaction** with one's life situation as it is
- ◉ **Sense of Duty or Work Ethic**
- ◉ **Listening Carefully –** May be exemplified in following directions or obedience
- ◉ **Physical Strength or Dexterity**
- ◉ **Serenity or Calmness –** Peaceful, even-keeled, a disdain for over emotionality or noisiness

Appendix B, List of Themes

Story Information   **Story Themes**

Province	Story Title	Theme:
Torba	Maraptit the Traveller	"There is no place like home" (page 21)
Torba	The legend of Kwat	A great leader has persitence, courage, and forgives.
Torba	The devil's nasara from Sarevugvug	Cleverness is good, trickery is harmful
Torba	Wenagon and his two daughters	Mean trickery is wrong
Penama	Muehu Katekale, the unsatisfied	Grow where you're planted - be satisfied.
Penama	How Tagao beat Mweragbuto, the traitor	Dissatisfaction & deception led to great harm
Penama	The legend of Tagaro	Not listening to the creator led to war
Penama	The legend of kava	Inability to bear children made woman evil, but she pr kava
Penama	Ulunwel and the devils	The living and dead are linked across time.
Penama	The legend of the moon and the sun	Selfishness ended a friendship
Penama	The story of Tabi and Bule	Clever man outwitted intelligent man
Penama	Barkulkul the God	Creation story - importance of love
Penama	The legend of old Wakos	Patiently wait to join ancestors
Penama	The story of two brothers, Taisamul and Fassel	Mistrust led to ruin
Penama	The legend of the namarae from Pentecost	Mistrust led to ruin
Sanma	The Namalao Cave	deception is wrong
Sanma	The tamed lisepep of Santo	Ignoring kastom causes harm
Sanma	Maliu the fisherman and the giant eel	don't take foolish risks.
Sanma	The legend of the namarae from Santo	Don't be greedy/leave well-enough alone
Sanma	The legend of Taribowe	A chief has humility, kindness, & persistence.
Sanma	The life and death of Mol Malamala	Duty must not be ignored.
Sanma	The legend of the new moon	Greed dirtied the moon.
Sanma	The legend of the fisherman and his five children	Justice comes to those who persist
Malampa	Ambat and Nevinbumbaau	imprudent brother falls for deceit, wise brother saves
Malampa	The birth of the sea	People were separated due to disobedience.
Malampa	The dwarves of Malekula	It's important to finish what you start.
Malampa	The two Lindenda	A clever man feel to deceit and jealousy
Malampa	The legend of Tolambe Islet	"Curiosity caused all the trouble"
Malampa	The pig from the islet of Vao	Inevitability of ancestry
Malampa	The legend of the carnivorous stone	Greedy monster turned into rock.
Malampa	The snake of North Ambrym	Don't mess with family loyalty.
Malampa	The legend of the Vermelap stones	Family love & kindness
Malampa	The lisepsep's son from Ambrym	Show kindness to all for the greater good.
Malampa	The Titamol	Trickery will be punished.
Malampa	The namele's child	Care for all and keep promises.
Shefa	The old woman and the bananas	Anger stunted growth of bananas.

Shefa	The prisoner of the stone	Can't escape duty (familial)
Shefa	The legend of Sakora and Tiara	Loyalty is paramount; deception will be discovered.
Shefa	The magic shell	Lack of temperence led to demise.
Shefa	The legend of Kuwae	jealousy led to lack of prudence, saved by listening
Shefa	Six brothers and the snake	Not listening and imprudence leads to demise
Shefa	Mauitikitiki, the fisher of islands	Lack of loyalty to family & imprudence
Shefa	The myth of Sina	Beauty in eye of beholder, family
Shefa	Seganiale, the Forari devil	Greed was the devil's undoing.
Shefa	Nising and Turig	Love will succeed.
Shefa	The legend of Sosolobang	Help others, selfishness is punished
Shefa	Wotanimanu, the Rock Monument	Finish your own work;pride will get you shunned
Shefa	The Mutuama of Ifira	Greed is evil, countered w/ teamwork
Shefa	The rat and the octopus	Meanness is wrong.
Shefa	Suepus and Atafru	Wise boy called on ancestors to save home.
Shefa	Sokomanu	Loyalty to community & ancestors
Shefa	Leikele and Kurunaenae	Cleverness leads to success.
Shefa	The voyage of Atafru	Love conquers - someone for everyone.
Shefa	The origin of clan names	Truth will triumph
Tafea	The bird woman	Lack of kindness & empathy led to demise.
Tafea	Semusemu, the ogre from Tanna	Brother gained courage to triumph by listening.
Tafea	Yasur, "the volcano man"	Search 'til you find what was meant to be.
Tafea	The Newak Newak	Creation myth - devil had lack of prudence
Tafea	The red fowl and the sea crocodiles	Don't judge your success to early.
Tafea	The birth of Futuna	Authenticity & forgiveness will succeed.
Tafea	The marriage of kava and the coconut palm	Offering oneself to another - love
Tafea	Nalakyang, the ogre	The devil was outsmarted in his greed w/ cleverness & persistence.

References:

Allen, M. (1981). *Vanuatu: Politics, Economics and Ritual in Island Melanesia.* Sydey: Academic Press.

American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition.* Washington: American Psychiatric Association.

Aronow, E., Altman-Weiss, K., & Reznikoff, M. (2001). *A Practical Guide to the Thematic Apperception Test: The TAT in Clinical Practice.* New York: Routledge.

Biswas-Diener, R. (2006). From the Equator to the North Pole: A Study of Character Strengths. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 7, 293–310.

Bok, S. (1995). *Universal Values.* Columbia & London:University of Missouri Press.

Bolton, L. (1997). Radio and the Redefinition of Kastom in Vanuatu. In P. Gardissat (Ed.) *Nabanga: An illustrated anthology of the oral traditions of Vanuatu.* (pp. 277 – 288). Port Vila, VU: Vanuatu National Cultural Council, Sun Productions.

Bonnemaison, J. (1994). The Meatphor of the Tree and the Canoe. *Pacific Arts,* July, 1994, 21-24. Translated by Peter Crowe.

Buckingham, M. & Clifton, D.O. (2001). *Now Discover Your Strengths.* New York: The Free Press.

Carley, K. (1993). Coding Choices for Textual Analysis: A Comparison of Content Analysis And MAP Analysis. *Sociological Methodology,* 23, 75-126.

Courlander, H. (2002). *A Treasury of African Folklore: The Oral Literature, Traditions, Myths, Legends, Epics, Tales, Recollections, Wisdoms, Sayings, and Humor of Africa.* New York: Marlowe and Co.

Croft, R. (2006). Folklore, Families and Fear: Exploring the Influence of the Oral Tradiiton on Consumer Decision-making. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 22, 1053-1076.

Crowley, T. (2004). *Bislama Reference Grammar.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.* New York: Harper.

Diener, E., Lucas, R.E., & Shigehiro, O. (2005). Subjective Well-being: The Science of Happiness and Life Satisfaction. In C. Snyder & S. Lopez (Eds.) *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (pp. 63-73). New York: Oxford University Press.

Douglas, B. (1999). Provocative Readings in Intransigent Archives: Finding Aneityumese Women. *Oceania,* 70(2), 111-130.

Fox, J. (2008). *Your Child's Strengths.* New York: Viking.

Franzosi, R. (1998). Narrative Analysis – Or Why (And How) Sociologists Should be Interested in Narrative. *Annual Review of Sociology,* 24, 517-554.

Gardissat, P. (2004) In *Nabanga: An illustrated anthology of the oral traditions of Vanuatu.* Vanuatu: Vanuatu National Cultural Council, Sun Productions.

Gee, J.P. (1991). Memory & myth: A perspective on narrative. In McCabe & C. Peterson (Eds.) *Developing narrative structure* (pp. 1-25). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Genereux, R. & McKeough, A. (2007). Developing narrative interpretation: Structural and content analyses. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77, 849–872.

Griffin, L. (1993). Narrative, Event-Structure Analysis, and Causal Interpretation in Historical Sociology. *American Journal of Sociology,* 98(5), 1094-1113.

Happy Planet Index. (2007). Published by New Economics Foundation, UK. Retrieved from http://www.itint.co.uki.hpi on September 1, 2007.

Harris, C. (2001). Archival Fieldwork. *Geographical Review.* 91(1/2), 328-335.

Hoyle, R.H., Harris, M.J., & Judd, C.M. (2002). *Research Methods in Social Relations.*

Australia: Wadsworth.

Interviews with Peace Corps Volunteers, February – June, 2008. Conducted and reported by Elizabeth Millar, Walaha, West Ambae, Vanuatu, South Pacific.

Introduction to Content Analysis (2008). *Colorado State University Writing Guides*. Retrieved from http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/research/content/printformat on June 3, 2008.

Jolly, M. (1996). Devils, Holy Spirits and the Swollen God: Translation,Conversion and Colonial Power in the Marist Mission, Vanuatu, 1887-1934. In P. van der Veer (ed.) *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity*, (pp. 231-262). New York and London: Routledge.

Krippendorf, K. (1980). *Content Analysis.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Lee, F., & Peterson, C. (1997). Content analysis of archival data. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 65*(6), 959-969.

Lewis, J.L. (2005). Ancient Values, New Challenges: Indigenous Spiritual Perceptions of Landscapes and Forest Management. *Society & Natural Resources,* 18(10), 907-920.

Lickona, T. & Davidson, M. (2005). *Smart & Godd High Schools: Integrating Excellence And Ethics for Success in School, Work, and Beyond.* Cortland, NY: Center for the 4th and 5th Rs, State University of New York.

Lindstrom, L. (1990). *Knowledge and Power in a South Pacific Society.* Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Lindstrom, L. & White, G.M. (1994). *Culture-Kastom-Tradition: Developing Cultural Policy in Melanesia.* Suva, Fiji: Institute of Pacific Studies, University of South Pacific.

Luteru, P.H. & Teasdale, G.R. (1993). Aid and Education in the South Pacific. *Comparative Education,* 29(3), 293-306.

Lyrics online website. (2008)

http://www.lyricsondemand.com/miscellaneouslyrics/nationalanthemslyrics/vanuatunationalanth

emlyrics.html. Retrieved June 17, 2008.

Malinowski, B. (1999). *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise*

And Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea. New York: E.P. Dutton.

Meyerhoof, M.   (1999). Sorry in the Pacific: Defining communities, defining practices.

Language in Society, 28, 225-238.

Miles, W.F. (1998). *Bridging Mental Boundaries in a Postcolonial Microcosm: Identity*

And Development in Vanuatu. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Mugnier, C.J. (2004). Republic of Vanuatu. *PE&RS Grids and Datums,* April, 2004. Retrieved

June 17, 2008 from http://www.asprs.org/resources/grids/04-2004-vanuatu.pdf.

Munro, D. & Thornley, A. (1996). *The Covenant Makers: Island Missionaries in the Pacific.*

 Suva, Fiji: Pacific Theological College and the Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the

South Pacific.

Okafor, C.A (2004). Oral Tradition and Civic Education in Africa. *International Education*

Journal, 5(3), 410-430.

Park, N. & Peterson, C. (2006). Character Strengths and Happiness Among Young Children:

Content Analysis of Parental Descriptions. *Journal of Happiness Studies,* 7, 323-341.

Park, N. & Peterson. (2006). Methodological issues in positive psychology and the assessment

character strength. In A.D. Ong & N. van Dulmen (Eds.), *Handbook of Methods in Positive*

Psychology, (pp. 292-305). New York: Oxford University Press.

Park, N., Peterson, C., & Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). Strengths of character and

Well-being. *Journal of Social & Clinical Psychology*, 23, 603–619.

Park, N., Peterson, C, & Seligman, M.E.P. (2006). Character strengths in fifty four nations and

    the fifty US states. *The Journal of Positive Psychology,* 1(3), 118-129.

Peace Corps Website (2008). Vanuatu division. Retrieved at www.peacecorps.vu on

    June 4, 2008.

Peterson, C. (2006). *A Primer in Positive Psychology.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Peterson, C. (2008). Lecture notes in *Character Strengths and Virtues,* February, 2008,

    Presented at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Peterson, C. & Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and*

    Classification. American Psychological Association, New York: Oxford University Press.

Rath, T. (2007). *Strengths Finder, 2.0.* New York: Gallup Press.

Schulman, P., Castellon, C., & Seligman, M. E. (1989). Assessing explanatory style: The content

    analysis of verbatim explanations and the attributional style questionnaire. *Behaviour*

    Research and Therapy, 27(5), 505-512.

Schwartz, B. (2005). *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less.* New York: Harper.

Seligman, M.E.P. (2002). *Authentic Happiness.* New York: Free Press.

Seligman, M.E.P. (2007). Lecture notes, November, 2007 in *Foundations of Positive*

    Psychology, presented at University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Shineberg, D. (1967). *They Came for Sandalwood: A Study of the Sandalwood Trade in the*

    South-West Pacific 1830-1865. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Smith, C.P. (2000). Content Analysis and Narrative Analysis. In H.T. Reis & C.M. Judd (Eds.),

    *Handbook of Research Methods in social and personality psychology (*pp.313-335).

    Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tedlock, D. (1975). Learning to Listen: Oral History as Poetry. *Boundary 2,* 3(3), 707-725.

Tryon, D. (1987). *Bislama: An Introduction to the language of Vanuatu.* Department of

 Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University Press.

Vanuatu Country Report. (2007). Country Watch Inc., Houston, TX. Retrieved from

 http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:2054/login.aspx?direct=true&db=keh&jid=DYJ&site=ehost-

 live on June 17, 2007.

Vanuatu Tourism Office (2008). Colonial History. Retrieved from http://www.vanuatu

 tourism.com/Vanuatu/export/sites/VTO/en/history on June 2, 2008.

Veenhoven, R. (2006). How Do We Assess How Happy We Are? Tenets, implications,

 and tenability of three theories. Paper presented at conference on "New Directions

 for the Study of Happiness: US and International Perspectives," University of Notre

 Dame, USA, October 22-24.

60 Minutes, June 12 , 2008. Report on Denmark, the Happiest Country on Earth, Study by the

 Leicester University. Available at http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2008/02/14/

 60minutes/main3833797.shtml.