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Bibliotherapy in Psychotherapy: When Therapists Prescribe Reading

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CHRIST (deemed to be university)

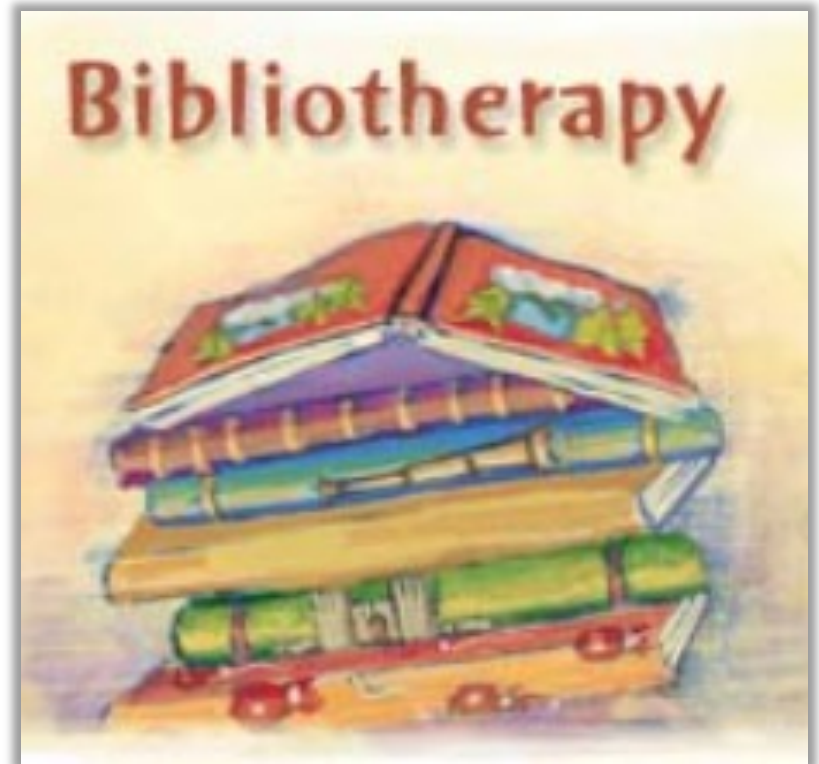
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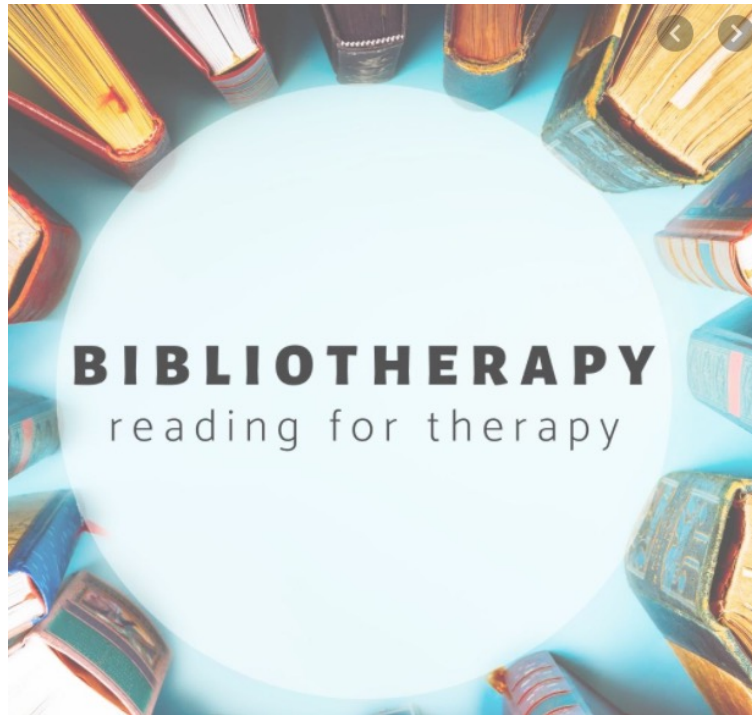
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Outline

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- Personal Motivation
- Research Study
 - ➔ Aims
 - ➔ Contribution to Knowledge
 - ➔ Literature Review
 - ➔ Methodology
- Findings
- Discussion
- Conclusions



Background

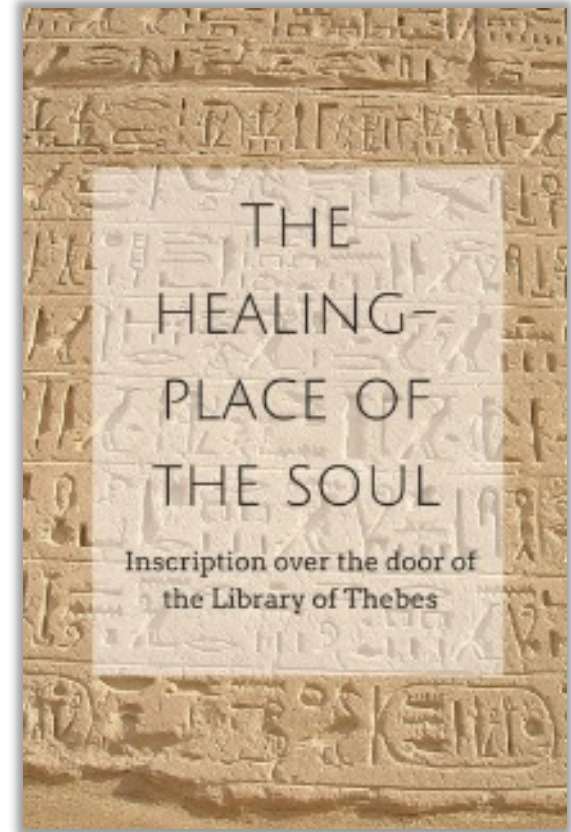


- **Bibliotherapy is the use of literature to facilitate the psychotherapeutic process**
 - ➔ **Often used as an adjunct to various psychotherapy modalities**
- **Defined as:**
 - ➔ **Any form of psychotherapy in which the reading of prescribed text forms an important part of the therapeutic process**



Background

- Coined around WWI
- Undertaken by specialized librarians
 - ➔ Treatment of veterans suffering from PTSD
- Concept dates back to ancient Greece
 - ➔ Linked to Aristotle who believed that literature had healing benefits
 - ➔ Library of Thebes above the door inscribed with ‘a healing place for the soul’

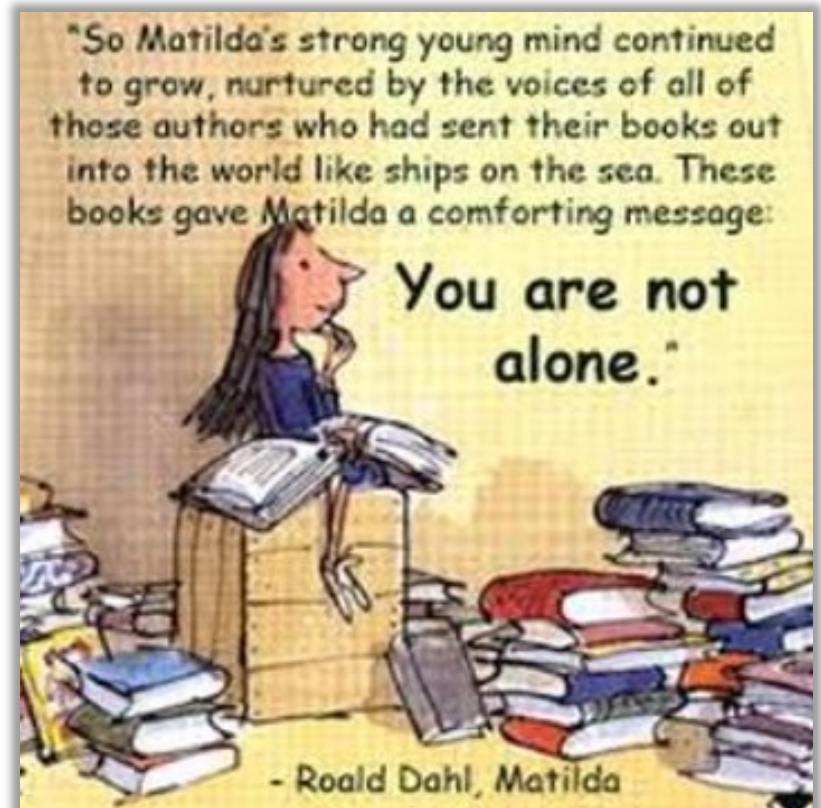


A Healing Place for the Soul



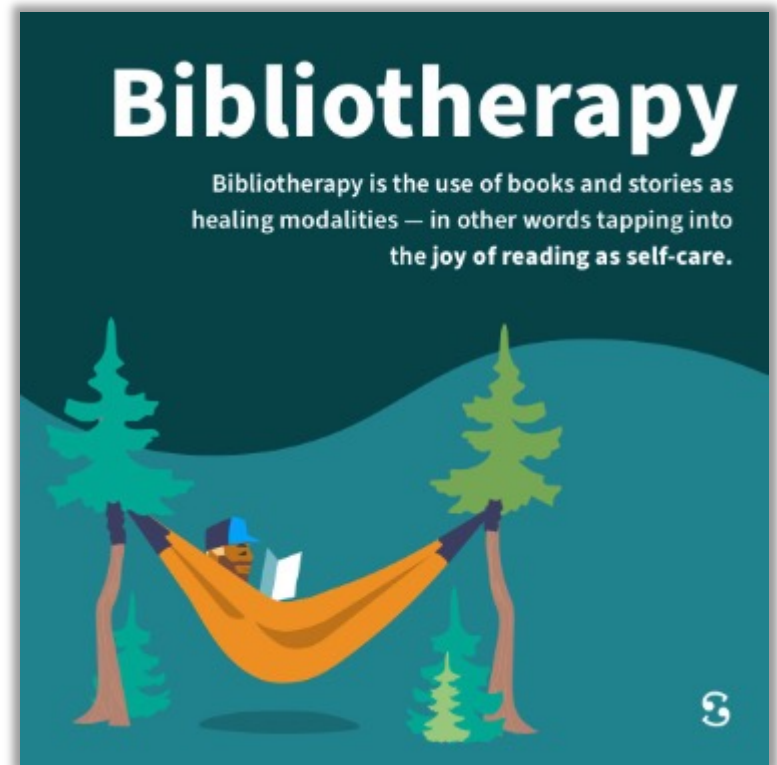
Background

- Over time **'prescription'** of literature for therapy has expanded and evolved
- Bibliotherapy supports other forms of treatment
 - ➔ Beneficial for both individual and group settings
 - ➔ People of all ages



Background

- **What does it look like in practice?**
- **Therapists and clients consider problems or stress areas in life**
 - ➔ The therapist then prescribes a book or story for the client to read
 - ➔ The reading material is specifically chosen for the client
 - ➔ Based on therapeutic need
 - ➔ Read outside the session



Background

- Texts are discussed in session
- Facilitates:
 - ➔ Psychoeducation
 - ➔ Self-compassion
 - ➔ Insight
 - ➔ Personal growth
- Types of resources:
 - ➔ Books (fiction/non fiction)
 - ➔ Self-help materials
 - ➔ Workbooks



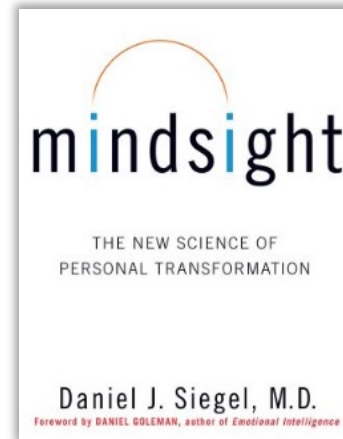
Bibliotherapy

- **Clinically useful for
fleshing out
psychological nuances in
functioning**

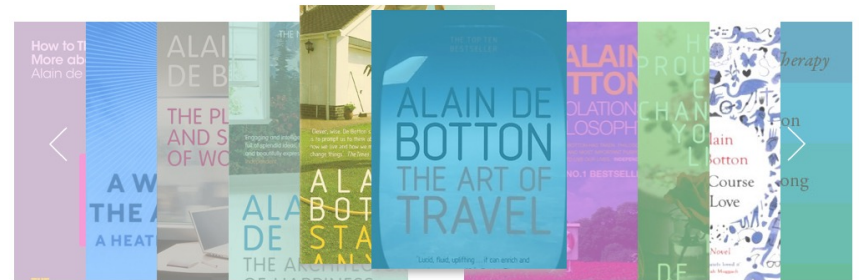
- ➔ **Mental processing**
- ➔ **Cognition and flow**
- ➔ **Black/White thinking**
- ➔ **Theory of mind**

- ## ➤ Psychoeducation

- ➔ **Interpersonal neurobiology**
- ➔ **Philosophy for living well**



www.drdansiegel.com/books

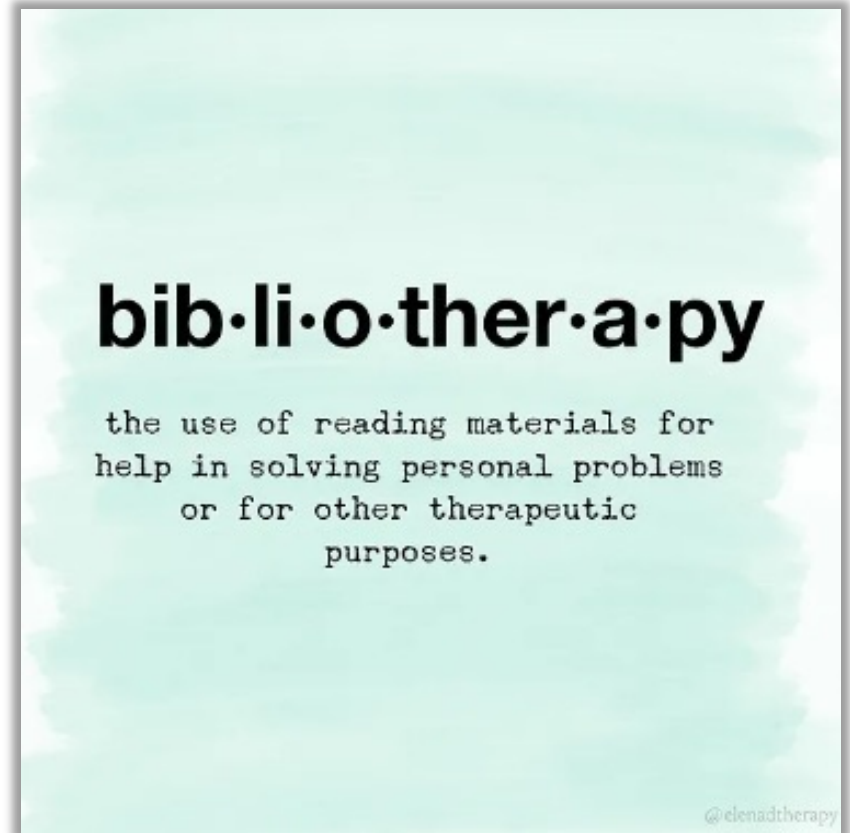


www.alaindebotton.com



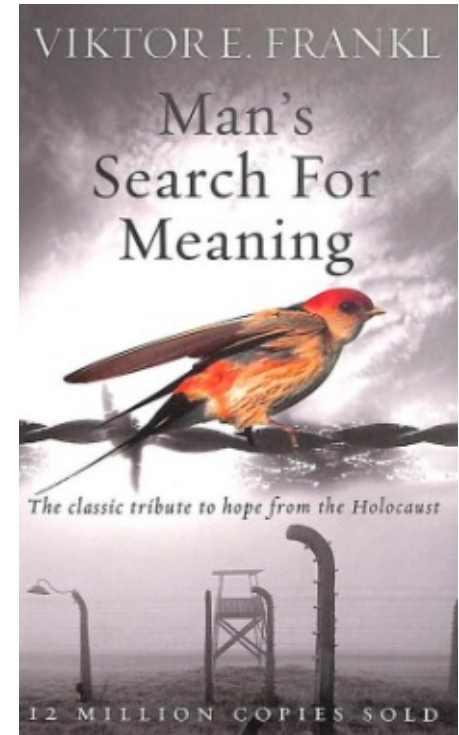
Background

- **Utilization of books in psychotherapeutic treatment for the benefit and promotion of psychological well-being is well-established**
 - ➔ **Neglected element of most formal psychotherapy training programs**



Personal Motivation

- Introduced to bibliotherapy in supervision
- Began to use one year into clinical placement
- Client had an interest in existential themes
- We read '**Man's Search for Meaning**' in our sessions
 - ➡ The text greatly facilitated our unpacking of existential themes



Case Example

➤ The client

- ➡ I always wondered why the German's bothered to carry everyone off to camps and put them to work etc., instead of just killing them right away.
- ➡ They went so far as offering medical assistance in the form of a 'hospital', but then didn't bother to offer care.
- ➡ It was interesting how the author was able to do what most couldn't and be in such a terrible unimaginable situation and still step outside of it all to wonder what was happening for others and think about it psychologically.
- ➡ Likely this preoccupation with analysing the effect of the camp on the other prisoners' psychological well-being saved him from demise.



Case Example

➤ The therapist

- ➡ We read some more of our book and covered one of the most important sections dealing with finding meaning in life and knowing that we live by the attitude we approach life with.
- ➡ We discussed our ability to choose ourselves at every moment. We agreed to finish the book at our next session.

➤ Philosophical themes:

- ➡ Temporality
- ➡ Death
- ➡ Meaninglessness



Collected Resources

- **Over time a selection of books that I believed to be of therapeutic value were put aside**
 - ➡ **Prescribed reading became a regular adjunct to my way of working**
 - ➡ **Resources now include:**
 - **Non-fiction**
 - **Self-help**
 - **DBT Workbooks**



Resource List

Existential Philosophy:

- The discovery of being (May)
- On becoming a person (Rogers)
- Beyond psychology (Rank)
- Toward a psychology of being (Maslow)
- Love & will (May)
- Nausea (Sartre)
- The consolations of philosophy (Botton)
- The myth of Sisyphus (Camus)
- Man's search for meaning (Frankl)
- The divided self (Laing)
- Knots (Laing)
- The courage to be (Tillich)

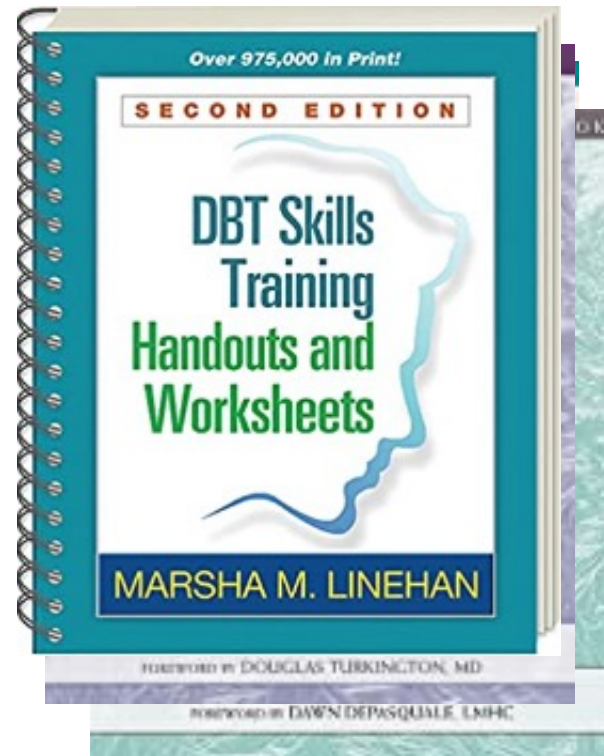
Psychotherapy:

- The gift of therapy (Yalom)
- Travels with Epicurus (Klein)
- Love's executioner and other tales of psychotherapy (Yalom)
- Get me out of here: My recovery from borderline personality disorder (Reiland)
- The examined life: How we lose and find ourselves (Grosz)
- Staring at the sun: Overcoming the dread of death (Yalom)
- Nerdy, shy, and socially inappropriate: A user guide to an Asperger life (Kim)
- DBT Workbook (McKay et al.)

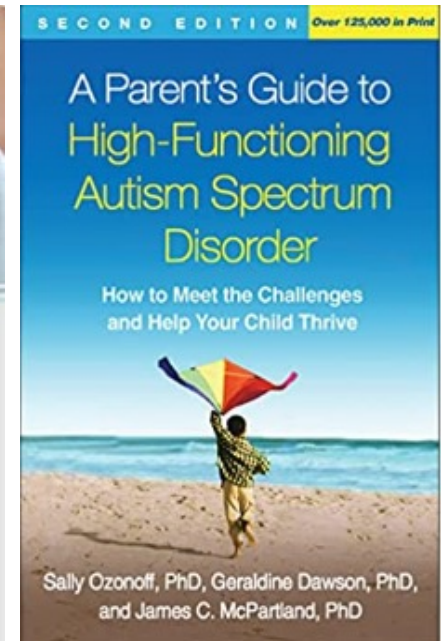
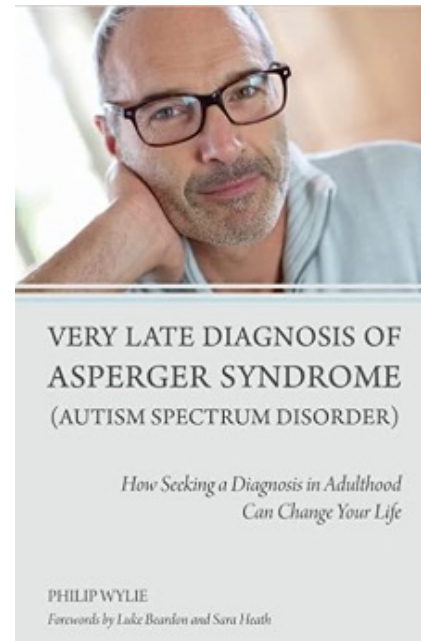
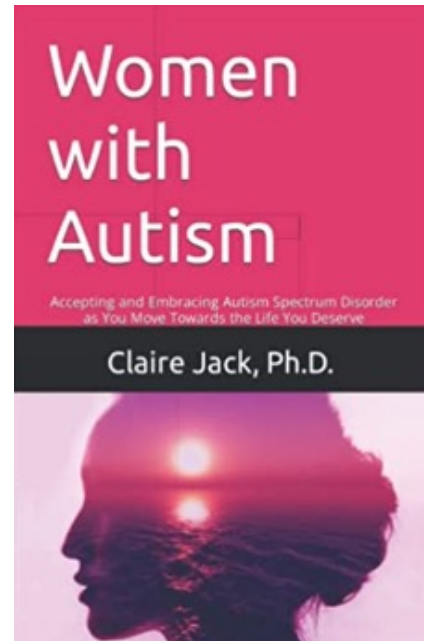
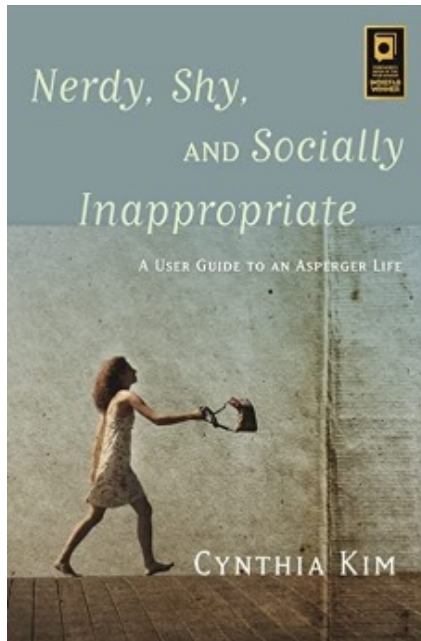


Resource Example

- **Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Workbooks:**
 - ➔ Personality disorder
 - ➔ Anxiety
 - ➔ Anger
 - ➔ PTSD
 - ➔ Bipolar
 - ➔ Psychosis
- **Individual Worksheets**



Resource Example



Personal Motivation

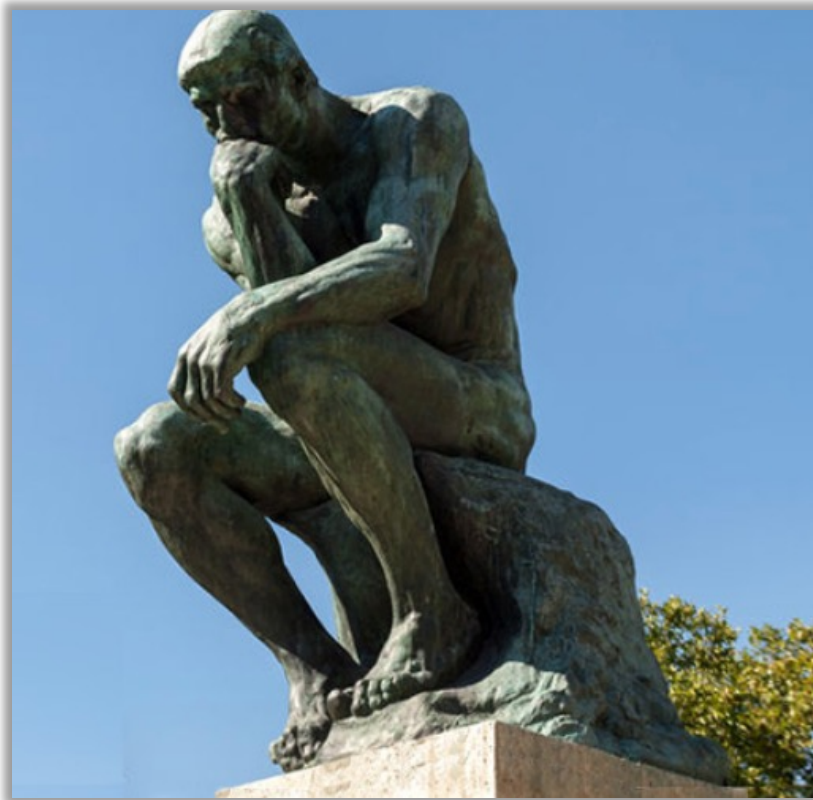
Reading for Your Mental Health: The Benefits of Bibliotherapy



- **Eight years of use**
 - ➔ Various client groups
 - ➔ In various formats
 - ➔ Multiple purposes
- **Including:**
 - ➔ Facilitating mindfulness through audiobooks
 - ➔ Psychoeducation
 - ➔ To speed up the therapeutic process
 - ➔ Assess cognitive function



Importance



- Importance of bibliotherapy cannot be underscored
- Understanding the nuances and experience of bibliotherapeutic prescription could not be a more worthwhile endeavor



Research Aims

- This study aims to explore the use of bibliotherapy by existential psychotherapists who consider prescribed reading an important adjunct to their way of working
 - ➔ How they experience the use of prescribed reading with clients



Definition of Terms

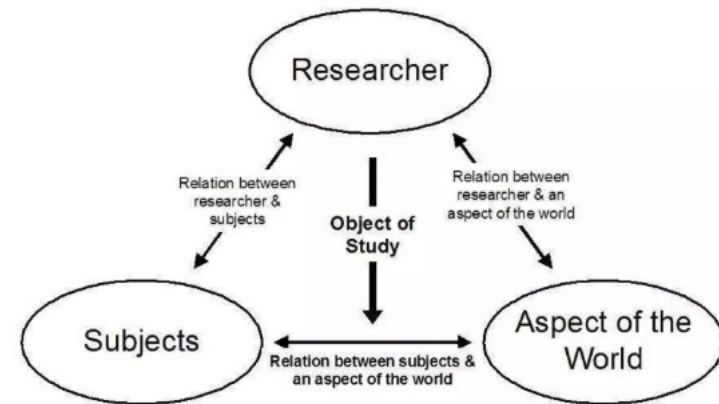
➤ Prescribed reading:

- ➡ The selection of literature (fiction or non-fiction) as an adjunct psychotherapeutic treatment method based on considered client therapeutic need, idiographic features, and symptomatology



Research Aims

- The specific objectives of this study are to determine:
1. How prescribed reading is used (i.e., format, rationale, function)
 - ⇒ Printed text, audiobook; client symptomology; homework/discussion
 2. Why prescribed reading is used (i.e., therapist beliefs of impact)
 - ⇒ What it is used for and why
 3. What impact practising as an existential psychotherapist has on the application of prescribed reading
 - ⇒ Choice of text (e.g., existential) and function (e.g., homework/discussion)
 4. What themes emerge by using the hermeneutic phenomenological method
 - ⇒ What is the lived experience of the therapist



Hermeneutic Phenomenology



Contribution to Knowledge

- This research is relevant for therapeutic practice and the field in general
- Results of the literature review reveal a dearth of existential-phenomenological bibliotherapy literature
- Aim is to add to the field by demonstrating how existential-phenomenological therapists can engage with bibliotherapy meaningfully with their clients
- Many health services have adopted the American manualized (self-help) approach
 - ➡ Returning to the phenomenon of clients' reading and *how* they use books, enables the client and therapist to co-explore, co-create, and co-construct meaning



Literature Review

Literature from various related fields was found

- Poetry therapy, film analysis, spirituality, self-help (children, adults, elderly), positive psychology, and psychiatric inpatient treatment

Dearth of bibliotherapy articles based in existential psychotherapy or existentialism

- Simon du Plock's previous published examinations of the topic consistently reappearing on all pairings of bibliotherapy and the words 'existential' or 'existential psychotherapy'

Final formulation of the research objectives by way of broadly searching the main interest

- 'Bibliotherapy' resulted in **1,322 results**



Literature Review

- **Bibliotherapy (Any Field) – 1,322 results**
 - ➔ **Removal of PsycBooks and PsycTests**
 - ➔ **Selection of Peer-Reviewed results only**
 - ➔ **Limited by Language (English)**
 - **734 results**
 - ➔ **Inclusion of Psychotherapy**
 - **326 Results**
 - ➔ **Limited by Age Group (Adulthood)**
 - **146 articles identified for review**
 - ➔ **Limited by Population Group (Human) and Document Type**
 - **141 articles identified for review**

141 abstracts will be scanned by title and abstract for inclusion

Non-empirical comment/reply and review articles will be excluded

Articles chosen for inclusion will have references screened for title for other relevant publications

References known by the author to be directly relevant to the review, but not detected by other search strategies will be included



Literature Review



- 18 papers identified as relevant
- Prescribed reading in individual or group contexts supported for:
 - ➔ Anxiety, fluency disorder, depression
- Majority of studies in the manualized self-help category
- Prescribed reading with minimal or no-therapist contact supported for:
 - ➔ Anxiety, eating disorder, OCD, perfectionism, stress, sexual dysfunction, depression
- First line of intervention in stepped care



How did using books in therapy first arise for you?

- Do you consider yourself to be using bibliotherapy or prescribed reading?

How do you use prescribed reading in your clinical practice?

- Do you prescribe texts as homework or does reflection and discussion of texts make up a designated part of individual sessions?
- On what basis have texts been chosen for inclusion in your prescribed reading list?

How do you decide which texts to prescribe?

- Can you give an example of texts you have prescribed and the reason that you chose them?
- What role does client insight, presenting problem, intelligence, or engagement in therapy play in your choice?

How do you decide what format to prescribe?

- Have you experienced any difference between the use of printed books versus audiobooks?
- Is there any reason you might choose one over another?

How is your use of bibliotherapy impacted by being grounded in existential-phenomenological practice?

- Have you been aware of using texts specifically to unpack existential themes or givens?
- Have you been aware when what clients take from a text and how they use it differs from your intention in prescribing the text and if so what has this been like for you?

How have you experienced the impact of prescribed reading on your relationship with clients?

- What has it felt like? Has it improved the relationship or impinged it?
- What is your experience of what can happen in therapy as a result of using prescribed reading as an adjunct to your way of working?

What is it like to use prescribed reading in existential clinical practice?

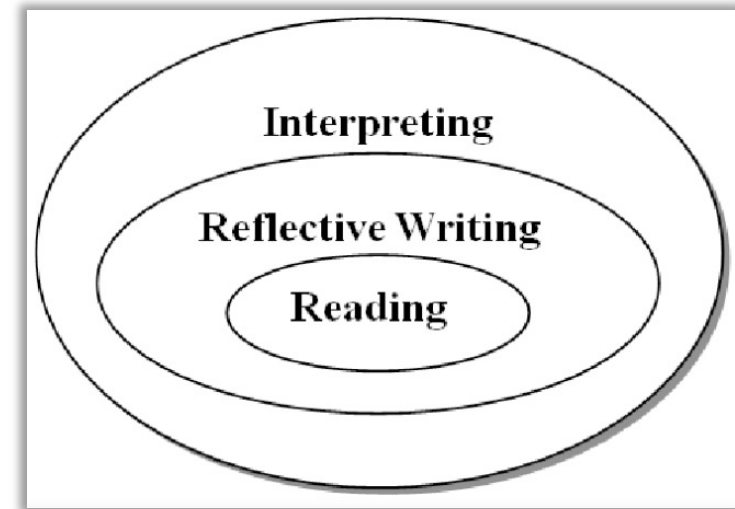
Face-to-face interviewing via a video platform.

Questions form an open/semi-structured interview from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective.



Methodology

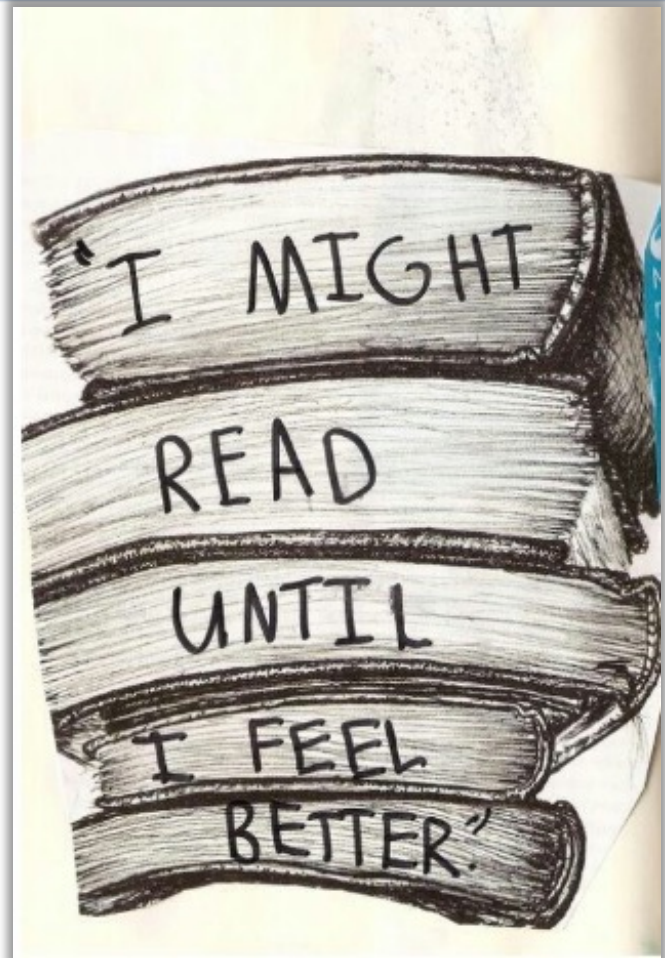
- **Hermeneutic phenomenological approach**
 - ↳ **Meaning-making is undertaken through a hermeneutic circle of interpreting (dialogued text), reflective writing, and reading**
 - ⇒ **Reflection of themes of the phenomenon that emerge**
 - ⇒ **Researcher is called upon to consider how their assumptions influence the process of reflection and interpretation**



Findings

➤ Four themes emerged from the thematic analyses:

- Directive approach
- Identification with prescribed reading
- Benefits of prescribed reading
- Meaning-making through literature



Discussion

1. Directive Approach

- ➔ Idea that prescribed reading is a directive approach
- ➔ Departs from the held conception of being a non-directive existential-phenomenological practitioner
- ➔ Useful for specific presenting problems
 - ⇒ E.g., eating disorder
- ➔ No concern using it for psychoeducation
- ➔ Uncomfortable recommending existential text to clients



Discussion

➤ Identification with Prescribed Reading

- ➔ Therapists does not identify with or consider themselves to be using prescribed reading or bibliotherapy

➤ Benefits of Prescribed Reading

- ➔ Noted significant benefits of prescribing books for specific presentations & psychoeducation

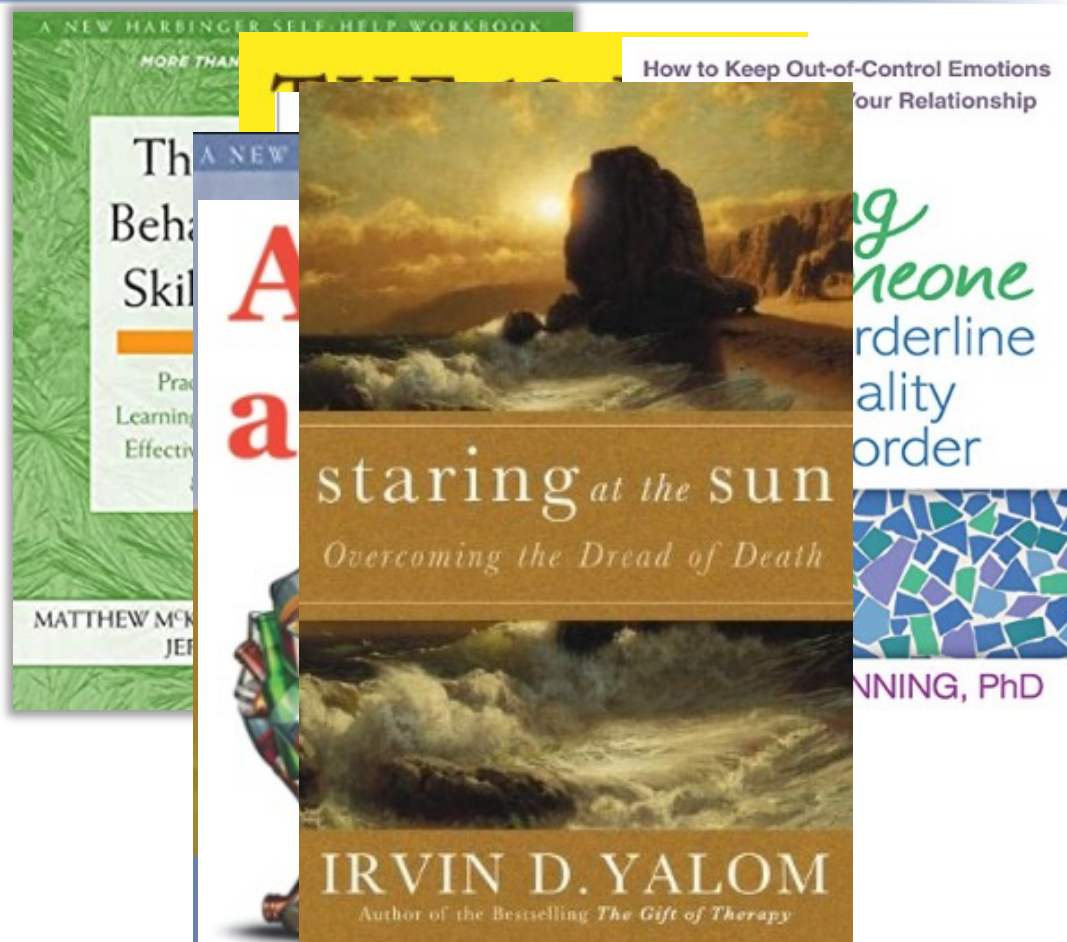
➤ Meaning-Making Through Literature

- ➔ Written word helps both client and therapist to understand each other
- ➔ Shared process of enlightenment
- ➔ Someone else's words say what they cannot



Conclusion

- Useful for specific presenting problems
 - ➔ Personality disorder
 - ➔ Eating disorder
 - ➔ Relationship issues
 - ➔ Depression
 - ➔ Anxiety
 - ➔ Substance use
 - ➔ Existential concerns
- Speeds up the therapeutic process



Lewis David



Conclusion

- **Various formats and uses**
 - ➔ **Workbooks – CBT, DBT**
- **Client's identification with the author and therapist**
 - ➔ **Client feels felt, seen, and understood**
- **Powerful**
 - ➔ **Author may write what a client can't or won't say**



Thank you!

