



PPRC

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH CENTRE

Disambiguation and Application: Values, Virtues, & Character Strengths in Psychotherapeutic Practice

**Carmel Proctor, DCPsych, PhD
Psychotherapeutics and Psychological Wellbeing
Conference**

Kuriakose Elias College, Mannanam, India

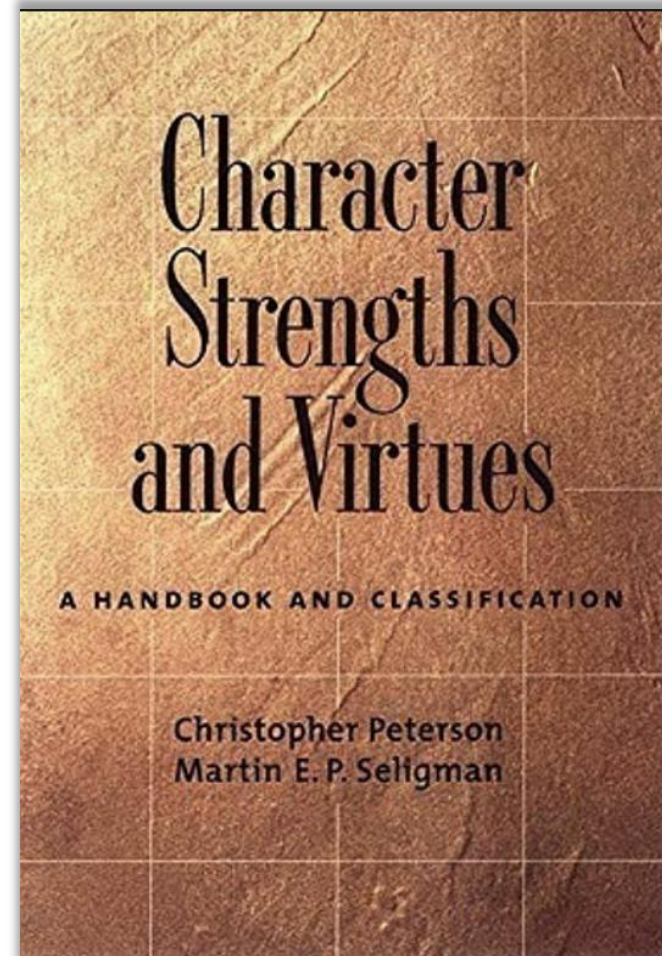
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carmel@pprc.gg

www.pprc.gg

Back to the Beginning: A Scientific Classification of Character Strengths and Virtues

- Martin Seligman and Chris Peterson set out to create a 'Manual of the Sanities'
 - ➔ Scientific classification of human strengths and virtues
 - ➔ 55 scholars, religious thinkers, and philosophers worked to determine universal human virtues and character strengths
 - ➔ Resulted in:
 - *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification (2004)*



Values in Action – Inventory of Strengths: VIA-IS

➤ VIA operationalisation of Character Strengths and Virtues Handbook

- ➔ 24 character strengths
- ➔ 6 broad virtues

➤ 240 item measure

- ➔ 10 items per strength
- ➔ Rank ordered
 - Top 5 – **Signature Strengths**



24 Character Strengths of the
VIA Classification



Values, Virtues & Character Strengths

- **Value** – right conduct and good life
 - ➔ Degree of importance of some thing or action, such that highly valuable action is regarded as **ethically** good
- **Virtue** – moral excellence
 - ➔ Trait or quality deemed to be **morally** good and valued as such
- **Character Strengths** – an expression of virtue
 - ➔ Processes or mechanisms that define virtues
 - ➔ Pathways to virtues



VIA Strengths

➤ VIA – six broad (*ubiquitous*) virtues – 24 character strengths



➔ Wisdom and knowledge

➤ Creativity, Curiosity, Love of Learning, Open-Mindedness, Perspective (Wisdom)



➔ Courage

➤ Authenticity (Honesty), Bravery, Persistence, Zest (Enthusiasm)



➔ Humanity

➤ Kindness, Love, Social Intelligence



➔ Justice

➤ Fairness, Leadership, Teamwork



➔ Temperance

➤ Forgiveness (Mercy), Modesty (Humility), Prudence, Self-Regulation

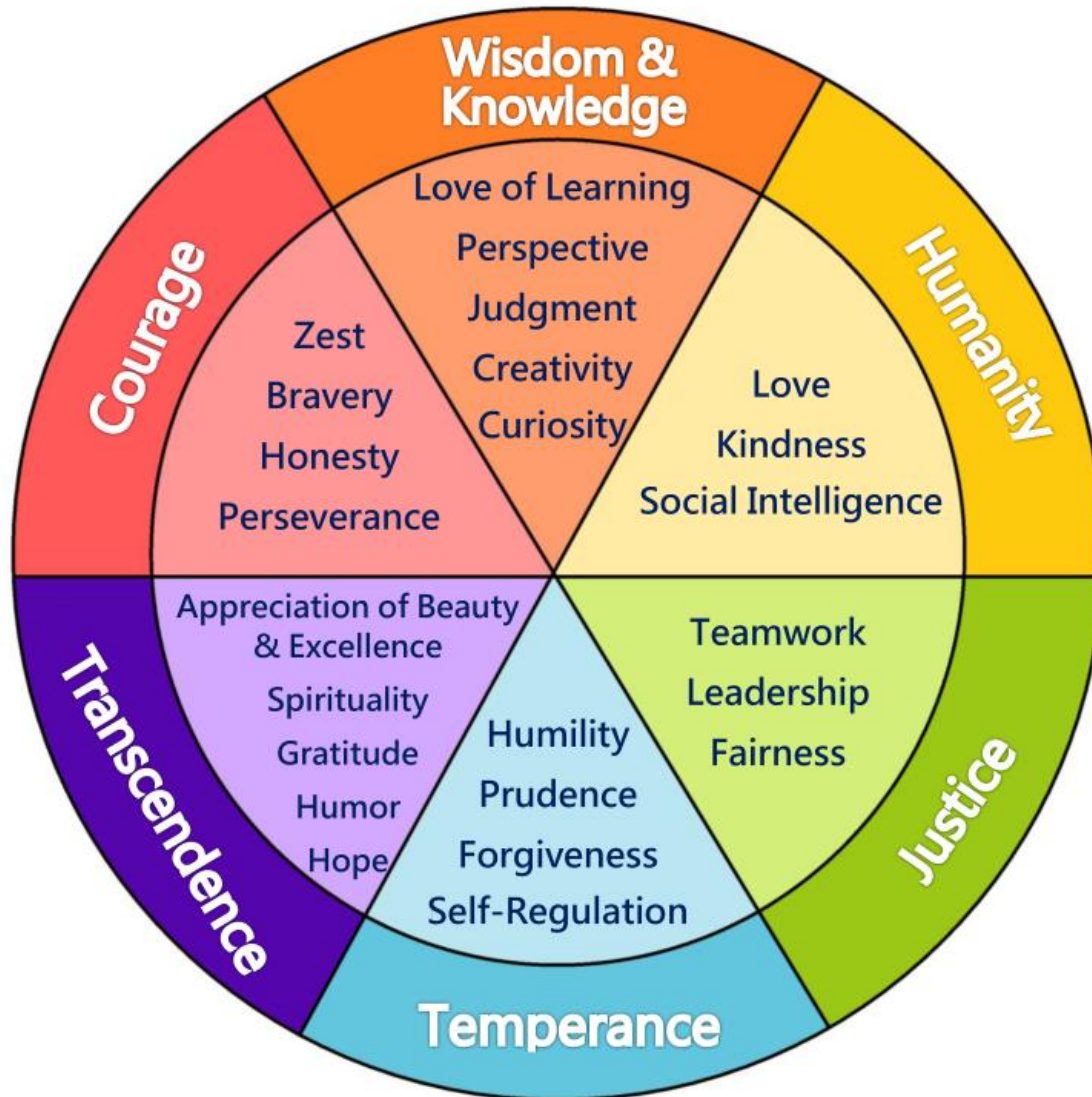


➔ Transcendence

➤ Appreciation of Beauty, Gratitude, Hope, Humour, Spirituality



VIA Strengths Classification

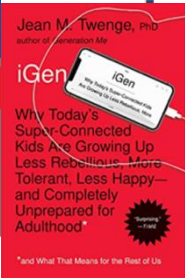
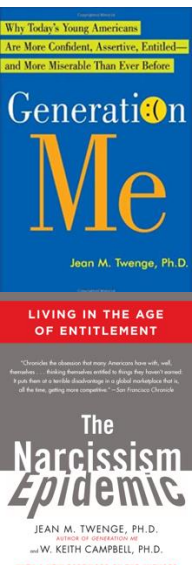
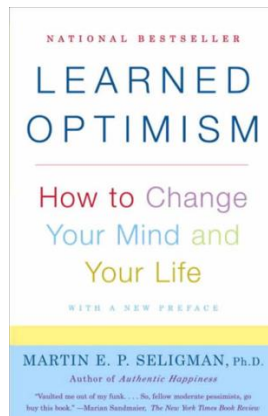
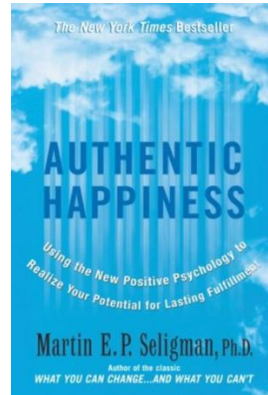


Fixing a Problematic Rhetoric

- Positive psychology was originally defined as the study of positive states, positive traits, and institutions that enable those (PP 1.0)
- Created a primary focus on individual happiness (pleasure/hedonia)

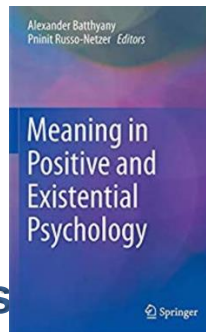
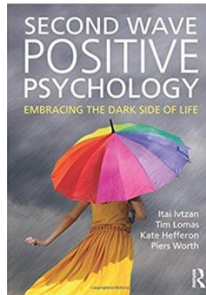
- ⇒ Human flourishing, virtue, wisdom, and meaning neglected
- ⇒ Fostered unstable forms of well-being, less able to cope with rigours of life

- » E.g., *Generation me: Why today's young Americans are more confident, assertive, entitled – and more miserable than ever before* (Twenge, 2006)
- » E.g., *The narcissism epidemic: Living in the age of entitlement* (Twenge & Campbell, 2009)
- » E.g., *iGen: Why today's super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy – and completely unprepared for adulthood* (Twenge, 2018)



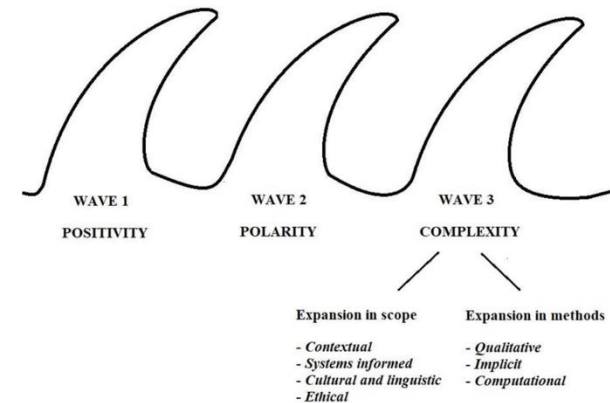
Fixing a Problematic Rhetoric

- Second wave positive psychology (PP 2.0) moved to a greater focus on eudaimonia (flourishing)
 - ➔ Integration of positive psychology with existential psychology – *Existential Positive Psychology*
 - ➔ How to bring about the best in individuals and society in spite of and because of the dark side of human existence
 - ⇒ Chinese principle of yin and yang adopted
 - ⇒ All things exist as inseparable and contradictory opposites
 - ⇒ Universal human capacity for meaning-seeking and meaning-making central to achieving optimal human functioning under both desirable and undesirable conditions (e.g., Frankl – self-transcendence)
 - ⇒ Paul Wong – *International Network on Personal Meaning*
 - ⇒ *International Journal of Existential Positive Psychology* – www.meaning.ca



Fixing a Problematic Rhetoric

- Third wave positive psychology (PP 3.0) has moved beyond the individual to the groups and systems in which people are embedded
 - ➔ General movement towards greater **complexity**
 - ➔ Epistemological **broadening**
 - ⇒ What we know and how we can know it
 - ⇒ **Broadening 'scope'**
 - Contextual – environment
 - Systems informed – human systems
 - Cultural & linguistic – international
 - Ethical – wider framework
 - ⇒ **Broadening 'methodologies'**
 - Qualitative – hermeneutic/phenomenological
 - Implicit – beyond self-report measures
 - Computational – increased data techniques
 - ➔ Move toward capturing, understanding, and impacting upon the complexity of the real world



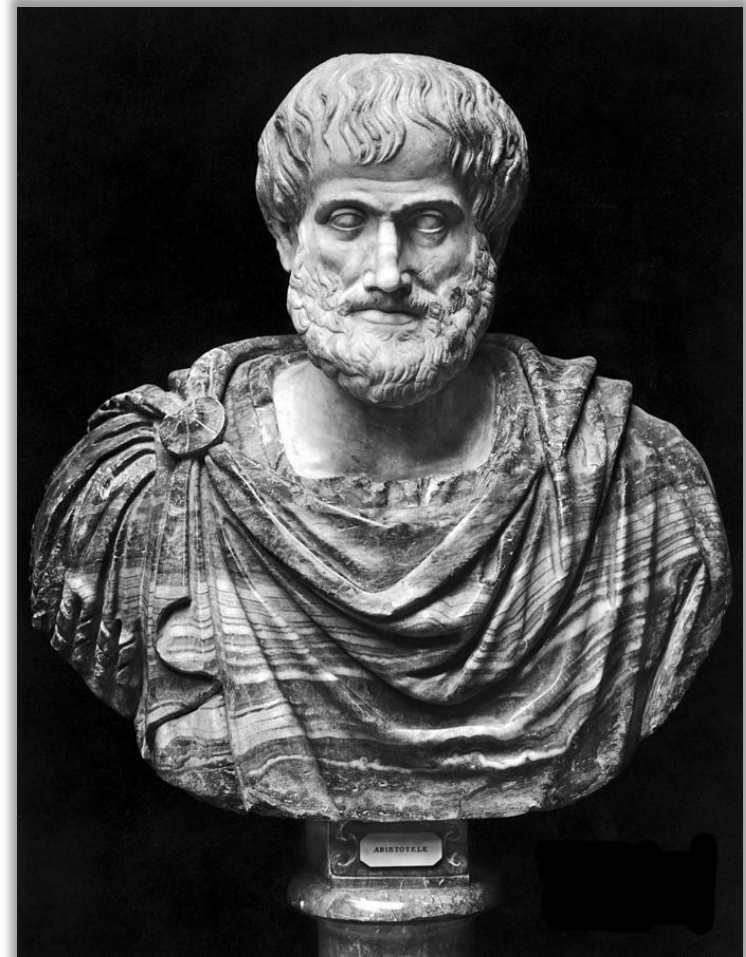
The three main waves of positive psychology, including details of the third wave

(Lomas et al., 2021)



PP: Links with Aristotle

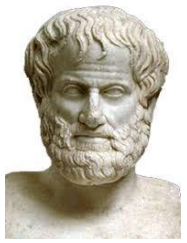
- Positive psychology's foundations rest in Aristotelian philosophy
 - ➔ Primary function of humans is to exercise good character through the conscious choice of action in the pursuit of **eudaimonia** (human flourishing)
 - ➔ Emphasises **practical wisdom** in the application of character and virtue



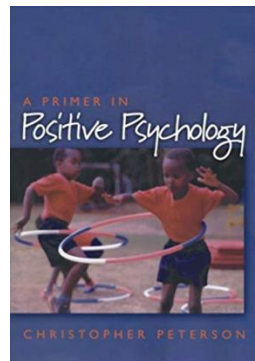
Acts must be done 'at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way'



PP: Links with Aristotle



- Positive psychology aligns itself with Aristotle's view of a **biological basis** for good character and **psychological growth** from activities that exercise our capabilities
 - ➔ We are born with all sorts of natural tendencies (i.e., positive and negative)
 - ➔ Natural tendencies can be encouraged and developed or discouraged and thwarted during development
 - ➔ Character strengths are not 'grounded in immutable biogenetic characteristics' (Peterson, 2006)
 - ➔ Character is about **doing**
 - **Positive psychology is not a spectator sport** (Peterson, 2006)
 - ➔ Virtue manifests itself in action (Niemiec, 2013; Sachs, 2016)



Aristotle

- Aristotle argued for habituation into virtue
 - ➔ Becoming virtuous by practicing virtue – making virtuous characteristics/ dispositions our own
 - ➔ Adopting a way of being, such that we become our choices
 - ⇒ Akin to making a *lifestyle choice*



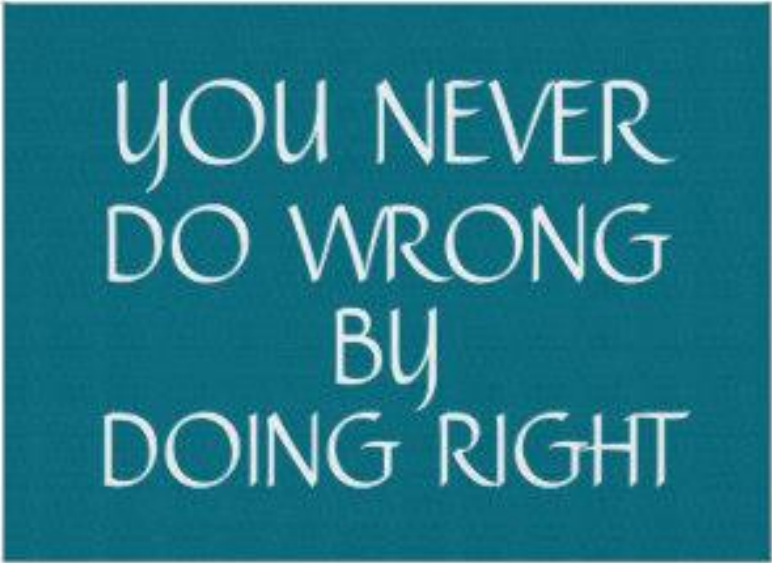
Aristotle

- Possible for acts to appear virtuous, without being ‘good’
 - ➔ Good acts must be done with the knowledge and desire to do them *because* they are good in order to be virtuous
 - ➔ Initially, good action may be painful and require self-control and willpower (e.g., temperance)
 - ⇒ Once attained the behaviour will not be painful
 - ⇒ Virtue *feels good* – doing apparently virtuous actions out of painful duty indicates that the underlying virtue has not yet been attained
 - ⇒ Once virtue has been attained, we are pained by (‘the things we ought’) vice – enabling us to measure the *morality* of our actions by our feelings
 - ⇒ ‘To feel delight and pain rightly or wrongly has no small effect on our actions’



Aristotle

- Eudaimonia is a process that requires habituation
 - ➔ *Working actively towards the objectively desirable life throughout the lifespan*
- Virtue itself is not a **habit**
 - ➔ Habituation is an aid to the development of virtue
- Matter of experience
 - ➔ Virtuous character/disposition takes a long time to develop
- Virtue involves emotion
 - ➔ **Activity of the soul**



YOU NEVER
DO WRONG
BY
DOING RIGHT



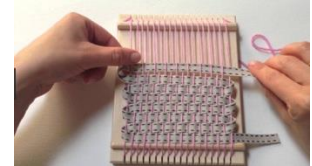
Weaving Virtue & Character Strengths Into Psychotherapeutic Practice

- By using the language of virtue and character strengths and highlighting these to clients, we begin to enable clients to consider themselves from this perspective
 - ➔ Phenomenology
 - **Name and identify** felt/experienced strengths
 - What do strengths look like in action?
 - ➔ Explore the gap between the person they are and the person they want to be
 - **Goals for change**
 - ➔ What does the good life look like to the client?
 - ➔ How would they like to improve how they are in-the-world-with-others?
 - ➔ To begin to live the life they desire, they must choose it actively
 - **Habituate** towards the self they want to be



Weaving Virtue & Character Strengths Into Psychotherapeutic Practice

➤ Wisdom exercises in therapy



➡ Imagined Future Self

- Begin to make changes in their lives **now** that will enable them to live more in accordance with their values and reach their desired tomorrow – reduction of **moral dissonance**

➡ Write Your own Eulogy

- If you imagine you died today, what would you like to have read out at the funeral or like to read in your obituary?

➡ Your 80th Birthday Party

- Imagine you are now 80 years old and a friend or relative is giving a speech, summarising your life, what will you hope will be said?

- Reel Wisdom – [Lessons from 40 Films in 7 Minutes](#)



Weaving Virtue & Character Strengths Into Psychotherapeutic Practice

- Exploring the relationship with the self
 - ➔ Self-love, forgiveness, kindness, justice
 - ➔ What kind of relationship is it? Good, kind, fair?
- What does living in accordance with core values **look like** for them?
- Therapists (and other practitioners) can weave virtue ethics into practice simply by being attuned to opportunities that afford them ability to open up and unpack virtue ethical themes, such as character strengths, values, and virtues



Introducing & Working With Character Strengths

- Challenge the negativity bias, enquire over known or experienced positive characteristics
 - ➔ We require the language to *name* and *spot* strengths
- Take the VIA
 - ➔ [VIA Institute](#)
- Results provide rank order of character strengths from 1 to 24, with definitions
 - ➔ Top five are *signature strengths*
 - ➔ Most essential to who you are
- Discuss results
 - ➔ Does the top five look like the 'real you'?
 - ➔ What stood out or struck you about the list?
 - ➔ How do you use your strengths, when, where?
 - ➔ Can you spot and name a strength
 - When do you see it, feel it, or experience using it?



Client Vignette

1. A 21 year-old student describes herself as being known among her friends as someone who can always be counted on to be 'brutally honest' and 'say how it really is'. The expressed idea of being brutally honest opened up a space for exploring with this client what that means to her – that is, how she defines or understands what it is to be *brutally* honest. She explained by way of noting, for instance, that she would tell a friend if they *really* looked good in an outfit or not. Her example opened up the space to consider her self-identification with *honesty* as a moral virtue and explore from the Aristotelian perspective the difference between using it virtuously and unvirtuously – to consider '[t]hat moral virtue is a mean...and in what sense it is so, and that it is a mean between two vices, the one involving excess' (e.g., insult), 'the other deficiency' (e.g., disingenuousness) (Aristotle, c. 330 BCE/1925, p. 45). She was struck by the realisation that insult could be hidden in so called *honesty* (and *humour*), which presented the opportunity to consider if telling others the *real truth* fit with her self-identification and ownership of being an *honest* person.



Client Vignette

2. A 24 year-old student expresses valuing honesty as one of their core values. During the session they note that they 'get away with' using the same train ticket sometimes for months without having to purchase a new one. Their behaviour stands in contrast to their espoused value of honesty. Challenging them to consider that honesty involves not only truth telling, but also authentic presentation of self to others, and living as an honest person would do (with *integrity*), offers the opportunity to apply virtue ethics in practice. This client at first presentation of being challenged with regards to their dishonest behaviour became defensive and expressed that a *small* dishonesty, such as a train ticket, surely did not *count*. They were open however to considering the difference between believing in honesty and self-identification with it and living the virtue in practice. Therefore, opening up discussion around these themes, which facilitated for this client the unpacking of what authenticity and integrity mean to them, causing them to re-examine their behaviour in light of how they desired to be-in-the-world.



Character Strengths Awareness Interventions

➤ Subtracting a Character Strength

1. Choose one of your signature strengths
2. Imagine this strength for a moment. Picture it in action and take notice of how important it is to you and your life
3. Now imagine that you cannot use this strength for 1 month. What would this be like? How would you feel? For example, if you choose kindness, you will be unable to be kind in any situation or circumstance
4. Take a few minute to note your observations having made this mental subtraction



(Niemiec, 2018)



Character Strengths Awareness Interventions

➤ Character Strengths Genogram

- Creation of a family genogram that includes three signature strengths of each member

➤ Character Strengths 360

- Get feedback from 10 or more people on the strengths they perceive most strongly describe you



Character Strengths-Based Exercises

➤ All Strengths

- ➔ Notice and name strengths in action

➤ Honesty

- ➔ This week, try stopping and thinking before you speak
- ➔ *Say what you mean and mean what you say*
 - E.g., Try not to tell lies for one week – even small ones

➤ Gratitude

- ➔ Three good things each day
- ➔ Top 10 things you are grateful for
- ➔ Gratitude Visit or Letter
- ➔ Letter of Appreciation



Character Strengths-Based Exercises

➤ Forgiveness

- ➔ This week, when people annoy you, try to respond with forgiveness not anger
- ➔ Letter of Forgiveness

➤ Teamwork

- ➔ Practice mindfulness actively in the community
 - E.g., Pick up after yourself, close doors, help others

➤ Kindness

- ➔ Carry out random acts of kindness
- ➔ Leave thank you notes
- ➔ Count kind gestures

➤ Love

- ➔ Tell someone you love that you love them



Character Strengths-Based Exercises

➤ Curiosity

- ➔ Try something new

➤ Prudence

- ➔ Think of healthy ways you can cheer yourself up when you feel low – how can you look after yourself well?

➤ Hope

- ➔ Visualise and write about your best possible future self—what do you need to do to make your dreams come true?
- ➔ Write your future diary

➤ Humour

- ➔ Three funny things each day
- ➔ Actively seek out those things that make you laugh



Strengths Gym

Love of Beauty

Love of Beauty means:

You notice and love beautiful things, in nature, art, music, or people.



Strengths Builders:

1. Create your own Strength in Action Story – Make up a story that contains a character or characters that display a Love of Beauty in a situation. Write or draw or tell your story of Love of Beauty in action.
2. Beauty Map Of The World – Make a map of the most beautiful places in the world or within a country of your choice. Team up with some friends to draw a map that points the way to beauty spots across the world or within the country of your choice. Compare your map with another group.

Strengths Challenge:

Find out about two different types of artwork. For example:

- Pottery and Papier Mâché
- Watercolour and Oil Painting
- Knitting and Cross-Stitch

Try and make a piece of artwork using one of the methods listed above or one you discovered on your own. Or find an example of something you consider to be beautiful or an example of excellence, such as a scientific invention, car design, or architecture.

Strengths Notes:



Kindness

Kindness means:

You do and say things to make other people happy. You are never too busy to do a favour.



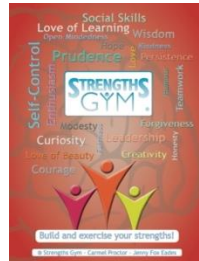
Strengths Builders:

1. Create your own Strength in Action Story – Make up a story that contains a character or characters who are Kind to someone else by doing a favour for them or helping them when they need it. Write or draw or tell your story of Kindness in action.
2. Think of some random acts of kindness you could carry out in the week ahead. Write them in your journal and tick them as you do them. If possible make them anonymous.

Strengths Challenge:

Go to: <http://www.wisdomquotes.com/topics/kindness> and pick a kindness quotation for the week and then write it in your notebook. Why not pick a new one for every week!

Strengths Notes:



Think in Strengths Clusters

➤ Book of Life

- ➔ Create as a gift for a loved one
 - Photos, memoirs, clippings etc.

➤ Signature Strengths in a New Way

- ➔ Use top 5 strengths in a new way everyday

➤ One Door Closes, Another Door Opens

- ➔ Time in life when a negative event led to a positive outcome you were not expecting



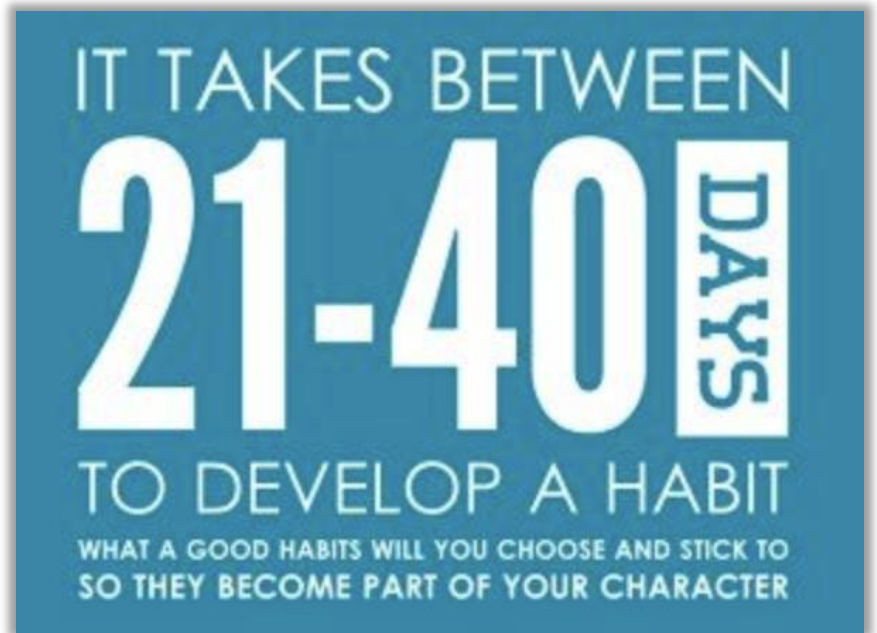
Gift of Time

1. Think of a person you care about
2. What could you do for this person that involves nothing more than giving your time?
3. Plan a gift of time for this person and give it, whether it means doing something with them or doing something for them on your own
4. Spend as much time as needed
5. Don't tell the person about your gift, let the gift speak for itself



Change a Habit

1. This exercise involves changing some health-relevant habit
2. This may involve reducing or eliminating a habit you don't like or adding a new healthy behaviour
3. It is important to define the habit concretely so you can monitor change
4. Keep a journal of your progress



Positive Psychology at the Movies

➤ Cinematherapy

➔ The use of movies in psychotherapy

➔ Benefits:

- ➔ Building hope
- ➔ Providing role models
- ➔ Identifying and reinforcing strengths
- ➔ Facilitating communication
- ➔ Prioritise values

➔ Cinema film index:

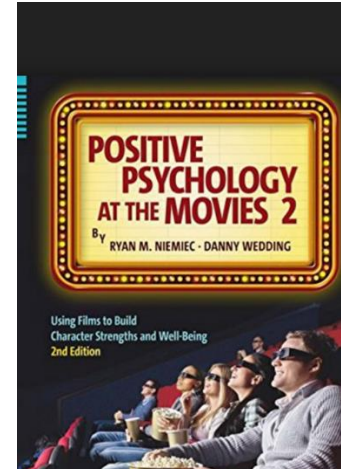
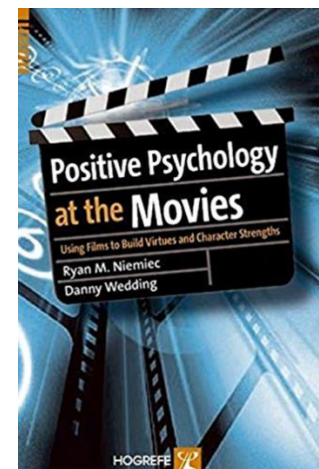
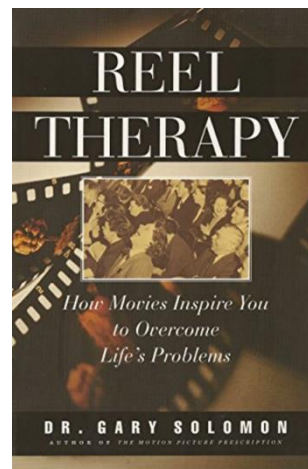
➔ Cinematherapy.com

➔ Clinical outcomes

- ➔ Reduced depression/hopelessness
- ➔ Grief/death acceptance
- ➔ Eating disorder
- ➔ Emotional Disturbance

➔ Movie and Cinema Therapy:

➔ Positivepsychology.com



Positive Psychology at the Movies

Movie

1. Inside Out
2. Home & Trolls
3. Runaway Bride
4. The Pursuit of Happyness
5. Pele: The Birth of a Legend
6. It's a Wonderful Life
7. Hidden Figures
8. Avatar
9. Forest Gump
10. The Shawshank Redemption
11. Field of Dreams
12. Cast Away

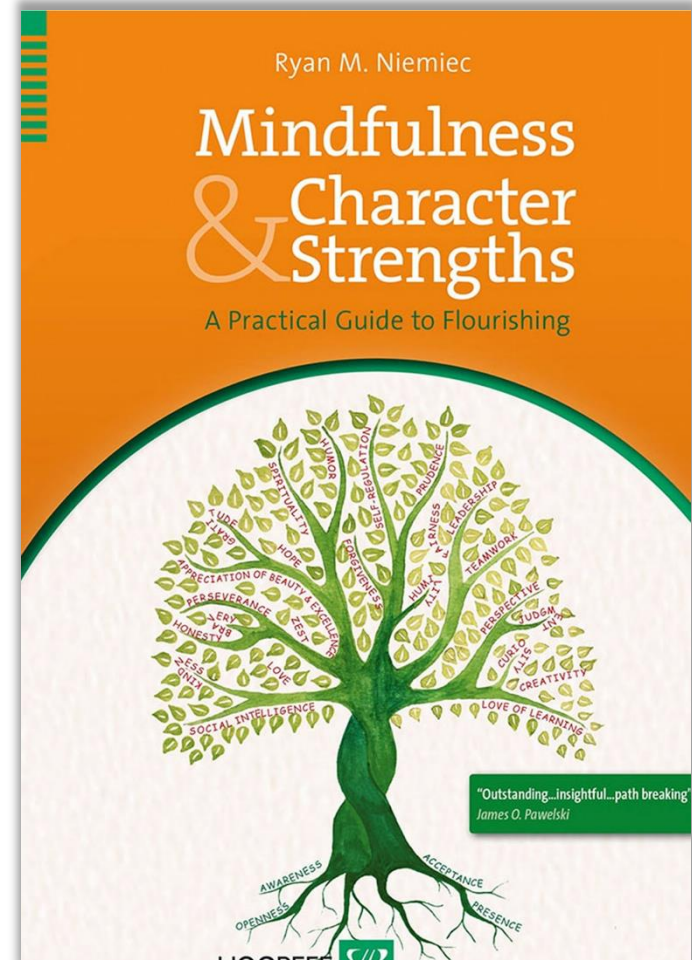
Psychotherapeutic Application

1. Emotions
2. Friendship
3. EUPD
4. Persistence
5. Paragon of triumph over adversity
6. Gratitude, Suicidal Ideation
7. Inspiration, Hope
8. Identity, Self-Schema
9. Death, Freedom, Isolation
10. Everything!
11. Prudence
12. Isolation, PTG

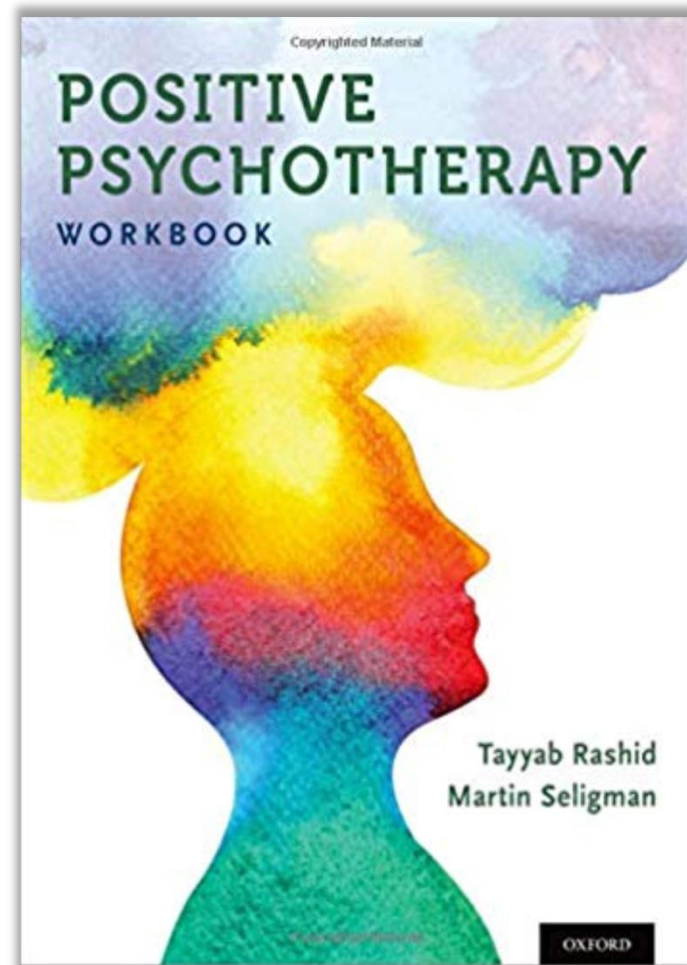
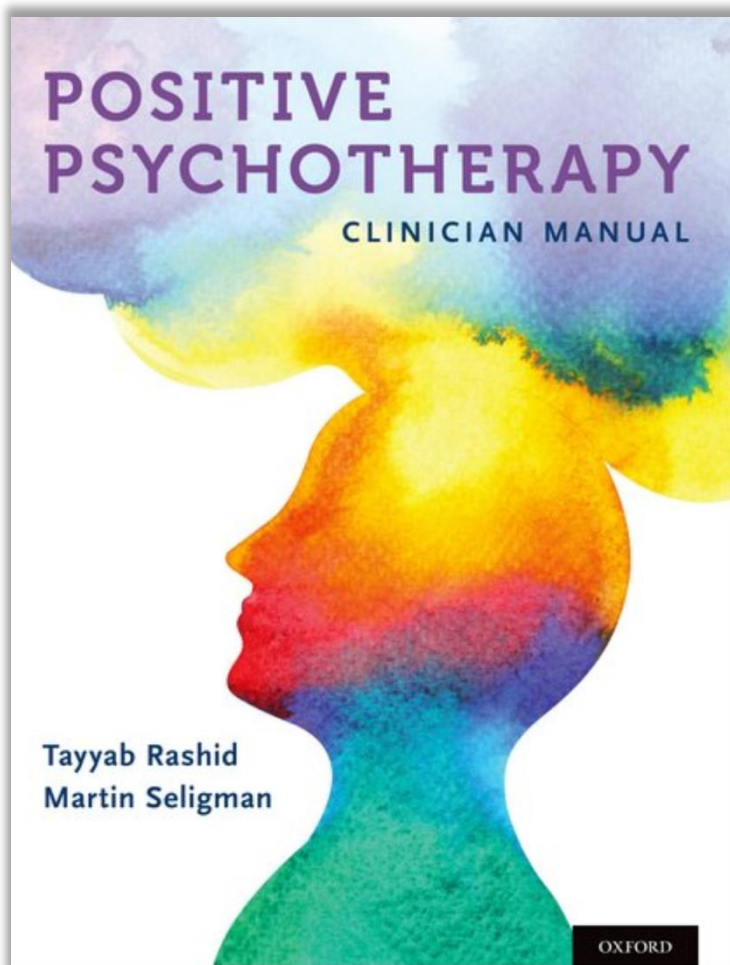


Mindfulness & Character Strengths

- **Mindfulness-Based Strengths Practice (MBSP)**
 - ➔ Use of mindfulness to boost character strengths
- **Integration:**
 1. **Strong Mindfulness:** Improving mindfulness practices by weaving in character strengths
 2. **Mindful Strengths Use:** Improving character strengths use by weaving in mindfulness
- **MBSP 8-session program**

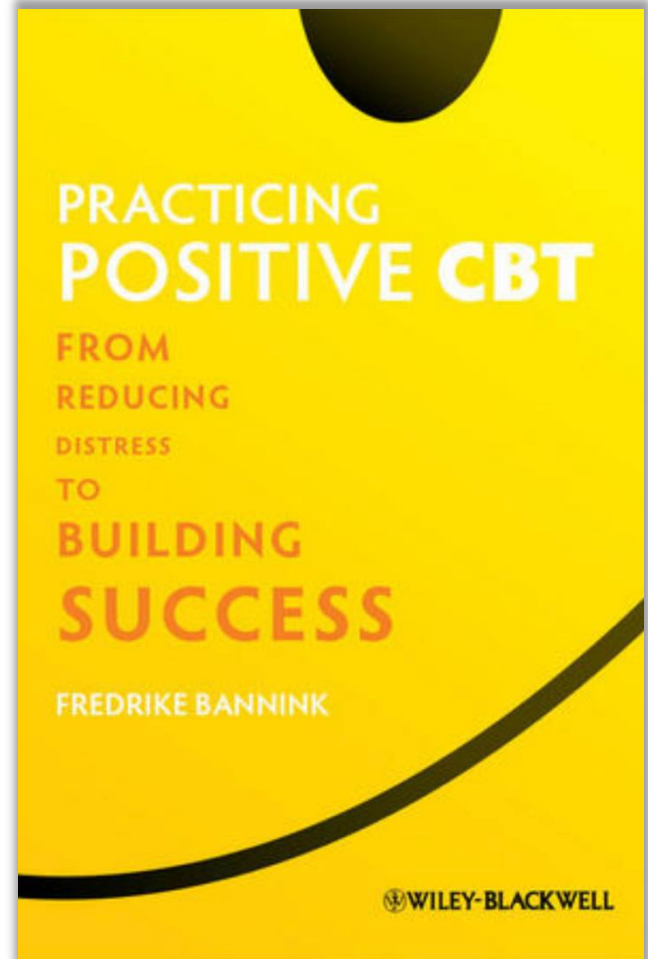


Positive Psychotherapy



Miracle Question

1. Suppose tonight while you are sleeping, a miracle happens and your problems are all solved. But because you are asleep, you don't know that this miracle happens. What will be the first thing you notice tomorrow morning that will tell you that this miracle has happened?
2. What will be the first thing you notice yourself doing differently that will let you know that this miracle occurred? What else? What else? What do you expect to see and find in the world around you, particularly your work?
3. Tell me about some recent times when you were doing somewhat better or (part of) the miracle was happening, even just a little bit.
4. When things are going somewhat better for you, what have you noticed that you or others do differently then? What other consequences have you noticed?



Positive Technology

➤ Positive Design

- ➔ The mechanisms and manifestations of design that stimulate human flourishing

➤ Apps:

➔ Journal

- ➔ [Journey](#), [Momento](#)

➔ Family Organiser

- ➔ [Google Calendar](#), [Microsoft To Do](#), [Cozi](#)

➔ Teams/Groups

- ➔ [Huddle](#), [WhatsApp](#)

➔ Health

- ➔ [Fitbit](#), [DBT Coach](#), [Calm](#)

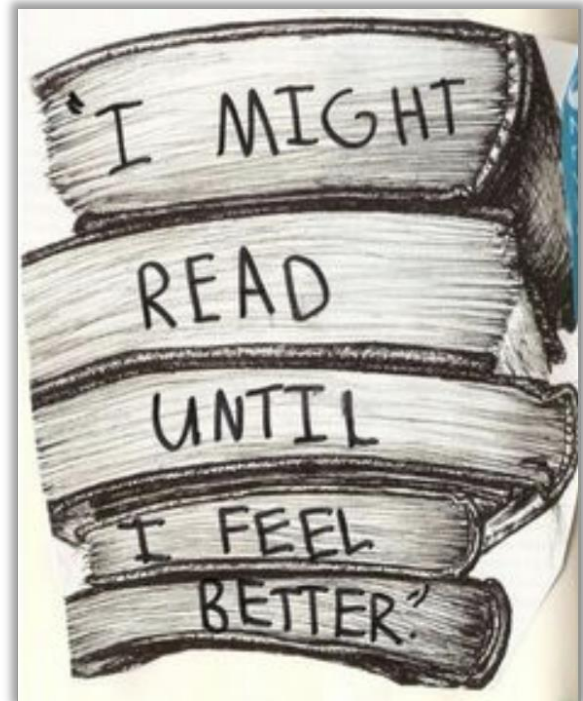
➔ Happiness

- ➔ [Live Happy](#), [Waking Up](#)



Bibliotherapy

- The use of books as therapy in the treatment of mental or psychological disorder
- Often philosophy or existential texts
- Clinically useful for fleshing out psychological nuances in functioning
 - ➔ Mental processing
 - ➔ Cognition and flow
 - ➔ Black/White thinking (splitting)
 - ➔ Grandiosity
 - ➔ Holism/The Now (Gestalt)
 - ➔ Embodiment
 - ➔ Transcendence



www.alaindebotton.com



Train Your Mind

➤ Meditation

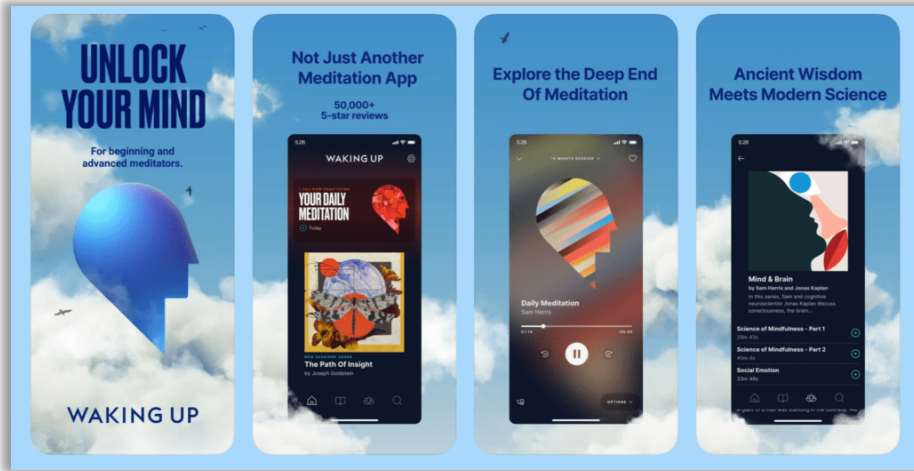
- ➔ Calm app
- ➔ Jeff Warren
 - 30-days How to Meditate
- ➔ Masterclasses
 - Rethinking Depression
 - Discovering Happiness
 - The Power of Rest
- ➔ LeBron James
 - Train Your Mind I & II
- ➔ Sleep Stories
- ➔ 7 Day series
 - Anxiety, Focus, Gratitude, Happiness



www.calm.com



Waking Up

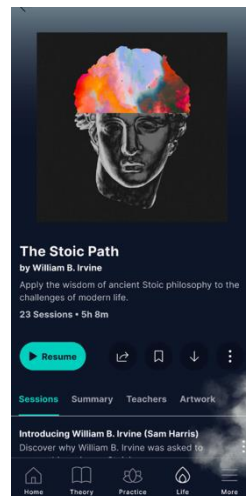
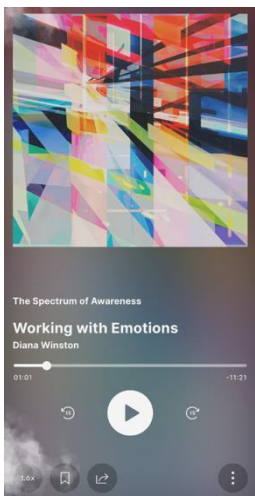


➤ Beyond meditation

- ➔ Philosophical discussion and lessons
- ➔ Meditation
- ➔ Relaxation techniques
- ➔ Mindfulness
- ➔ Thoughtful conversations
- ➔ Courses from world leaders and teachers



www.wakingup.com



Resource List

Positive Psychology:

- Character strengths and virtues (Seligman & Peterson)
- Handbook of positive psychology (Snyder & Lopez)
- Positive psychological assessment (Lopez & Snyder)
- Positive psychology in practice (Linley & Joseph)
- A primer in positive psychology (Peterson)
- Oxford handbook of methods in positive psychology (Ong & van Dulmen)
- Positive psychology (Snyder & Lopez)
- The Oxford handbook of happiness (David, Boniwell, & David)
- Positive psychology interventions in practice (Proctor)
- A life worth living: Contributions to positive psychology (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi)
- Positive psychology: A science of happiness and human strength (Carr)
- Average to A+: Realising strengths in yourself and others (Linley)
- Person-centred psychopathology: A positive psychology of mental health (Joseph & Worsley)

Positive Psychology & Virtues in psychotherapy:

- Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment
- Flourish: A new understanding of happiness and well-being – and how to achieve them (Seligman)
- Flow: The classic work on how to achieve happiness (Csikszentmihalyi)
- Mindfulness and character strengths: A practical guide to flourishing (Niemiec)
- Positive psychology at the movies 2 (Niemiec & Wedding)
- Character strengths interventions: A field guide for practitioners (Niemiec)
- Virtue and psychology: Pursuing excellence in ordinary practices (Fowers)
- Reason, virtue, and psychotherapy (Macaro)



Resource List cont.

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)
- Everyday mysteries (van Deurzen)

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)



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Thank
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