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Magic at the Movies: Positive Psychology for Children, Adolescents and Families

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Magic at the Movies: Positive Psychology for Children, Adolescents and Families

Abstract

Children learn in part from what they see and hear, whether modeling parents' or peers' behavior, reading books, or viewing movies. Parents and their children share the same and often unspoken goal—to live "the good life"—in a state of well-being. Character strengths are foundational to well-being, and movies are a rich source with which to build character strengths and hence flourishing. However, even though movies are considered efficacious (and more rigorous studies are needed), there are minimal resources for parents on how to use this powerful tool with their children and teenagers. Movies are presented here as an educational force, with the ability to promote altruism and self-improvement. The power of the narrative stimulates emotions, and these emotional responses influence learning and behavior. Immersion into a character in a movie increases empathy, and allows the viewer to live the experiences of the character without having to experience the real-life consequences. The following paper will discuss: movies as positive media, the rationale for how movies build character strengths, the benefits of building character strengths from movies in particular, and curriculum/criteria for "Positive Psychology at the Movies for Families, Children, and Teenagers." The 24 character strengths will be reviewed, and an exemplar movie presented for each, followed by discussion points and potential positive interventions. A literature review of positive psychology and character strengths can be found in the Appendix.

Keywords

positive psychology, positive media, film, well-being, character strengths, positive education, positive parenting, altruism, empathy, children's media/movies, narrative

Disciplines

American Film Studies | American Popular Culture | Arts and Humanities | Child Psychology | Developmental Psychology | Educational Psychology | Film and Media Studies | Interdisciplinary Arts and Media | Personality and Social Contexts | School Psychology | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Magic at the Movies: Positive Psychology for Children, Adolescents and Families

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University of Pennsylvania

A Capstone Project Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Ryan Niemiec, Psy.D.

August 1, 2014

Positive Psychology at the Movies for Children, Adolescents and Families
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The Magic of Movies and Positive Psychology for Parents, Children & Teenagers

Children learn in part from what they see, whether modeling parents' or peers' behavior, reading books, or viewing movies. Parents and their children share the same and often unspoken goal—to live "the good life"—in a state of well-being. Character strengths are foundational to well-being, and movies are a rich source with which to build character strengths and hence flourishing. However, even though movies are considered efficacious (and more rigorous studies are needed), there are minimal resources for parents on how to use this powerful tool with their children and teenagers. Movies are presented here as an educational force, with the ability to promote altruism and self-improvement. The power of the narrative stimulates emotions, and these emotional responses influence learning and behavior. Immersion into a character in a movie increases empathy, and allows the viewer to live the experiences of the character without having to experience the real-life consequences. The following paper will discuss: movies as positive media, the rationale for how movies build character strengths, the benefits of building character strengths from movies in particular, and curriculum/criteria for "Positive Psychology at the Movies for Families, Children, and Teenagers." The 24 character strengths will be reviewed, and an exemplar movie presented for each—followed by discussion points and potential positive interventions for parents and their children and teenagers. A literature review of positive psychology and character strengths can be found in Appendix A.

Movies as Positive Media

In general, negative events seem bigger and more frequent than positive ones; this is referred to as *negativity bias*—one is biased in part because of the naturally higher intensity of the negative events (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). In return, positive events tend to occur more frequently—a *positivity offset*—but may be softer or less noticeable; in

truth, most moments are inherently good (Diener & Diener, 1996). Such is the case with movies; the violence, curse words and sexual scenes tend to overpower the positive aspects. Both the general public sentiment and the focus of researchers have concentrated on the consequences of aggressive behavior in children watching violent programming (Paik & Comstock, 1994; Wilson, 2008); admittedly, these effects are concerning and real (Anderson et al., 2003). These researchers add that despite negative film influences, youth can respond to positive film influences—especially with proper guidance and tailored strategies. In one large meta-analysis of television viewing, exposures to prosocial content has had positive effects at least as large as the negative effects of exposures to programs with violent scenes (Mares & Woodard, 2005). Mares and Woodard go on to assert that prosocial effects of audiovisual media content may be even more powerful than the negative effects of exposure to violent content, because existing social norms favor prosocial behavior. That is, children are apt to receive more positive reinforcement for imitating prosocial or altruistic acts, such as congratulations or smiles (Grusec, 1991).

Mares and Woodard (2005) are not alone to find that viewing prosocial media content can lead to more altruistic actions performed by the viewers. *Elevation* is defined by Sarah Algoe and Jonathan Haidt (2009) as an uplifting emotion that people feel when they observe a person helping another person; that is, improving the welfare of another by helping him via a virtuous act. In turn, the observer feels the motivation to do good themselves. Schnall, Roper, and Fessler (2010) find that viewing another person's altruistic act increases elevation, which then leads to measureable increases in the altruistic behavior—or helping actions—of the viewer himself. This finding that elevation leads to increases in altruism and prosocial behavior has been found in several additional studies as well (Aquino, McFerran, & Laven, 2011; Cox, 2010; Landis et al., 2009; Schnall & Roper, 2012). This opens the door that movies may increase desired positive

behavior. Indeed, the term *cinematic elevation* refers to the ability of movies to promote altruism, such that a viewer is inspired to perform acts to improve the welfare of others after watching a portrayal of virtue, goodness, and/or character strength (Niemiec, 2012d). A sister term, *cinematic admiration* refers to the ability of movies to promote self-improvement, or goal setting. This admiration occurs when a person observes excellence of character or skill, resulting in motivation to improve the self and pursue goals (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Niemiec, 2012d). If movies promote these desired behaviors, how are these desired behaviors learned or incorporated? Bandura's (1977, 1986) social cognitive theory purports that one way children learn is by modeling the behavior of others, whether parents, teachers, peers—or characters in movies.

Movies contribute to learning in other ways and are routinely used to supplement education, or *cinemeducation* (Alexander, Hall, & Pettice, 1994) in schools, colleges and medical schools. Students can benefit from films to enhance classroom learning, most commonly from history, English and psychology courses (Butler, Zaromb, Lyle, & Roediger, 2009). Uys (2009) found that knowledge is increased in students that receive film-assisted methods of instruction, but Stoddard (2009) warns that most teachers use clips without any film pedagogy or selection taxonomy. Films are useful to peak students' interest as an instructional aid; however, popular historical films may have trivial to major inaccuracies. Butler et al. (2009) admonish that as long as teachers warn students about these inconsistencies, this misinformation effect is lessened. Movies are also used to educate viewers at mental health conferences and training programs to teach psychiatry. Greenberg (2009) points out that it is worthwhile to remember that popular films are not produced for education, and when mental illnesses are portrayed, facts are often sacrificed for the sake of a seductive narrative and box office profits.

In addition to using films for education, movies may be used to practice psychotherapy, or *cinematherapy* (Berg-Cross, Jennings & Baruch, 1990). A client's favorite movie may give clues to lifelong conflicts (Greenberg, 2009). Prescribing films may grant fictive distance to a client, to externalize either problems or solutions so that the client may access nonthreatening behavior change (Dermer & Hutchings, 2000). Three stages are suggested: assessment, then implementation, followed by debriefing. In using movies therapeutically, it remains critical both to assess strengths and to match clients to movies that are a good fit. Reactions afterwards necessitate discussions to further process desired results. One example is the use of movies as cinematherapy to help children identify and discuss emotions to cope with divorcing parents (Marsick, 2010).

Entertainment-Education (E-E) is yet another kind of education fostered by movies, which refers to placing educational messages into entertainment media (Singhal & Rogers, 2002). This method uses films as a modality to spread ideas that may bring about change—both social and behavioral. Also based on Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977; 1986), E-E is most useful to instill health prevention behaviors and increased self-efficacy (or self-control) in viewers.

Movies and Emotions

Emotions are involved in learning, and the ability to invoke emotions is nearly a trademark of films. Movies elicit emotions through causal relations to cognitions; for example, cognitively appreciating injustice tends to give rise to anger, and loss to sadness (Plantiga & Smith, 1999). Scenery, music, timing and facial expressions also contribute to emotional invocation. Zillman (1988) offers the concept of mood management: almost all film selections are chosen for the outcome of pleasure—or increased positive affect. Even horror films would be

selected for same—the pleasure of release from or resolution of the tension. However, these are short-term affect changes subsequent to viewing movies; movies can also promote long-term affect and eventual behavior changes. Fredrickson's (2008) broaden and build hypothesis may be applicable, which states that one's positive emotions can multiply into an upward spiral, and transform current or immediate positive emotions into positive resources for future needs when times are hard.

Short-term or hedonic states of happiness—derived from *hedonia,* the pursuit of pleasure—are reflective of subjective well-being, or life satisfaction at that point in time (Diener, 2000; Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999; Waterman, 1993). Psychological well-being is less transitory and more of a long-term way of life, and is referred to as *eudaimonia* by Aristotle (Aristotle, 1962; Waterman, 1993). This difficult to define term refers to a state of flourishing, a personal expressiveness involving meaning, purpose and living the virtuous life (For a deeper discussion of these concepts, please refer to Appendix A). Hedonic well-being is characterized by high positive and low negative affect, while psychological or eudaimonic well-being is more centered on growth, self-acceptance, and purpose in life (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This dyad of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being serves as a framework for the short-term, or hedonic effects from movies compared to the long-term, or eudaimonic effects of viewing movies.

Oliver (2008) broadens Zillman's (1988) mood management theory to explain the seemingly hedonic paradox of selecting movies for insight or meaning rather than simply pleasure. In fact, she goes on to assert that preference for entertainment that provides insight or meaning is particularly employed when a person is in a tender affective state—characterized by warmth, sympathy and understanding. Entertainment (or enjoyment) is typically associated with a happy or cheerful viewing experience. If this were the only paradigm, there would be no

market for tragedies or tearjerkers. Decades ago, Tessar, Millar and Wu (1988) documented three motivations for movie attendance: self-escape, entertainment or pleasure, and self-development. The first two correspond to hedonic motivations, the third to eudaimonic. In this way, attraction to sad films does not mean attraction to sadness, but to connections with others or relationships, to dramatic depth of emotions and to non-superficial examinations of the state of humanity (Oliver, 2008). Movies do not exist solely for whimsical diversion. Perhaps there is more to life than positive affect; these observations suggest that a contribution to eudaimonic well-being is also a valued outcome.

Indeed, there are changes throughout the lifespan that influence such film selection choices, based on the relative values of the resulting affect, emotions and behavior—and depending on the age of the viewer. Mares, Oliver and Cantor (2008) proffer a developmental explanation for the appeal of specific types of movies. Pleasure may be more complex than positive affect alone; cognitive satisfaction comes into play. Older adults shift from long-term goals to achieving meaningfulness and emotional satisfaction in the present; they are less interested in wasting time on negative affect or useless slapstick plots. Young adults, seemingly immortal, have time to watch in order to escape boredom—or to just have fun. While older adults prefer uplifting or heartwarming content, young adults may view dark media that does not repair moods, but may serve the developmental functions of exploration and growth. Thus, youth or young adults may select movies based on hedonic fulfillment while older adults select more contemplative, or eudaimonic-enhancing films. Of interest, this may be one insight into the chasm between parents' and teenagers' stereotypical disagreement regarding which movie to watch; elucidating this natural developmental difference may foster more collaboration and result in the (presumably) mutually desired connections.

Empathy and Movie Narratives

Part of the appeal and entertainment from movies is losing track of time (and perhaps self) by immersing oneself into a narrative or character. Becoming engaged, or "lost" in a movie generally results in a favorable review of that film experience and is referred to as *narrative transportation* (Hall & Bracken, 2011). Reading fiction can also transform the self, and can be extrapolated to immersion into characters of movie narratives. Art, whatever medium, is a mediator by facilitating emotional change—leading to personal growth, maturation and self-expression (Djikic, Oatley, Zoeterman, & Peterson, 2009). Reading—or viewing movies—is a way to understand the subjective states of others. Stories introduce the reader to empathy, allowing the reader to put himself in a character's shoes—though not requiring the reader to feel the actual pain of the suffering. Pawelski and Moores (2013) state that a reader can benefit "when a character… experiences an insight or epiphany that results from suffering, or grows in significant ways as a result of tragedy" (p. 42). Kidd and Castano (2013) build on this theory, finding that reading literary fiction indeed improves Theory of Mind (ToM), or the skill of empathy, defined as identifying and understanding others' mental or subjective states. Coplan (2004) substantiates the extrapolation from a reader reading about fictional characters and a movie viewer immersing into a character's experiences in a film; in her "Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions," she states that she uses "the term 'readers' broadly, to refer to processors of both literary and film narratives" (p. 149). Platinga and Smith (1999) further add that movies activate more senses; visual and auditory stimulation render movies more powerful than reading on its own. Oliver (2008) relates the similar finding that movies allow even more opportunity for immersion into the character or narrative, because of visual depictions of characters' emotions, which are presumed to generate an even higher emphatic response.

Coplan (2004) defines empathy as requiring a maintenance of a critical sense of self-identity, and contrasts it with emotional contagion and sympathy—the ultimate goal being to clarify empathic engagement with fictional characters—whether in literature or in films. This self-other differentiation allows connection to characters while remaining separate from them, to realize empathic engagement. Imaginatively experiencing the perspective of the character allows the viewer to experience what the character experiences. If the viewer loses self-other differentiation, emotional contagion may result, in which the viewer experiences the same emotions as if they were his own. Sympathy, Coplan (2004) warns, is having concern for another without experiencing her experiences. A viewer may have empathy, but may still not necessarily have sympathy for the character's consequences.

Dermer and Hutchings (2000) provide insight into this facilitation of empathy through films, pointing out that the viewer experiences sameness, or common denominators with diverse groups of people—with whom the viewer would not automatically or typically connect. The value of experiencing empathy with characters in films relates to the cinematic elevation discussed earlier: the ability of movies to actually promote altruistic behavior. Shapiro and Rucker (2004) offer the Don Quixote effect as a mechanism to inspire compassion in medical students and residents—to increase empathy, altruism and understanding towards patients. The Don Quixote effect refers to using imagination to overcome reality. In this case, it allows these health care learners to experience the luxury of emotions without the real-world responsibility.

Immersion into Characters' Experiences (Without Real-Life Consequences)

There are empirical studies confirming that a viewer may experience the experiences of a character, but without having to experience the real-life consequences. Functional neuroimaging (fMRI) has been performed on subjects while reading fiction (Speer, Reynolds, Swallow, &

Zacks, 2009). The events in the story are found to light up the areas in the brain as if that activity

is actually happening; for example, while observing or reading about a baseball pitcher, the

observer's motor cortex lights up in the area of the neurons coding for the arm's motor function.

This neuro-programming results in experiencing—and not just understanding the narrative.

Hasson and colleagues (2008) take this one step further, and observe reactions in participants'

brains when viewing movies while undergoing fMRI. Alfred Hitchcock's movie, *Bang! You're*

Dead, induced pivotal responses: different brain regions were turned off and on at the same time

among different viewers. They assessed similarities in the timing and location of neural activity

across participants' brains, which depended on content and editing—and coined the term

neurocinematics for this new and exciting avenue for research integrating cognitive neuroscience

with the study of movies. There is precedent in research on mirror neurons: when a person

observes an action, mirror neurons fire in the same areas of the observer's brain as if he were the

performer (Haidt, Seder, & Kesebir, 2008). Plantiga and Smith (1999) confirm these findings,

solidifying that film experiences remain in continuity with real-world experiences; that is, an

observer uses the same foundation of emotional responses for cinematic narratives as in real-life

experiences.

As Shapiro and Rucker (2004) allude, there are distinct advantages to experiencing the

travails of a character without having to actually live through the experience. Horror films are a

perfect example. Hoffner (2009) looks at the allure of frightening films, but a distinction must

first be made between empathic concern and personal distress. Empathic concern is other-

centered, focusing on concern for the welfare of others—and leads to desires to lessen the

suffering of others, or altruistic behavior. Personal distress is self-centered, in which the viewer

is predisposed to reduce his own negative affect by avoiding or withdrawing. A viewer with

empathic concern displays less enjoyment of characters' suffering but increased enjoyment of the danger or of the excitement—especially if the characters escape violence. A viewer with personal distress has less enjoyment of a frightening movie and more long-lasting negative affect, sharing and personalizing as if he or she is experiencing the events.

As Goldstein (2009) postulates, the tears shed in sad movies are real, yet the emotional responses to true versus fictional sad films are distinguishable. In one way they are the same; viewers experience the same level of sadness whether the narrative is factual or fictional. However, viewers experience increased levels of anxiety along with the sadness when the stories are true. Therefore, immersion into the experiences of characters in sad movies is as sad (or real) as real-life experiences, yet without the accompanying anxiety—so movies remain a safe place to experience sadness without the obligation to feel the anxiety.

Having established that experiencing the experiences of a character in a film is as close to real life as possible without having to experience the real-life consequences, the door is potentially open to use the entertainment and educational potentials of movies for real-life teenagers. Parents may use films as a tool with teenagers—with the caveat that parents view the film *with* the teens and debrief afterwards—to instill healthy prudence and desired health prevention habits by allowing teenagers to immerse themselves into potentially hazardous experiences without having to experience the real-life consequences. Hence, after such an exposure, the teens may make better and safer choices—rather than modeling the unsafe behaviors of the unfortunate characters. For example, in the film, *Juno* (2007), the 16-year-old female protagonist gives a realistic portrayal of the tribulations of an unintended teen pregnancy.

Movies to Build Character Strengths

Movies can be used to teach parents, children and teens about character strengths and positive psychology. Character strengths are foundational to well-being, and a strengths-based approach—focusing on building these strengths rather than on improving weaknesses—enhances flourishing (Seligman, 2011). The 24 character strengths classified by Peterson and Seligman (2004) can be identified, measured and built with practice. Each character strength can be overused or underused, in which case it is not truly functioning as a strength per se. Aristotle's (1962) advice to follow the golden mean still applies—the character strengths are best expressed in the middle of overuse/underuse, in other words, in the optimal strengths zone—that will of course vary by the individual and context. For example, underuse of humor may result in an overly serious person, while overuse may be inappropriate or hurtful. *Signature strengths* are the core strengths most representative of and essential to an individual, and learning new ways to use these highest strengths can contribute to well-being for at least 6 months afterwards (Gander, Proyer, Ruch, & Wyss, 2013; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Please refer to the Appendix for a deeper dive into these concepts and the research behind them.

Positive psychology can help the world turn in a positive direction—a eudaimonic turn. Much as the eudaimonic turn in medicine resulted in focusing its lens primarily on health rather than solely curing disease, the eudaimonic turn in psychology—positive psychology—now focuses its lens more on flourishing than treating mental illness (Pawelski & Moores, 2013). The eudaimonic turn in literature results in focusing through the lens of hermeneutics of appreciation or affirmation versus a hermeneutics of suspicion in order to analyze literature (Pawelski & Moores, 2013). The same is true for movies—it is time for the eudaimonic turn to focus the lens

on building character strengths through movies. Please reference the Appendix for further discussion of these concepts.

Movies may help identify role models and mentors: persons to whom to look up. Young people in particular are prone and open to looking up to role models. Heroes fall into this category, and Campbell (1968) clarifies the hero's journey, which is marked by three stages: an epic adventure, obstacles to overcome, and the successful final triumph over such obstacles. In addition to parents, children are known to gain self-efficacy by modeling peers (Bandura & Menlove, 1968; Cialdini, 1993), who might represent personal heroes or heroines in their own right. Heath and Heath (2010) recommend that finding positive deviants, or paragons, in the population at hand is useful—to share with peers what it is that they do differently from them. Children or teens can often be more open to such advice from peers rather than from authority figures.

Spotting character strengths in others helps increase awareness and build one's own strengths. Recognizing and thinking about strengths in others helps one to recognize and think about one's own strengths (Linkins, Niemiec, Gilham, & Mayerson, 2014), as well as to become more fluent in the very language of character strengths. Spotting strengths may be a way to step into the shoes of another, and to see his point of view. This opens the proverbial door for the aforementioned tolerance and empathy. After a strength-based six-session classroom intervention, Quinlan, Swain, Cameron, & Vella-Brodrick (2014) found increased class cohesion, positive affect, autonomy-need satisfaction, and strengths use—all with lower class friction. Families can make use of these resources and experience these positive outcomes as well, by practicing strengths-spotting and discussing character strengths in movies.

Children and teenagers have an affinity for media, which continues to occupy more and more of each day (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). This video entertainment may be an integral part of a routine day (Wolf, 1999), and is more accessible than ever for so many people for so much time every day (Zillman & Vorderer, 2000). Regarding the odds of enhancing well-being, person-activity fit is crucial to success (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013)—meaning that some meeting place between children or teenagers and their parents is paramount. Intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation is key for success (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Parents want to connect to their children and teenagers; therefore, discussions about movies—as opposed to asking yes or no questions, or "how was school today?"—are more likely to fulfill this fundamental need.

There are additional benefits to both the family and well-being by means of this process. Relationships are promoted, and positive relationships (the "**R**" of **PERMA)** may be one of the most influential of the five foundational pillars of **P**ositive Emotions, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships**, M**eaning and **A**chievement (Seligman, 2011). Connections are fostered in a way that cannot be overestimated. As discussed above, movies may promote altruistic behavior from cinematic elevation, and self-improvement and goal-setting from cinematic admiration (Niemiec, 2012). To this end, guidance will be given and points or prompts offered for discussion of each character strength, following an analysis of a movie serving as an exemplar of each. The hope remains that after practicing, parents and their families of children and teenagers will learn to interpret future new movies in new ways.

Positive Psychology at the Movies

The field of positive psychology is complementary when studying well-being in its own right; yet, it has the breadth to also be comprehensive and integrate with realistic appraisals of what is not entirely right in the world. When emphasizing character strengths and strengths-

spotting in movies, one might consider four criteria for an optimal positive psychology film
(Niemiec, 2007, Niemiec & Wedding, 2014):

1. A character displays (at least) one of the 24 strengths in the VIA Classification.

2. The character faces obstacles, adversity, struggle or conflict while expressing the
   strength.

3. The character overcomes obstacles or builds/maintains the strength.

4. The film overall is inspiring, uplifting in tone or mood, or reflects the human
   condition.

Motion Picture Association of America Ratings (MPAA, 2014)

There is a special consideration when analyzing films as exemplars of character strengths
and strengths-spotting for children and teenagers: developmentally, the same movie may not be
appropriate or understandable for all ages. The Motion Picture Association of America rates
movies based on language, violence, sex or drug use portrayals. Other than NC-17, the ratings
are not firm regarding age cut-offs, but recommend parental judgment using the ratings as
guidelines. This dovetails with the premise of "Psychology at the Movies for Families, Children,
and Teenagers," in which the viewing of films is recommended for parents *and* their children—
as a method of educational entertainment to enhance well-being and life skills.

- **G** = General Audiences, All Ages

- **PG** = Parental Guidance Suggested. Some material may not be suitable for children

- **PG-13** = Parents Strongly Cautioned. Some material may be inappropriate for children
  under 13

- **R** = Restricted. Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian.

- **NC-17** = Inappropriate for anyone under 17

In the following section, a synopsis will be presented of each character strength, followed by an analysis of a movie chosen to serve as an exemplar of that strength, other character strengths identified in that movie, examples of overuse and underuse of strengths, discussion prompts for parents and families, and suggestions for positive interventions.

Table 1: Exemplar Movies for VIA Character Strengths

Virtue	Character Strength	Year	Rating	Exemplar Movie
Wisdom	Creativity	1986	PG	Labyrinth
	Curiosity	2013	PG	The Croods
	Judgment	2007	PG-13	Juno
	Love of Learning	2009	PG-13	The Ramen Girl
	Perspective	2006	PG-13	Peaceful Warrior
Courage	Bravery	2012	PG	Brave
	Perseverance	2012	PG	Life of Pi
	Honesty	2012	PG-13	Moonrise Kingdom
	Zest	2009	PG	Up
Humanity	Love	2013	PG	Frozen
	Kindness	2010	PG	How to Train Your Dragon
	Social Intelligence	1987	PG	The Princess Bride
Justice	Teamwork	2014	PG	The LEGO Movie
	Fairness	2012	PG	Wreck-It Ralph
	Leadership	2013	PG-13	42
Temperance	Forgiveness	2004	PG-13	Mean Girls
	Humility	2005	PG-13	The Ringer
	Prudence	2013	PG	The Secret Life of Walter Mitty
	Self-Regulation	2009	PG	Fantastic Mr. Fox
Transcendence	Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence	2012	PG	Cirque du Soleil: Worlds Away
	Gratitude	2009	PG	Coraline
	Hope	2010	PG	Tangled
	Humor	2007	G	Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium
	Spirituality	2014	PG	Heaven is for Real

VIA Character Strengths with Exemplar Movies

Wisdom

These are the intelligence cognitive strengths, but are not equivalent to IQ (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The facts themselves are not of importance, but the learning acquired through living—hardships and challenges included.

Creativity (originality, ingenuity). Creativity has to do with novel ideas and new ways of doing things. A creative person has ideas or behaviors that are original, and may or may not necessarily manifest as art (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Exceptional genius is referred to as Big-C creativity, while everyday ingenuity is referred to as little-c creativity. Supportive and open environments facilitate creativity. Beghetto & Kaufman (2007) add a third category, mini-c creativity, which is a more intrapersonal assessment of creative expression—the judgment of meaningfulness to the creative individual himself.

Movie exemplar for creativity: "Labyrinth"—PG, 1986. Fifteen year-old Sarah (played by Jennifer Connelly), lives in a bit of a fantasy world stoked by her irrepressible character strength of creativity. Costumed, she practices lines from her favorite play—only to be shocked when she remembers that she was supposed to be home to babysit for her little brother, Toby— so that her dad can have an evening out with her (from her perspective) evil stepmother. However, once home and sufficiently chagrined she repeats more lines from the book— including one entreating the Goblin King (David Bowie) to take her incessantly crying little brother away. Similar to many who get what they wish, she spends the rest of the film trying to undo her wish by reaching the Goblin castle to retrieve her sibling. Her creativity is called to task as she is charged with solving the labyrinth to reach the castle as the only way to win Toby back. Most of the other characters consist of Muppets by Jim Henson; major players include Hoggle,

Ludo and Sir Didymus. Several obstacles are presented to Sarah and she must use her creative thinking to overcome each, including a Knights and Knaves puzzle of logic, a journey through the Bog of Eternal Stench, and mysterious stairwells containing tessellations reminiscent of Escher. Though not achieving massive commercial success at the time of release, *Labyrinth* has since become a bit of a cult film and enjoys continued interest.

Other character strengths to spot. A fair amount of forgiveness is needed as the requisite Muppets help Sarah negotiate the labyrinth. Mistakes are made: some intentional, some not. Perspective or wisdom is needed by Sarah to discern just that: *which* are intentional and which are not. Social intelligence is used by Sarah as well; Jareth, the Goblin King, is not above using insincerity or seduction to accomplish his ill-begotten goals. She keeps an open mind to help get her out of this mess that she got herself into! The Muppets who help Sarah appear to love her.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. Jareth, the Goblin King has a shortage of humility for sure. He and the Muppets he commands continually display an underuse of honesty. Jareth prefers to think that it is love that motivates him to be connected with Sarah; alas, true love this is not.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Tell me about a time that you felt creative, or that someone recognized your creativity.

- Did any art teachers make you feel like you were particularly creative? How did that influence you from then on?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Instead of worrying that you are not good enough, pick up some paints and paper and try it. Paint whatever you like—there is no grade.

- Write a short story. Put it out on the Internet, or not.

Curiosity (interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience). A person's intrinsically motivated thirst for new experiences or knowledge is manifested as curiosity (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Curiosity is differentiated from love of learning in that it refers to a breadth of interest, rather than a deep exploration resulting in excellence and mastery of one particular subject. General openness is coupled with a desire to expand, and not be easily dissuaded by challenges. Curiosity tends to build on itself, leading to even more curiosity. Silvia and Kashdan (2009) explore the state of interest in the moment versus the more enduring trait of the character strength of curiosity. The challenge is to differentiate between manifesting immediate states of curiosity as opposed to nurturing and building a lifelong persuasion to being curious. Curiosity tends to give rise to an approach-avoidance pattern—reflecting the anxiety of leaning towards something novel. In the past, this anxiety was helpful to ensure humanity's survival; however, utilizing curiosity to get past this anxiety and lean in instead of running away is the doorway to new knowledge and growth.

Movie exemplar for curiosity: "The Croods"—PG, 2013. This caveman family is representative of our ancestors—and of what our ancestors needed to go through to survive—the fight or flight response. To survive as such, new is bad and curiosity is death. The conflict for this family is that the dad (Nicolas Cage) is trying to keep his family safe and alive in the usual "kill circles," but his daughter Eep (Emma Stone) insists on being curious, which appears to be the kiss of death in this era of time. However, though curiosity invites danger, it also paves the way to advancement, such as blowing conch shells to communicate and harvesting fire.

Other character strengths to spot. In this world, it takes bravery just to get breakfast. Eep displays her bravery in coming out of the caves and checking it out when there are new and potentially scary discoveries. Eep also remains optimistic, hopeful for another way of life. The

entire family exhibits zest- when they wake up, the first utterance is, "Still alive!" The family

used good teamwork, working together to acquire a large egg for breakfast—needing to use good

teamwork for their very survival! Teamwork and fairness are obvious when the family sleeps in

a pile for warmth for everyone—also indicating that the elderly are just as important.

Appreciation of beauty and excellence is shown when the Crood family makes it to a new land,

and there is awe and wonder for the fireworks and colors of the new world.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. The dad, Grug, shows overuse of

judgment/critical thinking and underuse of curiosity/openness and creativity. He is unable to

consider any new ways of doing things, which holds the family back—despite his concern of

protection. The dad imposes a rule that anything new is always bad; while on one hand this may

be prudent, from another angle it is a deterrent for the family's advancement.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Tell me about a time that you felt particularly curious. Did anyone shoot down your

  experience or discourage you?

- How does it feel when someone asks you a lot of questions about you—as if they are

  curious about what you are thinking or feeling?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Attend a presentation at the library or any public humanities presentation, preferably with

  a topic with which you are unfamiliar.

- Next time someone tells you something they are enthusiastic about, purposely ask many

  questions. Be very curious!

Judgment (open-mindedness, critical thinking). Judgment or open-mindedness refers

specifically to actively accepting evidence against one's beliefs or viewpoints, instead of forging

on only with evidence that supports one's own such viewpoints in a biased manner (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This implies a sort of confidence in an individual, to regard accuracy as more important than being "right." Hart et al. (2009) present an analysis of that same concept: people may choose selective exposure to information, depending on if the information itself will result in feeling validated in the correctness of beliefs versus being accurate or correct in general. A secure person who is open-minded will be open to look at information even if it does not support his pre-existing bias or opinion, rather than screening out information because of its threatening nature.

  Movie exemplar for judgment: "Juno"—PG-13, 2007. Juno (Ellen Page) is a precocious sixteen year-old, in high school and pregnant. Rather than glorifying her status—and certainly not encouraging others to emulate it—she presents an accurate picture of what it is like. She would be the first to say that she would not wish it on her worst enemy. Her open-mindedness is an example to everyone; indeed, the outcome of her pregnancy could have been so much more painful had she not utilized that character strength. For example, at first Juno attempts to set up an abortion and remove the "problem" entirely. However, her open-mindedness listens to the demonstrator in front of the clinic (coincidentally one of her classmates) that the baby she carried already had *fingernails*. This alone changed her entire trajectory—because of her judgment/critical thinking character strength. Another pivotal example of this strength occurs when the couple that she has chosen to allow adopt the baby changes their configuration. Juno sees a nuclear family with a mom and a dad, the "perfect" home situation that she herself did not receive. When the prospective dad (Jason Bateman) discloses that he intends to leave the prospective mom (Jennifer Garner), Juno is understandably angry—and at first believes that the adoption can no longer happen. She reiterates that she did not want her baby's family to be

"shitty and broken like everyone else's." Again, her judgment/critical thinking is strongly

expressed as she considers a new viewpoint that differs from her internal biases and beliefs: in

reality, the prospective adoptive mom has enough love and desire in her heart that is likely to be

at least as good—if not better—for the baby as an unhappy couple. Juno is open-minded enough

about the father of the baby, Paulie Bleeker (Michael Cera), to fall in love with him—even

though he took another girl (without a whale-belly) to prom.

Other character strengths to spot. A close second, this film could almost just as well

serve as an exemplar for social intelligence. Juno is a very emotionally intelligent girl, who

accurately senses what is going on in other people's heads—often before they know themselves.

Bravery is also characteristic of Juno; she is brave to go to school instead of hiding at home

completing a General Educational Development (GED) exam. It is arguable whether it is braver

to choose an abortion versus to have a baby and give it up for adoption. Just living through the

situation is brave, either way. Juno is also brave enough to speak her mind; her truthfulness is a

sign of her underlying character strength of honesty. Juno's dad and stepmother exhibit

perspective; shocked at first, they rally together and truly support her throughout the

pregnancy—without moral judgment. There is a good amount of forgiveness throughout the film,

almost universal among all the characters.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. The potential adoptive dad, Mark Loring,

underuses honesty both with himself and his wife, Vanessa. One could argue an underuse of

teamwork or fairness by Juno; it is commonly argued that the wishes of biologic fathers are not

as considered or valid when the biologic mother is not married. One might also argue (in a non-

judgmental manner) that an underuse of prudence and self-regulation may have resulted in Juno

and Bleeker's situation in the first place.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Is there a time that you remained open-minded, even though you thought you knew what was best or right—and still listened to the viewpoints of others? Did it make a difference?

- Both pro-lifers and pro-choicers can criticize or praise this movie. Can you see both sides? What do you think?

- Do you think that educating teenagers about safe sex and birth control really does in some way condone sexual activity at a young age?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Take an issue about which you already hold a firm stance, and truly listen to the other side's arguments. Is there anything you can learn?

- Read editorials in the newspaper that you might previously have skipped because they represent "the other side." This time, listen to their viewpoint and try to think about it from his or her shoes, instead of formulating rebuttals.

Love of learning. The character strength of love of learning refers to a predisposition to achieve mastery of skills in particular fields of knowledge; it goes beyond curiosity in depth rather than breadth (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Positive affect results from learning new skills, and learning itself is regarded as a positive experience. A person with a well-developed personal strength of love of learning would typically care more about learning the subject material at hand rather than what grade was levied upon him in the process. Covington (1999) clarifies the differentiation of intrinsic motivation derived from caring about the subject matter versus the extrinsic motivation of external rewards such as grades or recognition for achievement. The intrinsic motivation for the sake of love of learning is more assured when grade goals are

attainable, when a person is genuinely interested in the subject, and when the motivation for

learning is not for self-advancement or to ensure avoidance of failure.

   Movie exemplar for love of learning: "The Ramen Girl"—PG-13, 2009. Abby (Brittany

Murphy) travels to Tokyo to meet her boyfriend, who dumps her within weeks of her arrival.

While distraught, she finds her dream and life goal of becoming a ramen chef. Unfortunately, in

Japan, ramen chefs are most often male and must undergo grueling training to be able to cook

ramen noodles. Her love of learning cannot be dissuaded. She entreats a local ramen chef to be

her teacher and sensei, and must endure weeks to months of substandard treatment such as

cleaning toilets. Most indicative of the character strength of love of learning is the depth that she

must acquire and the persistence that she must maintain to achieve competence in that field.

When she smells the broth, which is understood to contain the spirit of the chef, it is obvious that

she transcends to a sublime state—which occurs because of her strength: love of learning.

   Other character strengths to spot. Abby uses creativity; to show her skills for the

ultimate blessing, instead of taking the safe and easy path she insists on her own path—which

includes corn and green peppers (Goddess Ramen). In this cultural situation, she must have the

character strength of bravery to even try. The ramen shop shows her kindness; they feed and

shelter her when she has nowhere to go, and offer her an umbrella when she needs to foray into

the pouring rain. The humor is plain to everyone but Abby herself; the English subtitles of what

the sensei and his wife say in Japanese are hilarious in the translation, for example, "she's a

lunatic!"—while Abby has no idea what they are saying in Japanese.

   Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. The sensei was not open-minded, though he

showed Abby love by the end of the story. Abby's first boyfriend showed underuse of love, as he

agreed to Abby moving to Tokyo and then he left weeks later. Abby probably showed overuse of

forgiveness, because no one could have stayed under that apprenticeship so long.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Is there a particular topic about which you have felt led to learn really deep?

- Who seemed particularly supportive, and who seemed to discourage further exploration?
  Why do you think that is?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Visit a museum. Pay particular attention to one area.

- Join a neighborhood or school book club.

Perspective (wisdom). A person with the character strength of perspective is generally

considered wise by others, and is routinely sought out for opinions or assistance with problem

solving (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This is not the same thing as intelligence, but rather an

ability to give counsel in a way that advances the well-being of all involved. A person with

perspective is aware of and does not overstep personal boundaries of weaknesses or values, and

is able to take into consideration the perspectives and needs of the others' involved. Baltes and

Staudinger (2000) delineate that the core of wisdom consists of contributions from knowledge,

character, mind and virtue. Wisdom does have to do with knowledge, yet knowledge that is

specifically applied to the virtuous conduct of life—coupled with the meaning derived from such

a life and its subsequent contribution to well-being.

Movie exemplar for perspective: "Peaceful Warrior"—PG-13, 2006. Dan Millman

(played by Dan Mechlowicz) is a college gymnast who dreams of competing in the Olympics.

He randomly meets a mysterious elderly service station attendant (Nick Nolte) whom he

hereafter refers to as "Socrates." Socrates serves as his mentor, his fountain of wisdom and his

beacon of the virtuous life—without which talent alone is insufficient. Socrates preaches mindfulness, meditation and living in the present moment as his central philosophies. Dan suffers a motorcycle accident, and his right femur is fractured requiring a metal bar to be placed in his leg. This appears to be the end of his gymnastics career—his college coach writes him off—yet, when Dan continues to absorb the perspective of Socrates he works harder and finds himself restored to his previous prowess. Thus, the power of perspective is realized, and Dan eventually performs triple consecutive flips on the rings—which had never before been accomplished. His college, Berkeley, goes on to win their first national championship, and the postscript reminds the viewer that this is based on a true story.

Other character strengths to spot. Dan displays his strength of bravery to even consider training again after his accident, despite the doctors' and coach's advice. He and Socrates exhibit perseverance as they continue to train and work long hours against all odds. Dan's hope is intermittent, but surely serves as a beacon for his continued training. Socrates is a prime example of the advantages of humility as a character strength. Overall, this was a very spiritual movie as well, with visions and mystical experiences—and Socrates' talent for seemingly instantaneous teleportation.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. Dan is in need of using some of Socrates' humility; he is under-dosed in humility on his own. Dan and his college coach both underuse judgment; the two of them each need to expand their closed-mindedness to achieve victory. This college athlete's attitude at times smacked more of insolence than of love of learning.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Can you think of a time that the "trash" (e.g.) in your mind held you back from accomplishing a goal?

- Is there a sport you like to play? If so, what advantages does mental preparation or training add to the physical? Is one necessarily more important than the other?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- For one week, try meditation. No formal training is required; simply sit quietly without focusing on any thoughts for fifteen minutes a day.

- Collect quotes that contain wisdom. Copy them onto post-it notes and place in conspicuous places like the refrigerator, computer monitor and bathroom mirror.

Courage

Courage refers to the emotional strengths that are involved when standing up to obstacles or opposition (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Courage has always been valued over cowardice, by many diverse societies and cultural groups over centuries of time.

Bravery (valor). Bravery may be physical, or not—but is not the same as fearlessness; it is doing or saying what is needed or right *despite* feeling fear (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It is taking the correct action or speech even when unpopular. A person who is brave is not moved by peer pressure, especially regarding moral issues. The ability to disregard fear leads to fulfillment from these actions or words. The actions are voluntary, not coerced, and involve danger or risk. Pury and Kowalski (2007) distinguish general from personal courage. Personal courage is in the context of a person's typical behavior or personal limitations. General courage refers to the courageousness of an action compared to the typical behavior of others. Various other character strengths are associated with general, rather than personal courage.

Movie exemplar for bravery: "Brave"—PG, 2012. It may seem rather obvious to take a film entitled *Brave* and make it an exemplar for bravery—but, Merida is all of bravery—and then some. As a princess, Merida bravely bucks trends from the beginning. Her prized gift is a set of

bow and arrows from her father, and her eventual favorite pastime becomes archery. In current

terms she would be labeled a tomboy; however, Merida has no qualms about being different

from other girls and she has no inclination to change. This, in fact, presents the central conflict of

the film: Merida bravely resists and rebels against the prevalent custom of awarding her as a wife

to the suitor that wins the Highland Games.

Other character strengths to spot. To rebel against the custom of auto-betrothal, Merida

makes great use of her inherent strength of creativity to outwit the process: she lobbies that she

should be eligible to compete for her own hand and then soundly defeats each of the potential

suitors. Merida only became such a crack shot with her bow and arrow by the persistence with

which she practiced. Merida's creativity strength is definitely tweaked when she has to manage

her mother as a bear, while her father is a bear hunter.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. The clans, in addition to the king and queen,

are not exhibiting strong judgment or open-mindedness when Merida resists being given away

like a prize to a winner of games. The king and queen are also low in their use of curiosity and

fairness to try and understand Merida's viewpoint. For that matter, they were not terrifically

honest with her in the first place about the forthcoming suitors' competition. Similar to Merida,

most children probably wish that their parents had a seemingly stronger manifestation of

perspective.

The filmmakers are also brave outside of the plot of the film. They realistically show a

scene of an argument between Merida and her mother, Queen Elinor—in the heat of emotions,

Merida wishes harm upon her mom. As luck would have it, Merida meets a witch in the forest

that can make this wish come true—though not in the way that Merida meant. This conflict may

indeed portray defiance and actual harm-doing. However, there is an authentic and honest

portrayal of the slamming of the door when the daughter hollers that she *hates* the mother—a scene repeated routinely in American homes, but a scene kept silent and not spoken about—what if it is only in *my* house and not in others'? To prompt discussion of this all too common topic is to promote understanding and perspective.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- When did you feel particularly brave, or did someone notice that you behaved bravely?

- Should girls be "awarded" to the men who win games of skill, or should women be involved in the choice of whom they will marry?

- Have you ever gotten so mad at someone that you wished them dead or at least broken? Have you then considered how that would feel if your wish came true?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Speak up and stand up for someone who cannot speak up for himself.

- Volunteer for an organization that you believe in, even if it is not popular or well received.

Perseverance (persistence, industriousness). Perseverance is continuing goal-directed action to finish what one starts (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). A person persists, undismayed by obstacles. Completing a task leads to increased positive affect. Hickman, Stromme and Lippman (1998) find that industriousness can be learned, especially by reinforcing high effort. High-effort training resulted in participants completing more difficult or demanding tasks than participants who received low-effort or no preliminary training.

Movie exemplar for perseverance: "Life of Pi"—PG, 2012. Pi Patel, short for Piscine, suffered a calamitous situation: his family was moving to Canada with their zoo, on a Japanese freighter. Terrible storms ensue, the ship breaks apart and Pi finds himself on a lifeboat with an

injured zebra, a hyena, an orangutan, and a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. Soon, Pi and the

tiger are all that are left; though rated PG rather than PG-13, the animal violence may be hard to

tolerate by the younger ages. This could be a definition of perseverance, 227 days in a small boat

with a tiger; Pi must constantly be on his toes. Eventually Pi and Richard Parker land on the

shores of Mexico, where the authorities are disbelieving. Pi then presents another story, that the

cook (the hyena) killed the wounded sailor (the zebra) for food and stabbed his mother (the

orangutan). In the end, the authorities do choose the more fantastical story that Pi attests to, of

227 days at sea with a tiger—and the insurance companies agree.

Other character strengths to spot. Clearly, Pi appeared to show bravery one way or

another just to have lived through this experience. Pi showed kindness and fairness to the

animals, sharing his provisions whenever he had any. He also shows his strength of leadership by

using fish caught to patiently train the tiger so that the tiger remains submissive. Pi is self-

regulating in that he keeps to routines, is appreciative of beauty and excellence, and repeatedly

shows gratitude—thanking the gods for his life. His spirituality also relies on the gods to guide

him, rather than self-determination alone.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. Pi's father underused prudence or perspective

in deciding to put his entire family and zoo on the same freighter. Pi may have underused

honesty depending on which scenario is the actual story: the cast of animals in the boat or the

persons symbolized by the animals.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Can you give an example of a time that you persevered against all odds?

- Is there a time that you persevered, and then had to deal with the fact that someone didn't

  even believe your account of the story?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Establish accountability for your goals. Enlist a good friend or coworker with a similar goal, and set up a plan to keep each other accountable and on track.

- Choose a major goal that has been an obstacle in the past. To practice perseverance, break the major goal down into several sub-goals or smaller obstacles that are less imposing. Give each smaller goal a due-date, and mark off completion on a posted chart.

Honesty (authenticity, integrity). Honesty is more than telling the truth; authenticity refers to a transparency in taking responsibility for one's behaviors or feelings, without pretense (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Integrity is demonstrated by behavior consistent with stated values—often incorporating a moral component. One area of application for this character strength is in the academic arena; noting that academic dishonesty is empirically studied more than academic honesty, Staats, Hupp, and Hagley (2008) contribute to reversing this trend. Students who display academic honesty are in the minority, but show strong character strengths—of courage, empathy, and honesty; in fact, academic honesty is predicted by these three qualities. These authors suggest that persons with these traits in particular are representative of everyday heroes.

Movie exemplar for honesty: "Moonrise Kingdom"—PG-13, 2012. Set in 1965, two twelve year-old misfits run away together. Rather than simply being categorized into simple escape or mis-behaviors, these two adolescents are both high in the character strength of honesty or authenticity; both Suzy and Sam are acutely aware that they are "different" from their peers; rather than trying harder to fit in, they are each comfortable with whom he or she is, in essence. They are also not acting out for the attention or reaction of their parents. They are brutally honest, to the point that they could hurt each others' feelings—except they profoundly

understand this about each other, sharing it in common—such that they do not take it personally. Sam is an orphan khaki scout, whose foster family does not think they can "invite him back again." Suzy's parents (Bill Murray and Frances McDormand) are both attorneys, and her mom is in the midst of clandestine meetings with Captain Sharp (Bruce Willis) of the local police force. The scoutmasters (Ed Norton) are dismayed, Social Services (here used as the given name of the person played by Tilda Swinton) is involved; meanwhile, the two continue to forge their way into the future as best they are able.

Other character strengths to spot. This film has been categorized as a love story, albeit between two so young. Sam exhibits a strong love of learning character strength, with a preponderance of khaki scouts badges in addition to his cache of outdoor camping and survival skills and facts. The social intelligence is very evenly matched between the two. Teamwork is shown between the two runaways, "I'm on your side"—as well as between the khaki scouts in general.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. The foster dad displays underuse of honesty, hardly taking responsibility for Sam at all, then he ditches him the first chance he gets. Humor is used throughout the film, though sometimes in a fashion that may hurt a person's feelings; for example, the boy whose myopia requires an eye patch is called "Lazy Eye." Suzy's mom's judgment, perspective and honesty are all questionable, as she insists that Suzy exhibit exemplary behavior while her own is in question.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Name a situation in which honesty came easily; that being authentic to who you are—whatever the outcome—was better than the effort involved to be something that you are not?

- Is there a time that you knew someone was not telling you the truth, but they wouldn't admit it? How did you know?

- Is it ever excusable to lie so that someone's feelings won't be hurt?

- Is it ever excusable to lie when better plans come up after you have already committed to someone or something else?

    Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Record any white lies for one week. Then what?

- Are there any lies that you have told in the past that you would like to clear up now with the person you lied to?

    Zest (vitality, enthusiasm, vigor, energy). A person with zest has a personal energy or vitality that is commonly infectious to energize others (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Lively and enthusiastic, people with such vigor are high functioning; stressors and tension detract from this positive energy. People with zest more commonly refer to their work as a calling than just a job (Peterson, Park, Hall, & Seligman, 2009). These investigators also find that zest predicts work satisfaction, as well as general satisfaction with life.

    Movie exemplar for zest: "Up"—PG, 2009. What is so funny about the film "Up" serving as an exemplar of zest is that zesty Carl is one of the older characters in this collection of movies—making him a seemingly unlikely exemplar for zest. Although, he certainly gains from the natural character strength of zest from a young boy, Russell, as well! Carl and his wife Ellie shared admiration of explorer Charles Muntz, who purported that he found a new species—a giant bird from Paradise Falls. Carl and Ellie hoped to travel someday to Paradise Falls, South America—but just as Carl arranged the trip Ellie suddenly became sick and died. Carl decides to move her house there as she desired, with the help of thousands of helium balloons. However, a

Wilderness Explorer named Russell inadvertently becomes a co-traveler on the trip, while trying

to earn his merit badge for assisting the elderly. The idea of trying to fly a house with thousands

of helium balloons in itself is rather zesty. Finding a live avian specimen substantiating Muntz's

claim only added to their zesty experience—they named him Kevin. A dog, Dug, that can speak

due to a special collar further adds to the collective zest in the film.

Other character strengths to spot. Carl and Russell both exhibit bravery, willing to

undertake dangerous risks for the right reasons. Russell utilizes his curiosity about his new

though older friend Carl, and Carl in turn utilizes his creativity to devise ways to fly the house

and solve other general problems as they inevitably arose. Carl, try as he might, is unable to be

unkind to Russell, or to Dug. Carl demonstrated his love for Ellie throughout the film.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. Explorer Muntz displays an underuse of

humility and prudence. Muntz does not employ good perspective, teamwork or leadership in his

management of the dogs, such as Alpha—who is to function as a leader for the other dogs.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Is there a specific time or activity in which you felt particularly "zesty?"

- Did you see any signs that when you used your zest that it was contagious or affected

  others?

  Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Exercise two or three times more in one week, and record if your personal energy goes up

  in general.

- Interview a zesty person that you know. How do they keep up their personal energy? Is

  zest tiring or energy-producing?

Humanity

These strengths are similar to those grouped under the virtue of Justice, in that they have

to do with improving the welfare of others. However, the character strengths in the group of

Humanity are the interpersonal skills that have to do with relating to each other (Peterson &

Seligman, 2004). They are altruistic and prosocial by nature.

Love (capacity to love and be loved). Sharing and caring are reciprocal in close, valued

relationships. Affection is also reciprocal, and the happiness of another can matter as much or

more than one's own (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Protection/safety and trust are integral, as

well as sacrifices, desire for closeness, and distaste for prolonged separation. There is child-

parent love, parent-child love, and romantic love. In each, a person feels free and able to be

himself, and to be loved for this true self. Fredrickson, Cohn, Coffey, Pek, and Finkel (2008)

start with Fredrickson's broaden-and-build theory, which finds that positive emotions build upon

themselves, resulting in an upward spiral. These positive emotions compound into resources that

are available when times are hard. In this study, practicing guided loving-kindness meditation

produced such positive emotions daily, which in turn increased personal resources—and eventual

increased life satisfaction and decreased depression.

Movie exemplar for love: "Frozen"—PG, 2013. Elsa and Anna are sisters and princesses

of Arendelle; Elsa has a special power, the "Midas touch" but with snow and ice instead of gold.

She inadvertently injures Anna, so the girls are separated and Elsa is isolated until she is older

and can control her powers; Anna has no memory of her injury, and as such does not understand

why her sister cannot play with her any longer. The king and queen die, and Elsa comes of age to

be crowned; however, during her coronation, Anna accepts the proposal of Prince Hans, whom

she has just met. Elsa cannot bless this betrothal, the girls argue and in an emotionally charged

scene Elsa's powers are again released and exposed. Elsa flees and constructs an ice palace to

isolate herself far away. Unbeknownst to her, she has cast an eternal winter upon their kingdom.

Anna, in an act of love, sets off in the dead of winter to find her sister and bring her home—

assisted by an iceman, Kristoff and a snowman brought to life, Olaf. They reunite, but Elsa is

upset by her sister's urges to return home and accidentally strikes Anna's heart. Anna's hair turns

increasingly white, which is a sign that her heart can only be thawed by an "act of true love" or

she will perish. Kristoff rushes Anna to Hans, who now admits that his love for her is not true

but motivated by political advancement. By the time they figure out that Kristoff has true love

for Anna and could break the spell, Hans is about to kill Elsa, and Anna throws herself in the

path of destruction just as she freezes solid—thus blocking the blow. Luckily, the very act of

sacrificing herself for her sister counts as the "act of true love," and Anna begins to thaw. Elsa

thus sees that true love also thaws the kingdom.

   Other character strengths to spot. The other very strong theme in *Frozen* is forgiveness,

and the concept that one must forgive oneself before one can forgive others. Anna forgives Elsa,

and Elsa learns to forgive herself before she can return and thaw the frozen kingdom. The theme

song "Let it go" speaks to this mandatory forgiveness that must take place for healing and

redemption. When Elsa sings "Let it go," she embraces her authenticity, singing about the

newfound freedom to be whoever one might be. Anna shows bravery in that she refuses to be

afraid either of the elements or her potentially dangerous sister, Elsa; and, she relentlessly

perseveres through the snowy tundra in the search for Elsa. Anna is quite zesty from the

beginning, enthusiastically bursting into song; even Hans shows kindness by sharing provisions

with the town while frozen.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. Elsa displays both an underuse and overuse of self-regulation. She is unable to control the use of her powers when her emotions intercede, yet she is quite controlled at walling herself in an ice palace and remaining far, far away. Elsa might also be overusing creativity in the giant snow creature that she creates to chase Anna and Kristoff away. Hans is underusing love and honesty, by acting like he loves Anna when he only wants to win her country for his own.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Share a time when you could tell the difference between a true act of love and a fake one?

- What does it mean to love someone unconditionally?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Listen to guided loving-kindness meditations to build personal resources of love and positive emotions (Fredrickson, et al., 2008).

- Consciously intend to tell those you love that you love them this week.

- For one week, consciously hug those that you love. Or, if and when appropriate, strangers. Then, repeat.

Kindness (generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, niceness). This character strength manifests in generous and caring acts towards others for their own sake—not for personal returns (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Good deeds and helping others are hallmarks of this strength; all other people are considered of equal worth and thus are equally worthy of compassion and care. Giving is generally preferred to receiving. Otake, Shimai, Tanaka-Matsumi, Otsui, and Fredrickson (2006) purport that kindness is important to increase subjective happiness. Happy people are more motivated to perform kind acts. A person's subjective

happiness is increased after counting his own acts of kindness for one week. Happy people are even more kind and grateful after the counting kindnesses intervention.

Movie exemplar for kindness: "How to Train Your Dragon"—PG-2010. Hiccup is a young Viking boy, who in the tradition of his people must kill a dragon to cross over from a boy to become a man. Through history and by nature, dragons and his people are mortal enemies, and his father is the chief. Hiccup traps the most elusive and fearsome dragon of all, a "night fury;" however, he is unable to kill the dragon—his natural character strength of kindness will not let him hurt another intentionally. Hiccup shows tolerance to others who are different—and to whom may have been feared because of this difference. Seeing that the dragon was injured, he brings him food; eventually he names him "Toothless" (though his teeth are not truly absent but retractable). Hiccup shows kindness to his peers, and instead of fighting in the public arena he shows kindness to the dragons such that the townspeople can appreciate the kindness of the dragons as well. His village resists accepting the dragons and persists in locating the dragons' nest and precipitating all-out war.

Other character strengths to spot. Hiccup is creative in drawing the only known diagrams of the unseen heretofore night fury. He also uses his creativity to craft a new tail piece so that Toothless can fly again. His love of learning is evident to the extent to which he studies all that is known about the dragons. Hiccup is also brave; he joins in the hunt for dragons before he's trained, he revisits the site to find his downed night fury and then rides him. His leadership strength equips him to lead his classmates on the flying dragons when his village attacks the dragons' nest; the village leaders do not realize that the leader of the nest, Red Death, is evil and not representative of the gentler dragons, in general.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. Hiccup's father Stoick underuses his judgment and open-mindedness; he cannot accept the dragons and temporarily would sacrifice his relationship with his son over such a difference of opinion. His perspective might not be as high as hoped for, considering that he is one of the leaders of the village. Stoick's bravery is overused when his emotions intercede and he launches full out assault onto the dragon's nest, without proper knowledge of the leader Red Death; this could be seen as foolhardy and ill-advised—as well as an underuse of prudence in his eagerness to secure his prowess as the ultimate dragon hunter.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Share a time that you felt you had acted kindly. Did the recipient "deserve" it? Does that matter for your intentions?

- What can you do when you want to treat someone kindly, while peers, friends or family are more hostile or judgmental?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Count your acts of kindness for one week (Otake, et al., 2006).

- Pick one day a week, and intentionally increase your acts of kindness (Lyubomirsky, 2007).

Social intelligence (emotional intelligence, personal intelligence). People with emotional intelligence are particularly skilled at perceiving the emotions and feelings of others and themselves—at times even before the other person may be aware (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). They are savvy about how to act in a myriad of social situations. These are the people who naturally know what makes people tick. Social intelligence is valued in effective leaders; leaders who exhibit leader behavioral flexibility (LBF) contribute to positive organizational

outcomes—and social intelligence may moderate this relationship (Sumner-Armstrong, Newcombe, & Martin, 2007). Successful leadership traits include the ability to perceive the needs and goals of workers, but perhaps even more importantly, the leader's ability to adjust her approach to problem-solve or respond in different ways depending on the specific situation at hand. This flexibility in a leader's behavior leads to a higher degree of leadership effectiveness—and emotional or social intelligence feeds into this ability to be flexible and choose most appropriate responses.

Movie exemplar for social intelligence: "The Princess Bride"—PG-1987. Buttercup is a farm girl in Florin, who orders around a farm hand named Wesley—who always answers her requests by saying, "as you wish." Over time, they realize they are in love and Wesley leaves to make his fortune so that he can marry her. Whilst seeking this same fortune, Wesley's ship is attacked by the Dread Pirate Roberts—who never leaves survivors. Five years later and thinking Wesley dead, Buttercup agrees to marry Prince Humperdinck. Before that transpires, she is kidnapped by three miscreants: Vizzini, Fezzik, and Inigo. An unidentified man dressed all in black, including a black face mask, is introduced only as the "man in black;" he catches up with the outlaws, and uses his signature strength of social intelligence to defeat, kill or otherwise outwit all three captors to rescue Buttercup. This masked man allows her to think he is Roberts, which enrages her until he says, "as you wish"—and she realizes it is Wesley (having taken on Roberts' identity upon his retirement). Wesley is perceptive and aware of the intentions of others, which he uses for their own good—helping him and Buttercup to traverse the Fire Swamp and escape the Rodents of Unusual Size. Following six or eight more perilous and impossible situations, including Wesley's near-death and Buttercup's near-marriage, Wesley's sharp wit and emotional intelligence prevails. His savviness and flexibility assist them to ride off into the

sunset. This film is a cult film, and aficionados continue discussions and fellowship at www.princessbrideforever.com.

Other character strengths to spot. Wesley is high in zest day in and day out. He often uses creativity to devise effective problem-solving. This movie could also serve as an exemplar for the strength of love; it follows the recipe of any classic love story. There is plenty of perspective offered by the characters, for example, "Life is pain. Anyone telling you different is selling something" and "life isn't always fair."

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. Prince Humperdinck has a shortage of humility, along with the underuse of honesty—as it is he who arranged the princess's abduction in the first place. In addition to Buttercup pointing out Humperdinck's cowardice, the viewer can appreciate his underuse of self-control as his anger leads to torturing Wesley to near-death.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Is there a time that you felt smart about what was truly going on, even if others were oblivious? Share your experience.

- Share a situation in which you thought you had things all figured out—only to find that things were not as they seemed.

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- To get more in touch with your own emotional intelligence, each day write down three feelings that you experienced, and what precipitated them.

- Choose one disagreeable situation this week, and consciously put yourself in the shoes of another—can you better understand why he or she acted as he or she did?

Justice

These strengths also have to do with the welfare of others, but in the sense of community. These are civic strengths instead of relating one to one interpersonally. These character strengths involve the connection of one person to many—the connection of a person to his community (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Teamwork (citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty). Citizenship involves identification with the common good of a group, and a sense of duty to work for this common good (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). There is a sense of obligation for the common good that goes beyond self-interest. People with this strength also find it important to contribute to the good of the community. Loyalty and working well in a team make an effective teammate. Son, Jackson, Grove, and Fritz (2011) studied the effects of personal versus group self-talk on the individual members, and the eventual efficacy and performance of the team. Self-talk focusing on the group's capabilities ("we are") rather than individual capabilities ("I am") resorted in increased self-efficacy, collective group activity and overall team performance indicators.

Movie exemplar for teamwork: "The LEGO Movie"—PG, 2014. Emmet is on an epic adventure, anointed as the "special one," whose job is to stop Lord Business from gluing the universe together with the secret weapon "kragle." He is an ordinary construction worker, who by happenstance has found the Piece of Resistance that can spoil the evil one's plan. Teamwork is showcased in this film, demonstrating that working together with others results in accomplishing much more than possible on one's own. In fact, the wizard Vitruvius admits he made up the prophecy of the "special one," in order to convey confidence—he knows there is no special power or person; yet, he also knows that if a person believes all things are possible. The result is that any "regular" person can step up, especially with the help of his friends—including

Wyldstyle, Batman, Princess Unikitty, and Benny. They work together with the Master Builders to go up against Lord Business and save the Lego world. One line in the film's theme song is particularly appropriate: "Everything is cool when you're part of a team!"

Other character strengths to spot. Optimism is laced throughout the song "Everything is Awesome!!!" The characters also demonstrate perseverance, by singing that same song for at least five Lego-hours (equivalent to about 20 minutes real time). Legos, as a toy, are practically an icon of creativity in general, and in the film, creativity is integral to the Lego team's success. The team builds motorcycles, flying machines and underwater vehicles on an as needed basis; the innovative machines are always more than adequate to ensure their escape.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. Lord Business exhibits a dreadful underuse of humility, not unlike most villains who intend to take over the world. In the beginning of the film, Bad Cop/Good Cop is a personalization of overuse and underuse, without a middle zone—his head rotates from one to the other. Business erased Good Cop's good face with nail polish remover, so that his underuse of judgment, perspective, honesty and kindness would prevail. However, eventually Bad Cop/Good Cop repainted his good face on with markers, so that he could demonstrate appropriate levels of character strengths such as judgment, perspective, honesty and kindness. Emmet is plagued by excessive self-regulation and underuse of courage. His fear of not knowing what to do and making a mistake feeds into his overuse of self-control, such that early in the movie he is unable to make any decisions or try anything without consulting instruction manuals—advising him on anything or everything from breathing to eating to showering.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Can you give an example in which you accomplished more as a team member than you would have been able to accomplish on your own?

- What is the difference between being placed on a team with other members, versus being able to choose the other members of the team? What are some advantages and disadvantages of either approach?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Join a group in your community that works for the common good of all.

- Next time volunteers are needed, whether at school or work, add your name to the list. Remember the motto: Many hands make light work.

Fairness. Fairness has to do with treating other people the same, without letting personal feelings or biases intrude (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Everyone gets a fair chance, and a fair share—under the same rules. Other hallmarks include no discrimination and no cheating. Perceived unfairness by individuals may result in unfavorable outcomes in organizations; however, it is not always predictable when an unfortunate event will be interpreted as fair or unfair (Nicklin, Greenbaum, McNall, Folger, & Williams, 2011). Contextual variables influence that fairness perception. Three components of accountability are determinant of the fair versus unfair perceptions: harm or negative consequences, if attributable to discretionary action of another person, and that violate accepted standards of behavior. Similarly, greater injustices are perceived if perpetrating individuals are experts, when they know the risks of harm, and if resulting harm is severe rather than minor. Further research will help to elucidate fairness theory and further understanding of these processes to hone the accuracy of perceptions of fairness versus unfairness regarding similar outcomes.

Movie exemplar for fairness: "Wreck-It Ralph"—PG, 2012. Ralph is a villain in a video game at an arcade—his job is to wreck things, so that the hero Fix-It Felix, Jr. can fix whatever Ralph wrecks. At night, when the arcade is closed, the characters can travel to other video games through power cables and socialize, freed from their in-game determinate roles; Ralph often feels ostracized. Ralph attends a support group for video game villains (many of whom are recognizable to video game aficionados, such as from Pac-Man, Mario Brothers, and Q-bert), where he recognizes a desire and goal to no longer be a villain. He sees the unfairness: in video games, there must be heroes and there must be villains; therefore, the roles of heroes and villains are assigned. Ralph thus discerns that he is only a decreed a villain rather randomly, because someone has to do it—not because he is intrinsically bad or villainous. His character strength of fairness is piqued, and he sets off on a mission to right these unfair wrongs and restore fairness. Specifically, he sees a way to become a hero by entering the game "Hero's Duty" and winning a medal. On the way to redeeming himself, Ralph helps Vanellope, a character who is being treated unfairly by a rogue has-been Turbo in the game "Sugar Rush." Willing to sacrifice himself for her, Princess Vanellope ends up restored to her fair and rightful title—just in time for Ralph and Felix to make it back to their own game before it is (unfairly) unplugged as "out of order."

Other character strengths to spot. It takes a good amount of creativity for Ralph to figure out how to get around and win at competing in the other unfamiliar video games, without being injured or deactivated. Ralph was previously sad about only being able to break things, yet he was able to create a new race kart for Vanellope. Teamwork from characters in various games that do not usually work together is then required; for example, Felix fixes Vanellope's broken race kart before the race, and Sergeant Calhoun from "Hero's Duty" helps save the day in "Sugar

Rush" as well. Ralph has a good amount of hope for making things better in the future, and displays a good amount of bravery and perseverance while setting things right and turning his life around.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. The other characters in "Fix-It Felix, Jr" underuse judgment/open-mindedness and fairness, by ostracizing and treating Ralph poorly as a person after-hours, as if he were the same person as his obligate job persona. Turbo underuses honesty and authenticity by pretending to be someone he is not.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Can you give an example of a time when something that was "unfair" made you work harder for those for whom it was "unfair?"

- Who *did* say that life is fair? *Should* life be fair? *Can* life be fair? Does one learn something after negotiating a situation that was not fair?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Watch movies, or read books about people who are examples of working for fairness or social justice, such as Nelson Mandela in *Invictus* (2009), or Erin Brockovich (in the film of the same name, 2000).

- For one week, pay attention to a person who may feel left out of some group or event, and make a move to include him or her.

Leadership. A leader helps direct and motivate a group to achieve its desired collective action (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Good relations amongst team members are facilitated, and opinions of members are valued. Leaders are good problem solvers, conflict resolvers, organizers and spokespersons. To answer the call for more altruistic behavior in leadership, Sosik, Jung, and Dinger (2009) empirically examine the motivations and outcomes of such altruistic behavior in

leaders. Superiors' ratings of managers' performance is predicted by subordinate ratings of managers' altruistic behaviors.

Movie exemplar for leadership: "42"—PG-13, 2013. This movie chronicles the breaking of the "color barrier" of professional baseball in 1946, when Jackie Robinson (Chadwick Boseman) becomes the first African American to play in Major League Baseball (MLB). Jackie Robinson is thus an obvious candidate for exceptional leadership strengths, paving the way for the future integration and success of African Americans in general. However, without the leadership strengths of the Dodgers, its visionary team executive Branch Rickey (Harrison Ford) and its manager Leo Durocher (Christopher Meloni)—Jackie's debut would never have transpired. Rickie signed Jackie, and then stood by his crazy-appearing decision ensuring its success from the top down. Most of the team signed a petition refusing to play with Robinson, to which Durocher offered them the open door out. Rickey supported Robinson through his first games, while the pressure was nearly insurmountable. Such leadership could not help but ensure success; to this day, every player on every team in the MLB wears number 42 in games played on the anniversary in April, to honor Robinson by demonstrating that all players look the *same*—regardless of color or race.

Other character strengths to spot. 42 can almost serve as an exemplar for bravery, whether that of the players, the MLB management, the sportswriters, the families, or the fans. In addition to the players, the fans needed courage to even attend these racially discriminative and highly emotionally charged games. The teamwork cannot be missed; baseball is a team sport. Yet, this example stands of a team that at first stood divided and then came together as a "we." The manager, Durocher, was particularly open-minded. Legendary ballplayer PeeWee Reese

(Lucas Black) stands with his arm around Robinson in a show of solidarity in front of a quite

hostile crowd—an act displaying strengths both of fairness and of love.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. An under-dose of both fairness and

judgment/open-mindedness permeated the very reason for the color barrier against the African

Americans in the first place. Durocher suffered consequences from overuse of love; his public

extramarital affairs resulted in his suspension and inability to manage the Dodgers that year. One

pitcher displayed underuse of both humility and prudence, putting his career on the line while

adamantly refusing to play with a "Negro;" he found himself traded.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Share a time that you were a leader. What tools served you well?

- How does a leader deal with having his or her own ideas for the group, yet still listening
  to the input of members of the group as well?

  Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Organize and lead an event (or lead a group joining an event) for families or coworkers to
  volunteer in the community for one day.

- Spend some time mentoring a child through Big Brothers, Big Sisters, or Boys and Girls
  Club.

- Volunteer for an office of leadership in one of the school's clubs or service organizations.

Temperance

This is control over excess; and refers to strengths that keep everything in moderation

(Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Forgiveness (mercy). Forgiveness is a conscious and freely undertaken decision, by

which a person who has been injured or offended elects to show mercy to the transgressor

(Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Anger and distress are common feelings prior to the act of forgiveness. Accepting that others have flaws, and avoiding revenge are other hallmarks of this character strength. Basking and Enright (2004) analyze known studies of forgiveness interventions, and find that process-based individual methods help with relationships and can positively enhance the mental health of clients. Giving up resentment and showing beneficence can assist a person in letting go of deeply held anger, or remember events in new ways—one can forgive without necessarily reconciling.

Movie exemplar for forgiveness: "Mean Girls"—PG-13, 2004. Forgiveness may only be prominent in the latter third of this movie, but there is arguably no better example of the poor behavior of high school girls' social cliques that is in need of forgiveness! And, if these mean behaviors can be forgiven, anything can. Queen bees, rumors, backstabbing and girls so fake they are referred to as the Plastics set the stage. Gossip and secrets are written in the Burn Book, a recipe for disaster. Dress codes and weight limits exist as requirements for lunch table seating. In one scene each of four girls are hooked up eight ways by phone, swapping lines and forgetting which other girl she is talking *to* and which one she is talking *about*. Eventually, it all gets out of hand with virtually all relationships in shambles and everyone's feelings hurt. One teacher, Ms. Norbury (played by Tina Fey), who was smeared as a drug dealer, organizes a forgiveness exercise for the entire female student body. One by one, the girls confess to rumors and apologize for evil acts; peace eventually reigns.

Other character strengths to spot. Ms. Norbury displayed excellent honesty and leadership strengths, more so than the other adults involved. The girls almost all used bravery and honesty when they fessed up and apologized. Cady (Lindsay Lohan) showed good teamwork by helping the Mathletes win a competition, rather than playing dumb to get a guy.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. Creativity was overused for nefarious means; for example, Cady convinces Regina (Rachel McAdams) to eat snack bars to lose weight, when the snack bars were actually formulated to help gain weight. Judgment and closed-mindedness were overused too many times to count. Honesty, fairness and perspective were underused by almost all of the teenagers.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Share a time that it was easy for you to forgive. Did you feel better before or after forgiving?

- Does forgiveness have to be deserved? Who makes such decisions?

- When you hang onto anger or righteousness in an unforgiving manner, who bears more of the burden - you or the person who wronged you?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Write a letter to a person against whom you are still holding a grudge, forgiving them. Choose whether to deliver it, or tear it up.

- Think of a time that you were forgiven. Consciously pay that forward and forgive the next person that offends you. Start with driving and traffic maneuvers!

Humility (modesty). Humility is the opposite of pride, in terms of self-focus. Rather than inflating the self, achievements are accurately presented and speak for themselves (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). A person can acknowledge one's own limitations or mistakes. Modesty can also involve not taking full credit for success—and remaining appreciative of the value of contributions of others. Kruse, Chancellor, Ruberton and Lyubomirsky (2014) look at this very relationship between humility and gratitude—which influence each other. Humility's low self-focus, secure sense of self, and increased valuation of others is complemented by gratitude,

which is often a sense of betterment or benefit from others. Writing gratitude letters increases

humility, while increased humility enhances the good feelings after writing a gratitude letter;

gratitude and humility mutually predict and reinforce each other.

    Movie exemplar for humility: "The Ringer"—PG-13, 2005. In an exploration of the

justification of the means by the end, Steve (Johnny Knoxville) sets out as a cheater to win the

Special Olympics—though for kind and humanitarian reasons. He pretends to be Jeffy, acting as

if he has a learning disability and an intellectual disability. In the process, he falls in love with a

volunteer, Lynn (Katherine Heigl). The beauty of this film is that it hired actors with

intellectual/developmental disabilities, rather than hiring actors pretending to have a disability;

and that's where the humility shines. Even when competing against each other, if one runner fell

several of the others would turn around and go back and help him up. Jeffy/Steve redeems

himself with humility on the medals podium; he confesses his deception and gives his third place

medal to Thomas.

    Other character strengths to spot. Several of the characters with disabilities showed more

"street-smarts" or social/emotional intelligence than the supposedly non-developmentally

delayed typical characters; they figured out fairly rapidly that Jeffy/Steve was faking his

disability by noting inconsistencies in his speech. Many or most had strong forgiveness

strengths; they forgave Steve, and even helped train him (showing good teamwork!). Even Lynn

eventually forgave Steve after hearing about the financial need for his friend's surgery. Humor

abounds, yet language and sexual innuendoes may be offensive to younger children.

    Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. Jeffy/Steve certainly started out with an

underuse of authenticity/honesty, which was sensed by others. Jimmy underused humility and his

arrogance after winning several times resulted in the other competitors wanting to see him lose.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

• Tell me about a time that you felt humble, instead of tooting your own horn?

• Have you had an experience when helping someone else hurt your own chances to win?

  Which feels better afterwards: winning, or losing because of helping another?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

• Perform one kind act anonymously, taking no credit.

• Practice consciously giving more credit to others, and resist pointing out one's own

  accomplishments.

Prudence. Prudence involves taking care with decisions, consideration of consequences

of speech and behavior, and tends towards balance and moderation (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Just because prudent people are not risk-takers does not mean they are cold, cheap or into

excessive self-denial. They are conscientious, and conscientiousness can predict academic

outcomes independent of IQ (MacCann, Duckworth, & Roberts, 2009). Specific facets that

correlate with academic achievement include: perfectionism, tidiness, refraining from

procrastination, control, cautiousness, and task planning.

Movie exemplar for prudence: "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty"—PG, 2013. This is

an example of a film that documents the transformation of a character moving from overuse of a

character strength to finding that golden mean where a true strength operates. Walter (Ben

Stiller) starts out as a dreamer, who is so rigid and risk-avoidant that he cannot even say hello to

a coworker, Cheryl (Kristen Wiig). He zones out of life repeatedly, while his brain concocts

fantasy versions of pretend favorable outcomes. He starts to wake up after experiencing what

looks like a failure or error of his—which he was unable to avoid even with all of his meticulous

over-care. He makes a choice to right this wrong, and ends up developing reasonable prudence as

a strength (also without ricocheting too far into underuse of prudence). Though some situations border on preposterous, Walter discovers both the pain of risks, but also the beauty and paybacks from living. A very clever plot twist makes for an excellent surprise ending.

Other character strengths to spot. Walter has a strong sense of appreciation of beauty and excellence at the on-location photo shoots, as well as with editing the photo negatives in his position as a "negative asset manager." He displays kindness, remembering that Cheryl's teenaged son loves skateboarding. Walter acquires a collector's version skateboard for him overseas, but then leaves it with a note in an act of humility. He branches out with some curiosity to try to create a profile on the eHarmony Internet dating service.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. The magazine company is dismantling its print version, and the "director of transition" hardly utilizes teamwork in any way, and in fact is disruptive and disrespectful. Walter's underuse of courage is responsible for a great number of his problems. For example, he also leaves a skateboard without speaking to Cheryl because he sees her ex-husband at the house fixing something and mistakenly assumes she has reunited with him. This clearly works against his goal of kindling a relationship with her.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Share a time that you may have been too prudent, or cautious. What were the results?

- Share a time that you took risks, or were not prudent enough. What were the results?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Think twice before you speak, ten times in one week (Rashid & Anjum, 2005).

- When making a decision, visualize or note what the potential consequences would be of either outcome, in one month, one year, five years and ten years (Rashid & Anjum, 2005).

Self-regulation (self-control). This character strength refers to conscious self-discipline—specifically to choose particular responses rather than others (Peterman & Seligman, 2004). Control is exerted over thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in the interest of long-term goals—rather than giving into choices that feel good in the short-term but may have long-term costs (Baumeister, Vohs, & Tice, 2007). Self-control is important to success, yet works like a muscle such that resources are limited, it tires from exertion, and can result in ego depletion—short-term impairments in subsequent self-regulation. This may shed some light on why *willpower* can at times be so elusive; perhaps Baumeister et al.'s suggestions can allow better planning for successful self-regulation.

Movie exemplar for self-regulation: "Fantastic Mr. Fox"—PG, 2009. Mrs. Fox (voiced by Meryl Streep) is well acquainted with Mr. Fox's (voiced by George Clooney) foibles. However, once she is pregnant and they will be starting a family, it is time to get things under control. She extracts a promise from the habitual chicken-thief to begin a respectable life, which he complies to do as a newspaper journalist. Two years (which amounts to 12 fox years) later, the columnist Mr. Fox is disenchanted living in a hole in the ground. Mrs. Fox points out that they may be poor, but they are happy; and, holes are safe. Lusting after a more well-to-do lodging in a hole in a tree (though advised against by the wise Mr. Badger, voiced by Bill Murray), Mr. Fox resumes his old criminal ways.

Other character strengths to spot. Kristofferson, the nephew/cousin that comes to stay with the Fox's, is a model of mindfulness, meditation and yoga. Stan Weasel, the realtor is a source of humor, as is Jimmy Squirrel's Storage business.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. As much as Mrs. Fox exhibits appropriate self-regulation, Mr. Fox displays a woeful inadequacy of self-regulation. He agrees (when he and she

are trapped years before) to give up his chicken-stealing ways. Yet, coupled with an underuse of

honesty, his urges get the best of him and he resorts to his trickery and thievery. Even

Kristofferson remarks that this side of the family takes unnecessary risks. Mrs. Fox is also a

model of prudence, in direct contradiction to Mr. Fox's underuse of prudence, from which

everyone in the family eventually experiences repercussions—even if all turned out okay in the

end.

> *Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.*

- Share an example of a time that you had good self-control, seeing that the long-term

  consequences were more important than the short term.

- Share a time that short-term benefits seemed so good that you couldn't wait—even

  though you *knew* that you were going to regret this later.

- Can you give an example of a time that even if it all worked out okay, the means did not

  justify the ends?

> *Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.*

- It is useful to realize that self-control, or willpower, is like a muscle and becomes

  fatigued in the face of overuse or under-exercise (Baumeister, et al., 2007). Using this

  knowledge, arrange activities on your to-do list in which self-control is needed such that

  necessary stores are not depleted; schedule tasks needing self-regulation first on the list.

- Think of a rearrangement in your home that reduces the chance of giving in to a

  temptation. For example, place fresh fruits out in view to encourage healthier snacks.

Transcendence

Transcendent strengths are beyond human knowledge, and have to do with meaning and

connection to the universe overall (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Appreciation of beauty and excellence (awe, wonder, elevation). Appreciating beauty and excellence, whether of art, music, of nature, of mathematic or athletic ability—elicits the feeling of *awe,* which involves a connection to something larger than the "self" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Elevation, admiration and wonder are related emotions, also experienced by people who are mindful to notice goodness and beauty around them—instead of running through life wearing "busy blinders." Algoe and Haidt (2008) refer to this family of elevation, gratitude and admiration as the 'other praising' emotions. These authors go on to purport that these emotions can encourage positive behavior changes: elevation motivates prosocial behavior, gratitude motivates improved relationships, and admiration motivates self-improvement behaviors.

Movie exemplar for appreciation of beauty and excellence: "Cirque du Soleil: Worlds Away"—PG, 2012. This film tells a story, yet is almost documentary in nature, using acts from the seven Cirque du Soleil shows in Las Vegas in 2011: O, Mystère, Kà, Love, Zumanity, Viva Elvis and Criss Angel Believe. A young woman attends a traveling carnival or circus, and becomes entranced with the star aerialist. He falls, and the ground gives way much as quicksand. She spends the rest of the movie traveling through different worlds in different tents, led by a meme/white-faced clown, in search of that aerialist—with whom she reunites in the finale. There is a good amount of action, and the movie is relatively fast moving. The awe and wonder experienced by the viewer is unrelenting, from synchronized swimming to acrobatics to ballet to trapeze artists to trampoline experts.

Other character strengths to spot. The young woman attending the circus exhibits perseverance as she continues to search for the aerialist, with whom she felt a fleeting but real connection. Stepping back from the story, the perseverance of the individual performers cannot

be underestimated; whether on trampoline or trapeze, the actual number of hours of practice to engender such skills seems superhuman in extent. Whether presented in dance or in song, "All You Need is Love" is the ultimate message of the film.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. This can only be surmised here, but if the hours of practice needed to secure such finesse are infinitely high—such demands may detract from relationships and other predictors of well-being. Such perseverance and self-regulation, though rendering a person "expert," may detract from other strengths by necessarily engendering underuse due to time constraints alone.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Maybe it wasn't dance or the circus, but share an experience that was so awe-inspiring that it took your breath away.

- Is there a time that you practiced so hard that you became really good at something? In such a case, did any areas suffer as a result (such as friendships, etc.)?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Take a hike. Literally. Nature is our most prolific provider of awe, wonder and appreciation of beauty and excellence. Look around, pay attention, and your time will not be wasted.

- Visit an art museum. Notice which pieces speak to you and contemplate why.

- Attend a live music concert, and listen to at least part of it with your eyes closed.

Gratitude. Gratitude is more than simply being thankful; and it is not just experiencing joy from receiving a gift—it is more like an overall sense of awareness of all good gifts around a person (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This appreciation, even of being alive today, then translates into taking the time to express thanks—whether to another person or to oneself. Emmons and

McCullough (2003) add to the empirical study of gratitude: the benefits of counting blessings

rather than burdens enhances well-being (with robust effects on positive affect) in participants

who keep daily or weekly diaries. Thus, a conscious focus on blessings appears to confer

benefits upon a person's well-being.

Movie exemplar for gratitude: "Coraline"—PG, 2009. Home is frustrating for Coraline,

who recently had to move into the euphemistically named "Pink Palace"—which it is not. Her

parents are chronically busy and inattentive, or rather emotionally absent. In her room, she

discovers a secret corridor to a fantasy "Other World," complete with an "Other Mother" and

"Other Father." These Other Parents look just like her parents, except they have buttons for eyes;

and, they don't behave like Coraline's real parents. They act just like how Coraline wishes her

real parents would act—they are warm and attentive and make only her favorite foods, without

kale! Coraline becomes more and more enchanted with her new mom, until Other Mother invites

her to stay in the parallel world forever—except she would need to give up her eyes in exchange

for buttons. Coraline declines, and Other Mother changes into her true form as a grotesque witch

and traps the girl. Using her wits, Coraline eventually reunites with her real parents in the real

world—and is struck with profound gratitude. Her vision clears, and she is grateful for how her

real parents love her, and perhaps are busy and less attentive because of their zeal to truly care

for her. She transforms into a person who is authentically grateful for all the blessings that she

already has, instead of jealously regarding the grass as greener on the other side of the fence.

Other character strengths to spot. Coraline uses a "beginner's mind" with her character

strength of curiosity; that is, she experiences things commonly as if it is the first time she is

seeing such a thing. She shows her strength of bravery by returning to the Other World after she

escapes to help the others who are trapped there—which is also a display of kindness and love.

Coraline must be clever and creative to challenge the Other Mother to free the others, and eventually trap the Other Mother and close off the Other World, for good.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. There are several clues that Other World is not quite as perfect as it seems, and an underuse of prudence leads Coraline to end up in the pickle that she finds herself. Gratitude was at first underused, but sometimes an underused strength that transforms and develops into a true strength is a better example to learn from than simply watching someone who is already expert in that strength—it may offer a viewer more hope for his own potential transformation.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Share a time that you felt grateful for something.

- Consider the phrase - "The grass is greener on the other side"—How often is that true, and how often is it an illusion?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Each night, record in a journal three blessings from that day for which you are thankful, and why (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005).

- Write a letter of gratitude to someone on your past that you have not properly thanked. If possible, read it out loud to him or her in person (Seligman et al., 2005).

Hope (optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation). This character strength adopts a future orientation, expecting that positive events and desired outcomes will occur (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Actions are then chosen to increase the likelihood of such positive outcomes, and looking on the bright side thus contributes to goal-directed action. If an undesirable event does occur, it is viewed as a learning opportunity for use in further future positive endeavors. In addition to positive effects of optimism on mental health, a meta-analytic

review conducted by Rasmussen, Scheier, and Greenhouse (2009) determines the strength of association of optimism with physical health. Outcomes of physical health included: mortality and survival, cardiovascular outcomes, physiological markers of immune function, cancer outcomes, physical symptoms or pain. Effect sizes are larger with subjective (versus objective) measures of health, but these authors still find that optimism predicts positive physical health outcomes in each case.

   Movie exemplar for hope: "Tangled"—PG, 2010. Disney's 50th animated classic is loosely based on the fairy tale Rapunzel; the princess is stolen as a baby from her parents by Mother Gothel, who raises her in a tower as her own while coveting the powers of youthfulness contained in the girl's magic hair. Despite the princess having spent her entire life imprisoned under the guise of parental protectiveness, she remains relentlessly optimistic about her future. She hopes to leave the tower to discover the genesis of the magic lantern lights that are set into the sky each year on her birthday. These lights are also symbolic of hopefulness, as her real parents and citizens of their kingdom release them every year as a sign of optimism for her return—even after 18 years.

   Other character strengths to spot. Instead of wilting in captivity, the princess nurtures the character strength of creativity and becomes a gifted painter of views from her window. Her golden hair is metaphoric for her generally sunny disposition. She exhibits bravery by escaping with Flynn, fearlessly traveling out despite never having been outside the confines of her tower. Princess Rapunzel is a fairly zestful girl, attacking her chores and seizing each day with gusto; admittedly, this seems even more of an achievement under the premise of spending every day and year in the same area of confinement. She continues to experience awe and wonder, even while imprisoned. The horse, Maximus, is a source of humor. Flynn, her rescuer, undergoes a

character transformation from swindler to empathizer to giver and receiver of love. After being reunited with her biological parents, the princess utilized prudence in waiting several years to marry her future prince, Flynn.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. The princess's abductor, Mother Gothel displays overuse of control or self-regulation, and underuse of prudence, honesty and fairness. Her judgment and perspective are not operating in the golden mean area of true strengths, either. She is an excellent example of an over-protective parent, who defends her actions as "best" for the child as if they were selfless. This dishonest non-mother also overuses humor; she consistently puts Rapunzel down verbally, then exclaiming that she was "just kidding."

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Share a time that you felt very hopeful or optimistic.

- If what you hope for doesn't materialize, is the hopeful time period lost, wasted or useless?

- Share a time that you felt one or both of your parents was over-protective. Can you put yourself into their shoes? How does it feel now if you look at it from a parents' point of view?

- Can you think of a time that you resented a parent's rules, yet later felt grateful that those restrictions had been in place?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- For twenty minutes, write about your best self, and how you see your life in five years. All dreams are allowed; this is your story. (Burton & King, 2004; King, 2001).

- Think of a time when you faced an adversity. What positive results or potential for growth did you realize afterwards?

Humor (playfulness). The character strength of humor does not refer to a practiced joke-teller, but more to a person who tends to laugh and make others laugh in a spontaneous manner (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). A person with humor recognizes and enjoys the little incongruities in life, and can often find something to laugh about even in adverse situations. At different times in history, humor has been considered more of a vice than a virtue; Beermann and Ruch (2009) examine and detail the connection between humor and virtue. Wisdom and Humanity are the two virtues most strongly associated with humor, though all six core virtues are connected at least slightly, and five moderately. Humor was evaluated as a vice when mean-spirited or aggressive, which is not the defined character strength of humor in this context. (Refer to further discussion of overuse and underuse of character strengths in the Appendix).

Movie exemplar for humor: "Mr. Magorium's Wonder Emporium"—G, 2007. A myriad of films are funny and make people laugh; however, the character strength of humor is more than "funny." The magical toy-store owner Mr. Magorium, played by Dustin Hoffman, is a 243 year-old perfect example of a person who finds little things in everything that are humorous. Along with his trusted employee, Mahoney (Natalie Portman), their relentless playfulness looks like a more happy way to get through the day. As Mr. Magorium says, "There is no reason to turn grey and begin pouting." Problems are not downplayed, but are not made worse by finding something to smile about. One of the few movies even if made for kids rated G, this movie works for all ages—with a cornucopia of magical toys and colors.

Other character strengths to spot. Mr. Magorium's avid creativity strength is evident everywhere one can see in his business establishment. He is also a fairly zestful person in general, and a veritable repository of perspective and wisdom. He and Mahoney both consistently display appreciation for beauty and excellence, and experience awe and wonder

daily. Mr. Magorium is optimistic for Mahoney's future, and helps develop hope in her as well. To develop her own spirituality, he gives Mahoney a tool (the Congreve Cube) with magical ability that can only be realized if a person believes. This is metaphoric for Mahoney, who needs to believe in herself to get unstuck. He displays profound spirituality; he is grateful for a long life well-lived, and is prepared to confidently move on.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. The accountant hired by Mr. Magorium, Henry (Jason Bateman) exhibits an underuse of judgment or open-mindedness. He is rigid in his own thinking, and thus is unable to see the magic. Henry also is unable to appreciate beauty and excellence; Mahoney describes him as a "just" man—no matter what, all he sees is just a store, just a tree, and just what anything is. Mr. Magorium borders on occasional overuse of humor; he occasionally annoys others, such as when the accountant is trying to advise him about a serious problem, he laughs and exclaims, "I don't have any serious problems!"

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Share a time that you felt particularly funny - not in making fun of yourself, but in finding a funny perspective on happenings that others did not see.

- Identify a time that humor may have assisted you while you were facing an obstacle.

- Can you think of a time when humor hurt someone's feelings? How can this be avoided in the future?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Intentionally choose a funny movie to watch once a week to make you laugh and raise your endorphins! Some examples include *Best in Show* (2000), *Bruce Almighty* (2003), *Shrek* (2001), and *The Muppets* (2011).

- Pick one day a week. Count how many times you can bring a smile to someone's face.

Spirituality (religiousness, faith, purpose). This strength refers to beliefs or convictions regarding a nonphysical or transcendent other-dimension to life (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). A Higher Power is believed in or looked up to for strength. Such beliefs also often supply comfort. Purpose and meaning in life are especially cogent for those with high levels of this character strength. Many are also religious, but not necessarily. Smith, Bartz, and Richards (2007) document an analysis of studies following the outcomes of spiritual therapies, which have dramatically increased in use. Spiritually oriented psychotherapy may be beneficial to people with certain psychological problems in particular, such as depression, anxiety and stress.

Movie exemplar for spirituality: "Heaven is for Real"—PG, 2014. This movie is based on a New York Times bestseller book (Burpo & Vincent, 2010) written by a pastor, Todd Burpo, whose four year-old son, Colton, began describing other-worldly events that he experienced while critically ill and undergoing emergency surgery. The family became convinced when he described detailed events and people he met in heaven that he could not have known about, such as a miscarried sister and a great-grandfather who had died—both years before he was born. He described heaven with angels singing and rainbow-colored horses. The book was criticized by both Christians and atheists; the father was conflicted himself over presenting such a controversial subject. However, in this way this film is most provocative for further discussion of spirituality of whatever form or denomination.

Other character strengths to spot. Both Colton and his dad Todd exhibit the character strength of honesty/authenticity. The boy speaks his truth, not under relentless questioning but at random and spontaneous times. The father bravely releases the story as his truth, even though surely criticism and disbelief would result in some viewers. Todd is also frank in his depiction of doubts in and anger at his God, even as a pastor. Both parents display open-mindedness and

curiosity with their son, Colton. Pastor Burpo and his wife both show excellent leadership skills in their church, and tirelessly express gratitude for Colton's survival. Teamwork was evident as the entire community pulled together to pray for and support the boy and his family.

Overuse/Underuse of character strengths. A statement that Pastor Burpo sermonizes in church could be interpreted as either overuse or underuse of spirituality: "We ask these kids to believe this stuff, and I don't even know if I believe it myself!" Some disbelievers are judgmental, critical and closed-minded towards the family. Could the dad have overused his leadership by using his church's pulpit to disseminate his story? Critics may also argue that more prudence may have been wise for this family.

Discussion points/prompts for parents, children and adolescents.

- Did you ever have any experiences that maybe seemed like experiencing heaven?

- What is your perspective on the themes addressed in this movie—that a person can experience a "near-death" circumstance, and then remember things about heaven or the afterlife?

Positive interventions for parents, children and adolescents.

- Watch one or two of these other films that investigate different elements of the strength of spirituality (e.g., purpose, meaning, faith): *Bruce Almighty* (2003), *Noah* (2014), *10 Questions for the Dalai Lama* (2006), *Field of Dreams* (1989), *Seven Years in Tibet* (1997), and *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982).

- Spend 15 minutes each day in meditation, quiet solitude or reflection.

- Read a book about a religion other than the one in which you may have been raised.

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Appendix: Literature Review of Positive Psychology and Character Strengths

History—The Pursuit of Happiness

Seemingly for eons, the search for happiness has been as fickle as a hapless lover. In the time of Aristotle, the road to happiness was thought traveled by living the virtuous life (McMahon, 2013; Melchert, 2002). By the time of the emergence of Christianity, the virtue of suffering was espoused (McMahon, 2013). Humanity was advised to accept unhappiness in this world and to not expect it until the hereafter. The age of enlightenment ushered in a sense of entitlement—people deserved to be happy, to the point of feeling guilty if unhappy. Since 1776, The Declaration of Independence of the United States only guarantees the *pursuit* (McMahon, 2013, p. 15) of happiness, not its realization. As modern society advanced with fancier technological toys, people could not keep up with their desires and happiness remained elusive. If one pays attention to the lessons of history, the singular and direct pursuit of happiness results in endlessly spinning wheels. Perhaps a better concept is a term from Aristotle—*eudaimonia*, referring to overall flourishing—rather than the evanescent state of happiness (Aristotle, 2000). Perhaps in pursuing purpose and meaning for its own sake, a person may end up living with more subjective happiness (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

The Emergence of Positive Psychology

Aristotle may have had the first recorded glimmer of positive psychology, but Martin Seligman—as the President of the American Psychological Association—fired the starting pistol in 1998 (Seligman, 2011). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) define positive psychology as the scientific study of what makes life worth living; that is, the strengths and virtues that help both individuals and the community to thrive. These two pioneers envisioned three pillars of positive emotions, positive individual traits of character, and positive institutions. Positive

psychology is more than a yellow smiley face, and happiness is more than the absence of unhappiness—it is experienced in the presence of well-being.

Well-being is a dyad composed of hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions (Park, n.d.). Hedonic well-being—or subjective well-being—*feels good*, and is what most people refer to when they use the word "happiness" (Diener, 2000; Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999). This state is characterized by high positive emotions (joy, excitement, contentment) and low negative emotions (sadness, anger, fear)—with a sense of life satisfaction. Eudaimonic well-being, on the other hand, is characterized by *high functioning*: character strengths, mental engagement, and a sense of meaning or purpose (Seligman, 2002; Waterman, 1993). The two arms of well-being are distinguishable, yet reinforce each other (Park, n.d.). However, the distinction is important between the two: subjective well-being is a more transient state of feeling good, while the eudaimonic is psychological well-being, with personal growth and a life with purpose (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002).

Positive psychology can help the world turn in a positive direction—a eudaimonic turn. Much as the eudaimonic turn in medicine resulted in focusing its lens on more on health rather than only curing disease, the eudaimonic turn in psychology—positive psychology—now focuses its lens on flourishing rather than only treating mental illness (Pawelski & Moores, 2013). Thus, positive psychology began as a strengths-based and evidence-based science, building competencies rather than concentrating on disabilities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

PERMA—The Model for Well-Being

A predominant model of well-being is Seligman's (2011) **PERMA**, with the five pillars of **P**ositive emotions, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, **M**eaning and **A**chievement as the foundations

of a flourishing life. Each is independently sought for its own sake, and each is measurable. The

beauty of this model is that each person can concentrate on the components that work for him;

one now can reach the promise of well-being even if not blessed with a preponderance of smiley-

face emotions. As Christopher Peterson (2013) alludes, living the good life can be available to

each and every one.

Positive Interventions

Positive interventions are specific and evidence-based exercises that are focused on

helping people get more of what they want—from themselves and for or from their organization.

Just as positive interventions are intentional positive activities that increase well-being for the

individual, positive organizational interventions are intentional positive activities that increase

well-being for the organization. Positive interventions are rendered most effective by optimizing

the modifying factors of: the activity, the participants, or the participant-activity dyad; person-

activity fit is crucial to success. (Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013).

However, perhaps people need tools for both how to flourish from opportunities, *and*

how to hone skills to cope with problems (Pawelski, 2014). As Pawelski suggests, it is optimal

for positive psychology to focus on both constructive and mitigative methods to enhance

flourishing. Therefore, applications need to offer both sorts of exercises (Pawelski, 2014); there

may be a logical instability to using solely one or the other. People need interventions not just to

increase hope and love, but also to develop coping skills—such as resilience and perseverance—

to deal with the ever-present negative events that may be around the corner. Again, if happiness

is not simply the absence of unhappiness—then the flourishing life will be optimally cultivated

by applications that increase the former, decrease the latter, or do both. These tools can be

successfully applied to the character strengths, which are foundational to flourishing (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Character Strengths

  Classification/derivation. The character strengths are like routes to the virtues, and they are integral contributors to well-being. Peterson and Seligman (2004) classified 24 character strengths, stratified under the six virtues of Wisdom and Knowledge, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance and Transcendence. Each person has a constellation of strengths, unique to oneself. These strengths have been stable over time and across cultures—that is, universally valued (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Culture-bound strengths have been excluded.

  VIA Institute on Character (formerly referred to as Values in Action Institute). The above classification is known as the VIA classification, and this project was funded by the Mayerson Foundation in 2000. The VIA Institute on Character, a non-profit organization in Cincinnati, Ohio, was created to support this scientific work (www.viacharacter.org).

  Characteristics of character strengths. Each character strength is morally valued, contributes to one's well-being and is generally representative—or, "characteristic"—of a person (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Like other personality attributes they are stable, yet can change over the lifespan; they can be measured and cultivated. The strengths may be utilized differently in different contexts, or domains—the strength of humor may be exhibited differentially whether at work, home or social domains (Niemiec, 2013b). Some strengths are tonic—meaning always present, and used almost daily. Some tend to be more phasic and may be utilized only when a situation calls for it rather than on a daily basis. Which strengths are more tonic and which are more phasic will be different for each individual.

Measurement of character strengths. Character strengths are measured by the VIA Survey, or VIA Inventory of Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). A survey for youths age 10 to 17 years—VIA Youth Survey—has already been validated (Park & Peterson, 2006). Differences of 1.0 are regarded as very likely to be *meaningful* differences in strength expression, while differences of 0.5 are only moderately like to be *meaningful* differences of expression (R. Niemiec, personal communication, January 12, 2014).

Self-report/internal. The VIA Survey is reliable and validated, has been taken by more than 2.6 million people, and strengths are ranked after self-report online. Pronin and Kugler (2007) issue one caveat: the introspection illusion. This refers to the potential of the self-report method to reflect internal thoughts rather than actual behavior.

External. Multiple lenses give a richer discussion. Biswas-Diener, Kashdan and Minhas (2011) admonish that blind spots may exist, because a person may not see a strength as more than ordinary—as in courage, thinking that anyone would have done what they did. Therefore, strengths noted by others are illuminating, especially when paired with concrete examples. Strengths noted on self-report but not echoed by external reviewers may be potential areas of opportunities to develop (R. Niemiec, personal communication, January 12, 2014).

Signature strengths. The signature strengths are a person's top strengths, the strengths that most define one's true self—and were originally considered to be five to seven in number (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). Subsequent research by the VIA Institute has supported the existence of a construct called signature strengths although the quantity of signature strengths that people believe they have is higher than Peterson and Seligman's original hypotheses (Mayerson, 2013). Signature strengths seem like the "real you," are particularly energizing, feel more natural than effortful, and others frequently note them as well. The VIA Survey ranks

character strengths, and researchers believe that the top strengths act as an accurate proxy for "signature-ness". However, there may be some interpretation of the test questions that influences the rankings; therefore, one's own input does matter.

Middle and lesser strengths. It is important to relate lower strengths to those that are less expressed, rather than defining them as weaknesses. The lower strengths are not weaknesses, but rather character strengths that are less strong, or less representative of a person. The best way to think about this is Niemiec's (personal communication, January 12, 2014) analogy of Starbuck's cup sizes: Venti, Grande and Tall. Each person's top signature strengths; those that are most integral, or most representative; these are equivalent to the Venti size. The middle strengths are more like the Grande size, while the lower strengths are equivalent to the Tall size. Notice that the size is Tall, and not Small. All strengths matter, and strengths may be exercised whether they are high or low.

Overuse/underuse. In life, any strength can be overused or underused. In general, most of the character strengths are best utilized in the middle—the "golden mean" spoken of first by Aristotle (Aristotle, 2000; Melchert, 2002). For example, courage in excess can result in recklessness, and when in short supply cowardice. Niemiec (2013b) admonishes that this balance is critical; it is a strength only when expressed as a strength—that is in the right amount in the appropriate situation. Schwartz and Sharpe (2006) recommend using practical wisdom; regarding honesty, for example, more is not necessarily better.

Character strengths versus talents, skills, values, traits. Character strengths are not the same as skills (such as typing), which are likened to proficiencies that can be acquired. They are more like the things that make you "you!" Personality traits, such as gregariousness or shyness, are not generally imbued with moral connotations (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), and values may

be driving beliefs or the ideals of a society—with both positive and negative valences. Talents

may be a proclivity for a particular skill or behavior, such as music or athletic prowess. For

example, StrengthsFinder 2.0 (Rath, 2007) is a strength survey, but measures talents and skills

rather than character strengths.

Exercises/positive interventions to build character strengths. Character Strengths can

be practiced and bolstered to increase well-being (Niemiec, 2013b). Regarding young people, the

goal is to provide students a language with which to discuss character strengths, to spot strengths

in others, to be aware of their own strengths, and to use them (Linkins, et al., 2014). Gillham et

al. (2013) attest that rather than solely addressing the desired character skills or goals

individually, an overall and broad character strength-based approach to well-being may be just as

essential to achieve those individual skills/goals. Targeting interventions that develop

relationships, positive emotions and meaning are a complimentary, alternative and just as

essential approach to foster individual character strengths.

Aware, explore, apply model. This three-step model offers a simple process by which

practitioners and clients can take action with strengths (Niemiec, 2013a). The first step is to

become aware, by understanding the language of strengths, finding out one's own strengths, and

noticing strengths when they are being used. Exploring is to reflect on past and present uses of

strengths, delineate which strengths resonate most, and which help move one forward when

stressed. The last step, apply, is the action step. Here one moves from thinking about strengths to

actually and consciously practicing them.

Use signature strengths in a new way. Operating out of one's signature strengths is

correlated with overall well-being, or flourishing. Only two positive interventions have been

shown to reap either improvements in life satisfaction or a decrease in depressive symptoms: one

of the two uses character strengths—*Using a Signature Strength in a New Way* (Seligman, et al., 2005). This study was fully replicated by Gander et al. (2013), and similar results have been found in a number of additional studies (Madden, Green, & Grant, 2011; Mitchell, Stanimirovic, Klein, & Vella-Brodrick, 2009; Mongrain & Anselmo-Matthews, 2012; Rust, Diessner, & Reade, 2009). Once one knows one's signature strengths, this involves mindfully choosing to use a signature strength in a new way, a way that one does not routinely use it. This may also facilitate strength mastery.

For example, if a person has creativity as a signature strength, he can use it in a new way by painting if he is not a painter, or sculpting if he is not a sculptor. Rashid and Anjum (2005) recommend similar strategies in *340 Ways to Use VIA Character Strengths.* Niemiec (personal communication, January 12, 2014) asserts that bolstering even non-signature strengths may still confer benefits to well-being. Let them all paint!

Strengths-spotting in others. Spotting character strengths in others helps increase awareness and build one's own strengths. Recognizing and thinking about strengths in others helps one recognize and think about one's own strengths (Linkins et al., 2014). A person may work with a partner, or work independently with characters in literature and movies (Niemiec & Wedding, 2014).   One may record, and then reflect on: which strengths were used, how they were used, in which settings or context, and what positive outcomes resulted. After some familiarity and experience, one may also spot overuse and underuse (or missed opportunities) of specific strengths.

360 degrees. Character strengths observed and labeled by others (when accompanied by concrete examples or rationale) are more reflective of actual day-to-day behavior. This is best acquired as direct feedback from several people who know a person well, in different settings

(Linkins et al., 2014). These observers are asked to describe three VIA strengths that they see in a person, with examples. As discussed above, self-report may be more reflective of internal values or beliefs than behavior. In youths, it may be more beneficial to receive such reports from peers and known adults—especially with specific examples—before receiving one's own self-reported VIA-Youth Survey results (M. Linkins, personal communication, March 01, 2014).

Strengths across settings. This exercise involves choosing a signature strength that one would like to use more often in a particular setting; for example, at work, at home or at school (Linkins et al., 2014). First, a plan is created for specific applications of the strength per setting for a designated length of time. A person may predict positive outcomes, and then compare actual positive outcomes. In addition to increasing the use of signature strengths, this exercise also helps increase awareness of the positive benefits of using one's VIA strengths.

Sum of strengths/teams. A person does not exist in isolation, but interacts with others. How do individuals' strengths relate to and contribute to a group or institutions (and vice versa)? Individual VIA strength data is aggregated to determine the strengths of a group (Linkins et al., 2014). A group strength audit is then performed, noting which group strengths are already in use, and which could be cultivated or used in new ways to benefit the group.

ROAD-MAP for all strengths. The ROAD-MAP model can serve as positive interventions for all strengths (Niemiec, 2012b): Reflect, Observe, Appreciate, Discuss, Monitor, Ask and Plan.

Reflected best self. A person may ask or email 10-15 people to write down three examples of times when he made a positive contribution (Fredrickson, 2009). Then, the stories are compiled and analyzed for common themes and insights. Summarize and create a Best Self Portrait, and share the result with significant others.

Clusters of character strengths. Five character strengths have stood out in repeated studies as having a strong correlation with life satisfaction: hope, zest, gratitude, curiosity and love (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Shimai et al., 2006). Three-fourths of people have at least one of these strengths in their top five. In youth, love, gratitude, hope and zest are most correlated with life satisfaction (Peterson & Park, 2009). The character strengths least associated with life satisfaction are humility, creativity, appreciation of beauty & excellence, judgment and love of learning (Park, et al., 2004). This suggests that strengths of the "heart" may be more correlated with well-being than strengths of the "head."

Various character strengths have been associated with satisfaction in college, resilience in the face of physical and psychological disorders, sexual health and general health benefits (Niemiec, 2013b).

Heckman (2001) asserts that to predict success in school (and other domains), non-cognitive skills such as character strengths are at *least* as important as cognitive skills. Peterson and Park (2009) have identified that the five strengths of character: love, hope, gratitude, perseverance and perspective predict which students are most likely to achieve high grade point averages. Character strengths may be even more important for achievement in school than IQ! Self-discipline and perseverance help sustain effort in the face of difficult tasks, and empirically predict higher grades and achievement test scores (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; 2006).

Character strengths in positive education. These interventions can be utilized in business, medicine, schools, psychotherapy, coaching and the military; the example of positive education is used here to demonstrate utilization in one field—as an example. Rather than an external, prescriptive enforcement of rules to instill character strengths, Peterson and Park (2009)

propose describing and nurturing existing strengths in the child, to build upon the positive that is

intrinsically present. Thus, the goal of character education is to assist students to identify and use

their "unique constellations" (p. 4) of character strengths (Linkins, et al., 2014). These traits and

potentials might otherwise not be expressed. The educator's role is to facilitate favorable

conditions for growth. Research so far has found character strengths-based educational practices

sound, with a range of positive outcomes (Linkins, et al., 2014). The Positive Psychology for

Youth and the Strengths Gym (Proctor et al., 2011) programs demonstrated significant effects on

social skills, engagement and learning strengths in the former, and life satisfaction in the latter.

Linkins and his colleagues (2014) document a framework for VIA strengths-based education

There are two methods of education: teaching and cultivating strengths and skills, and

providing a supportive school culture, in which they can be practiced. (Gillham et al. 2013).

Multiple evidence-based programs have demonstrated a good amount of evidence that

interventions in schools to promote resilience, as one area of character strengths, does indeed

benefit the children. Gillham et al. (2013) go on to assert that it is important to teach all the

children, not solely those at high risk: all children need resilience and strengths to overcome

everyday stressors (conflicts, homework, life transitions).

These benefits for the students include significant improvements in emotional

competence, social skills and academic achievement. The benefits extend across socioeconomic,

racial and cultural divisions. In the U.S., about two-thirds of adults think that schools *should* be

responsible for children's emotional, social and behavioral needs in addition to academic

learning (Rose & Gallup, 2007). Common concerns that delegating school time to teach socio-

emotional skills may detract from academic achievement are unfounded; indeed, the opposite is

found—promoting socio-emotional skills in schools not only does not detract, but may even

improve academic achievement (Seligman, et al., 2009). These investigators define positive

education best: there is synergy between positive emotion and learning. Happiness skills can be

taught. Schools should teach skills for happiness along with academics. Positive education is a

scientifically validated approach to ensure that outcomes such as confident, successful and

responsible learners are developed (Waters, 2011).