

# Positive Psychology in Alcoholics Anonymous Literature

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# Positive Psychology virtues such as transcendence (spirituality, gratitude, hope) and humanity (kindness, love, social support) are abundant in AA literature, offering a bridge to resistant clients and skeptical clinicians

## Problem & Significance

### Problem:

- Clinicians:** some bias against AA & people with SUDs (Laudet, 2003); May lack confidence / familiarity with AA (Vaillant, 2005)
- Clients:** abstinence & spirituality in AA may discourage participation (Laudet, 2003)

### Social Significance:

- Clinicians:** 40% of people with a SUD have comorbid mental health issues, yet only half get treatment (Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality [CBHSQ], 2016)
- Clients:** only about 10% of people with SUDs seek professional help (CBHSQ, 2016)

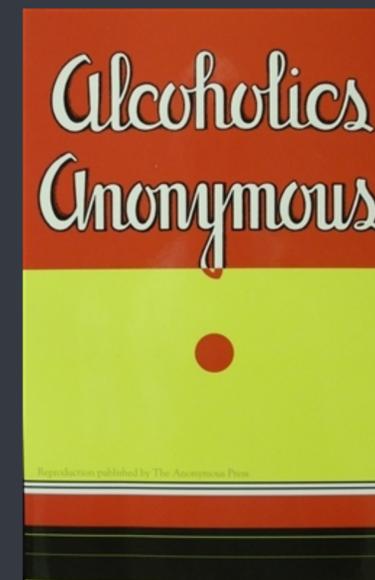
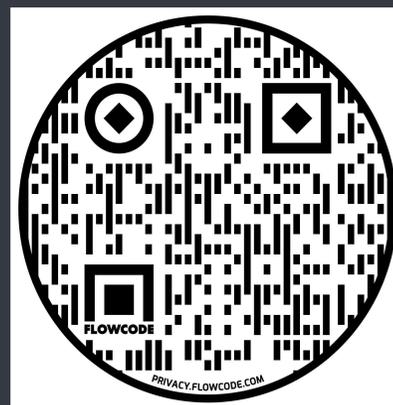
## Literature Review

- AA often more effective than therapy for abstinence; social interaction & emotional support as primary mechanisms (Kelly, Humphreys, & Ferri, 2020).
- Mechanisms for treating SUDs in therapy: hope, optimism, gratitude, increasing confidence & self-worth (Krentzman & Barker, 2016).
- Self-administered, brief positive psychology interventions increased happiness for people in substance use recovery (Hoepfner et al., 2019).
- AA/NA members higher in gratitude = more engaged in 12-steps, less stressed, better physical health, & increased social support (LaBelle & Edelstein, 2018).
- AA literature predates modern positive psychology theory; hope, optimism, gratitude, and self-worth are present in AA.
- Positive psychology consists of 6 virtues (Park et al., 2004): Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, Transcendence, & Wisdom/Knowledge, 24 strengths

## Hypotheses

- Gratitude & spirituality/religion will be most common positive psychology themes in AA literature.
- Strengths of Transcendence will be most identified by the expert panel as being related to AA literature.

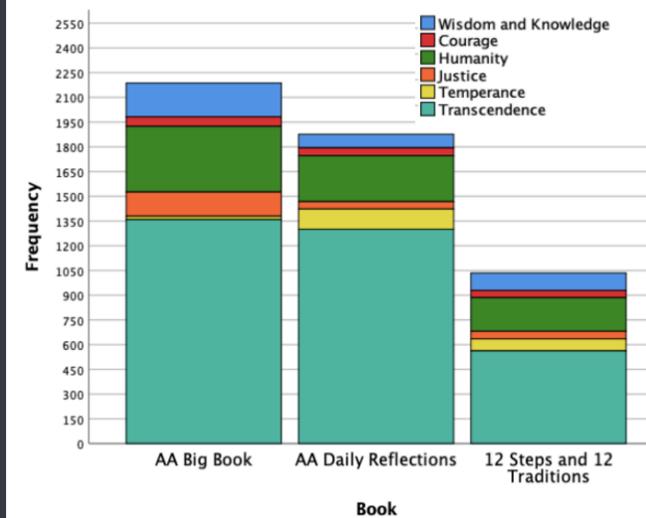
**Follow link for expanded results, including breakdowns of each virtue by Strengths of Character, all searched terms, and expert panel data:**



## Methods

- Conducted content analysis of The Big Book, 12 Steps & 12 Traditions, & Daily Reflections using NVivo 12 software
- 24 Strengths of Character and synonymous terms searched and recorded by frequency for each book
- 24 Strengths of Character grouped into six virtue categories, e.g. virtue of Transcendence included strengths of Beauty, Gratitude, Hope, Humor, Religion/Spirituality
- Surveyed expert panel of current and former AA members; 100% of respondents identified all six virtues, 100% identified gratitude and spirituality, 80% identified hope in AA literature

## Results



	The Big Book	Daily Reflections	12 Steps and 12 Traditions
Courage	58	48	43
Humanity	398	278	205
Justice	147	45	46
Temperance	20	123	73
Transcendence	1359	1300	562
Wisdom	205	82	106

## Discussion

- AA may be effective for some in creating community & maintaining abstinence (Kelly et al., 2020), but for others strict abstinence & religious/spiritual focus may be unappealing (Laudet, 2003).
- Increasing gratitude, hope, optimism, self-worth, & confidence have been shown to improve outcomes for people in recovery (Krentzman & Barker, 2016; LaBelle & Edelstein, 2018).
- Positive psych constructs appear throughout AA literature providing evidence-based therapy for clients who are familiar with AA but have struggled with attendance or the main tenets of 12 step programs.
- Links between positive psychology & potential for positive treatment outcomes for those in recovery may help guide treatment & increase clinician's confidence in working with this population.