

# The Three Female Characters in *The Braid Under the Spotlight: A Character Strengths Analysis Through the Lens of Positive Psychology\**

*Saç Örgüsü* Adlı Eserdeki Üç Kadın Karakterin İncelemesi: Pozitif Psikolojideki Karakter Güçleri Bakımından Bir İrdeleme

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ABSTRACT

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Positive psychology is a consequential movement that emphasises the positive aspects of individuals. Over the past few years, there is a marked increase in the number of studies on positive psychology in literature. In this sense, understanding character strengths, which are among the building blocks of positive psychology, is crucial. In this study, Laetitia Colombani's *The Braid* was examined in terms of character strengths in positive psychology. Employing the lens of character strengths, the lives of three women in the Colombani's work were analysed, to offer a better understanding of the concept in question as well as to underscore its importance in our daily lives. This study is based on document analysis method, which is one of the qualitative research approaches. The data of the study were entered into QDA Miner Lite 3.0 programme and analysed. As a result, it was discovered that there were a total of 151 examples falling under 13 character strengths: hope, spirituality, courage, love, fairness, leadership, open-mindedness, love of learning, humility, curiosity, appreciation of beauty, gratitude, and creativity. Consequently, it seems viable to argue that the work *The Braid* contains examples of character strengths. The findings are discussed in the light of the literature, followed by implications for further research and limitations.

**Keywords:** *character strengths, document analysis, positive psychology, qualitative research*

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ÖZ

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Pozitif psikoloji bireylerin olumlu yanlarını ön plana çıkararak önemli bir akımdır. Alanyazın incelendiğinde son yıllarda pozitif psikoloji ile ilgili yapılan çalışmaların arttığı görülmektedir. Pozitif psikolojinin temel yapı taşlarından olan karakter güçlerinin anlaşılması ise son derece önemlidir. Bu çalışmada ise Laetitia Colombani'nin "*Saç Örgüsü*" adlı eseri pozitif psikolojide yer alan karakter güçleri açısından incelenmiştir. Kitapta yer alan üç kadının (Smite, Giulia, Sarah) yaşamları karakter güçleri merkeze alınarak değerlendirilmiştir. Karakter güçlerinin daha iyi anlaşılması amaçlanmış ve yaşam içerisindeki önemi ortaya koyulmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu çalışma nitel araştırma yaklaşımlarından olan doküman analizi yöntemine dayanmaktadır. Çalışmanın verileri, QDA Miner Lite 3.0 programına yüklenmiş ve analiz gerçekleştirilmiştir. Yapılan analiz sonucunda umut, maneviyat, cesaret, aşk, hakkaniyet, liderlik, açık fikirli olma, öğrenme aşkı, alçakgönüllülük, merak, güzelliği takdir etme, minnettarlık ve yaratıcılık olmak üzere toplam 13 karakter gücünde 151 örneğin olduğu görülmüştür. Araştırma sonucunda, "*Saç Örgüsü*" adlı eserin karakter güçlerinden örnekleri içerdiği söylenebilir. Bulgular alanyazın ışığında tartışılmış, öneriler ve sınırlılıklara yer verilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *doküman incelemesi, karakter güçleri, nitel araştırma, pozitif psikoloji*

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## INTRODUCTION

Psychology is a major scientific discipline that has largely dealt with the mental disorders of individuals from past to present. Especially after World War II, psychology has focused heavily on pathology and the treatment of the negative aspects of the individual (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, it can be argued that psychology focuses more on the negative aspects of humans than on their positive aspects. This may be because negative emotions and experiences can be more urgent and often reflect urgent problems or objective dangers, which can be strong enough to force people to pay attention, stop, think about their behaviour, and change their actions if necessary (Baumeister et al., 2001; Gillham & Seligman, 1999; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Rand, and Snyder (2003), in their research of the studies carried out between 1872 and 2003, stated that the studies on the concepts that are described as negative have received much more citations than the studies on the positive concepts. However, psychology does not aim to study only negative situations, pathology, and weakness; it also aims to scientifically reveal our positive qualities, strengths, and virtuous structures (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology, on that basis, has attracted attention by highlighting the strengths of individuals. In other words, positive psychology has moved away from the approach of “repairing” the “broken” and has turned to revealing and developing the existing strengths of human nature (Seligman et al., 2005).

Positive psychology's focus on the positive has also increased interest in studying virtue and good character (Biswas-Diener, 2006). The study of character strengths, the investigation of associated traits, the design of longitudinal studies, and the implementation of experimental interventions have also significantly shaped positive psychology (Kabakçı, 2016). Indeed, Peterson and Seligman (2004) introduced 6 observable virtues and 24-character strengths, which constitute their subcategories, to the literature. The fact that character strengths focus on universal virtues and analyse these virtues comprehensively (Nofle et al., 2011) is a sign that they are highly inclusive and useful. *Table 1* presents the six virtues and 24-character strengths with their definitions:

An analysis of literature has highlighted the fact that character strengths have positively significant correlation with life satisfaction (Allan & Duffy, 2014; Gander et al., 2012; Lounsbury et al., 2009; Peterson & Park, 2011), and psychological resilience (Hutchinson et al., 2010); and also have negatively significant correlation with depression (Gillham et al., 2011; Mongrain & Anselmo-Matthews, 2012), and stress (Duan et al., 2015). Accordingly, it can be said that each character strength has a very important place in increasing the subjective well-being of individuals.

**Table 1**

*The classification of 6 virtues and 24 character strengths*

<b>Virtue and Strength</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>1 - Wisdom and Knowledge</b>	<b>Cognitive strengths that enable knowledge acquisition and use</b>
Creativity	Thinking of new and productive ways to get things done
Curiosity	Being interested in the ongoing life
Judgment (Open-mindedness)	Ability to think about events and evaluate them in every respect
Love of learning	Mastering new skills, topics, and areas of knowledge
Perspective	Ability to provide wise counsel to others
<b>2 - Courage</b>	<b>Emotional strengths include exercising the will to accomplish goals in the face of internal or external opposition</b>
Bravery	Overcoming fears and realizing own potential
Honesty	Telling the truth and presenting oneself sincerely
Perseverance	Undaunted by threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain
Zest	Approaching life with excitement and energy
<b>3 - Humanity</b>	<b>Interpersonal strengths that involve “tending and befriending” others</b>
Kindness	Doing good deeds and favours to others
Love	Valuing close relationships with others
Social intelligence	Being aware of motives and feelings of self and others
<b>4 - Justice</b>	<b>Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life</b>
Fairness	Treating everyone the same according to notions of fairness and justice
Leadership	Organizing group activities and seeing that they happen
Teamwork	Ability to work well as a member of a group or team
<b>5 - Temperance</b>	<b>Protective strengths against excess</b>
Forgiveness	Forgiving those who have done wrong
Humility	Letting one’s achievements speak for themselves
Prudence	Being careful about one’s choices, not saying or doing things that may later be regretted
Self-regulation	Ability to regulate what you feel or do
<b>6 - Transcendence</b>	<b>Strengths provide meaning and forge connections to the larger universe</b>
Appreciation of beauty and excellence	Recognizing and appreciating beauty, virtue, and/or masterful performance in all domains of life
Gratitude	Being aware of and grateful for the good things that happen
Hope	Expecting the best and working to achieve it
Humour	Liking to laugh and tease, bringing smiles to others
Spirituality	Having coherent beliefs about the meaning and higher purpose of life

(Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

The discovery of virtues and character strengths can be influenced by many factors. One of these factors is reading novels, which also has an important role in psychology. For example, in world literature, we can find character strengths such as bravery and curiosity in Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*, perseverance in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*, forgiveness, humility, and prudence in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, love and hope in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, and leadership and self-regulation in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. On that basis, one might hold the view that understanding character strengths is becoming increasingly important. A review of related literature revealed that there are several studies employing this lens: In a study conducted by Işık et al. (2019), character strengths were examined in 100 fundamental works that are recommended for primary and secondary school students in Türkiye by the Ministry of National Education (MEB). As the findings of the study reveal, the most emphasised character strength turns out to be loving while the least emphasised character strength is forgiveness. In another study, the work *Mesneviden Hikayeler* (Eng. *Selected Stories from Masnavi*) was examined in terms of character strengths, and it was seen that the character

strengths of originality, open-mindedness, curiosity, perseverance, and humour were the most common (Aktu, 2023). As the findings of the above-mentioned studies reveal, there is an ongoing need for concrete examples on character strengths in literature, due to the limited number of studies conducted with this aim.

In the same vein, another work that can help us discover character strengths is Laetitia Colombani's book, *The Braid*. This study aims to provide a better understanding of the concepts by exemplifying the lives of three female characters in the work *The Braid* in terms of virtues and character strengths. The storyline of the work consists of the lives of three different women in three different countries and the way they cope with the challenges they face in their lives. It is considered that the incorporation of such analyses in psychology with an interdisciplinary approach may be beneficial in understanding the concepts of positive psychology and will allow these studies to become more widespread.

## METHOD

### Research Design

Document analysis, a qualitative research method, is used in this study. It allows for a systematic and meticulous analysis of the content of written documents (Wach, 2013). Since no human subjects are studied, fewer ethical problems are encountered in document analysis. There is no requirement to obtain permission to use published/released content such as books, films, series, videos, etc. that are considered to be in the public domain (Lambert, 2019).

### Data Sources

The sample of this study consists of three female characters in Laetitia Colombani's novel *The Braid*. The criterion sampling method was used in creating the study group of the research. Criterion sampling is defined as the identification of an important criterion by the researchers and the inclusion of situations that meet this criterion in the sample (Patton, 2018). In this study, the selection of a book that would allow for a detailed analysis of virtues and character strengths, which are important concepts in positive psychology, had an impact on sampling.

*La Tresse*, written by Laetitia Colombani, was originally published in French in 2017. Later, it was translated into English under the title *The Braid* and published in 2019. It was translated into Turkish by Gülşah Ercenk and published in 2020. The work consists of 183 pages. The ISBN number of the work is 978-605-82766-6-6. It can be stated that the text appeals to a wide range of readers thanks to its plain language and didactic nature. Dialogues in the book were used as data in the research (Colombani, 2017). The attention-grabbing work strikes the reader with its storyline, which is shaped around the difficulties faced by three different women living in three different countries and their ways of coping with them. One of the main characters of the book,

Smita, belongs to the Dalits *jait* (the lowest category of the caste system) in India. She has no education and works in jobs such as cleaning latrines. Smita, who does not want her daughter to be like her, struggles for her daughter’s education. The second main character of the book is Giulia, who tries to keep the family workshop afloat following her father’s illness. Giulia’s struggle to cope with the debts of the workshop is described in detail in the book. The third main character is Sarah, who has a successful career. Later in the book, however, it is revealed that Sarah is fighting cancer. This work has been chosen because it provides strong examples of character strengths in terms of lived experiences, inner strengths, and resilience of the characters. It is thought that the work will provide individuals with an opportunity to deeply examine their character strengths, which are among the concepts of positive psychology, as well as providing inspiring examples of how to cope when they encounter similar difficulties in their own lives. Additionally, examining character strengths through this work can help readers identify and reinforce these strengths in their own lives. The details of the analysed work, *The Braid*, are provided in *Table 2* below.

**Table 2**

*Details of the braid*

Title	<i>The Braid (EN)</i>	<i>Saç Örgüsü (TR)</i>
Author	Laetitia Colombani	
Date of Publication	2019	2020
Edition	-	13 <sup>th</sup>
Number of Pages	150 (eBook version)	185
Publisher	Atria	Yan Pasaj
Translator	-	Gülşah Ercenk

### Data Collection Tools

Before the data collection phase, Peterson and Seligman's (2004) classification of virtues and character strengths was taken into consideration and a character strengths form was created to provide an in-depth examination. In the form, virtues, character strengths, frequency and percentage values of character strengths are respectively provided. In the findings section, the table of frequencies and percentages offers a detailed presentation of the above-mentioned data.

### Analysis of Data

The study began with the selection of a literary work that would lend itself well for the analysis of character strengths in positive psychology. Laetitia Colombani's *The Braid* was selected, read, and analysed in detail by three researchers. As a result of the analysis, the lives of the three female characters in the work were matched with character strengths. The Turkish translation of the work was read by three researchers. Both Turkish and English translations of the work were read and analysed in detail by the researcher who has expertise in English

Language and Literature (ELL). Quotations that were thought to be examples of character strengths were compared in both languages. The work was read at least twice by the researchers and the categories expressing character strength were identified. A record of the character strength and the quotation it is attributed to is kept for each category identified. Subsequently, a comparison of the character strengths identified by the researchers, with their respective quotations, was made. Quotations about which the researchers were undecided were re-read. Whether the found examples lend themselves well to an analysis of character strengths was decided only after a consensus was reached by the researchers. In addition to consensus, disagreements between the experts were scored, based on which code conformity was calculated. Detailed information on this calculation can be found in the "Validity and Reliability" section. As a result of the analyses, the experiences of the three female characters in the work were matched with character strengths. In this vein, each character strength was handled as a individual category. A table of frequencies was created by systematically matching the quotations in the work with the listed character strengths. Subsequently, the character strengths in line with the expressions chosen by the researchers were noted, as well as the page numbers. The research data was entered into the QDA Miner Lite 3.0 programme by the researchers and a content analysis was carried out. Content analysis is defined as a summarizing method that involves dividing a text into codes and themes (Karadeniz et al., 2020). A total of 151 codes were identified in the study.

**Validity and Reliability.** Validity in qualitative research is related to the unbiased presentation of the reality as it is. At the same time, interpretations and categories should overlap with the reality (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018; Karadeniz, Büyüköztürk, Akgün, Demirel, & Kılıç-Çakmak, 2020). Therefore, direct quotations were used in the current study. Validity and reliability analyses were carried out by considering the criteria of consistency, credibility and verifiability. Firstly, in order to ensure consistency, the codes were compared by the three researchers as a result of the association of character strengths with the work titled *The Braid*. The code agreement between the researchers and experts was calculated. The formula "Reliability = 100 X Number of Agreements / Number of Agreements + Number of Disagreements" was used and the result was found as 92%. Since the value obtained is above 80%, it can be said that the codes are reliable (Miles & Huberman, 1994). At the same time, care was taken to ensure consistency by including direct quotations from the work (Creswell, 2014). In order to meet the credibility criterion, the ELL expert researcher carried out a comparative analysis of the English and Turkish translations of the work. So as to ensure the verifiability criterion of the study, the data were kept in computer environment and uploaded to QDA Miner Lite 3.0 programme. While presenting the findings, the quotations are tabulated and their interpretations are given.

## FINDINGS

The themes related to the character strengths in *The Braid* were classified and presented in Table 3 below.

**Table 3**

*The distribution of virtues and character strengths*

Theme	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Transcendence	Hope	41	27.1
Transcendence	Spirituality	40	26.2
Courage	Bravery	20	13.1
Humanity	Love	9	5.9
Justice	Fairness	9	5.9
Justice	Leadership	5	3.3
Wisdom and Knowledge	Judgment	5	3.3
Wisdom and Knowledge	Love of learning	5	3.3
Temperance	Humility	4	2.7
Wisdom and Knowledge	Curiosity	4	2.7
Transcendence	Appreciation of beauty and excellence	3	2.7
Transcendence	Gratitude	3	1.9
Wisdom and Knowledge	Creativity	3	1.9
<b>Total</b>		<b>151</b>	<b>100</b>

### Character Strengths in Positive Psychology and Evaluation of Some Quotations from the Book *The Braid*

Positive psychology focuses on identifying and cultivating individuals' strengths and virtues (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The emphasis on strengths in positive psychology has led to an increase in the number of research on virtues and character strengths. On that basis, 6 observable virtues and 24-character strengths, which constitute their sub-categories, have been introduced to the literature (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In this content-analytical section, character strengths that have a higher frequency than 3% will be explored based on various quotations from *The Braid*.

#### 1. Transcendence / Hope

Hope, the first of the character strengths examined, represents a cognitive, emotional, and motivationally optimistic stance toward the future. It activates actions such as thinking about the future, expecting desired events to occur, and acting in line with coherent beliefs (Martinez-Marti, 2014; Park et al., 2004). In the book *The Braid*, the hopeful outlook of the characters towards the difficulties they face in their lives shows that having a hopeful point of view increases their capacity to overcome negative situations and nourishes their inner strength.

*She may eat rat meat, but she will learn how to read. (Smita, p. 27)*

*She thinks of their condition in life; she tells herself that they are poor now, but that perhaps, one day, Lalita will own a car. The thought makes her smile and gives her strength. Her daughter's life will be better than hers, thanks to the offering they are making here and now. (Smita, p. 126)*

*For their sake, she wanted to remain positive, just like her father. He would wake from the coma, she was certain of that. He would take his place at the helm of the workshop once again. This was just an interlude, she told herself, a moment suspended in time. (Giulia, p. 44).*

*Giulia is no longer nine years old. Her father's Vespa will never come back, but she knows now that the future is full of promise. Now, the future is hers. (Giulia, p. 130)*

*Gazing at her reflection in the glass, Sarah knows one thing: she is going to live. She will see her children grow up. She will see them become adolescents, adults, and parents. More than anything, she wants to know what their likes and dislikes will be, their talents and skills, their aptitudes, and their loves. She will accompany them through life, and be the attentive, tender, benevolent mother at their side. (Sarah, p. 134)*

## 2. **Transcendence / Spirituality**

One of the other character strengths explored in the book is spirituality. It is defined as having coherent beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life. Spirituality concerns a non-physical dimension of life. Although the contents vary in each culture, there is often a concept of divine and sacred power (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In the work titled *The Braid*, it is seen that the characters try to cope with the difficulties in their lives by drawing strength from their spirituality, creating a source of internal resilience.

*Smita has often told her about this city, a place of pilgrimage to which she had been brought several times as a child. Together, she and her parents had completed the Panchatirthi Yatra, an itinerary that involves bathing in five places along the sacred river, in a specific order. (Smita, p. 84)*

*It's a tradition dating back thousands of years: to offer your hair is to renounce all vanity, all sense of self, to lay yourself bare and come before the god in total humility. (Smita, p. 124).*

*More than anything, she believed in the protection of Vishnu, to whom she had addressed all her prayers, morning and night, since childhood. (Smita, p. 52)*

*She never prayed, but she felt the need to collect her thoughts. (Giulia, p. 91)*



### 3. Courage / Bravery

Bravery is defined as overcoming your fears and realizing your potential. A brave person has the ability to deal with problems, pain, and difficulties (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In the work titled *The Braid*, it is possible to observe that the characters face not only physical dangers but also various emotional risks. As one might argue, they take courageous steps to change both their own lives and the lives of those around them.

*Lalita had not given in. She had said no. Smita feels proud of her daughter. This six-year-old child, barely taller than the stool the schoolteacher sat on, had looked the Brahmin in the eyes and said, "No." He had caught hold of her and caned her in the middle of the class, in front of all the others. Lalita hadn't cried, hadn't shouted out, she hadn't made a sound. (Smita, p. 41)*

*But Giulia wanted to believe. The internet had made the world a much smaller place. Distance meant nothing; the world fitted in the palm of their hands today, like the globe lamp they had been given when they were children. India was so close – a whole subcontinent on their doorstep. She had studied the prices at length, she knew what to pay and what to charge, and her scheme was workable. All it took was courage and faith. She had both. (Giulia, p. 121-122)*

### 4. Humanity / Love

Another character strength concept in positive psychology is love. Encompassing mental, emotional, and behavioural stances towards other people, love is defined as the value individual places on their close relationships with others. It is a strength that makes individuals feel safe while the lack of it can cause distress in them (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In the book *The Braid*, it is possible to observe that the characters form deep bonds in their relationships thanks to their character strength of love. It can therefore be concluded that the strengthening effect of love extends beyond romantic relationships to encompass all human relations.

*She went back to the library the next day, secretly hoping to meet him again. (Giulia, p. 46)*

*He lifted his eyes to her as if he had been waiting. At that moment, Giulia felt her heart leap. (Giulia, p. 47)*

*Sarah contemplates her reflection. Suddenly it seems this hair is restoring the things she has lost. Her strength, her dignity, her determination, the things that made her the woman she was. Sarah, proud and beautiful. She feels ready. (Sarah, p. 134)*

## 5. Justice / Fairness

The character strength of fairness is defined as treating everyone within the framework of the same concepts of rights and justice. It refers to treating everyone in the same manner and underlines the necessity that individuals should act by leaving their prejudices aside when doing the right thing (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). In *The Braid*, it is seen that the characters do their best to make the right decisions by adopting a fair point of view. One might thus hold the view that they strengthen their social ties by approaching the people around them fairly.

*Smita curses a society that crushes its weakest members, its women, its children, and the very people it should protect. (Smita, p. 42)*

*And yet the government promised toilets, right across the country. They have not come here. In Badlapur, as elsewhere, people defecate in the open. The ground is filthy, everywhere: the streams and rivers, the fields, polluted with tons of excrement. Sickness spreads like wildfire. The politicians know it: what people want, before reforms or social equality, are toilets. The right to defecate with dignity. In the villages, many women are forced to wait until nightfall, to go out into the fields, exposing themselves to the risk of attack. The most fortunate have a corner set aside in their yard, or at the back of their house: a simple hole in the ground, euphemistically described as a "dry latrine." These are the latrines that the Dalit women come to empty every day, barehanded. Women like Smita. (Smita, p. 9)*

## 6. Justice / Leadership

Designing group activities and seeing that they happen is explained within the scope of character strength of leadership (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). As can be seen in *The Braid*, the main characters in the book highlight their leadership qualities and act as a source of motivation by guiding other characters. It is therefore deduced that they take on leadership roles as a response to the struggles they face in their lives.

*It is true, we must think of the workers, she said, that is a question of honour and respect. (Giulia, p. 22)*

*Women were in the majority further down the ranks, but Sarah was the only one to have made partner in a firm that had a reputation for machismo. (Sarah, p. 19)*

*It was the same at work: she always had a head start over the others, that's what had enabled her to rise so fast. She left nothing to chance. She always planned. (Sarah, p. 36)*

## 7. Wisdom and Knowledge / Judgment

The character strength of judgment (open-mindedness) is defined as the ability to think about events and evaluate them in every respect. An important component of empathy, judgment

is also considered to be a way of thinking critically (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). As one might hold, in the book *The Braid*, the characters display a flexible way of thinking in the face of the difficulties they experience and are open to new situations. It can be said that they strengthen their relationships by valuing different perspectives.

*Tradition will lead us to ruin, replied Giulia. The accounts are perfectly clear: the workshop will close in a month, at most. We need to rethink the production process, and open it up to supplies from elsewhere. Accept this changing world and change with it. Family firms that refuse to move with the times are shutting down one after the other in Sicily. We need to expand our horizons, and look further afield, it's a matter of survival! Adapt or die, there is no other choice. (Giulia, p. 120-121)*

### **8. Wisdom and Knowledge / Love of learning**

Mastering new skills, situations, and areas of knowledge are explained within the scope of character strength of love of learning. It is known that individuals with a high love of learning experience positive emotions in the face of new knowledge and skills, even in situations of disappointment (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). One might express the view that the characters in the book consider the difficulties they experience as new learning opportunities. In this context, it can be argued that the characters in *The Braid* are open to new information and lifelong learning processes.

*Sarah had read a great many personal stories in forums and blogs online. Sometimes, she almost felt she was part of a club, an enlightened band of women who knew, and who had gone through it. (Sarah, p. 131)*

## **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Recognizing character strengths protects the individual against mental disorders (Boniwell, 2012). Therefore, it is important to discover and develop strengths. Character strengths are positively related to variables such as life satisfaction, resilience (Kabakçı, 2013), subjective well-being (Gillham, et al., 2011), and academic success (Güler, 2018; Gülbahar, 2019) and are an important predictor of happiness (Park et al., 2004; Demirci, 2017). Therefore, it is extremely important to better understand character strengths and to concretize them through examples.

An analysis of literature revealed a number of studies analysing other works in terms of character strengths. These studies, however, examine the works tailored towards preschool, primary and secondary school students (Aktu, 2023; Çetiner-Akalın & Murat, 2024; Işık et al., 2019). There is no such limitation in the current study. It is considered that the findings of this

study can be instrumented for teaching purposes, especially within the scope of positive psychology education, in undergraduate programmes of Guidance and Psychological Counselling.

In *The Braid*, the life struggles of Smita, Giulia, and Sarah contain many examples of character strengths, which serve as one of the most fundamental concepts of positive psychology. In their order of frequency, the main character strengths in *The Braid* turn out to be hope, spirituality, bravery, love, fairness, leadership, judgment, and love of learning, based on the analysis conducted in light of these examples.

Smita, one of the main characters of the book, is one of the Dalits at the bottom of the caste system in India. She has never gone to school and she cleans places called latrines for a living. She struggles for her daughter to study because she does not want her daughter to be like her. It can be argued that Smita is a brave and open-minded character who is very devoted to her religious beliefs and rituals. Smita's cognitive, emotional, and motivational optimistic stance towards the future of her daughter and herself indicates the presence of hope, one of the character strengths (Petersen & Seligman, 2004). Hope is closely associated with life satisfaction and happiness in many cultures (Buschor, 2013; Martinez-Marti, 2014; Park et al., 2004). Smita's hopeful outlook towards her daughter's education, her open-mindedness despite the opposition of the people around her, her belief that God will protect her and her daughter, her sacrifice of her daughter's hair to God for the sake of this belief, her daughter's courage despite their difficult life, her rebellious attitude towards the society that oppresses children and women exemplify the character strengths of hope, spirituality, bravery, love, fairness, and judgment.

The second main character of the book is Giulia, who tries to keep their family business, —the workshop— running in the absence of their ill father. In the book, the readers hear about Giulia's struggle to save the workshop from its debts. Throughout the plot, Giulia takes risks and faces her fears, a lot of pain, and hardship while realizing her potential. She is depicted as a character who loves her job and overcomes difficulties successfully. Giulia's belief that her father will recover, her need to pray in the face of what she has experienced, her risk-taking to save the workshop, her feelings for her lover, her concern for the future of her employees, and her effort to go beyond the limits in her job contain many examples related to character strengths of hope, spirituality, bravery, love, love of learning and leadership.

A truly successful professional, Sarah is the third main character of the book. As the storyline proceeds, Sarah learns that she has cancer. Sarah's belief in overcoming her illness, her ability to see her beauty after losing her hair, the fact that she is the first woman to be promoted in a firm infamous for machismo, and her combatant nature can be explained by her character strengths of hope and love.

Developing character strengths and virtues plays an important role in an individual's life and provides a number of benefits. A good character can be defined as having moral values, honesty, responsibility, empathy, and a sense of justice. The development of these virtues contributes to the personal development of the individual. It has a positive effect on the development of young adults. At the same time, it is known that it can have positive effects on individuals such as academic achievement, tolerance towards differences, leadership, kindness, altruism and caring, and protect them from negative effects such as limiting or preventing problems (Park & Peterson, 2009). Although there is a limited number of studies on character strengths in the literature, it is seen that character strengths are associated with positive outcomes in existing studies (Gillham et al., 2011). Having a strong character allows the individual to realize and develop their inner strengths and maximize their potential. A good character plays a fundamental role in human relationships. A trustworthy, understanding, and helpful character helps to establish strong and lasting interpersonal connections. It can be proposed from a wider perspective that individuals with strong character tend to contribute positively to their society. Consequently, developing character strengths and virtues can contribute to the holistic development of the individual. Therefore, cultivating these virtues can lead an individual to live a more fulfilling life and make a more positive impact on their environment.

The book *The Braid* contains many of the character strengths of positive psychology, while the experiences of the characters act as concrete examples of these strengths in many parts of the book. For that matter, it is possible to take the stance that this study can be a rich teaching material for teaching positive psychology.

This study also has several limitations. This analysis is limited to the evaluation of the positive psychology character strengths of hope, spirituality, courage, love, fairness, leadership, open-mindedness, and love of learning, which have the highest frequency in the work. In other words, not all character strengths were included in the study. Moreover, the scope of the analysis is limited to the novel in question. However, it is thought that effective teaching materials can be created by analysing other texts, such as plays and films, in future studies.

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## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

### Giriş

Psikoloji geçmişten günümüze çoğunlukla bireylerin ruhsal rahatsızlıklarını ele alan önemli bir bilim dalı olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Özellikle İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrası psikoloji, ağırlıklı olarak patolojiye ve bireyin olumsuz yönlerini tedaviye odaklanmıştır (Seligman ve Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Bununla birlikte psikolojinin insanın olumsuz yönlerine, olumlu yönlerine kıyasla daha fazla odaklandığı söylenebilir. Ancak psikoloji sadece kötü durumları, patolojiyi ve zayıflığı çalışmayı amaç edinmemiştir; aynı zamanda pozitif özelliklerimizi, güçlü taraflarımızı ve erdemli yapılarımızı bilimsel olarak ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir (Seligman ve Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Bu durumlardan hareketle ortaya çıkan pozitif psikoloji bireylerin güçlü yönlerini ön plana çıkararak ilgileri üzerine çekmeyi başarmıştır (Seligman vd., 2005). Bir başka deyişle pozitif psikoloji, "bozuk" olanı "tamir etme" yaklaşımından ayrılarak insan doğasının var olan güçlü yanlarını ortaya çıkarmaya ve bu güçlü yanları geliştirmeye yönelmiştir (Seligman, 2005). Pozitif psikolojinin olumluyu merkeze alması, erdem ve iyi karakteri çalışmaya yönelik ilgiyi de arttırmıştır (Biswass-Diener, 2006). Karakter güçlerinin incelenmesi, ilişkili olduğu düşünülen özelliklerin araştırılması, boylamsal çalışmaların tasarlanması ve deneysel müdahalelerin gerçekleştirilmesi pozitif psikolojiye de önemli ölçüde yön vermiştir (Kabakçı, 2016). Erdem ve karakter güçlerinin keşfedilmesinde birçok faktör etkili olabilir. Bu faktörlerden biri ise psikolojinin de önemli bir parçası olan romanlardır. Karakter güçlerini keşfedebileceğimiz bir eser Laetitia Colombani' nin "Saç Örgüsü" kitabıdır. Bu çalışmada, "Saç Örgüsü" eserinde yer alan üç kadın karakterin yaşamlarının erdem ve karakter güçleri bakımından örneklendirerek, kavramların daha iyi anlaşılması amaçlanmıştır.

### Yöntem

Bu çalışmada, nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden doküman analizi kullanılmaktadır. İnsan deneklerle çalışılmaması nedeniyle doküman analizinde daha az etik sorunla karşılaşmaktadır. Şu anda yayınlanmış ve kamu malı olarak kabul edilen kitaplar, filmler, diziler, videolar vb. dokümanları kullanmak için izin alma zorunluluğu bulunmamaktadır (Lambert, 2019). Bu araştırmanın çalışma grubunu Laetitia Colombani' nin "Saç Örgüsü" adlı eserinde yer alan üç kadın (Smite, Giulia, Sarah) karakter oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunun oluşturulmasında ölçüt örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Araştırma verileri, araştırmacılar tarafından QDA Miner Lite 3.0 programına yüklenmiş ve içerik analizi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Nitel araştırmalarda geçerlik, tüm gerçekliğin tarafsız bir şekilde ortaya konulmasıyla ilgilidir. Aynı zamanda yorumlar ve kategorilerin gerçeklikle uyumlu olması gerekmektedir (Kirk ve Miller, 1986; Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2018; Karadeniz vd., 2020). Güvenirliğin belirlenmesi için araştırmacılar ve uzmanlar arasındaki kod uyumu hesaplanmıştır. "Güvenirlik = 100 X Uzlaşma



Sayı / Uzlaşma + Uzlaşmama sayısı” formülü kullanılmış ve sonuç %92 olarak bulunmuştur. Elde edilen değer %80’in üzerinde bulunduğu için kodların güvenilir olduğu söylenebilir (Miles ve Huberman, 1994).

### **Bulgular**

Bulgular sunulurken “Saç Örgüsü” adlı eserde yer alan karakter güçlerine ait temalar sınıflandırılmıştır. Buna ilişkin olarak pozitif psikoloji karakter güçlerinin detaylı bilgilerine ve “Saç Örgüsü” adlı eserden çeşitli alıntılara yer verilerek değerlendirilmiştir. İncelenen karakter güçlerinden ilki olan umut geleceğe yönelik bilişsel, duygusal ve motivasyonel olarak iyimser bir duruşu temsil etmektedir. “Saç Örgüsü” adlı eserde karakterlerin maneviyatlarından güç olarak yaşamlarındaki zorluklarla baş etmeye çalıştıkları ve içsel bir dayanıklılık kaynağı oluşturduğu görülmektedir. Hem kendi hem çevrelerindeki kişilerin yaşamlarını değiştirmeye yönelik cesur adımlar attıkları söylenebilir. “Saç Örgüsü” adlı kitapta karakterlerin aşk karakter gücüyle ilişkilerinde derin bağlar oluşturduğu görülmektedir. Sadece romantik ilişkilerinde değil tüm insan ilişkilerinde karakterleri güçlendiren bir faktör olduğu anlaşılmaktadır. Kitaptaki karakterlerin yaşadıkları olaylara hakkaniyet ile yaklaşarak doğru kararlar almaya çalıştıkları görülmektedir. Kitaptaki ana karakterlerin liderlik özelliklerinin ön plana çıkardıkları ve diğer karakterleri yönlendirerek motivasyon sağladıkları görülmektedir. “Saç Örgüsü” kitabında karakterlerin yaşadıkları zorluklar karşısında esnek bir düşünme biçimi sergiledikleri ve yeni durumlara karşı açık oldukları görülmektedir. Kitaptaki karakterler yaşadıkları zorlukları yeni birer öğrenme fırsatı olarak görmektedir. Bu bağlamda karakterlerin yeni bilgilere açıklığı ve yaşam boyu öğrenme süreçlerine açık oluşları anlaşılmaktadır.

### **Tartışma & Sonuç**

Karakter güçlerinin farkına varmak kişiyi ruhsal bozukluklara karşı korumaktadır (Boniwell, 2012). Bu sebeple, güçlü yönlerin keşfedilmesi ve geliştirilmesi önem arz etmektedir. Karakter güçleri yaşam doyumu, öznel iyi oluş, yılmazlık, akademik başarı gibi değişkenlerle pozitif yönde ilişkili ve mutluluğun önemli bir yordayıcısıdır. (Demirci, 2017; Güler, 2018; Gülbahar, 2019; Park vd., 2004). Bu nedenle karakter güçlerinin daha iyi anlaşılması ve örneklendirilerek somutlaştırılması son derece önemlidir.

Eserde Smita, Giulia ve Sarah’ın hayatlarında verdikleri mücadeleler karakter güçleri açısından pek çok örnek barındırmaktadır. Bu örnekler karakter güçleri açısından incelenmiştir. İnceleme sonucunda eserde en çok umut, maneviyat ve cesur olma karakter güçlerinin bulunduğu görülmüştür. Kitabı ana karakterlerinden biri olan Smita, kast sisteminin en altında yer alan Dalitler’ den biridir. Okula hiç gitmemiş ve kızının kendisi gibi olmasını istemediğinden kızı için mücadele etmektedir. Smita’nın kendisi ve kızı için geleceğe yönelik olarak karakter güçlerinden

umudu ortaya koymaktadır. Umut karakter gücü, çoğu kültürde mutluluk ve hayattan memnun olma ile yakından ilişkilidir (Buschor, 2013; Martinez-Marti, 2014; Park, 2004). Ayrıca, Smita'nın hayatında maneviyat, cesur olma, aşk, hakkaniyet ve açık fikirli olma karakter güçlerinden de örnekler barındırdığı görülmektedir. Kitabın ikinci karakteri sahibi olduğu atölyeyi ayakta tutmaya çalışan Giulia'dır. Giulia'nın işyerini ayakta tutmak için verdiği mücadele, babasının iyileşeceğine olan inancı, yaşadıkları karşısında dua etme ihtiyacı, sevgilisine olan hisleri ve çalışanlarının geleceğini düşünmesi umut, maneviyat, cesur olma, aşk ve liderlik karakter güçlerine dair örnekler yer verildiğini göstermektedir. Kitabın üçüncü karakteri kanser hastası olan Sarah'tır. Hastalığını yenmesine olan inancı ve savaştığı bir kadın olması umut karakter gücüyle açıklanabilir.

Karakter güçleri ve erdemleri geliştirmek, bireyin hayatında önemli bir rol oynar ve bir dizi fayda sağlar. İyi bir karakter, ahlaki değerlere, dürüstlüğe, sorumluluğa, empatiye ve adalet duygusuna dayanır. Bu erdemlerin geliştirilmesi, bireyin kişisel gelişimine katkıda bulunur. Güçlü bir karaktere sahip olmak, bireyin içsel güçlerini fark etmesine, geliştirmesine ve potansiyelini en üst düzeye çıkarmasına olanak tanır. İyi karakter, insan ilişkilerinde temel bir rol oynar. Güvenilir, anlayışlı ve yardımsever bir karakter, sağlam ve kalıcı bağlantılar kurmada yardımcı olur. Toplumsal düzeyde, güçlü bir karaktere sahip bireyler, toplumlarına olumlu bir şekilde katkıda bulunma eğiliminde olduğu söylenebilir. "Saç Örgüsü" kitabının Pozitif psikoloji karakter güçlerinden pek çoğunu içermekte ve karakter güçlerine ilişkin karakterlerin yaşadıklarına kitabın çeşitli sayfalarında yer verilmektedir. Ayrıca, bu çalışmanın Pozitif psikoloji öğretimi sırasında zengin bir öğretim materyali olabileceği düşünülmektedir.