

Living On Purpose: Why Purpose Matters and How to Find It

A Framework for Gen X Women to Thrive

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Advisor: Judy Saltzberg Levick, Ph.D.

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Abstract

Frankl (1963) suggested that we each have a uniqueness that is irreplaceable. Just as no two people have the same set of fingerprints, no two people have exactly the same set of strengths, talents, passions and experiences. Therefore, each person can make a distinct contribution to this world. Each of us has a unique purpose for our lives. People who live their purpose enjoy greater health, life satisfaction and overall well-being (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). However, many people are not living their purpose – and worse yet, they aren't sure what their purpose is. In desperate search for purpose, they are miserable (Steger, 2008). Among this group are Generation X women who have “everything” – more education, successful careers and their own homes - and yet many feel empty inside. Despite achieving more objective success, women today are significantly more depressed than women were 30 years ago (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009). Perhaps women are looking in the wrong places for their own happiness. Positive psychology, the scientific study of well-being finds that meaning is one of the critical aspects of human flourishing (Seligman, 2002, 2011). Akin to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of human needs, the highest need is living beyond oneself toward a greater good – a fate to which one is called. This calling is our life purpose and when living our purpose, we flourish. The first

half of this document reviews existing literature on meaning and purpose, describes the value of purpose, and the consequences when one is “stuck” searching for their purpose. The second half offers a research-based positive psychology program for finding one’s purpose. As such, this work offers tremendous opportunity to empower women, enhance their lives and that of those around them. Moreover, as purpose necessarily supports a greater good, with more people living their purpose, society flourishes.

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Introduction

“The high prize of life, the crowing fortune of (wo)man, is to be born with a bias to some pursuit which finds him in employment and happiness.” - Ralph Waldo Emerson

Why Purpose Matters

To Flourish is to Live our Purpose

For centuries, people have pursued happiness in search of the good life. Aristotle called the highest state of happiness, “eudaimonia,” translated today as “flourishing” (Robinson, 1999). Aristotle stated that we can reach eudaimonia by acting “in accordance with *(our) highest virtue*; and this will be that of *the best thing in us*,” (Ross, 1923, p. 263). The “best thing in us” that Aristotle describes is our individual, distinct potential (Ryff & Singer, 1998). It is our unique gift that we can offer this world – our unique purpose. Just as each snowflake is unique, so is each person. No two people share exactly the same fingerprints – nor do they share the same life purpose. Each person’s potential is unique because no two people have the exact set of strengths, talents, passions, values, vision and experiences. The combination therein allows each person to make his or her unique stamp on this earth. Indeed as Frankl (1963) stated, everyone has a “uniqueness and singleness which distinguishes each individual” (p.79) such that there is “impossibility of replacing” him or her. In this manner, we each have a distinct purpose for why we are on this earth; an exclusive gift that we can offer. As Aristotle explained, living this purpose enables flourishing.

Purpose Fulfills Our Highest Need

Perhaps purpose is so important to flourishing because purpose is a deeply held human need. Maslow (1943) suggested that a human’s highest need is self-actualization. Though the term may sound grounded in selfish interests, Maslow defines self-

actualization as living beyond oneself, working toward a greater good –toward a fate to which one is called (Maslow, 1965). This “calling” is our purpose. As will be described later, this calling comes to us as epiphanies (Pawelski, 2007), as dreams, when modeling others, through tragedy and through proactive search (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

Because our purpose so ingrained into our core selves (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009), it reasons that for those that do have the yearning for such purpose, they often feel lost without it, and depressed and frustrated in search of it (Bronk, Hill, Lapsley, Talib & Finch, 2009; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). While searching for purpose during adolescent and emerging adulthood (before 25) makes us feel hopeful and satisfied, searching for purpose into our adulthood makes us miserable (Bronk et al., 2009). Perhaps this is because our purpose isn’t just a “thing” we’re looking for; but rather, our purpose is an inherent part of who we are. As McKnight and Kashdan (2009) suggest, “purpose is woven into a person’s identity and behavior as a central, predominant theme—central to personality as well” (p. 242.)

It reasons, then, that uncovering one’s purpose – and living it – can lead to enhanced well-being. As Ryff and Singer (1998) state, “purpose in life and personal growth are not contributors to, but in fact defining features of positive mental health” (p. 216). As such, people who have a strong purpose enjoy greater life satisfaction (Bronk et al., 2009; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Purpose helps people feel confident, self-efficacious toward their goals, and resilient to obstacles (Bronk et al., 2009).

Why Purpose for Gen X Women

Enhancing Women’s Lives

In particular, women may benefit from finding their purpose. As will be explored in more depth later, women are twice as likely to be depressed as men (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987) and women's reported happiness has been declining throughout the last 30 years (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009). Moreover, women of Generation X (Gen X women) – defined as born between 1961 and 1981 (Miller, 1999) – face unique challenges and opportunities. This generation gets stereotyped as lost, selfish, and uncertain of goals (Miller, 1999) but as will be discussed in more depth, perhaps this is an unfair judgment. For many of these women who have had all of their “basic” and other needs (Maslow, 1943) met – food and shelter, the safety of nice neighborhoods, loving friends, respect of colleagues – many search for the highest human need of self-actualization. They yearn for their purpose to contribute to the greater good. Gen X women thrive on autonomy and change, they assert their own power, and they are unwilling to do that which isn't meaningful (Kezar & Lester, 2009). Therefore, when they feel stuck in a life (work, relationship, and/or other domain) that they don't find meaningful, their natural female tendency to ruminate (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003) can increase. This can deepen a woman's depression and decrease overall life satisfaction (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003). When one identifies her purpose though, she will likely feel content, motivated and therefore, enjoy greater life satisfaction (Bronk et al., 2009).

A Solution

Gen X Women Finding and Living Their Purpose

The following work provides empirical research and scientifically-based exercises to help Gen X women find and live their purpose – and therefore enjoy greater well-being. Based on the science of positive psychology, the study of well-being and human

flourishing, this work offers a comprehensive case and framework for living one's purpose. The first part describes the construct of "purpose" – what it is, why it matters, how purpose relates to similar constructs, and where purpose is found. The second part provides a comprehensive strength- and research-based guide for Gen X women to uncover their life purpose. Throughout the document, I will share my story of purpose, and stories from other women about how they found their life purpose. Collectively, this piece will be used in career coaching, workshops and as the basis for a future book proposal, all with the goal of helping as many women as possible to identify and live their purpose so that they enjoy a fulfilling and flourishing life.

Background:

“There came a time when the risk to remain tight in the bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.” - Anais Nin

Women and Depression¹

Women's happiness is declining.

Objectively, women today are significantly more successful than women 30 years ago. Women earn significantly more, hold higher positions and are more educated (Blau, 1998). In fact, since the 1980's more females than males have earned associate's, bachelor's and master's degrees. In 2009 alone, more than 57% of all bachelor's degrees, 61% of all master's degrees, and more than half of all doctorate degrees granted in the U.S. were earned by women (Snyder & Dillow, 2010). Given these advances, one might expect women to enjoy greater well-being than their counterparts 30 years ago. However,

¹ Introduction about Women and Positive Psychology written in conjunction with Anna Janeen Pesiridis, MAPP 2011.

women's reported well-being (and happiness) has been declining - and for the first time in decades, women report being less happy than men (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009).

Why is this?

Although hormonal fluctuation is cited as one of the most popular explanations for the significant difference in the depression rate between the sexes, this strictly female phenomenon is open to multiple interpretations and clearly cannot solely account for the 2:1 difference in depression between men and women (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; Seligman, 1991). Rather, a number of explanations are hypothesized, including biology, explanatory style - the way in which one interprets adversity (Seligman, 1990), rumination, role confusion, gender inequality, psychosocial and socioeconomic.

Is it biological? Lykken and Tellegan's (1996) twin study found that approximately 50% of the variance in subjective well-being (SWB) is associated with genetic variation. But how much of one's SWB is determined by his or her sex? Whether you are born a male or a female, as it turns out, accounts for less than 1% of the variation in people's subjective well-being (Myers & Diener, 1995). However, when it comes to depression, it is well-known that women are twice as likely as men to experience depression in their lifetime (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987, 1990, 1994). About 1 in 8 women will develop depression at some point in her lifetime (Mayo Clinic, 2001; Mental Health America, 2011). Onset age of the first depressive episode for women often coincides with puberty, indicating that estrogen and progesterone play a role in brain function, depression, stress, and anxiety (Zender & Olshansky, 2009). However, researchers believe that there is more to women's rate of depression than hormones (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2003).

Is it due to thinking style? In fact, women tend to be more emotive altogether, experiencing more negative and positive affect than men (Seligman, 2002). Women have a tendency to focus attention on their affective states when in a sad or depressed mood, analyzing their mood state and how to get out of it (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987). As such, women are more prone to rumination, which causes increased anxiety and depression (Butler & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1994; Nolen-Hoeksema, Larson, & Grayson, 1999). Conversely, when men get depressed, they tend to distract themselves, which can alleviate their depressive state (Almeida & Horn, 2004). Moreover, women's attention to their negative moods may lead to increased pessimism (Bunce & Peterson, 1997). In fact, Mansour, Jouini and Napp (2006) found that women might be more "pessimistic" than men. Father of positive psychology, Seligman (1978) defines "pessimism" as explaining negative events as permanent, pervasive and personal, called "negative explanatory style" (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasedale, 1978). As Bunce and Peterson (1997), found, negative explanatory may lead to lowered sense of well-being for women, but not for men. For men, negative explanatory style may lead to lowered interpersonal skills. Taken together, women's biological nature may lead to increased levels of depression.

Multiple Depressors a factor: worrying about self, others and relationships.

Another difference between men and women is the type and amount of stressors in their lives. Women are brought up to invest in love, in social relations, and naturally focus more time and energy fostering relationships while men are brought up to invest in personal achievement (Almeida & Horn, 2004; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; Seligman, 1991). Therefore, men are more likely to experience self-focused stressors, while women's stressors include other people, adding more stress to women's lives (Almeida & Horn,

2004). For example, men and women experience similar stress at work (Netterstrom, Conrad, & Bech, 2008); however, the added stress of also caring for intimate relationships, family and others' concerns add to women's stress and tendency toward depression. In a study focusing on causal pathways for depressive disorders, Accortt, Freeman, and Allen (2008) found that women might be at a higher risk of becoming depressed because they place greater value on intimate relationships than their male counterparts. As such, when relationship problems arise (such as arguments ensuing, divorce, separation, perceived social failures, or even a wasted evening on a bad date) women may find themselves focusing attention on the discord and consequently develop depressive symptoms (Accortt et al., 2008; Seligman 1991). These results are consistent with many validated studies that have shown that women are more sensitive than men to social interaction and develop closer and more extensive social networks as a result.

The "Love" Years the Most Challenging

Although depression can occur at any age, it is most common in women during their reproductive years between the ages of 25 and 44 (Kessler, McGonagle, Swartz, & Blazer, 1993; Mayo Clinic, 2010; Mental Health America, 2011; National Institute of Mental Health, 2009). According to Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development stages, these are the "love" years of one's life when someone explores personal relationships and finds "intimacy or isolation." Given that these are also the years when people build their careers, many women today feel additional emotional challenges in trying to balance what can seem to be competing needs. In fact, one of the most frequently cited explanations for why women of this generation experience more depression is role confusion (Mayo Clinic, 2010). Women are simply caught in a

conundrum of how to prioritize their time and lives with a ticking biological clock and interest in a purposeful, successful career. Similarly, work overload and unequal power and status, are also among other commonly found reasons for this generation of women's depression (Butler & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1994; Mayo Clinic, 2010; National Institute of Mental Health, 2009; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1987; Nolen-Hoeksema, 1990).

What's So Special about Generation X Women?

The following document is specifically for Gen X women whose basic needs are met, but are still unhappy. Women who have careers and friends and homes, but still feel emptiness inside. I used to feel this way and know too many women in this predicament. My collaborator² and I are thirty-something year old, successful, unmarried, childless and (yes, in many ways,) stereotypical Generation X Women. We are “those” women who want to “have it all” and have gone to great lengths to achieve amazing things while simultaneously trying to “find” greater meaning and purpose in our lives. *Objectively*, our cohort is doing well, and yet too many of our friends and peers feel *subjectively* depressed. Our peer group has had more opportunity, more success and more depression - and we believe that using positive psychology principles and tools, we can help.

What makes Gen X women different? Well for starters, born to baby boomer mothers who worked, but were not yet wholly accepted into professional careers, Gen X women were the first generation of women that were told we could have any career we wanted. As such, we statistically hold the highest education levels compared to previous generations and to our Gen X male counterparts (Kruger, 1994). As a bi-product of the women's empowerment generation of the 70's and the “breakthrough” generation of the 80's, many Gen X women find themselves working 60-plus hour weeks in their 20's and

² *ibid*

30's (Center for Work-Life Policy, 2002). As a result, Gen X women have postponed marriage and family putting greater focus on their careers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). In fact, more than 50% of 35-year old women in 2002 were childless and more than 80% believed they will be able to get pregnant in their 40s (Center for Work-Life Policy, 2002). Unfortunately, though, more and more women in their mid-thirties find their friends (and themselves) having difficulty getting pregnant, thus making childless women more anxious and potentially more depressed. Most women believe that their lives are better than their counterparts 30 years ago with limitless career opportunities – and they do not want to revert to lowered status; however, the majority of women think added choice makes life more complicated for women (Stevenson & Wolfers, 2009). As Schwartz (2004) finds, having too much choice can lead to increased regret, anxiety and depression.

Gen X women have received their fair share of negative press in blogs and newspaper articles touting that they are selfish, lost and misguided (Miller, 1999). But is this a fair assessment? Gen X is the first living generation that did not have a major world crisis while growing up – no world wars, wide-spread famine or debilitating depression. As such, the women for whom this work is meant have had all of “basic” needs met (Maslow, 1943). For the most part, our generation has had more than enough food, nice housing and the safety of good neighborhoods. We are a generation looking for higher needs – namely, for our life to matter. In many ways, Gen X women are the subjects of a large social experiment in trying to “have” it all. We propose that women can have it all – if they know what “it all” is. In other words, if they know what matters most. Based on positive psychology, the science of well-being and human flourishing, this document will

show women the keys to a flourishing life. We must prioritize that which is most important: investing in our most valued personal relationships³ and knowing our core purpose.

What is Positive Psychology?

Positive psychology was founded on a simple premise: the absence of illness is not wellness. Just as ridding the body of cancer does not make the body healthy, nor does treating depression necessarily make someone thrive. Prior to WWII, psychology had three priorities: curing mental illness, making the lives of all people more productive and fulfilling, and identifying and nurturing high talent (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, after World War II, much of the field's efforts had focused on human pathologies and how to treat them (Peterson, 2006). Positive psychology developed as the call for the field to also understand and build that which enables people, communities, and society to be healthy, to flourish (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

While president of the American Psychological Association in 1998, Dr. Martin Seligman coined the umbrella term, “positive psychology” (Peterson, 2006) with the belief that psychology should be as concerned with virtue as with pathology, as interested in building the best things in life as in repairing the worst, and as concerned with making the lives of all people fulfilling as the field is with healing pathology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Since then, positive psychology has attracted hundreds of millions of dollars in research, garnered thousands of articles in scientific journals and popular press, generated applications in business, education, and even the U.S. military, and the subject is now taught at dozens of universities internationally including the

³ For information on relationships, see “Gen X Women and the Case for Cultivating Relationships” (Anna Janeen Pesiridis MAPP Capstone, 2011)

University of Pennsylvania, Harvard, and University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom.

Positive psychology encompasses three tenants: positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits and positive institutions (Peterson, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The field “promises to improve the quality of life and prevent the pathologies that arise when life is barren and meaningless” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). This may sound like the self-help genre found on the shelves of bookstores worldwide. However, what differentiates positive psychology from popular self-help is the rigorous scientific method that positive psychologists use to understand the complexities of human flourishing.

While positive psychology is descriptive of human flourishing, the content of study – gratitude, resilience, flow, meaning and love – do indeed increase well-being. In fact, many positive psychology interventions have been empirically proven to enhance human flourishing. For example, recording gratitude daily for just one week has been found to increase happiness up to six months (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005). Similarly, using signature strengths in new ways every day for a week was found to increase happiness one month later (Seligman et al., 2005). Moreover, inducing positive emotions has been found to broaden our scope of attention (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), enhance problem-solving skills (Isen, Daubman, & Nowicki, 1987), improve memory (Talarico, Berntsen, & Rubin, 2009) and build resilience (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003) (Berridge, Rockind and White, 2011). In a like manner, performing diverse acts of kindness enhances well-being (Boehm, Lyubomirsky, &

Sheldon, 2008). As Seligman (2011) states, “positive psychology make(s) people happier” (p.2).

Positive Psychology and Purpose for Gen X Women

Generation X women can particularly benefit from positive psychology interventions – and specifically those that help them uncover and live their life purpose. As stated, having an identified life purpose is associated with greater life satisfaction (Bronk et al., 2009). For this reason, Zika and Chamberlain (1992) condone attainment of purpose an essential goal of applied psychology. When someone feels confident that she has the will and knows the pathways to pursue her purpose, her satisfaction with life increases (Bronk et al., 2009).

Following are two parts: the first identifies the benefits of purpose; and the second offers a framework to help a woman uncover her purpose. Collectively, this piece aims to help women thrive and the world around them to flourish.

Part A: Understanding Purpose

“Those only are happy, I thought, who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness, on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art of pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end.” - John Stuart Mill.

Defining Purpose

As John Stuart Mill indicates, perhaps the only way to find true happiness is to pursue an aim larger than oneself – something that benefits the larger good. This is purpose. Purpose is an overarching belief, desire, motivator and guide in one’s life. As Kashdan and McKnight (2009) state, purpose is “a central, self-organizing life-aim” (p. 303). Central in that it is a predominant theme in all aspects of someone’s life, self-organizing in that it provides direction and clarity in resource allocation, and life-aim in

that it allows us to remain resilient during life's adversities. As such, purpose stimulates objectives, guides behaviors, and offers a sense of meaning (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

In this manner, a woman's purpose is her life mission. As Ventegodt, Anderson, and Merrick (2003) state, one's purpose can be seen as her gift to the world, her true nature, her key intention and/or the realization of her full potential. When someone discovers her life purpose and lives it professionally and personally, her life will flourish (Ryff & Singer, 1998).

Furthermore, purpose is unique to each individual. As Frankl (1963) articulated, each person has a distinct contribution to offer the world. No individual can replace another. We each have a potential calling that only we can fulfill (Frankl, 1963; Maslow, 1965). In this manner, fulfilling our purpose is in service to others and the world at large. It is the gift we offer.

Are "Purpose," "Meaning" and "Goals" the Same Thing?

A great deal of literature exists on these various constructs, their different (or similar) definitions and their correlation. Following is an exploration of the literature to clarify the definition of "purpose" henceforth.

Some researchers conflate "meaning" and "purpose" and "goals;" while others see "purpose" as a subset of "meaning" (Damon, Menon & Bronk, 2003) or vice versa. For instance, Reker and Wong (1988) position purpose as one of three tenants of meaning: "the cognizance of order, coherence and purpose in one's existence, the pursuit and attainment of worthwhile goals, and an accompanying sense of fulfillment" (p. 221). Similarly, Baumeister (1991) posits that purpose is one of four aspects of meaning, in

addition to values, efficacy and self-worth. Of course, he defines purpose differently than defined above; he states that purpose is finding meaning in present events.

We make meaning; we have purpose. In the context of this document, purpose refers to a life force (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009), while meaning refers to a feeling, a perspective, a belief, the connection or sense we make (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002). In this manner, meaning is the sense we make of our lives, the belief that our existence has significance (Steger, Frazier, Oishi & Kaler, 2006), and that our life is full of our guiding purpose (Kashdan & Steger, 2007). We make meaning of our lives by framing and reframing the past and present, but purpose is forward looking. It is a compass that provides guidance and an aim at which we pursue in our lives (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). Purpose calls us to the future (Seligman, 2011).

Purpose gives our lives meaning: it can be beyond the self. While M. Steger (personal communication, July 24, 2011), posits that purpose can also be self-focused, many researchers have found purpose to be beyond the self, for larger benefit. Damon, Menon and Bronk (2003) posit that purpose is both meaningful to the self and of consequence to the larger world. As Bronk et al. (2009) suggest, purpose includes a critical beyond-the-self focus, which is not captured in the meaning construct. We consider our lives meaningful when our lives matter (King et al., 2006). And for something to matter, it must matter *to* others, or *for* a larger purpose. A greater sense of purpose that transcends the every day monotony and chaos makes us feel that our lives are meaningful (King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso 2006).

Many sources of meaning; purpose is more central. Meaning in life can arise from multiple sources (Lukas, 1986; Reker, 2000). In fact, in a review of elderly adults'

accounts of life, Kaufman (1986) found that most life stories have between four and six different main themes. Such domains include relationships, life work, service, growth, belief, pleasure/happiness and health (de Vogler & Ebersole, 1980). While each of these is a source of significance in one's life, these sources do not define one's purpose. In other words, purpose is not a series of nouns that describe our roles in life such as "Mother" and "Teacher"; rather, our purpose is a central action phrase that describes how we are shedding light on the world. The more central a purpose is in one's life, the more it influences her actions in all domains, in all thoughts and emotions – and the more she will benefit from having that purpose (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). The key is that each person uniquely constructs her life's meaning around a central purpose (Frankl, 1963).

McKnight and Kashdan (2009) hypothesize that it is possible for someone to have multiple purposes, each in a different domain of life. They find that this may help someone remain resilient if faced with too many obstacles. However, multiple purposes can also be detrimental, as we may spread ourselves too thin and live without focus (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). Living this way is already a challenge for the modern day Gen X woman (Center for Work-Life Policy, 2001). I propose that rather than living with multiple purposes in various domains, we can realize one overarching purpose that is applicable in various domains. Bronk et al. (2009) support this theory. In this manner, we find the overarching theme of our lives. We find the driving mission. For example, an overarching purpose can be to support human growth, to inspire well-being, to serve as a role model for others or to further one's religion – all of which can be lived through domains of relationships, work and service. Granted, this can be challenging to construct. It is worth, it though, as when high in purpose, we enjoy significantly greater

life satisfaction (Diener, Fulita, Tay, & Biswas-Diener, 2011).

Purpose Informs our Goals. Emmons (1999) describes that goals are a source of meaning that offer a sense of purpose. Conversely, Ryff & Singer (1998) find that one derives meaning in life from having a sense of purpose - and investing time and effort into achieving goals related to it. In the Personal Well Being Scale (PWB), Ryff (1989) defines purpose in life as having directedness and related goals; believing that the past and present have relevance; having values that give one's life purpose; and having aims and objectives for living. The good life comes from having a coherent purpose, pursuing attainment of precious goals and the accompanying sense of fulfillment that comes from this congruence (Reker, 2000). We need goals to pursue our purpose and live an accomplished life. In this manner, we can have many goals (Miller & Frisch, 2009) - some short-term (Little, 1983), some longer term and of course, some unrelated to our higher purpose (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). When our goals are in congruence with our purpose, though, that we are happiest; and when we don't live in congruence when we feel discord (Battista & Almond, 1973; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). In this manner, purpose is a generative source of meaning through constant goal setting and achievement that is aligned with our highest mission.

Purpose as Life Work

We can pursue purpose as work (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin & Schwartz, 1997), in our relationships, and/or through volunteer service in the community (Battista & Almond, 1973). As Frankl (1963) states, for some, their unique purpose is more prevalent through parenting, while for others it is vocational achievement. Of course, many people desire to experience purpose in their careers (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). As

Dik and Steger (2008) state, approaching work as an inclusive, cross-culturally relevant experience that originates beyond the self, connects someone with a broader sense of life purpose and in support of “others” can greatly enhance one’s work, life, and overall well-being. Similarly, Wrzesniewski et al. (1997), find that working our calling is fulfilling and gratifying. In fact, Maslow (1968) states that self-actualized people are happy working their purpose, for it makes them love work. The devotion of life to one’s higher purpose is the ultimate value and true of “being” (Maslow, 1965). Because purpose is a guiding life aim, it is compass for our value system and it directs every domain of our life.

Who Needs Purpose?

Not everyone feels like they have a higher purpose – or that they need to find it (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). As McKnight and Kashdan (2009) state, because purpose is somewhat of an abstract concept, some people may not be able to grasp its notion or relevance in their lives. Many others, though, feel purpose in their lives and/or feel a desire to find their purpose (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009).

People vary in when and how they find their purpose. Some people realize their purpose from a young age as they are drawn to entertaining, religious faith or serving others. Others realize their purpose through a personal tragedy, and then find themselves called to help similar persons in need. In this manner, our understanding of our purpose can evolve with time, and can become more evident with time, experiences, self-awareness and wisdom (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). The ways in which people find and live their purpose will be explored throughout this document as stories of women living their purpose are shared.

The Many Names of “Purpose”

This description of language is important because clearly, throughout the literature, these constructs can hold different meanings. For the intention of this document, the distinction being made is that purpose is a higher calling. One finds meaning in life through living her higher purpose; and we pursue our purpose through aligned goals. Purpose, though is an overarching, life mission that is unique to the individual.

Throughout the psychological and philosophical research, various names are assigned to this given definition of “purpose”, including “meaning” (Frankl, 1963; Steger, 2009); “life mission” (Ventegodt et al, 2003); “self-actualization” (Maslow, 1943); and even eudaimonia (Ryff, 1998). Henceforth, I will call this construct of an overarching unique life mission: “purpose”.

My Purpose

My contagious energy and courageous action inspire and encourage others to live their best lives. I help people take the big (and small) risks to discover their purpose, follow their hearts and pursue their passions as life work so that they feel fulfilled and happy.

I believe that we each have a unique purpose on this earth and we’d be happier if we were living it. I live my purpose through my work as a college instructor, career coach, employee engagement consultant, motivational speaker and author. I also live my purpose as a friend, sister and daughter. I hope one day to extend my purposeful action toward being a wife and mother. In other words, my purpose does not change because of the domain. Rather, it guides how I behave in every domain.

Purpose Matters

“This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one”--George Bernard Shaw

What Good is Purpose?

Purpose Keeps People Focused

Purpose is intrinsically motivating, it makes us prioritize our most important goals, it aligns our actions to our dreams, remain focused, and it enhances well-being.

Intrinsic motivation. Purpose is intrinsically motivating (Deci & Ryan, 1995), as we are autonomously driven to pursue it. As opposed to “extrinsic motivation” which encourages us to pursue something because it holds external value or worth (such as parent or partner approval, financial need), “intrinsic motivation” is that which is we pursue because it holds interest, and enjoyment for us in and of itself. When we are intrinsically motivated, we are more likely to grow our capacities and achieve success (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Prioritizing goals. Further, having purpose makes us prioritize our goals. According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), (Deci & Ryan 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000), the more we personally value something, the more autonomous it feels and the more likely we are to consciously adopt it (Brown & Ryan, 2004). Because purpose motivates us intrinsically and is autonomous, we are more able to use our self-control and modify behaviors to ensure that we achieve related goals (Brown & Ryan, 2004). Similarly, Batista and Almond (1973) describe that purpose encourages positive commitment such that it creates a framework through which one views her life and around which one prioritizes action.

Alignment of action to vision. In this manner, purpose encourages intentional alignment of action to vision. In fact, McKnight and Kashdan (2009) find that purpose involves a higher level of cognitive processing in the cerebral cortex – the part of our brain responsible for awareness, consciousness, and thought. When we have higher purpose, we focus our attention and conscious action to pursuing it. In this manner, when we pursue our purpose, it is actually effortless (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). It feels “right” (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House and Sandhal, 2009).

Purpose helps people remain resilient and on course. Viktor Frankl (1963) highlighted the importance of purpose in his work, “Man’s Search for Meaning.” After surviving three years of torture, tyranny and starvation in a Nazi concentration camp, he wrote this book to describe (and perhaps prescribe) the psychology and survival of such trauma. A psychiatrist himself, he found that those prisoners who maintained a larger sense of unique purpose had greater chance of survival. Several others have also found that purpose in life increases resiliency (Benard, 1991; Smith, Tooley, Christopher, & Kay, 2010).

Health Benefits of Purpose

Living our purpose feels good. When someone aligns her life to fulfilling her purpose, she feels great fulfillment in doing so (Battista & Almond, 1973). Action supporting purpose brings great joy and sense of achievement (Bronk et al., 2009). As Valliant (2008) suggests, purpose is in our “limbic hearts” – our positive emotions.

Purpose enhances well-being. Many empirical studies have found that purpose is highly correlated with well-being. Purpose has been measured by the Purpose in Life Test (Crumbaugh & Maholic, 1964), which determines if someone has meaningful goals

around which to organize and integrate her life; the Life Regard Scale (Battista & Almond, 1973), which determines the degree to which someone has meaningful purpose; the Sense of Coherence Scale (Antonovsky, 1993) to measure the degree to which someone believes his or her life is aligned with the world around them (Chamberlain & Zika, 1988); the Personal Meaning Profile (Wong, 1998), which identifies where people find meaning in their lives; and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (Steger et al., 2006), which is a shorter (10-item) measure of the presence of and search for meaning.

Using these measures, researchers have identified that people who have higher purpose tend to enjoy better physical health (Parquart, 2002), greater mental health (Crumbaugh & Maholick, 1967; Reker, 1997) and overall well-being (King et al, 2006; Reker, 2005; Reker, Peacock, & Wong, 1987; Ryff, 1989; Steger & Frazier, 2005; Steger et al, 2006; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). In fact, Diener et al. (2011) found that people with high purpose in life enjoy greater life satisfaction. The researchers found that even when such individuals weren't enjoying themselves, they still felt fulfilled because of their larger life purpose. It reasons then, that people who feel their lives are more purposeful are more self-actualized and optimistic (Compton, Smith, Cornish, & Qualls, 1996), have greater self-esteem (Steger et al., 2006) and positive affect (King et al., 2006). Further, Steger et al. (2008) suggest that people with purpose enjoy positive future orientations. For example, more purpose correlates with greater hope and optimism (Mascaro & Rosen, 2005; Steger & Frazier, 2005; Steger et al., 2006). Similarly, McKnight and Kashdan (2009) find that people with purpose in life tend to take care of themselves and to invest energy in life pursuits and relationships that are meaningful. For these reasons, Wong (2000) posits that purpose is important at every life stage. In fact,

purpose relates positively to psychological well-being at almost every stage of the life span (Steger, Oishi & Kashdan, 2009; Zika & Chamberlain, 1992).

Moreover, purpose is correlated with less depression and anxiety (Steger et al., 2006). Debats (1998) found that having greater purpose is associated with less psychological distress. In fact, lacking purpose has been associated with psychopathology (Yalom, 1980) and more need for therapy (Battista & Almond, 1973). As McKnight and Kashdan (2009) posit, absence of purpose in able human beings may offer explanation for increased depression, feelings of emptiness and suicide in older adults.

Searching... and Lost

“The purpose of life is a life of purpose.” - Robert Byrne

The Quintessential Question

While philosophers, psychologists, biologists and many other professions often discuss the meaning “of” life (why are humans on earth?), many people struggle to understand *their* purpose *in* life (why am *I* on earth?) (Haidt, 2006). Maslow (1968) stated that the goal of every human being is to pursue the inner nature and to realize its full potential, as that will bring happiness to the individual and benefit to society as a whole. People have a strong desire to comprehend themselves and the world around them (Ryff & Steger, 1998). As Steger and Frazier (2005) state, “people need to feel that their lives matter, are understandable, and have a purpose or mission” (p. 575). Similarly, Frankl (1963) argued that humans have an innate “will to meaning,” a deep motivation to find meaning and significance in their lives. Failure to achieve this, he believes, results in psychological distress.

Maddi (1967) called this distressed condition “existential neurosis.” Those

searching for purpose often feel helpless over their environment and circumstances and are left feeling dissatisfied with themselves and their relationships (Steger et al., 2008). For a woman, in particular, not knowing who she is results in a sense of meaninglessness that has been well-documented throughout feminist psychological literature (Gersie, 1997). Camus (1981) agrees, stating, “I have seen many people die because life for them was not worth living . . . I therefore conclude that the meaning [purpose] of life is the most urgent of questions” (p. 70).

Why is it a Search?

Frankl (1963) stated that one’s search for purpose is “the primary motivational force in man” (p. 121). However, if purpose is the core of who we are, why is it a question? Why must we search? Do we believe that finding our purpose is like solving a complex puzzle? Or is the need to find purpose part of some people’s personality (Steger, 2008)?

The search for meaning refers to people’s efforts to comprehend and integrate their experience into a coherent whole (Steger et al., 2008.) Steger et al. (2008) define the search for meaning as, “The strength, intensity, and activity of people’s desire and efforts to establish and/or augment their understanding of the meaning, significance, and purpose of their lives” (p. 200). The authors suggest that at the heart of the search for meaning is a deeply held human desire to make sense of experiences and integrate them into understanding and validating our life. In this manner, perhaps such a search is similar to one’s development and determination of identity (Marcia, 1966). One can be at various stages of finding her purpose (e.g. life stages, Erikson, 1968) until it is achieved.

Who is searching?

Some people feel that they know their purpose from a young age, while for others, the search continues long into adulthood. The age at which someone finds their purpose has great effect on their well-being. As Bronk et al. (2009) suggest, still searching for purpose after the age of 25 is correlated with depression.

Baumeister (1991) suggests that if one (or more) of four needs (purpose, values, efficacy and self-worth) is not met, we search to fulfill that need. Steger (2008) disagrees. He posits that the search for purpose does not mean the absence of purpose; rather they are independent constructs. In research to understand purpose-seekers, Steger et al. (2008) found that those searching for purpose tend to be people who value imagination and creation of original work, those who like to solve complex problems, those with drive and the Big Five Personality Trait “Openness to Experience” (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Moreover, people who search for purpose may tend to question business-as-usual. Such purpose-seekers may tend toward pessimistic thinking and rumination, feeling helpless in changing their current circumstances (Steger et al., 2008).

Searching Hurts

Sadly, regardless of why someone is searching, it is a painful state of being. Steger et al. (2008) suggest that ambiguity is perhaps why those who search for meaning report lower well-being. We can feel lost while searching. Searchers report less self-acceptance, worse relationships and that they have more anxiety, as they are unhappy about past experiences and present circumstances (Steger et al., 2008). In fact, Steger et al. (2006) found that searching for life’s purpose is significantly correlated with depression. Bronk et al. (2009) agree. They find that if those still searching for purpose as an adult feel diminished life satisfaction. Moreover, Bronk et al. (2009) find that if we

know our purpose, but aren't sure how to pursue it (which pathways to take), we are more likely to suffer.

There is Hope – We Can Discover our Purpose

In essence, different people may have different motivations for searching (Steger et al., 2008). Some may be searching because they feel that they are missing something, while others may have a personality trait that pre-disposes them toward curiosity and drive, while others proactively desire to be their very best. Therefore, the search for purpose has both healthy (i.e., life-affirming) and unhealthy (i.e., deficit-based) motivational roots (Reker, 2000). Maddi (1970) suggests that a healthy search is one that is grounded in people's aspirations and insights, and Steger (2008) believes that life-affirming searches may be healthier and lead to better outcomes. Regardless, those searching want answers. Steger et al. (2008) find that people who search seem more curious, receptive, tending to question, investigate and become absorbed in their experiences. This indicates that while searchers may be unhappy about how life has unfolded, they are interested in finding a better path. They are ready to make their mark on the world and therefore, positive psychology can help them.

Where do we find Purpose?

“I have learned, that if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours.” - Henry David Thoreau

Purpose Found in Multiple Ways

As stated above, there are various ways and places (and life stages) in which one might find her life purpose. Some find purpose through religion, while others through life experience or trauma. According to Kashdan and McKnight (2009), purpose can be found

through trauma, social modeling or a proactive process of constant pursuit, clarity, enhancement and evolution. The latter is the basis for this body of work and will therefore be discussed in depth later. Following is an investigation of some of the other ways in which people find their purpose.

Is Purpose Found in Religion?

It is a commonly held belief that religiosity and a belief in God create a sense of purpose in life (Jackson & Coursey, 1988). Certainly, one function of religion is to provide a source of purpose and meaning for people (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Peterson & Roy, 1985), as religion addresses that which makes life important (Pargament, 2002). For some people, attending services, reading about spirituality and meditating do enhance feeling a greater sense of purpose in life (Steger & Frazier, 2005), as spirituality can manifest higher levels of purpose (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). For others, though, attending religious services creates anxiety, rather than meaning or purpose (Peterson & Roy, 1985).

The key mediator in whether one finds purpose in spirituality is the meaning which people *make* of their religion and spiritual practices (Steger & Frazier, 2005). Whether one finds purpose through spiritual practice is not a matter of the institution or God's control, but one of internal control (Jackson & Coursey, 1988). If one wishes to find purpose through religion, they will. If not, they won't. Purpose in life is found when one feels *intrinsic* religiosity (Steger & Frazier, 2005). In this manner, religion and spirituality serve similar roles as work and family in one's life and purpose – they can lead to purpose, but not necessary so.

Interestingly, those who have higher purpose in life experience a greater number of

“transcendent” experiences – defined as “overwhelming feeling of peace and unity with the entire creation, or profound inner sense of Divine presence” (Kennedy, Kanthamani, & Palmer, 1994, p.21). As Zinnbauer, Pargament and Scott (1999) suggest, the feeling of spirituality can help those searching for purpose to more easily find it. However, religion is not the only route to purpose (Battista and Almond, 1973).

Do We Need a Crisis to Find our Life's Purpose?

Personal transformation through crisis has been a theme in literature dating back to the ways in which the Israelites grew from wandering the desert for forty years, and the resurrection of Jesus after dying on the cross. Growth through trauma is well documented in psychological research (Frankl, 1963; Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004; Yalom, 1980). Certainly, much of positive psychology research has affirmed this effect, describing such transformation as Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004). PTG is the experience of positive change that occurs through the struggle with a very challenging life event.

Though not called PTG at the time, such growth is what Frankl (1963) referred to when he described how people find their life purpose through trauma. He believed that we need a challenging event to find such purpose. In fact, Tedeschi, Park, and Calhoun (1998) find that one of the most commonly reported positive outcomes of coping with adversity is an increased sense of life's purpose. In fact, finding purpose through trauma can be beneficial for those suffering (Taylor, 1983; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). For example, PTG has been experienced after acquiring a physical disability (Elliott, Kurylo & Rivera, 2002), through HIV progression (Millam, 2006), and with breast cancer survival (Bellizzi & Blank, 2006; Cordova, Cunningham, Carlson, & Andrykowski,

2001). As Dildy (1996) found, many patients are finally able to see their purpose after major illness.

L.G., a 37-year old life coach and organizational development consultant found her purpose through tragedy. One month before college graduation, her mother suffered a stroke. Her experience as a daughter caring for a loved one in ICU provided direction for her life. She says:

“I entered her room in the ICU to see (my mom) bloated, unconscious and connected to multiple life saving machines. She had a very different type of stroke--one that occurred in her brainstem, rendering her completely paralyzed below the eyes. We were told quite simply that she would die because only a handful of people had ever survived this kind of stroke at this time. Needless to say, our lives were forever changed.

Over time, she managed to beat every statistic, every odd and every prediction relative to her condition. She awoke out of a two-week haze and soon entered an inpatient rehabilitation facility where she remained for two months. I spent my post-college months by her side all day, everyday in the hospital--acting as her voice, her advocate and her cheerleader. I was blessed to witness her first independent movement (lifting a finger) and hear her first post-stroke words. I also watched in horror as she would awake every morning and cry at her new reality--tears flowed readily and unexpectedly because emotions live in the brainstem. We were thrown into the 'new normal' and it was far from comfortable, despite the beauty that occasionally existed within the chaos and horror.

Years later, my mom is by definition a quadriplegic, despite having gross movement in her arms, hands and legs. She can breathe on her own and speak fairly audibly. I truly believe that there was a moment early in her hospitalization when she made a choice between living and dying. My family jokes that she looked at my dad, my brother and myself and could not imagine us functioning without her. It is probably true. At that time there were likely less than ten people who had survived this type of stroke, so her motivation lies well beyond medical science. Her strength has been matched by that of my dad. I have watched him remodel their house, fight with the insurance company and give up their dreams of travel and flexibility as true empty nesters. With ease I acknowledge that the most compelling component of this entire journey is that my parents have chosen not to be defined by this event, but rather to re-define what is possible in life. Instead of planning trips around the world, they find joy in a day trip. Rather than living in a large house, they have found pleasure in re-modeling a smaller one. Now that my mom can no longer cook, my dad derives great joy in trying out new recipes.

This part of my family's life journey has impacted each of us differently, yet profoundly. I have spent a great deal of time reflecting on my life purpose along the way. And through a few career changes, it became clear to me that I am most comfortable, fulfilled and connected with helping patients and families in their moments of lost hope. While I don't have the knowledge (or the stomach) to work clinically, I am fortunate to make patients' lives better by working directly with those who give them care. This manifests itself in multiple ways on a given day, but it all comes from the same deep place within me that acutely remembers the feelings I had walking into an ICU for the first time, sitting by my mom's hospital bed holding her hand and watching her wiggle her toes with every ounce of effort she could muster.

Yeah, shit happens. That's what I conclude when I think about what happened to my mom, to my parents and to our family. Everything is glorious and in one moment it all changes, as is always the way of tragedy. And shift happens-- I saw the Shift my mom made from dying to living. I witnessed the Shift my parents made in their perspective about what is really important in life. I have experienced my own Shift as I strive to live in a way that honors what is most important. And I believe that my life purpose is to help others Shift, as well. I know that when I enter a space, join a group, or have an intimate conversation, I create an unexpected, joyous shift that ultimately grows people. My words and impact tend to be unpredictable and unexpected, opening people to new possibilities within themselves and others. I am a catalyst for growth and do it through humor, empathy and anything else in between. Currently, I'm Shifting healthcare by helping physicians, nurses and executives navigate a broken healthcare system so that we can ensure patients and families receive the care they need and deserve. And while I'm lucky to get paid to do this everyday, the real compensation is helping anyone and everyone I interact with shift attitudes, shift perspectives and shift possibilities. So thanks to the Shit, I'm bringing hundreds of others the Shift" (L. G., personal communication, July 11, 2011).

While a major life crisis helped L. G. clarify her life purpose, most people (thankfully) do not face such a huge challenge in their lives (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Fortunately, Kashdan and McKnight (2009) offer that reaction to a traumatic event is just one pathway through which people find their core purpose, as stated earlier.

Popular Media can Provide Answers

Another place people turn to for answers is the popular media. Sometimes, the answer comes to us when we least expect it. As D. W. a 45-year old performer, actress,

musician and trainer describes:

“For me, it was the movie “Fight Club.” The scene in which Brad Pitt pistol whips a deli clerk and reaches into his wallet to discover a student id card - he asked the clerk, "What did you want to be, Raymond? What did you want to be!?!?" because he knows that higher education is not a requirement for a bodega clerk job. The guy, terrified, snuffles, "a veterinarian," going on to say that he quit because it was "too much school." Brad Pitt then promises to come back in a year and vows to, if Raymond is not well on his way to becoming a vet, kill him.

That scene really spoke to me and made me question, "If Brad Pitt was going to come here and shoot me if I wasn't pursuing my dream, what would I be doing? The very next day, I picked up a paper and started auditioning for bands and acting jobs because I knew that I was not put on this earth to help corporate America. My passion is performing; it took a while longer to determine what my purpose is but it started with identifying my passion and figuring out a way to make a living at it.

I believe my purpose is that of inspiring others to lead authentic lives, to live the lives THEY really want to lead, not the one that others think they should. I do that through a couple of shows I produce and host as well as leading IntenSati (fitness training). My hope is to reach a larger audience by bringing some of this material to TV” (D. W., personal communication, July 14, 2011).

For D. W., the calling came through a movie. Important to her story, though, is that she chose to answer the calling. Many women searching for their purpose read books, ask mentors, and consult therapists, sometimes begging them to provide the answer to the quintessential question, “Who am I?” Several self-help videos and books exist on finding one’s purpose such as “Discover Your Passion” by Barrie Davenport, “Living on Purpose” by Dan Millman, and “Follow Your Heart: Finding Purpose in Your Life and Work” by Andrew Matthews. Some of these self-help books are excellent and discuss positive psychology, though credentialed positive psychology practitioners or researchers didn’t write them. Moreover, there are some non-research based blogs dedicated to finding life purpose. For instance, www.womenssearchformeaning.com is one woman’s experience in a blog format. Well suited to help people,

www.theonequestion.com offers a series of valuable questions to help people find their unique purpose. Questions include: understanding one's interests (what kind of non-fiction books one likes reading, what magazine articles are of interest); changes someone would like to make in the world; that which someone wants to accomplish before he/she dies; which activities (passions) someone enjoys; and who inspires them. The website then compiles the answers into a list that the person reviews in order to find themes. This intervention may be beneficial, though the exercises are not based in research.

Researched-Based Programs

While a great deal of empirical research exists about the construct of “purpose”, including the degree to which people have it in their lives and the correlations when one does, little empirical research exists on how one finds their purpose and develops a plan to pursue it (T. Kashdan, personal communication, June 28, 2011). Certainly, Frankl (1986) developed logotherapy, which is meaning-centered psychotherapy, but little else exists. Moreover, programs that have been empirically tested tend to be focused on youth development or elderly care. As the pursuit of purpose often begins in adolescence (Fry, 1998), Damon (2008) wrote a book for young adults to find purpose. Similarly, a research-based life skills training program exists to engender purpose in youth called “Going for the Goal” (Danish, 1997; Danish et al., 1992). Several studies have also been conducted with senior citizens to help older adults retain purpose later in life. For example, programs include providing senior citizens with volunteer work and education (Brown, 1990) and community responsibility and life (Leviathan, 1989).

But What about the “Non-Clinical” Woman?

Unfortunately, research-based programs do not exist for the average non-clinical

Gen X woman to find her purpose and develop a path to pursue it. Such women, though, have a lot to offer the world. With a unique set of strengths, talents, passions and experiences, each of these women has a distinct purpose that only she can fulfill (Frankl, 1963). Once living that purpose, these women can experience greater individual well-being and contribute to creating a flourishing society. Like cogs in a wheel, each independent person (and purpose) works in unison with others (Williamson, 1992) to enhance and advance humanity.

A Positive Psychology Intervention

Psychology can help people find their purpose (Lent, 2004). Focus on this aim as it is crucial to well-being (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992). Many people seek psychological intervention because they want personal growth (Steger et al., 2006). Fortunately, positive psychology interventions can help. As positive psychology focuses on people's strengths and helps to nurture and expand people's capacity, the field can help people find their purpose. As Frankl (1963) states, we have freedom of will; and with the will to find the meaning of our lives we can discover our purpose.

As stated, according to Kashdan and McKnight (2009), we discover purpose through one of three processes: reaction to a traumatic event, socialization through modeling others, or a proactive, consistent process of refinement and clarity. The next section will mostly focus on the latter.

Opportunity exists to develop a strength-based "Purpose" intervention that is grounded in scientific research. Those who seek their purpose are guided by intrinsic learning - learning to be the best individual that each of us can be (Maslow, 1965). They are motivated and want to find their life mission. The field of positive psychology can

leverage this motivation and help more women. Such interventions, Maslow (1965) believes, need to be the aim of psychology application. With introspection and reflection, we can uncover the ways in which we already impact the world (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). Coupled with our strengths, passions and talents, we can find our purpose. With applications to determine one's character strengths, consider their peak experiences, explore passions and interests and envision a successful future, a positive intervention would enhance women's well-being and those that they impact.

Part B - "Finding" Our Purpose

"Efforts and courage are not enough without purpose and direction." - John F. Kennedy

A Process for "Us"

As this section helps women uncover their purpose, it is presented as a guide for readers in an informal, conversational and motivational voice.

Searching in All the Wrong Places

The women of Gen X for whom this is written are generally successful and healthy. As stated, we are objectively doing well, and yet, many of us are searching for more. As Reker et al. (1987) discovered, women have a stronger will to find purpose as compared with men. It is no wonder, then, that even with full bellies and wallets, when we are unclear about our life's purpose, we feel unsettled and unhappy. Perhaps we're searching in the wrong places. The popular television show "Sex and the City" portrayed Gen X women looking to shoes, cocktails, and men for their happiness. Of course the main characters have the best friends in each other, and yet, they often feel unfulfilled and lost. Why is this?

As discussed, Maslow (1965) maintained that once basic needs have been met, humans inevitably move toward higher ranking needs. He believed that the highest human need is “self-actualization” which means realizing our potential, capacities and talents as fulfillment of our mission. To break this down, we feel happiest when living to our fullest potential, using our full capabilities and natural gifts toward our life’s purpose. In our search for purpose, we aren’t looking for who we are and what we need in the world as much as what the world needs from us (Frankl, 1963). So perhaps it is not the man or material that will satisfy us, but a larger life purpose.

The Frustrating Process

At this point, many people are frustrated in their search for purpose, as they don’t know how to *find* it. In a longitudinal study, Steger and Kashdan (2006) found that most people who were searching for their purpose still had not found it one year later. For goal-oriented, successful women like us, this can feel defeating and unacceptable. Therefore, as we search, our female tendency to ruminate over our state (Nolen-Hoeksema, McBride and Larson, 1997) can exacerbate an already frustrating situation. Our “search for purpose” then becomes the story we tell ourselves such that we come to identify ourselves (McLean & Pratt, 2006) as lost.

Searching Implies that We’re Lost

By definition, searching for something indicates that we’ve lost it. When we lose our favorite blouse, we go searching for it in the closets, laundry basket, under the bed, calling our friends to see if we left it at their houses – and worse, ruminating over whether we left it at an ex’s house. Searching is a frustrating process because we know that we lost something we love and we can’t figure out where it is. Searching for our

life's purpose is the same. Purpose is so much a part of who we are that when don't know what it is, we *feel* lost. Unfortunately, feelings of frustration only worsen the situation. Think of your co-worker who gets under your skin or the last guy who knew exactly which (negative) buttons to push. Your body is probably tensing just thinking about it! Feelings of frustration, anger and anxiety narrow our thinking and tense the body (Ekman, Levenson & Friesen, 1983). Moreover, anxiety makes us feel chaotic and disorganized (Levenson, 2004). This is not helpful for searching. Rather, we need to open our minds and relax our bodies so that we can see what already exists within.

Remain Open and Aware – Mindfulness

The great philosopher and psychologist, William James (1911) stated, “Compared to what we ought to be, we are only half awake” (p. 237). What he means by this is that we are not as *conscious* as we could be. According to Brown and Ryan (2003), consciousness involves both awareness and attention. Awareness is a background “radar” constantly monitoring the environment while attention is focusing our conscious awareness on a particular experience, object or need. Conscious awareness stimulates autonomous motivation and action (Levesque & Brown, 2007). Most people have the capacity for conscious awareness and active attention (Brown and Ryan, 2003) but how many of us are using this capacity to our benefit (James, 1911)?

D. M., a 40-year old spiritual advisor, educator and author shares her perspective on why we need to remain mindful and open to hear our calling. She says:

“Through all my trials, tribulations, and lessons in life, I have learned that everyone has the same purpose. Our individual and collective purpose is to “let our light shine.” We do this by remaining fully present and connected with the inner voice, spirit, or God within us. This voice provides the guidance and direction needed. When we listen to this voice, or follow the guidance it provides, in that moment, we act from a place of pure inspiration (in spirit).

The goal is to learn to live from an inspired state. When all of our actions originate from this place, we cannot help but live “on purpose” and the “light” within us shines through and inspires others. So no matter what action we are taking, i.e. - writing, singing, teaching, etc. – if we are following our inner guidance and acting from a place of pure inspiration we are expressing our light **through** that action and therefore fulfilling our purpose in that moment.

With this in mind, the **actions** we take in a day, year, or lifetime may change, but the **purpose** never does. In other words, the way God uses each one of us in the world may differ during various seasons in life. But no matter **how** we are used to express the “light”, the purpose is always to express the “light”.

It has been a long journey in learning to surrender every aspect of my life and to stop trying to control everything. I have learned to stop NOW, become fully present NOW, connect NOW, and allow the spirit to operate through me NOW. My purpose is not “out there” in the future somewhere...it is being fulfilled NOW in this moment. After all, NOW is all anyone has. Therefore, I have found that a life of purpose comes from a lifetime of inspired moments.” (D. M., personal communication, July 19, 2011.)

D. M. describes the need to let go, or “surrender.” This is important, for Brown and Ryan (2003) found that rumination, absorption in the “why” of past events or anxieties about the future can take us away from the present moment such that we don’t pay attention to what we see – we don’t hear the calling. We need to be aware, open and receptive to new experiences to be curious and hear our calling (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). In the state of conscious awareness, we open our minds and hearts to possibility. Mindfulness is frequently defined as “the state of being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present.” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 822). Therefore, being present, staying awake and listening are key to hearing our calling (Frankl, 1963).

Deikman (1982) suggests that it is beneficial to become more receptive, devoting more attention to the information we’re given in the environment and in ourselves. With moment-to-moment sensitivity, he says, we engage our observing self to address the task

at hand. When we become more sensitive to the environment, when we become consciously aware of how we are feeling in the moment, the answers become evident.

Martin (1997) suggests that mindfulness is useful in psychology applications. Combined with cognitive-behavioral therapy techniques, people can translate insight into action (Martin, 1997). In this manner, we must first be open and receptive, then focused in applying the information we garner. The following workbook does just that. It encourages you to be mindful of important moments, receptive to learning, open to using your strengths and talents in full force to live your best possible life. Such reflexive consciousness (Baumeister, 1999) can be beneficial to our well-being, as when mindfulness is coupled with heightened self-knowledge, we can better focus to live the lives we want (Brown & Ryan, 2003).

Found Within

The process of becoming mindful allows us to not only hear that which is outside of us, but perhaps most importantly, to heed that which is inside of us. I believe that our soul knows what it is called to do. Often, our purpose comes to us in dreams, as “inspired moments” as D. M. described – also called “epiphanies.” Pawelski (2007) states that epiphanies are intuitions that we experience as revelation. Epiphanies offer clarity, which “allow(s) us to understand things in their true nature” (Pawelski, 2007, p.135). We must be open, though, to receiving the epiphanies. We must be open to hearing our calling. S. B., a 41-year old professor of Art History and Judaic Studies (and the mother of two young children) shares that her calling came to her as an epiphany at an early age. She says:

“I don't remember not knowing (my purpose). I always knew that my purpose was to perpetuate the Jewish people in work and life. And this is not from growing up

with my family, which is irreligious. I forced my mom to send me to Sunday school, let me have a Bat Mitzvah, and to be confirmed. She finally understood she had to support me on this and sent me to Israel after senior year of high school” (S. B., personal communication, July 3, 2011).

Sometimes, we can’t see our purpose because it’s been hidden beneath external pressures of society, or the beliefs of our families. For S. B., she knew her purpose, but had to convince her mother to support her in pursuing it. Often, we may know what we want in life, but perhaps at some point we were told that it wasn’t okay to want what we want. We become confused as we try to sift through what *we* want vs. what “they” want from and for us. In this manner, your purpose might be buried beneath others’ expectations for you, fears that may be holding you back, and beliefs about what you “should” do or who you “should” be. But underneath those confusing layers, the answer lies within, as it did for S. B. Fortunately, with the research-based tools that follow, you too can uncover what is within. You can discover your true passions and unleash your calling so that you may pursue it.

Follow Your “Knows”: Be Curious, Not in Search

Being curious (instead of searching) is a good first step. While searching makes us feel lost and frustrated, curiosity motivates us to explore (Kashdan & Steger, 2007). As such, Kashdan and McKnight (2009) and Kashdan and Steger (2007) state that to uncover our life’s purpose, we need to be curious. With introspection, reflection, and consideration (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009) of our peak experiences, turning points, happiest and most inspiring moments, strengths and passions, we can uncover our purpose.

Researchers find that curiosity leads to personal growth because it increases attention to new and interesting stimuli, causes us to explore and engage in rewarding

novel activities, and encourages us to integrate new experiences into our lives (Kashdan, Rose & Fincham, 2004). Perhaps this is why curiosity enhances well-being (Kashdan & Steger, 2007), and increases positive affect (Kashdan et al., 2004).

B. B., a 28-year old graduate student of Positive Psychology and Human Sexuality describes how being curious helped her find her purpose. She says:

“Regarding my career purpose, I feel like it was a series of following my nose from one clue to the next. I took my time figuring it out. There were several years where I didn't know where I was going and felt like I was treading water. But I was paying attention the whole time, and there were themes I kept returning to. Specific to discerning my purpose was a woman, Susan Clark, who taught me how to pay attention in a way that I could know what I wanted (which is an art!). So pretty soon I was talking about those things to people, and learning more about them, and finding programs that I could take, so eventually the only thing I could do was to study what I was most passionate about, which was Human Sexuality education. Three years later I was studying the other exact thing I wanted to study in conjunction with sexuality, and that was Positive Psychology. None of this was pre-planned, but looking back, I am amazed at how everything has connected, as though it was planned.

My purpose is "Open minds and worlds: connect ... marvel." The content of what I study is great (I love it!), but it is not so much the content that I want to impart but the perspective-shifts that can happen when I can show someone the world a little differently. Seeing this happen is what guides every aspect of my life. I can sense in the other person that something just opened up, and something is more okay -- like THEY are more okay. They connect to something inside themselves that feels real.

Making these tiny connections seems small, but I think it affects everything. I think it is the beginning of healing, and growing. It is about integrating all the parts of being. Connecting inside yourself allows you to more deeply connect with others. And the circle keeps expanding. I think that the world going forward needs this more than anything.” (B. B., personal communication, July 12, 2011).

As we can see from B. B., getting curious about our interests can lead to finding our purpose. Following our “nose” (or “knows”) will help us, for we “know” what brings about joy; we know when we feel good about ourselves. So get curious, asking yourself important questions. When am *I* happiest? What activities bring a rush of excitement to

my blood? Who do I most admire and why? Where do I feel serene? When do I feel confident?

A Better Process – A Research-Based Process

Our exploration will include scientifically-based exercises geared toward uncovering our purpose within, our greatest passions and deepest desires. Most of the exercises will include written reflection, as it has been widely noted that writing about our experiences can enhance psychological and physical well-being (King, 2001; Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2009; Pennebaker, 1998; Pennebaker & Chung, in press). Writing forces us to pause, reflect and process through our emotions so that we find meaning in events (Pennebaker & Chung, in press). Furthermore, writing about life events helps to integrate them into larger, overarching meaning (King & Miner, 2000). Therefore, when working to uncover our life's purpose, writing about important events can be very informative to the process. Writing about unresolved conflicts (Pennebaker, 1998), hopes and dreams (King, 2001) and intensely positive experiences (Burton & King, 2009) all offer long-term benefits. For example, writing about intensely positive experiences broadens our thinking (Burton & King, 2009), an important element to uncovering our purpose. Similarly, Bryant (2003) indicates that replaying our highest moments helps us savor the experience and increase the joyful effect on our lives. Therefore, throughout this process, I'll ask you to write about past experiences, reflect on given exercises and record your deepest dreams. The key through all of these writing exercises is to look for themes and patterns that will help you learn about yourself (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006), plan and prioritize (King & Miner, 2000).

Positive Emotions – Getting in The Right Mindset

Given how frustrating the search has likely been, you need to reset your mindset. As discussed, negative mindsets can restrain us, whereas positive emotions, like joy, amusement, serenity and hope, have a soothing effect (Levenson, 1988). Think about the puppy that just moved into your neighborhood, or the last time you and your girlfriends were laughing hysterically over a bottle of wine. Positive emotions can “undo” the physiological responses we have to negative feelings like anxiety and anger (Fredrickson & Levenson, 1998). Therefore, positive emotions can relax us as we embark on this process.

Moreover, positive emotions prepare us for this work. As King et al. (2006) finds, positive moods enhance the feeling that life is meaningful. The researchers found that we are more receptive to finding meaning when in a positive state of mind. In other words, smiling at the puppy and remembering laughing with our friends opens us – and therefore expands our opportunity. Barb Fredrickson, perhaps the world’s foremost researcher on positive emotions, originated the “Broaden and Build Theory” of positive emotions (2001) which describes this phenomenon. First, positive emotions open our hearts and minds to become more aware of possibilities. When smiling, serene, or interested, our bodies are more relaxed, our minds more free, and our eyes see more. Second, we build: with this heightened sense of awareness, we discover and develop new skills and create new connections that add resources for the future (Fredrickson, 2009).

For this reason, it is critically important that we are in a positive state when we begin our journey toward purpose. Moreover, by considering that which brings us joy, piques our interest and offers us hope, we may find initial clues to our life’s purpose (Valliant, 2008). Fredrickson (2009) points to ten forms of positivity: joy, gratitude,

serenity, interest, hope, pride, amusement, inspiration, awe, and love. By thinking about where we find these states in our lives, we begin the journey toward purpose.

Positive Emotions Exercise: When are you happiest? What brings you the most joy?

Which topics interest you? Who inspires you? Below is a list of statements. Consider each one – and have fun with it. Feel free to add additional lines if more than one statement comes to mind.

I am GRATEFUL for _____.

I am AMUSED by _____.

I am INTERESTED in _____.

I am INSPIRED by _____.

I take great PRIDE in _____.

I am in AWE of _____.

I feel HOPEFUL when _____.

I feel JOYFUL when _____.

I find SERENITY in _____.

As LOVE encapsulates all of these emotions (Fredrickson 2009), it flows through us in many – if not all – of the situations you have listed above. Therefore, it's important to spend additional time considering who, where and what you love.

Knowing and Loving Yourself

We often think of love as romantic love, or even the love we have for our parents. However, as Brandon (1994) stated, it is important to love ourselves. Not in an excessive, narcissistic manner (e.g. Campbell, Rudich & Sedikides, 2002) - rather, in an authentic appreciation of our greatest strengths, talents, values and passions so that we feel self-efficacious in realizing our dreams. In fact, Maddux (2009) believes that self-efficacy may be the most important element to success. Believing that we are competent and able to achieve our goals helps us do so. Therefore, knowing and loving our authentic selves is an important step to loving ourselves and uncovering our purpose. Moreover, authenticity – living true to one's core self every day – leads to healthy minds and overall well-being (Goldman & Kernis, 2002).

One way to uncover your core, authentic self is to consider when you most like yourself. Sometimes called “peak experiences” (Maslow, 1968), these are times when we are at our best, at the top of our game, we act with more autonomy, we feel complete - and at peace. In positive psychology, these experiences are sometimes called “Me at my Best” and can be a great way to introduce yourself to someone new, as these experiences often say so much more about ourselves than our occupation and age (Peterson, 2006). Talking about when we are at our best can sometimes feel both awkward and proud. We aren't typically encouraged to brag about ourselves (Bell, 1996). Especially as women, we have often been socialized to constrain from self-advocacy (Wade, 2001) for fear of

social exclusion and backlash (Rudman, 1998). It is important, though, that we recognize, honor and use our strengths (Seligman, 2002). Plus, peak experiences, are not necessarily when we won the top prize, earned the highest score or got the promotion. Rather, peak experiences are when we act in accord with our values - when we display our strengths of character (Peterson, 2006). Such intrinsic aspects are core to our purpose. As such, by considering our peak experiences, we can find themes among them that help us discover our purpose. E. P-P., a 60-year old Psychiatric Nurse and leader of a mental health services organization (who is also a wife, mother and grandmother), describes how peak experiences early in her career unveiled her life purpose:

“I remember being a preadolescent and looking at myself in the mirror - studying myself and pondering the questions "What am I made of? What is inside me? Why am I here?" I just always believed there had to be something else besides the face in the mirror. There had to be a reason for my existence, a greater purpose.

I grew up in a very Catholic, very Italian home. I am first generation Italian American and I am the youngest of 4 and the only girl. My mother did not graduate from high school and my dad worked in the steel mill in a small town in PA. Church and family were the center of our lives. I should also mention (that) my grandfather fled Italy without my grandmother and his children for the US as he was to be hung. It would be several years before my dad and his mother and only one sister could come through Ellis Island to Pa.

While I was in high school, my brother was very active in the Civil Rights Movement - and the Anti-War Protests. He was also involved in The Poor People's March on Washington and became involved with the Berrigan Brothers and left the USA for a number of years.

I knew (what) I wanted - was destined to do something of significance in service, somehow, some way. I found myself organizing student action committees in high school that caused a bit of a stir.

Then I left for nursing school and became the President of Student Association in my Senior Year and realized I could lead.

My identification of what I would do for the rest of my life - what my career would be- what would be my life's work and be my calling came to me within minutes after I sat with my first patient on a psychiatric unit and began to try to

talk with a truly psychotic patient. I was afraid, confused, and I wanted to run but I sat and listened - only listened and he calmed down...and then I met with my instructor and asked what do you say and she asked what did you say and I said nothing! I did not know what to say. She said wise choice. Now let's begin talking what you can do ----but simply be honest and empathic to their beliefs. It is that simple. So with classroom knowledge to back up the clinical experience, I knew what I wanted to do and where I would end up...working with psychiatric patients and at some point in a leadership role” (E. P-P., personal communication, July 10, 2011).

This peak experience took place nearly 40 years ago. E. P-P. described that this experience of listening to her patient has given her a career that she loves and has allowed her to be a “serving leader.” As she describes, “Being a psychiatric nurse has gifted me with my purpose in living...I have found meaning” (E. P-P., personal communication, July 10, 2011).

Peak Experiences Exercise (Adapted from Berridge, 2011): When have you been at your best? Below record 5 peak experiences – those times when you really liked yourself and were proud to be you. What were you doing? Who were you with? What skills were you using? Why does it stand out for you?

Peak Experience #1:

Peak Experience #2:

Peak Experience #3:

Peak Experience #4:

Peak Experience #5:

If possible, ask others to send you a story of when they've experienced you at your best.

Ask your closest family members, friends and/or colleagues. Doing so may give you new ideas and insight about yourself and your future. In addition, this may help you learn more

about your core strengths and talents, which will be discussed in detail shortly. Plus, this exercise enhances positive emotions, self-esteem and self-efficacy so that you feel more hopeful and energized about pursuing your dreams (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006).

Reflection on Themes: Read through your peak experiences above, and those submitted by loved ones (if applicable). What do you notice? Which themes stand out?

For example, is there consistency in activity among your peak experiences? Did you use the same skillset throughout these experiences? Were you usually with particular groups of people, such as kids or the elderly? Were you exercising character strengths and values such as courage, personal growth or fairness?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Turning Points and Epiphanies

Similar to peak experiences, “turning points” are also key moments that can teach us about our life’s purpose. A turning point, though, is a moment or experience that had such significant impact that our path was altered and/or we were profoundly changed by the experience (McLean & Pratt, 2006). Sometimes, our peak experiences are turning points for us, and often, there are experiences or moments where we were not at our best, and yet the experience still had lasting impact. For instance, a turning point could be a moment you wish you had acted differently, or it could be a lesson you learned from watching or listening to someone else. Turning points could have been a realization, an epiphany, or an incredibly difficult circumstance to overcome. M. C., a leader, coach and trainer shares that her purpose became clear through a series of turning points. She describes a few. The first turning point was choosing life over death. She says:

“Sitting in the cold metal chair, staring at the phone, with all my 16-year-old heart and soul, willing it to ring. Wanting to live beyond the abuse, but not knowing how. Wanting help, but not knowing how to ask. A stack of letters written, goodbyes burning through my back from their place of the kitchen table. The cold handgun at my temple, my finger on the trigger. The cold handgun at MY temple. MY finger on the trigger. The phone ringing. I hit bottom. I burned the letters. I became aware that I had a choice. I chose life. It would take nearly 10 years for me to find my voice and confront my father, and tell my family. Choosing life was the first step.” (M. C., personal communication, July 14, 2011).

She then traveled the world and paid attention to every inspiring moment, to each epiphany and remembered the lessons of the following turning points:

“Sitting in the mountains of Switzerland, in the Jungfrau region above Lauterbrunnen....part way through a 12 hour hike that could have easily resulted in my demise. Staring at a river that would take walking a single plank across rocks and then wading chest deep, carrying my camera gear (all 30lbs of it) above my head to cross. Embracing the expanse of breathtaking landscape before me; having my being completely present to the beauty before me. A door opened in my soul, and everything came before me.

Standing on the beach in England with the 7 Sisters Cliffs towering above me, slumping for having missed the sun set only to be in awe and wonder of the moonrise above the cliffs. I looked down and right at my foot was a rock with a hole in it. The ones my best friend told me about. The ones her granddad, whose house I'd be staying at that night, told her since she was a little girl were lucky stones. The whole world came before me in that moment; I was completely overwhelmed, tears streaming down my face. I was connected to everything I loved through space and time in that moment.

After those experiences during a 3 month backpacking trip through Europe. I came home and confronted my dad about the childhood molestation I suffered from him. A pivotal event in starting the journey of bringing down the barriers of blame and guilt that were shrouding my being.

Camping out under the stars in Amboselli National Park, Kenya, Africa, being completely overwhelmed by the grandeur of Africa. Listening to the crickets, the hyenas and other wildlife completely enveloping the landscape and me with it. Waking up to an elephant 50 feet from my tent. Being in community with Africa. Visiting a Masai village near the Masai Mara game reserve, connecting with an entirely different culture who saw straight through me to the heart of my being. Feeling totally exposed and seen. Connecting in a way that made language unnecessary.

After camping and visiting in East and North Africa for 5 weeks, I felt the potential of who I was internally vs. the external accomplishments that had formerly been my main defining factors. Within a couple years I took coach training through the coaches' training institute and subsequently took their leadership training. Those courses changed my life because they helped me connect to my full being and effectively remove the existing barriers that I was still holding up. The work done through those courses allowed me to fully identify with my being, and to articulate who it is I am in the world.” (M. C., personal communication, July 14, 2011).

After experiencing these “turning points,” M. C. realized that her “life's purpose is being *radiant illumination igniting passionate possibilities*” (M. C., personal communication, July 14, 2011). To her this means that she lives life from a place of positivity, possibilities, wonder, appreciation, and connection and that she emanates values shedding awareness, openness, understanding, and simply, light, illuminating possibilities. As she notes, “Being

radiant illumination doesn't guide my daily actions or goals; being radiant illumination is who I am” (M. C., personal communication, July 14, 2011).

Remembering our turning points are important to self-development as retelling the narrative of the situation provides self-understanding (Bruner, 1994). In fact, McLean and Pratt (2006) find that making meaning of our turning points through narration enables growth and optimism. In other words, it helps us discover our purpose. Similar to M. C., my turning points have greatly informed my higher purpose. For example, I remember becoming a “big sister” to my cousin, Stacy, when her father passed away and she was only 4 years old. I then remembered how much I loved leading younger people when I was a youth group leader in high school, then a camp counselor in college, and finally a youth group advisor in my twenties. I didn’t follow the calling though, until three years ago, when I survived armed robbery. As I knelt on the floor with a gun to my head, begging for my life, I decided that if I lived through the experience, I would pursue my dreams of being a professor, motivational coach, speaker and author to be a “big sister” to the world.

Turning Points Exercise: What are the turning points of your life? Where were you? What happened? Who was there? What is memorable about the situation? What did you learn about yourself and the world? What is the lasting meaning you take from the situation?

Turning Point #1:

Turning Point #2:

Turning Point #3:

Turning Point #4:

Turning Point #5:

Reflection on Themes: Read through your turning points above. What do you notice? Which themes stand out? For example, are they mostly related to overcoming adversity? Are you constantly learning from others' behaviors? Do you notice themes of love, achievement, the environment or international exploration?

Personal History

Similarly, our history can often inform our purpose. As Porter and Suedfeld (1980) found, cultural and social events influence how we process information. As such, several aspects of history, such as family, cultural, and personal history can help our process. Knowing family history, documenting lessons passed from generation to generation, considering how ancestors overcame adversity and how they experienced flourishing, can all create a foundation for self-knowledge. For example, while the Holocaust shaped much of my grandparents' perception of well-being, civil rights further

influenced my parents. All of these events, therefore, have informed my beliefs, behaviors and my purpose. Most particularly, I feel awesome responsibility to do great things as the grandchild of Holocaust survivors – it is an honor and challenge I greatly accept. This likely left me searching for my higher purpose when I felt that there was more to life than the job I held and the life I lived.

In addition to family history, our personal history can teach us a great deal about our strengths, our purpose, and ourselves. For instance, I was abused by my girlfriend in high school; just as I was learning about who I am and how to love, she began hitting me. Though we are dear friends now, I learned from the experience that I am a survivor and that I want to help other women survive and thrive. I learned similar lessons ten years later as I was going through divorce and found myself managing an online blog for young divorcees and writing a book to help them through the experience. My personal history shows me consistent themes of survival, teaching, coaching and encouraging others to live to their fullest.

Similarly, R. E., a 37-year old mother and volunteer describes how her history helped inform her purpose. She states:

“I have always liked so many things and wanted to try different paths, but I could not pin down what my real purpose was for living. It was not until my life changing moment of my brother's sudden death (he was 26 & I was 32) that my life took a turn and gave me new perspective on what was/is the most important to me...what makes me tick, what makes me happy, and really helped me to connect to a higher power, the energy around me (living and dead). I have had my awakening, and have been able to see and hear almost every "awake moment" as I like to call them. And have been connecting thoughts, feelings, ideas, and moments in time together to arrive at why I am here.

I started by looking at why my soul was chosen to be born through my parents. I look at who they are and what they have become and how it has shaped me. I think most parents want the best for their children and want better than what they had...so when I look at their lives, I am able to almost magnify it and see

where I am supposed to be going. It is very cool!

My bigger life purpose is to make a difference in this world. And then I work down from there...I am a mom. My main purpose right now is to grow, nurture, teach, etc. my three children, so that they can go and make a difference in this world. I also have chosen to make a difference through all my volunteer work. I get so much satisfaction out of giving of myself to help others. Sometimes it is just small acts of kindness that make a huge difference, and sometimes I have been able to make larger impacts on many people. I am helping making this world a better place. And am here to say that every person can make a difference, big or small. And I am doing that every day...with my kids, my family, friends, communities, the world by giving my time, money, and energy in any way I can.

I also believe that I am here to watch over (the summer camp I attended). My parents met there as counselors, married and had me a few years later...my mom went back and worked there for 11 years where I called camp my home every summer. I grew up there. I joined the Board of Directors. And then my brother died while working for camp. Everything in my life comes back to Camp. And as a board member for the last seven years, I have been able to make a huge impact on so many areas of camp. And have really been the "angel" watching over camp. Now, I watch over "Jeff's Campfire Circle" and I am a huge influence in many decisions that go on regarding camp. It is exactly where I am supposed to be.

I think a soul is constantly learning and growing, so even though I feel good about who I am and what my purpose is now, I know that you never know what might be coming next. But if you are open to what is around you, you can't miss what your purpose is in that moment and as part of the bigger picture. I am sure you have heard the saying "live in the moment" or "be present" or "take each day as it comes"...."live today as if it were your last". I know that these are not just sayings anymore. These are real to me" (R. E., personal communication, July 8, 2011).

Reflection on History: Which events of your past and your family's past have most shaped you? What about the times, culture and heritage in which you grew up? What stands out? Why? What have you learned about yourself and society? What inspirations have you gleaned about how you might like to impact the world?

Your (Powerful, Beautiful) Narrative

Combined, our peak experiences, turning points and history create the foundation of our life stories. We each have a narrative – the story we construct to make sense of our lives (Flowers, 2011; McAdams, 2008). Stories integrate our lives (McAdams, 2008; McAdams et al., 2006). Flowers (2011) believes that it is our personal narrative that creates the meaning of our lives. Sometimes, our narratives support our growth. Sometimes, they hold us back as we find that we still see ourselves as victims of history. Writing our narrative can help integrate life events into larger overarching meaning (King & Pennebaker, 2006). Moreover, rewriting new stories that affirm growth, health and adaptations can enhance our well being (DiMaggio & Semerari, 2004). Particularly as women, telling our full stories can offer validation, self-awareness and self-acceptance (Butler, Ford & Tregaskis, 2007). The key to doing so, though, is to tell the story from the heart (Lyubomirsky, Sousa & Dickerhoff, 2006) and find the positive meaning of our of our negative events (McAdams, 2008).

J. B., a 37-year old human resources professional and mother of two who is currently recovering from cancer describes her narrative from the growth perspective:

“I made a career move back in 1999 within my accounting firm. I went from being a systems consultant and helping people improve the efficiency of their business to being a human resource professional. By representing my firm at a few recruiting events on college campuses, I saw what an impact I could make on young college students early on in their careers. I had a knack for engaging with people and soon decided I would like to contribute to my firm in a more meaningful way by impacting people versus a businesses bottom line.

Until this "cancer thing" came along, I never really questioned my career path. I love my career as an HR professional and I am in a firm I grew up in...Challenged every single day but surely still within my comfort zone.

As I went through three rounds of chemo and a bone marrow transplant, I did everything in my power to "will" positive results... Meditation (specific guided imagery for cancer patients), Jewish prayer of healing several times a day, positive attitude, friendliness (just being nice to nurses, doctors and other patients went a long way!), etc. People would spot this attitude in me and comment... To this day, I still believe all of the things I did added up to help me get into remission and help me make a lasting impression on those I interacted with. I know this now because they still reach out to check on me or interact with me - and they have patients come and go regularly.

I decided I needed to take this skill set and impact those that may need inspiring. While I recover, I have been making notes of what makes me happy and brings me and my family joy. My list gets longer as the days tick on and I do hope to put the pieces of my list together at some point when I am more fully recovered. I know for certain I would like to help, impact and inspire those in need - I just haven't figured out the mechanism or venue yet!" (J. B., personal communication, July 20, 2011).

However J. B. decides to pursue this calling, clearly her positive attitude and redemptive narrative will inspire the people she touches. Each of us has this opportunity to tell the story of our lives from a growth perspective, from a place of strength.

Narrative Exercise: Consider your peak experiences, turning points and history and now, write a redemptive, positive version of your life story. What lessons did you learn? How did the situation(s) help you grow? How are you impacting others today? What is the story you want to tell about your life?

YOU: Strengths, Talents, Passions and Values*Strengths*

Now that you have considered when you are at your best and how you can positively tell the story of your life, you can begin to see themes of strength. You can probably see that most of your moments center around a few key personal attributes such as kindness or bravery or making other people laugh. Regardless of the particular themes, what is evident is that you have a unique set of strengths that you bring to this world.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) define “strengths” as psychological aspects that define morally valued virtues. Strengths are positive traits that we carry into our behaviors, thoughts and feelings (Park, Peterson & Seligman, 2004). They are often so innate to our core authentic selves that they seem ordinary to us and thus we don’t even realize that they are strengths (Biswas-Diener, in press.) When a strength is so ingrained, using it is seems like business-as-usual. As example, research shows that only one-third of people can

identify their strengths (Hill, 2001). Because our strengths are “who we are” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), merely identifying one’s strengths can enhance well-being (Seligman et al., 2005).

The “Values in Action” (VIA) Classification of Strengths (Peterson and Seligman, 2004) allow us to identify our core strengths. The VIA identifies 24 core character strengths that are ubiquitous across cultures, morally valued, distinct, measurable, elevating and fulfilling. According to Seligman (2002), our happiest lives come from using our strengths “every day in the main realms of your life to bring abundant gratification and authentic happiness” (p.161). Of course, this is not a new concept. Aristotle believed that happiness is full and excellent exercise of our core virtues (Melchert, 1994). The principle extends to modern day life. According to Morris and Garret (2010), using our strengths directly leads to more passionate work. Similarly, Goldman and Kernis (2002) found that the more people characterized their goals as reflecting “who they really are”, the more positivity and life satisfaction they report later. As Seligman (2002) states, using our strengths in service of something larger than ourselves leads to having a meaningful life.

E. Z., a life coach, “edutainer”, speaker, author, and healer in her twenties found her life purpose through initial consideration of her core strengths: “love of learning” and “determination.” She describes:

“It started when I was in college with my mentor, Dr. Srikumar Rao, gently pushing me more than other students because he saw within me a thirst for knowledge and determination. I studied “Creativity and Personal Mastery” with him. At the time, I had not heard of positive psychology, (but I) did some gym yoga and had a few spiritual experiences. I started to get an inkling that I wanted to help people make their lives spectacular. I thought I’d get a doctorate degree in traditional psychology and then sneak happiness in the back door. One of my classmates from the course told me about her life coach. My heart leapt. I didn’t even know what a life coach did; I just knew that’s what I wanted to do. The Masters of Applied Positive Psychology program at Penn was created that same

year, and I was accepted straight out of college. I knew that anybody could call themselves a life coach, and since I was starting at 21 years old, I wanted science behind me. I knew I would use positive psychology for coaching and speaking. While doing MAPP, I was inspired one night to sign up for a 200 hour, 1 month intensive yoga teacher training. I naturally fell into the roll of yoga teacher and have since then integrated all the various traditions I've been trained in under the umbrella of the art and science of Flourishing" (E. Z., personal communication, July 24, 2011).

E. Z. states that she is now completely clear that what she is doing is life purpose and what she is on this earth to do. Considering our strengths can help us understand our mission.

VIA Strengths Exercise: Take the Values In Action Assessment of Character Strengths and Virtues (found on www.authentic happiness.com). Print out all of your strengths and record your top 5 below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Reflection on Strengths: Overall, what did you learn about yourself taking the VIA?

Your Signature Strengths. The VIA is intentionally named “Values in Action” because the survey identifies those strengths that we most often use, called our “signature strengths” (Seligman, 2002). Consider these top-rated strengths that you’ve written in above. Do they resonate? If not, regardless of their order as ranked in the VIA, select the three strengths that most resonate for you. I ask you to do this because it is possible that a strength is more signature to you than the ranking shows (Reivich & Saltzberg, 2011). These are the signature strengths we’ll focus on, so circle those. Gallup posits that people have better growth potential when they invest energy in developing strengths instead of trying to correct weaknesses (Rath, 2007). Now, considering those 3 strengths, answer the following (Adapted from VIA Seed Questions, Reivich, 2008):

Signature Strengths Exercises:

1. What do your signature strengths mean to you? What is YOUR definition of each of your signature strengths?

Definition Signature Strength 1:

Definition Signature Strength 2:

Definition Signature Strength 3:

2. In what ways are you already using your signature strengths in work, love and play?

Write about a recent example when you used each of your signature strengths toward a goal, in a group and/or in a manner in which you're proud:

Using Signature Strength 1:

Using Signature Strength 2:

Using Signature Strength 3:

Working Strengths. Similar to the VIA, Gallup created “StrengthsFinder 2.0” (Rath, 2007) to identify 34 common talents used in the workplace. Gallup (Rath, 2007) finds that people are six times more likely to be engaged in their jobs and three times more likely to enjoy well-being when they have the opportunity to use these strengths every day.

StrengthsFinder Exercise: Either visit www.strengthsfinder.com or purchase *StrengthsFinder 2.0* at your local or online bookstore and take the StrengthsFinder assessment. Print out the report and record your top 5 StrengthsFinder Strengths below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Reflection: Overall, what did you learn about yourself taking the StrengthsFinder?

StrengthsFinder Themes Exercise: Now, review what the StrengthsFinder website and/or book says about your particular strengths. Record below the main themes that resonate for each of your strengths:

Key Themes StrengthsFinder 1:

Key Themes StrengthsFinder 2:

Key Themes StrengthsFinder 3:

Key Themes StrengthsFinder 4:

Key Themes StrengthsFinder 5:

The WHOLE You. While each strength is valuable on its own, together, they create a new “whole” that is greater than the sum of its parts. How do your signature strengths and StrengthsFinder strengths work together synergistically to create the “whole” of you? According to Biswas-Diener, Kashdan and Minhas (2011), strengths work together in combination to create something different and larger when coupled together. Similar to baking a cake, the flour, sugar and eggs are three separate ingredients that when put together make a uniquely fourth item: a delicious cake. Though little is empirically known about how specific strengths work together (Biswas-Diener et al., 2011), you know yourself and can consider your holistic self. For example, do you regularly exercise Courage and Kindness such that you stand up for others in need? Are Humor and Leadership strengths of yours, such that you create a fun, inspiring environment for your staff? Are you a Visionary with Zest and Social Intelligence such that you’re the one always planning the community fundraiser?

Your Strengths in Harmony Exercise: Consider your signature strengths and your StrengthsFinder strengths and how they work together in harmony toward your purpose:

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Passions: Finding Flow

While Strengths are core to our character, they do not alone uncover our life's purpose. As Biswas-Diener et al., (2011) suggest, strengths work should not be done in isolation, but considered in conjunction with skills, values and passions. Vallerand, Blanchard, Mageau, Koestner, Ratelle, Léonard, and Gagné, (2003) define passion as a strong inclination to invest time and energy in an activity that we find important and that we enjoy. Achieving a certain level a proficiency in our passions, they become part of our identity (Vallerand, 2008). In this manner, we can look to our greatest passions for insight into who we are and what our purpose is. According to Damon (2008), being engaged in activities that we love can cultivate purpose. When a passion is pursued

autonomously, in accord with the other activities of our lives, and in support of a meaningful cause, it can further help us uncover our life's purpose (Vallerand, 2008).

Which passions should we look to? Those that are “Harmonious Passions” and those that create “Flow”. Harmonious passion is experienced when we intrinsically pursue an activity because we personally have interest in it and love it (Vallerand, 2008). Harmonious passion is linked with better health, relationships, skill development and psychological well-being (Vallerand, 2008). “Flow” is the state of engagement where we are so fully immersed in the activity that we lose track of time and we forget to eat (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). According to the foremost researcher on “flow”, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, flow is more than simple enjoyment; when we are in flow, all else goes away - we become one with the activity (1990).

Vallerand et al. (2003) suggest that flow is an outcome of passion: when we are passionate about endeavors, we find flow in them. Finding flow, though, is also a matter of being challenged, for flow is found at our growing edge when we are working toward our best personal performance (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Peterson, 2006). Though the activity may challenge us, through the focused attention we bring to it and the sense of control we feel while attempting mastery, we find deep enjoyment from flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In this sense, flow makes us want more flow. Flow builds confidence, encourages being our best, and makes us feel great about ourselves (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). As Seligman (2002) states, flow creates psychological growth and capital from which we draw for years. When we participate in such passions more frequently, consistently raising our own personal bar with more challenge and requiring

us to advance a higher skillset, we increase positive affect (Gregory, 2003) and our ability to flourish (Seligman, 2011).

It reasons, then, that our passions are extremely telling of our life purpose. Our greatest joy can come of pursuing our passions as life work. N. M. P., a professor of Education Studies and History who is also an IntenSati fitness trainer describes finding her purpose through following her passions. She says:

“My purpose in life is to embody excellence, perseverance, and passion in all I undertake, and to challenge stereotypes and transcend boundaries in every area of life. I strive to stand as an example to others (especially women) that living an extraordinary life is possible, if we are willing to take risks and do the work - work which can be all-consuming but totally exhilarating when we are pursuing our passions.

There were two signal "a-ha" experiences that allowed me to distill this purpose. 1) School always came naturally to me, and when I put in the work, I excelled. Though I felt fulfilled by intellectual pursuit, I had completely neglected any athletic endeavor, assuming that my academic success precluded my enjoying or excelling at physical activity. When I discovered group fitness and started working as hard at cultivating my body as my mind - and saw amazing results in all areas of life- I realized how rewarding it was to engage deeply in this unfamiliar area, and how much hard work paid off, even in area in which I wasn't a "natural." Now, as an assistant professor and a Premiere IntenSati leader, I can honestly say I am striving for greatness in both domains, and that they support growth in each other.

2) Right after college, I had no idea what I wanted to do/be, so I did what many direction-less Ivy League grads do - I took a high-paying, grueling job in investment banking. During this one year of my life in which I was not a student or a teacher, I could not stand going to work: I felt insecure, unfulfilled, and exhausted. I realized in that year that a big paycheck was not motivation enough for me to do work I didn't enjoy, and that waking up each day "not excited to be Nati," as I told my mom once, wasn't a life I wanted to live. I left after one year to teach Spanish at a middle school, and then to pursue a doctorate in History, which many people dissuaded me from doing due to limited fellowships, job opportunities, etc. I realized then that I was willing to take that risk - to hold fast to the belief that "it" has to work out for SOMEONE, and that if I am pursuing my passions with rigor and enthusiasm, why can't it be me? I am still making that bet every day as I seek out new challenges, and remain committed to live a life I love” (N. M. P., personal communication, July 14, 2011).

N. M. P. reminds us that we can live our passions as life work. Each of us has different passions. As such, the activities in which we find flow vary to the individual. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) refers to “autotelic” experiences, those activities done for their own sake, rather than an extrinsic reward. We each have these. My passions are writing, teaching, running and browsing open markets. Perhaps yours are playing tennis, gardening, reading, or cooking. Wang, Khoo, Woon Chia, & Divaharan, (2008) describe that such “harmonious passions” are done autonomously and feel in accord with the other domains of our life. Often, these activities become central to our identity (Vallerand et al., 2003) such that rather than saying that I run, I call myself, “a runner.” Rather than gardening, you call yourself “a gardener.” These are the passions that we want to take note of as we work to uncover our life’s purpose.

Passions Exercise: What are your passions? Where do you find flow? In the left column below, list those activities in which you find flow. Next to it, write *why* you love that activity. For instance, I am passionate about teaching because I care about young adults and enjoy encouraging them to pursue their dreams, I get excited seeing the spark in students’ eyes when they “get it”, and I love public speaking – it’s fun for me and I’m good at it! So, fill in your passions below:

Passion (where I find flow)	Why
Carin: teaching	Carin: I care about young adults and enjoy encouraging them to pursue their dreams, I get excited seeing the spark in students’ eyes when they “get it”, and I love public speaking – it’s fun for me and I’m good at it!
YOU:	YOU:

Talents (Skills):

According to Seligman and Parks (2006), the purposeful life consists of using our signature strengths and talents to serve something larger than oneself. This philosophy may well be aligned with Aristotle's view that the good life of true virtue is maximizing one's talents and capacities. Similarly, Ryff and Singer (1998) posit that the good life involves finding out what we are good at, exercising those talents and as such, realizing our potential. They believe that regardless of culture or race, this pursuit is universal.

What is the different between strengths and talents and skills? According to Seligman (2002), strengths are moral traits while talents are innate and non-moral. When one has a musical talent, for instance, the theory reasons that the talent is automatically inherent in them from a very young age. Moreover, a talent is tangible (Debats, 1999). Often, our passions rise from our talents – those skills we have honed. According to Schuller and Seligman (2010), flow states nurture talents and enhance our skills. Engagement in our passions leads us to pursue activities that challenge our skills, and as such, we develop our talents (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Ericsson et al. (2007) believe that with enough practice, we can hone skills to become talents. For this reason, henceforth, I refer to talents and skills synonymously as the tangible actions we are good at, such as

acting, public speaking, teaching, writing, debating, mathematical equation, problem solving, analytical thinking and strategic planning, to name a few.

According to Ventegodt et al., (2003), everyone has many talents, and among them, a special gift, something that the person can do better than others. In this manner, the authors claim that talents are behind purpose. They postulate that this core talent is what gives people the greatest possible pleasure in life. Moreover, they believe that to fully realize our purpose, we must accentuate that core talent, and nurture auxiliary talents that support our full exercise of our unique gift. For instance, Lance Armstrong's special gift is likely cycling, and to be an accomplished champion, he must also exercise auxiliary talents such as strategic thinking and team management.

Clifton and Harter (2003) agree. They believe that we have inherent talents that are part of our personality. Others see talents as honed with practice rather than innate (Ericsson et al., 2007). I believe they are a mixture of both. I am the worst singer in this hemisphere – no amount of practice would make singing a talent. However, I have always had a knack for writing. My second grade teacher noticed it and encouraged me to strengthen this skill. Regardless of whether innate or honed, our talents (or skills) are important because they inform us *how* we will execute our purpose. For instance, my purpose is to help others live their best lives. I could do this in many ways, as a corporate leader, a teacher or social worker. With my talents in public speaking, writing and coaching, though, my unique purpose comes to life differently than others with similar missions.

Talents Exercise: What are your core talents? Below is a list of possible skills (Partially adapted from “Resume Skills List” (e.g. “Resume Skills List,” n.d., para. 3). Check off your top 5 talents. Note that there are many more skills than listed, so feel free to fill in your own next to “Other” if your core talents are not represented here.

<input type="checkbox"/> Acting	<input type="checkbox"/> Editing	<input type="checkbox"/> Raising funds
<input type="checkbox"/> Administration support	<input type="checkbox"/> Entertaining	<input type="checkbox"/> Remain calm in crisis
<input type="checkbox"/> Advising people	<input type="checkbox"/> Financial management	<input type="checkbox"/> Reaching conclusions
<input type="checkbox"/> Analyzing data	<input type="checkbox"/> Finding answers	<input type="checkbox"/> Research
<input type="checkbox"/> Attention to details	<input type="checkbox"/> Following instructions	<input type="checkbox"/> Selling
<input type="checkbox"/> Bringing people together	<input type="checkbox"/> Handling Complaints	<input type="checkbox"/> Setting goals
<input type="checkbox"/> Building	<input type="checkbox"/> Interviewing others	<input type="checkbox"/> Spreading optimism
<input type="checkbox"/> Budgeting	<input type="checkbox"/> Listening	<input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Communicating	<input type="checkbox"/> Managing people	<input type="checkbox"/> Teaching
<input type="checkbox"/> Communicate w/children	<input type="checkbox"/> Mathematical Equation	<input type="checkbox"/> Working with hands
<input type="checkbox"/> Compiling data	<input type="checkbox"/> Manipulate numbers	<input type="checkbox"/> Writing
<input type="checkbox"/> Comprehension	<input type="checkbox"/> Motivate people	<input type="checkbox"/> Recognize problems
<input type="checkbox"/> Confronting people	<input type="checkbox"/> Negotiating	<input type="checkbox"/> Relating to People
<input type="checkbox"/> Counseling people	<input type="checkbox"/> Organizing space	<input type="checkbox"/> Serving others
<input type="checkbox"/> Creating ideas	<input type="checkbox"/> Performing	<input type="checkbox"/> Troubleshooting
<input type="checkbox"/> Create positive environment	<input type="checkbox"/> Persuading	<input type="checkbox"/> Visualizing
<input type="checkbox"/> Debating	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning mtgs/events	Other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Decision making	<input type="checkbox"/> Prioritizing tasks	Other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Delegating tasks	<input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving	Other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Diplomacy	<input type="checkbox"/> Promoting products	Other: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Drawing plans/diagrams	<input type="checkbox"/> Public Speaking	Other: _____

Reflection on Talents: How are you using your talents today? Which is are special gifts?

Which can support your nurturing that gift?

Role Models

As Kashdan and McKnight (2009) state, one way that we identify our core purpose is through modeling others and social context. Most (if not all) of us have people whom we admire and wish to emulate. Perhaps you hold your grandmother, or first grade teacher, or your best friend in especially high regard. Our role models can be family, friends, professional colleagues or even celebrities. Reflecting on our role models' best attributes and actions of can help us identify our own values (Miller & Frisch, 2009) and purpose. What is important in considering these role models is not who they are, but *why* you admire them.

Role Models Exercise: Below list 3 role models and why you admire them. Be clear about which specific characteristics you hold in high esteem.

Role Model	Most Admirable Qualities

Core Values:

A key aspect of uncovering your purpose is to be very clear about your values (Boyatzis & Akrivu, 2006; Boyatzis, Murphy & Wheeler, 2000; Dik & Steger, 2008; Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). Living in accordance with our personal values and beliefs are core to living authentically (Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph 2008). As Locke (1996) states, activities and conditions that further our values ignite positive emotions. In fact, he believes that we choose our goals based on our values, to propagate or strengthen them. As Whitworth et al. (2009) state, when we live our values, we *feel* “right.” In this manner, our values drive intrinsic motivation such that we are more likely to pursue and accomplish our goals when they are in alignment with our innermost values (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009).

Often, though, we have a hard time figuring out what our values are - or how to describe them (Miller & Frisch, 2009). The key to determining your personal values is to ensure that they are YOURS – not only (or wholly) those that are socially constructed by your culture or family, but those that ring true to your gut. As Whitworth et al. (2009) state, “Values are who we are. Not who we would like to be, not who we think we should be, but who we are in our lives right now” (p. 245). Certainly, we’ve likely garnered some of our values from family members, our culture, and the social identity groups to which we belong or we wish we belonged (Boyatzis, et al., 2000). However, we also shape our values through our personal history and our character strengths (Boyatzis & Akrivu, 2006).

As Kashdan and McKnight (2009) state, our innermost values consistently manifest in our behaviors, thoughts and actions (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). Therefore,

we can find our values through reflection of our “peak experiences,” consideration of our “signature strengths” and appreciation for when we feel inspired, hopeful and joyful. In other words, the activities you’ve done thus far will help you with this exercise.

Values Exercise: (Adapted from Rokeach, 1973). Consider the themes you identified in your peak experiences, strengths and positive emotions exercises. For example, you might notice a propensity for fairness, family or achievement. Note them below:

Now, consider the list of Values below (Rokeach, 1973). Based on themes above, first put a star (*) next to the 12 that most fit your values. Blank lines are included so that you can add your own if not on the list. This may be challenging to select (Whitworth et al., 2009) as we all care about many of these socially appreciated values. Remember, though, there is no “right” or “wrong” answer (Whitworth et al., 2009). We all have many values – and a few that drive most of our decisions and priorities in life. After you’ve chosen 12, then circle the 6 of those that are most important to you.

Accuracy	Fairness	Independence	Power	Tolerance
Adventure	Family	Individuality	Privacy	Tradition
Challenge	Faith	Innovation	Progress	Trust
Change	Flair	Integrity	Punctuality	Truth
Cleanliness	Freedom	Justice	Reliability	Unity
Collaboration	Friendship	Knowledge	Resourcefulness	Variety
Community	Fun	Loyalty	Respect for Others	Wisdom
Cooperation	Goodness	Money/Wealth	Romance	_____
Courage	Global	Nature	Safety	_____
Creativity	Gratitude	Openness	Service to Others	_____
Democracy	Hard Work	Patriotism	Simplicity	_____
Diversity	Harmony	Peace	Status	_____
Efficiency	Honesty	Personal Growth	Success (Achievement)	_____
Excellence	Honor	Pleasure	Teamwork	_____

Reflection on Values: How do your values show up today? How would you like to enact on them in the future?

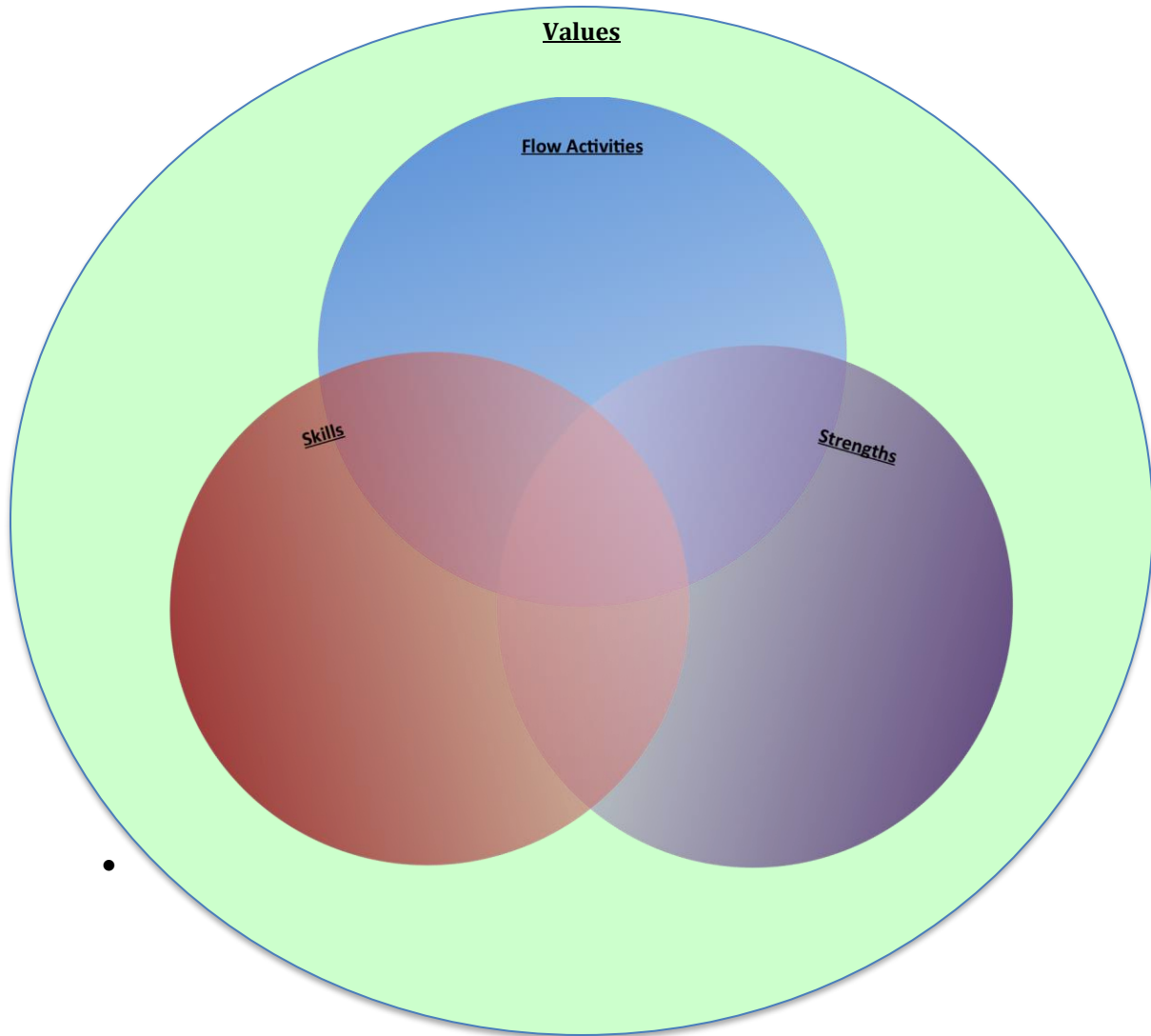
Your Purpose

“The secret of success is constancy to purpose.” - Benjamin Disraeli

The Intersection of it all: Your Purpose

Now that you are clear about your values, your talents, passions and strengths, you have the essence of your purpose. You know who you are. Use the diagram below to help you align these aspects of your core self. Within the green circle, on either side of the word “Values” write your six core values. In the blue circle under “Flow Activities”,

record your greatest passions. Within the red circle, under “Skills” write your top talents. And in the purple circle, under “Strengths” write both your VIA and StrengthsFinder strengths.



Your Purpose Statement Exercise:

At our core, we are our values. We interact with the world through our passions, embodying our strengths and using our skills. And in the center, is our unique purpose. Our authentic selves.

We now need to translate that into our purpose (or mission) statement. Consider the following purpose statements (see Zadra, 2009). Walt Disney said, “My mission in life is to make people happy.” Phil Knight, the founder of Nike said, “My mission is to bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world.”

In writing your purpose statement, consider the impact you can make on this world with your unique blend of values, strengths, skills and passions. What does the world need from you (Frankl, 1963)? What do you love to do? How do you love to inspire others? While this task can seem daunting, you have all of the information that you need. Consider the themes you’ve recorded throughout this book – do you find yourself often informing others? Do you find yourself often cheering people on? Do you find yourself the one who is always sticking up for the underdog? Your passions will give you a clue. When you consider these, remember the second column of the exercise – *why* you love that activity. If you love playing tennis, perhaps strategy is important to you. If you love reading, perhaps gathering knowledge and understanding context is really important to you.

The purpose statement needs to be clear and strong enough so that you can access it any time, helping you to stay on course (Whitworth et al., 2007). For instance, your purpose may be to create new art to inspire others, to feed the flame of people’s passion for film, or to educate your neighborhood. If you’d like, consider a metaphor that captures the essence of your purpose (Whitworth et al., 2009). For example, you could

say “I am the sparkplug that will ignite my community’s economy.” Another way to write your statement is consider what is uniquely “you” and how it impacts the world. For example, S. O., a 23-year old health and well-being expert states her purpose as: “My spirit and energy reminds people that life is valuable” (S. O., personal communication, July 30, 2011).

This may take several tries and a few nights of marinating in the words that come to you. As Ventegodt et al. (2003) find, with time and practice, some people may even be able to capture their overarching mission in a single short sentence like “I create” or “I bring joy”.

Purpose Statement Exercise: What is YOUR statement of purpose?

How You Can Pursue Your Purpose

Often, there are many ways to pursue a purpose. For instance, two people can aim to uplift their spiritual community, but do so in different ways. This is where our talents play a key role. For the person blessed with public speaking talent, she may become a Rabbi; while for another who has superior organizational skills, she may plan community events. In this manner, each has a unique purpose. When there are too many ways to

pursue our purpose, we can become paralyzed (Schwartz, 2004). We need to narrow down the choices and determine good options that fulfill us.

Pursuing My Purpose Exercise: With your mission statement, consider the following:

What are the talents and skills that you have to execute this mission? (Refer to your talents list!)

What are the avenues through which you can fulfill it? (For instance, as a rabbi, a community organizer, a writer, a mother, a friend, etc.)

Who are the people you want to impact?

How will your experiences shape fulfillment of this mission?

Based on all of this, what are the ways *YOU* will live your purpose?

Living Your Purpose

“Success demands singleness of purpose.” – Vince Lombardi

Your Vision: Your Best Possible Future Self

Now that you know your core self and your mission, what is your vision for how to impact the world? What are your biggest dreams? Your deepest desires? When you close your eyes and imagine that *anything* is possible, what do you see? According to McClelland, (1985) our dreams and fantasies are the expression of our inner needs and wishes. We are driven by our dreams, inspired by the possibility that they may come true (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006). As Seligman (2011) says, we are called by the future.

Having a clear vision of what we *could* accomplish helps us live our purpose. When we imagine success, we increase our rate of achieving such success, as we create a closer connection between our thoughts and our actions (Pham & Taylor, 1999). King (2001) suggests writing about our “Best Possible Selves” to bring our dreams to life. Possible selves are personalized representations of our goals and as such, they create a critical link between self-concept and action (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Constructing a story of our “best possible selves” has been shown to enhance mood, increase well-being

and create health benefits (King, 2001). Moreover, imagining about our “best possible self” makes us more optimistic about the future (Meevissen, Peters & Alberts, 2011). As Boyatzis and Akrivou (2006) posit, when we share our dreams, they have “the power to become a force” (p.633).

Best Possible Future Self Exercise: Think about your life in twenty years. Imagine that everything has gone as well as it possibly could. You have worked hard and succeeded at accomplishing all of your life goals. Think of this as the realization of all of your life dreams. Now, write about what you imagined (King, 2001).

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slight shadow on the right side, suggesting it's resting on a surface.

The Will AND The Way

To fully realize our purpose, we must take action. As Bronk et al., (2009) suggest, identifying one's purpose can be futile if we don't know how to enact that purpose – and if we don't have the agency required to pursue it. We need both the “will” to pursue our purpose and be determine the “way” to do it. As the skills and tools required for this exceed the scope of this Capstone, these topics are briefly discussed below. However, when this work is used with a coaching client and when it is presented in a book for the mainstream public, it will include another part all about how to confidently pursue the purpose that the reader (or client) worked so hard to uncover.

The Voices Holding Us Back

Pursuing our dreams can be scary. Sometimes, we fear rejection and therefore, we lose the will to pursue our vision. As Ventegodt et al. (2003) state, pursuing our life mission can be difficult because frustrations or failures along the way can cause severe emotional pain. The authors state that defeat, fear and pain can lead us to pursue a secondary talent or goal that isn't as fulfilling as our primary goal, leaving us still hungry for our true purpose. Similarly, sometimes, we can't see a logistical pathway to pursue our purpose. For example, if you are in a job that pays the rent and offers health insurance, leaving it to pursue your dreams of being a writer or actor can be terrifying and can seem implausible. We become paralyzed from fear of regretting the decision later (Schwartz, 2004).

We may have many voices – internal and external – that hold us back. Sometimes the voices come from others – parents or partners or friends that love us by wanting to protect us. They project their fear onto us, though they usually do so with good intention.

Moreover, as women, we have likely been particularly socialized to adhere to socially constructed norms and expectations, which may lead us to deny our true desires (Butler et al., 2007). Such projection and fear of rejecting social values can impact the difficulty of achieving our purpose (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

Sometimes the voices are internal. We tell ourselves that we aren't good enough, that this work has already been done, that others will chastise us, or a variety of other negative sentiments that you wouldn't dare say to your best friend. Therefore, we need to build our resiliency and develop effective tools to hold these voices at bay. Maslow (1968) said:

“Every human being has [two] sets of forces within him. One set clings to safety and defensiveness out of fear, tending to regress backward, hanging on to the past, ...*afraid* to take chances, afraid to jeopardize what he already has, *afraid* of independence, freedom and separateness. The other set of forces impels him forward toward wholeness of Self and uniqueness of Self, toward full functioning of all of his capacities, toward confidence in the face of the external world at the same time that he can accept his deepest, real, unconscious Self” (p.55).

Maslow felt that this basic dilemma or conflict between the defensive forces and growth is an experience we all face. To pursue our purpose, we need to remain task-focused, as this leads to successful pursuit of purpose (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). How do we remain task-focused, though, when our minds are so full of the negative voices?

Often these negative voices are “automatic thoughts” or “cognitive distortions” (Leahy, 1997). The voices tell us we “should” do something a particular way or we label ourselves as undesirable (Leahy, 1997). These thoughts are “thinking traps” (Beck, 1967) into which we can easily fall. The key to staying “on purpose” is being able to recognize these thoughts, the underlying belief systems that created them, and develop cognitive processes to increase the accuracy of our thinking (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Several tools

can help with this. Beck (1967) realized seven common thinking traps into which many of us fall, including “Jumping to Conclusions”, “Mind Reading”, “Personalizing” and “Overgeneralizing”. By reading about the traps (See Appendix A), you will most likely be able to identify which trap (or 2) you most usually trip into. By asking yourself the questions coupled with each trap (identified in Appendix A), you can begin to check the accuracy of your thinking and create healthier thinking. Similarly, connecting our thinking traps with our underlying belief systems can help. Ellis (1973) developed the “A-B-C” model (See Appendix B) in which we uncover the belief and consequences of the adversity, or negative thoughts. In combination with Thinking Traps, we can truly begin to change our thinking. Learning these techniques to quiet the voices in our head is an important step to pursuing our purpose.

Being Optimistic, Hopeful and Self-Efficacious Through Goal Setting

To overcome our fears, pursue our passions and live our purpose, we need resilient thinking, hope, goals, self-efficacy, and a concrete plan. As discussed, resilient thinking helps to push away the thinking that has held us back. We then need to develop healthier, more optimistic thinking that sees obstacles as “temporary, specific and not personal” (Seligman, 1990). Optimistic and hopeful thinking can greatly help us.

According to Snyder, Irving and Anderson (1991), hope is a positive motivational state that gives us the agency (motivation) to pursue our goals and enables us to develop the pathways to achieve them. Hope ignites action. In this manner, hope brings our purpose to life (Bronk et al., 2009). Moreover, we need clear goals. According to Snyder (1994), goals ground our hope. Therefore, to determine the pathways for living our purpose, we need to pursue intelligent goal-setting. Locke (1996) suggests that we are more likely to

pursue goals that are challenging, to which we are deeply committed and about which we are self-efficacious. When our pursuit is too large, it seems impossible. Therefore, Locke (1996) suggests that we break our large goals into smaller goals that are manageable and offer positive reinforcement along the way. This helps to build our self-efficacy so that we remain committed to the pursuit. As Maddox (2009) states, self-efficacy may be the single most important element to goal achievement.

Creating a Plan

The development of goals and formation of a practical, achievable plan are necessary to pursuing our purpose. Whereas the content thus far has helped you define your purpose, a second set of exercises is required to help you pursue it fully. Again, due to the specific purpose of this document as a part of the MAPP Capstone, such exercises are not included. When this work is fully utilized, healthy thinking, goal-setting and plan development will be fully included so that women not only discover their purpose, but feel prepared and energized to pursue it.

Conclusion: Discover Your Purpose and Flourish

In summary, purpose matters. People with purpose have better health, greater resilience through tragedy, and enjoy overall well-being. For people who yearn for more, uncovering one's purpose provides a compass, a direction and a tremendous feeling that their life matters. Even when having a bad day, or you're in a bad mood, when we have purpose, we feel fulfilled and satisfied with our lives (Diener et al., 2011).

Until now, purpose has sometimes been considered an abstract concept and many people have become miserable in their pursuit to find it. Finding our purpose has been considered the most urgent of questions (Camus, 1981), the primary motivational force of

humans (Frankl, 1963) and the quintessential question (Haidt, 2006). Wanting to know who we are and why we specifically are here on earth can both motivate and destroy us (Camus, 1981). With the work heretofore, people can not only understand what purpose is and why it matters, but they can use the easy strength-based exercises to find their calling. With this work, the field finally has a research-based process to help clients find their true purpose and therefore help them live to their highest level of life satisfaction.

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Appendix A: Thinking Traps

Thinking Trap	What to do/ask	Notes/Examples
Jumping to Conclusions	Slow down: What is the evidence?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Automatic and with certainty ▪ (<i>Ready, Fire, Aim</i>)
Tunnel Vision	Include More: What salient info did I miss?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Seeing the behaviors that fit with your own beliefs/thinking. ▪ (<i>Forest through the Trees</i>) ▪ Focusing on the less significant, while screening out the more important
Magnifying and Minimizing	Be evenhanded: What positive events occurred?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overvalue some and undervalue others. Leads to self-fulfilling prophesy ▪ (<i>Wrong side of the Binoculars</i>) ▪ Errors in evaluating events in which the negative aspects of a situation are magnified and the positive aspects of a situation are minimized.
Personalizing	Look outward: How did others or circumstances contribute?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Blaming yourself. ▪ (<i>Me, Me, Me</i>) ▪ The tendency to automatically attribute the cause of an adversity to one's personal characteristics or actions.
Externalizing	Look inward: How did I contribute?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ (<i>Them, them, them</i>) ▪ Tendency to automatically attribute the cause of an adversity to other people or to circumstances.
Overgeneralizing	Look at behavior: Is there a specific behavior that explains the situation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ (<i>Character Assassination</i>) ▪ Settling on global beliefs about one's general lack of worth or ability on the basis of a single situation.
Mind Reading	Speak up: Did I express myself? Did I ask for information?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ (<i>The Great Walendo</i>) ▪ Assuming that you know what another person is thinking, or ▪ Expecting another person to know what you are thinking
Emotional Reasoning		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If I feel it, it must be true.

Originally from Beck, 1967; this version from the work of Jane Gillham Ph.D., Mark Linkins, & Karen Reivich, Ph.D.; version retrieved from Pete Berridge, 2011.

Appendix B: A-B-C Model

When faced with adversity (or we hear a voice that holds us back), consider what it is saying – these are your “Beliefs.” For instance, if your voice is telling you that you aren’t talented enough to be successful as a writer, your belief may be “Negative Comparison” below and this is likely making you embarrassed, and/or hiding from going after your dream. This is the “Consequence” of your belief. By using this A-B-C tool with the Thinking Traps (Appendix A) tool, you can see what trap you’re falling into that is leading to this belief and then thoughtfully ask yourself the identified questions (in Appendix A) to reset your thinking to more accurate thinking. In the example above, the trap you may be falling into is “Jumping to Conclusions” so you need to slow down and ask what is the evidence that you aren’t good enough? What evidence do you have that you ARE a good writer? You may fall into a number of traps at once. Carefully ask yourself each question to calm that nasty voice in your head and reset it to healthier thinking.

Beliefs	Emotional Consequences
Loss (I have lost something)	Sadness/Withdrawal
Danger (Something bad is going to happen and I can’t handle it)	Anxiety/Agitation
Trespass (I have been harmed)	Anger/Aggression
Inflicting harm (I have caused harm)	Guilt/Apologizing
Negative comparison (I don’t measure up)	Embarrassment/Hiding
Positive Contribution (I contributed in a positive way)	Pride/Sharing, planning future achievements
Appreciating what you have received (I have received a gift that I value)	Gratitude/Giving back, paying forward
Positive future (Things can change for the better)	Hope/Energizing, taking action

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