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Flourishing Mothers: A Positive Psychology-Based Coaching Strategy for Women

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Abstract
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Keywords
parenting, mothering, women, job crafting, coaching, positive psychology

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Flourishing Mothers: A positive psychology-based coaching strategy for women

Brooke Albright Booth

University of Pennsylvania

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Master of Applied Positive Psychology

Advisor: Jane Gillham

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Abstract

Mothering is one of the most challenging, rewarding, uplifting, and frustrating experiences of a woman’s life. In this paper, I present literature reviews of positive psychology, mothering, and job crafting followed by a coaching strategy that incorporates this research to create a proactive, growth-oriented opportunity for women to feel more confident and happier in their parenting role. Positive psychology, with its foundation of strengths, offers an opportunity to match each woman’s strengths with scientifically valid interventions to create a parenting style that will increase a woman’s well-being, which in turn has the potential to increase her children’s happiness. The Positive Organizational Scholarship technique of job crafting enables women to examine and modify their daily lives to create more opportunities to develop meaningful moments in their parenting and for their children. These two approaches are combined into a coaching schema for use in my own practice that will help mothers apply these techniques to improve well-being for themselves and their families.
Mothering has been a demanding role throughout history, but I believe the complex balance of work, family, and personal fulfillment presents a unique challenge to women today. **Positive psychology**, with its focus on increasing flourishing and positive adaptation, offers a skill set that has the potential to help mothers better create a balance among these elements. Combining individual positive psychology interventions with the concept of job crafting (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2007) can help women develop personally appropriate solutions to challenges in their lives and has the potential to dramatically increase the flourishing not just of one woman but an entire family system. Individual coaching provides a delivery system that can adapt to the unique challenges and strengths of each mother and family system.

Job crafting supplies a framework with which to look at the tasks, relationships, and motivation for mothering and to identify areas where positive change can be made. Positive psychology interventions give women specific ways to intervene in their daily lives to generate better connections and increase well-being for themselves and their families. Using the individual nature of the coaching relationship enables women to create positive change that aligns with their own personal needs and desires.

In the sections that follow, I will review ideas central to the field of positive psychology and will then present some of the challenges facing mothers today. I will outline the current research supporting the efficacy of positive psychology interventions and job crafting and will introduce a coaching method that utilizes these approaches to enable mothers to achieve greater well-being for themselves and their families. As a practicing therapist, my intention is to implement and continue to develop the coaching sessions in this capstone through my practice.
The completion of this paper signifies the beginning of a new method of practice for me, not the end of my capstone.

**History of Positive Psychology**

Until recently, clinical psychology has concerned itself with what goes wrong with people and how to solve these problems (Seligman, 2011). In 1998, when Martin Seligman became president of the American Psychiatric Association, he championed a platform he termed positive psychology (Seligman, 2002). Seligman’s idea of positive psychology was that happiness was not simply the absence of the negative but that it requires the presence of positive elements (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Positive psychology is the scientific study of those elements that make life worth living (Peterson, 2013).

While the definition of “happiness” is the subject of extensive debate, I feel Diener and Biswas-Diener’s (2008) definition of happiness is most relevant for this paper. They define happiness as subjective well-being, which entails having high positive affect, low negative affect, and high life satisfaction. Happiness, or subjective well-being, is then a complex process involving multiple inputs, including character strengths and the elements of PERMA, which are described below.

Seligman’s model of well-being can be summarized in the acronym PERMA: Positive emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Achievement (Seligman, 2011). Positive emotion not only increases happiness but has a “broaden-and-build” effect on one’s mind (Fredrickson, 1998). When a person experiences positive emotions, she is better able to think flexibly and creatively, and expands the number of possibilities she sees (Fredrickson, 1998). By being more open to possibilities, she is able to build new mental, social and physical resources
that accumulate and assist her in withstanding adverse events in her life (Fredrickson, 1998). The more positive emotions she feels, the more resources she builds, which in turn can lead to both more positive emotion and greater success in life (Fredrickson, 2009). Fredrickson (2009) terms this an “upward spiral.”

A flourishing individual feels that her life is going well; that is, she feels good and functions effectively in life (Huppert & So, 2013). Fredrickson and Losada (2005) found that people who are flourishing experience a ratio of three positive emotions to one negative emotion. Similarly, in a study looking at teams of workers, the most successful teams had a positive-to-negative ratio of around 6-to-1, whereas the least successful had a ratio around 2-to-1 (Losada & Heaphy, 2004). From this research, it appears that positive emotions have a direct effect on our success, both personally and professionally.

Engagement often involves a state called “flow” in which a person is so involved and interested in the experience that time and emotion cease to exist (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow is a moment of transcendence in which one’s abilities are stretched just enough to meet the challenge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The characteristics of a flow experience include greater intrinsic motivation, increased enjoyment, positive mood, and greater self-esteem (Csikszentmihalyi & Shernoff, 2008).

Relationships are an essential piece of flourishing. Connecting with others is a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995); No one flourishes in isolation. As Chris Peterson (2013) famously said, “Other people matter.” Numerous studies have looked at how relationships increase a person’s flourishing. In the workplace, Dutton (2003) has found that having high quality connections (mutual positive regard, trust, and engagement) with others can lead to upward positive spirals in the workplace and add to the vital energy and well-being of
both individuals and organizations. Fowler and Christakis’s (2008) study on the effects of social networks suggests that an individual’s happiness was significantly predicted by the happiness of the people with whom they are connected. And Valliant (2012) found that for those men in Harvard’s Grant Study who lived longest, maintenance of important relationships played a key role in their longevity.

**Meaning** entails having a connection with something larger than oneself. Meaning can come from trying to enact one’s values, or it can be defined as a person feeling that their life makes sense and that she has a larger purpose in life (Steger, 2009). People can find meaning in multiple areas in their lives – work, family, religion. Having a variety of sources protects a person from experiencing meaninglessness if they encounter difficulties in one area (Baumeister & Vohs, 2005). While having meaning in life does not always ensure well-being, Baumeister and Vohs (2005) claim that one cannot experience well-being without meaning. Research has shown that having meaning in life is associated with life satisfaction (Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan, & Lorentz, 2008) while lacking meaning in life has been associated with pathology, including substance abuse and depression (Zika & Chamberlain, 1992).

**Achievement** involves pursuing mastery or accomplishments for their own sake (Seligman, 2011). This can be achieved by using strategies such as goal setting to increase self-efficacy, grit, and resilience. It is not necessarily concerned with what someone has achieved, but rather the process by which he achieved it. Achievement involves a sense of self-efficacy and the ability to set goals. Self-efficacy is confidence in one’s ability to achieve a task, and mastering goals in turn, builds self-efficacy (Locke, 1996). Self-efficacy is also linked to grit, which is defined as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, &
Kelly, 2007, p. 1087). Research on educational outcomes and The National Spelling Bee have shown that grit is a better predictor of success than measures of IQ (Duckworth et al., 2007).

While PERMA provides a theoretical overview of the elements of flourishing, positive psychology research focuses on finding methods to make this theory applicable in everyday life. Some people feel that positive psychology is no more than glorified self-help. While there may be overlap between the two, there is a significant difference: science. Positive psychology is empirically based, and the interventions it recommends have been shown to be effective through scientific testing. This does not mean that all interventions will work for all people, but that improving happiness or well-being by using a given intervention will occur more often than simply by chance (Peterson, 2013). Focusing on increasing one’s optimism is an example of this; thinking optimistically will not always get you what you want, but you certainly have a better chance at achieving it than if you approach something pessimistically (Peterson, 2013).

The foundation of Seligman’s (2011) model of PERMA is the recognition of 24 universal character strengths. Peterson and Seligman (2004) developed the common language of the character strengths classification system by looking at psychological inventories or virtues and strengths, historical figures and writings, creeds of organizations such as the Boy Scouts, character education programs, and fables from around the world. To be included in the classification system, a strength needed to meet a series of criteria, including that the strength contributed to an individual’s fulfillment in life, is morally valued on its own, and that the strength was generalized across situations in an individual’s life (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). From these criteria, a manual of “the sanities” was created (Easterbrook, 2001).
Mothering

My particular area of focus is how to apply positive psychology principles to mothering. It is difficult to accurately convey what being a parent is like to someone without children. Expectant mothers read books to prepare or rely on friends, family, or media to give them a glimpse into their future motherhood. Ultimately, however, the training for motherhood is “on the job.” Unfortunately, for many, the reality of being a mother does not match the romanticized image. As Betty Friedan said “There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform…” (1963/1997, p. 50). While this quote was referring to women’s dis-satisfaction with how their lives were constructed in the 1960’s, I feel that substituting the word “mother” for “women” in the quote succinctly expresses the difficulties of mothering today. In the “we can do it all” generation, the expectation is for women to work outside the home (and be successful) as well as to care for the home and family (and be successful). Psychologists theorize that having this outsized expectation as the model to which mothers should aspire is detrimental to women’s well-being (Maushart, 1999).

Many ideals of contemporary motherhood seem to be stuck in a past definition that no longer matches with today’s reality (Maushart, 1999). In previous decades, fewer women worked outside the home and the value of “women’s work” (keeping the home, raising children) was appreciated and valued by society at large (Maushart, 1999). The reality of the work that women do has changed; most (71%) mothers with children under the age of 18 currently work outside the home (Parker & Wang, 2012). Despite this, the ideal of motherhood has, for the most part, not significantly changed. This ideal, referred to as “intensive mothering” by Hays (1996), defines motherhood as a role in which “mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture and development of the sacred child and in which children’s needs take precedence over the
individual needs of their mothers” (p. 46). In this ideal, a child is understood to be someone who is shaped and developed through not only his environment, but also in large part by the mother herself (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001). Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson (2001) suggest that a mother’s identity may be so tied to her child that when the child misbehaves, the question she (and others) ask is not “Why is Alex behaving like that?” but “What have I done wrong that Alex is behaving like that?” The expectation that “good” mothering will result in a “good” child places a great deal of internal and external pressure on women.

Mothers themselves have expectations of what mothering should be like. Motherhood, we are told, will fulfill us and make us immensely happy. When this doesn’t bring the happiness anticipated, women can become stressed out and disappointed, then feel ashamed and guilty for feeling this way (Lyubomirsky, 2013). If one looks at positive affect alone as the benchmark, it is true that parenting, particularly motherhood, does not appear to create greater happiness for parents. In one oft-quoted study ranking the positive affect rating of activities, mothers ranked taking care of a child lower than eating and talking on the phone, and only slightly above housework and commuting (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwartz, & Stone, 2004). Other studies, however, have shown that childrearing actually adds to a parent’s meaning and purpose in life (Nelson, Kushlev, English, Dunn, & Lyubomirsky, 2013).

I believe both of these seemingly dichotomous results can be true at the same time. In day-to-day life, women may not notice and savor daily events because the negative has a stronger pull than the positive (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001). In addition, when women experience a major negative event in their lives, they marshal resources to cope with it and manage the crisis, including seeking social support from others. However, Lyubomirsky (2013) argues that in daily life women do not practice the same coping skills when
faced with minor negative events in part because they feel that others will not care as much about these events as they do. She theorizes that the tendency not to cope with and manage the everyday frustrations, along with the constancy of emotional, physical, and psychological support given to children means that moment-by-moment enjoyment of mothering can be tough to come by (Lyubomirsky, 2013).

Peak-end theory posits that one’s judgment of a particular experience is based on the peak moment, either positive or negative, along with how the experience ended (Kahneman, 2011). Using peak-end theory, a mother’s conclusion of her mothering experience would look at the summary of the experience of childrearing and base her judgment of success on the peak moments and how the experience ended. Therefore, while folding laundry, dealing with temper tantrums, and cooking may not be very enjoyable, peak moments such as graduations and a child’s first job may help one to view childrearing as a meaningful and rewarding event in life. Lyubomirsky (2013) suggests that taking a “big picture” approach to parenting allows mothers to look past the immediate issues and appreciate how the whole of mothering can be rewarding.

While expectations for motherhood may change as children grow, it is still difficult trying to live up to society’s image or to a woman’s perceived image of other “good” moms. While women make unconscious comparisons to this ideal every day, the comparison is inevitably an upward one, meaning that the mother finds herself lacking when measured against the ideal. Upward comparison produces frustration, negative mood, and stress, along with decreased happiness and lowered self-esteem (Schwartz, 2004). Many women ascribe to a mothering ideal of “superwoman”, a woman who can excel in all areas of life with a smile. This ideal, however, is not achievable, and by allowing themselves to buy into this unattainable image, mothers set themselves up for failure.
Another issue is the number of choices that face women today. Even focusing solely on choices in motherhood, there are a staggering number to be made. Will you breast-feed or bottle feed? Should you listen to Dr. Ferber (2006) and let your baby cry it out so they’ll learn to sleep through the night or should you co-sleep to ensure maximum attachment (Sears & Sears, 2001)? Will you enroll the child in day care or not, and if so, should it be a home day care or a day care center? Should you work outside the home and use your degree(s) or should you stay home to focus on raising your children? And these are only some of the options facing a new mother. As children grow older, their needs change and life becomes a delicate dance of how to teach values and discipline.

More options, while perhaps sounding better, can actually detract from our well-being (Schwartz, 2004). Choices are essential for how one chooses to exercise autonomy, which in turn directly impacts one’s well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). However, having too many choices can actually overload us and paralyze us to the point where we are unable to make any decision (Schwartz, 2004). Add to this mix the number of tasks and roles a mother is supposed to perform and the world can seem overwhelming. As Ashworth and Nobile note, “A too busy mom has failed to make any choices at all” (2007, p. 60).

Positive Psychology Interventions

Four concepts, or tools, within positive psychology seem particularly well-suited to help mothers cope with the stressors of daily life: Use of character strengths, active-constructive responding, savoring and gratitude, and mindfulness.
Character Strengths

The use of one’s character strengths has been shown to have many benefits. People who use their strengths have been shown to experience less stress, greater happiness and less depression (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005; Wood, Linley, Maltby, Kashdan, & Hurling, 2011) and the novel use of strengths has been empirically shown to be a successful intervention for increasing well-being (Seligman et al., 2005). Strengths such as bravery, humor, kindness, spirituality, and appreciation of beauty and excellence are associated with aiding recovery from illness or trauma, and the character strengths of hope, zest, gratitude, love, and curiosity are associated with greater life satisfaction (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2006). The ability to use a high level of self-regulation appears to be connected to better money management, increased physical health, and less use of less alcohol and cigarettes (Oaten & Cheng, 2010). In an experimental study, a character-education curriculum called Strengths Gym was taught to middle school-aged children in Great Britain. Results indicate that students who participated in the character education group experienced higher life satisfaction than those in the control group (Proctor et al., 2011). The Positive Psychology Programme, a character strengths-based program for adolescents, found that participating in a language arts course containing a positive psychology curriculum increased student’s reported engagement and enjoyment of school along with improving social skills (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009). Teachers also reported that the program increased strengths such as curiosity and love of learning (Seligman et al., 2009). Thus it appears that using character strengths can positively affect one’s well-being.

In order to use these strengths, however, one needs to be able to identify both the strengths themselves as well as know how to apply these strengths to problem-solve or boost
personal functioning (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2011). In a study by Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, and Minhas (2011), the authors present their argument for a concept they call strength development, which expands the traditional method of identifying and using strengths to take a more subtle approach of learning when the use of strengths is advantageous and when it is not. Part of the strengths development concept is the idea that strengths are not static entities but are traits that one can develop through their use and practice (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2011). If people feel that strengths are a stable entity, this may lead to underperformance and an unwillingness to try and develop other strengths or use them in a new way (Hong, Chiu, Dweck, Lin, & Wan, 1999).

**Active Constructive Responding (ACR)**

ACR is a way of interacting with others around good news. Sharing good news with others makes the people telling the news and the people receiving the news happy (Langston, 1994). Research has shown that sharing good news with others who respond with ACR can actually boost the positive emotion of both parties beyond the positive affect of the news itself (Gable, Reis, Impett, & Asher, 2004). Increases in positive emotion can affect a person’s well-being through the “broaden and build” effect wherein a person experiencing positivity is more open to expanding their thoughts and responses as well as building resources, such as relationships (Fredrickson, 1998). ACR benefits both the teller and receiver, and has also been associated with better relationship quality such as more intimacy and trust, and fewer daily conflicts (Gable et al., 2004). Positive emotions, such as feeling understood and cared about, felt during the relaying of good news were correlated with the current and future commitment and satisfaction with the relationship (Gable, Gonzaga, & Strachman, 2006). While this study was based on married couples, the response to good news could easily translate to parent-child interactions as well.
Savoring and Gratitude

Savoring is what people do to enjoy and share what is good in life (Reivich & Saltzberg, 2013). Savoring involves “mindfully engaging in thoughts or behaviors that heighten the effect of positive events on positive feelings” (Revich & Saltzberg, 2013) and has three components – anticipating the upcoming event, savoring the moment as it happens, and reminiscing about it afterwards. The benefits of savoring include increased positive emotions as well as elevating the momentary happiness of a person’s mood (Jose, Lim & Bryant, 2012).

Bryant, Smart, and King (2005) found that the more often a person reminisced about a positive event and the more vivid the memory, the more the person’s happiness was impacted. Another study found that savoring everyday positive events in life increased a person’s happy mood (Jose, Lim, & Bryant, 2012). As with ACR, the process of savoring is associated with an increase in positive emotions, which contribute to Fredrickson’s (1998) upward spiral.

Linked to savoring is gratitude. Gratitude can be generally thought of as being thankful for good things in your life. Experimental research has shown that being consciously grateful about people or events in your life is associated with increased positive affect and well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Gratitude has benefits for individual health, sleep, and relationships (Emmons, 2007). Some interventions that have been shown to increase happiness and decrease depressive symptoms include writing gratitude letters and making a gratitude visit, as well as writing down three blessings each night (Seligman et al., 2005). While thinking about gratitude increases positive emotions momentarily, commitment and motivation to practice regularly is needed to continue the positive benefits of the exercise (Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, & Sheldon, 2011). Gratitude can be an individual practice, but making gratitude into a
family event can potentially help reduce some of the entitlement and materialism that today’s children may experience (Carter, 2011; Polak & McCullough, 2006).

**Mindfulness**

Mindfulness is the act of actively cultivating conscious awareness and attention to the present moment (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Practicing mindfulness involves stepping back from distracting thoughts and emotions and recognizing the present in a non-judgmental manner (Garland & Fredrickson, 2013). Mindfulness has been associated with a decrease in negative emotions, such as depression or social anxiety, as well as an increase in positive emotions, such as life satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimism (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Simply being conscious of your breathing focuses your attention to the present moment and makes you aware of your thoughts and emotions. This consciousness can enable you to slow you down and engage with the events and the people around you in a more authentic, less distracted way.

Research in positive psychology has focused on finding empirically validated interventions that increase people’s well-being. Schueller (2010) divided some of these interventions into three categories (active-constructive responding and savoring, strengths and a gratitude visit, and life summary and blessings) and found that people tend to prefer one type of intervention over the others. While the reason behind a preference for a particular intervention type is not yet known, when people practiced an intervention type they preferred, they were more likely to complete the intervention, continue it for more days, and experience a greater increase in happiness and decrease in depression (Schueller, 2010). By tailoring interventions to particular people’s preferences, clinicians can better assist people in increasing their well-being.

While Schueller’s (2010) study looked at people’s preferences for specific interventions, Seligman, Rashid, and Parks (2006) took the 12 best-documented positive psychology
interventions and combined them to create positive psychotherapy (PPT), a packaged therapy that aims to target positive emotion, engagement, and meaning in order to increase happiness. They found that blending various interventions together led to significant decreases in depressive symptoms compared with control groups. While they designed programs for both groups and individuals using PPT, the individual process allowed for more customization to the client’s specific issues.

**Applying Positive Psychology to Mothering**

I feel that the ability to customize a program for an individual client is an extremely important part of applying positive psychology interventions to mothering. While many mothers face similar problems in their parenting roles, the unique combination of personalities in her family necessitates a personalized approach to problem-solving. Using multiple interventions in combination with job crafting offers a more comprehensive approach than simply trying a single intervention. Given that Schueller’s (2010) research indicated people appear to have preferences for different types of interventions, I felt that combining his three categories into my coaching practice would ensure that at least one of the three was a good fit with mothers in the program.

As mentioned earlier, the four elements that will make up the coaching program are strengths work, active constructive responding, savoring and gratitude, and mindfulness. Each woman will have her own signature strengths, which are the strengths that come most naturally to a person. These strengths can be used as a starting point when thinking about which pieces of job crafting a mother might want to tackle first. If a woman’s signature strength was humor, for example, and she wanted to work on connecting more with her child, she might think about placing a message in her child’s lunch box along with a joke.
ACR could help a mother be more fully conscious about listening to her child when she asks “How was your day at school” and can give her insight into the pieces of life that are important to her child at the moment. Using ACR and asking questions enables a mother to show her child that she is willing and interested in listening to what the child has to say, which helps to keep channels of communication open. Savoring and gratitude can help a mother push through the everyday frustrations of lost shoes, sibling rivalry, and a sink full of dishes to consider how she might better enjoy the moments she has with her children at bedtime. Creating a practice of keeping a gratitude journal and reviewing it on a particularly challenging day could prompt a mother to reflect on the positive interactions she has with her family to balance out a more negative day. And mindfulness offers a mother a calm moment to slow down, collect herself, and recenter so that she can more effectively focus on those things that add to her satisfaction with life.

While the interventions discussed to this point are focused on the individual or group of individuals, another area of positive psychology, Positive Organizational Scholarship, has looked at finding interventions that work to increase the well-being of an entire system. When one considers the family as a system, one of the areas of research in POS that seems most applicable to mothering is job crafting, which focuses on an individual’s ability to change their role in an organization to benefit both the individual and organization.

**Job Crafting**

The idea of designing a job is not a new one. Traditional job design theory suggests that people experienced more meaning from their work when their job had a variety of tasks
(enabling them to use different parts of themselves) and when they saw the tasks of their job as part of a greater whole (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). Additionally, positive relationships have been shown to play a large role in how motivated people feel in their job (Oldham, 1976). More recently, Grant (2007) introduced the idea of relational job design, in which employees are more motivated in their jobs when they are able to see how their work makes an impact on others.

Scientists have proposed that work falls into one of three categories – jobs, careers, and callings (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). In the job category, people are not personally invested in their work but are motivated to work to earn money in order to pursue passions and interests outside of work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). In a career, people are more invested in their work and are motivated to work by the promise of achievement and recognition in an organization. People with a career orientation are driven by the increased financial and social rewards that advancement brings (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997).

While many working people fall into the job or career categories, some people are fortunate enough to have found a calling to their work. A calling is defined as a situation in which a person works for the fulfillment they find by doing that work (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). For people with a calling, work is not separate from the rest of their life and they would choose to continue doing this work even if they were not paid for it. They feel it is something valuable to society even though not all the activities of their work may be enjoyable (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Research has shown that people who see their work as a calling feel higher life and work satisfaction than others who don’t feel a calling to their work (Tims & Bakker, 2010).

One of the ideas behind the theory of job crafting is that people have the ability to change their jobs to feel more like a calling to them. To create this shift, the individual looks at her job
from the perspective of three elements – motives, strengths, and passions – and uses the tasks, relationships, and cognitive categories of the job as building blocks with which to work (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2013). Motives are the values the individual brings to the job – perhaps it is a need to help others, or a desire to create change in the world (Berg et al., 2013). An individual’s strengths are the skills and talents that she possesses – perhaps a person is able to translate complex ideas into layman’s terms to make those ideas more easily accessible to others or has a talent for organizing and motivating team members (Berg et al., 2013). Passions are areas that captivate the attention of the individual and which produce strong feelings of enjoyment or meaning (Berg et al., 2013). Using these three elements, people can use the framework of job crafting to redesign their jobs in order to create personal meaning (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Having increased control over work and gaining more meaning from it can lead to positive work outcomes (Tims & Bakker, 2010).

Meaning, as discussed previously, is a key ingredient to greater well-being (Seligman, 2011) and psychologists have suggested that people have an innate desire to make meaning from the world that surrounds them (Baumeister & Vohs, 2005). Ambrose and Kulik (1999) posit that people find meaning in work through focusing their efforts on outcomes that are important to them, which could mean anything from doing good in society through their work to being able to grow personally and professionally. Using job crafting to redesign a role to allow one to use more of one’s strengths can also add meaning by allowing an individual to leverage what comes naturally to them (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Using one’s signature strengths in a new way has been shown to increase happiness and decrease symptoms of depression for up to six months (Seligman et al., 2005), which suggests that job crafting to use strengths in a new way could contribute to greater well-being. Job crafting also enables employees to steer their work toward
their passions to obtain more enjoyment, meaning and engagement from their jobs, which Seligman (2011) posits as being key to increasing a person’s well-being. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggests that the more a person feels their role is a good fit, the more likely it is that they will find meaning in their job and perform better at it.

The ideal situation for job crafting is one in which tasks are less interrelated and where there is a flexible job description (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). The ability to job craft appears to have numerous benefits; a good person/role fit can create greater happiness (Tims & Bakker, 2010) and can lead to better performance at work (Wrzesniewski, 2003) and increased meaning and sense of self (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). A clear example of this is detailed in Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001) when they describe how some hospital cleaning staff took the initiative to job craft their roles and create greater meaning for themselves. Some cleaning staff, despite instructions from management not to interact with patients, took it upon themselves to greet and have conversations with patients or family as they cleaned the patient’s room. They added this task to their job because they felt that engaging patients in this way helped brighten the patients’ day and added to their own enjoyment and meaning of their work (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). By doing so, they also changed the relational boundaries of their work by moving beyond their original job description. Additionally, some cleaning staff made a point of engaging with the nurses, another task and relational shift, which aided in creating a smoother workflow (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Finally, some cleaning staff engaged in cognitive recrafting by envisioning their work not as mopping a floor or emptying the trash, but as being part of the larger unit where by performing their tasks efficiently and engaging with clients, they became part of the patients’ healing process (Wrzesniewski, MAPP Lecture, March 23, 2013).

Most research on job crafting has been cross-sectional or correlational, with no
experimental studies. Recently, however, researchers conducted a quasi-experimental study on job crafting using employees at a Fortune 500 company (Wrzesniewski, Berg, Grant, Kurkoski, & Welle, 2013). They found that job crafting significantly increased participants’ happiness in the short term (6 weeks), but that happiness levels tapered back to near baseline when retested at 6 months (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). However, the researchers also tested a concept they call “dual crafting” in which people crafted not just their job but themselves (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). This self crafting means learning skills to change personal actions to align better with one’s values (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). Wrzesniewski et al. (2013) theorized that adding the self-crafting piece to job crafting would be the key to sustaining the gains in happiness made by job crafting alone. Their research showed that while dual crafting initially lowered happiness levels at 6 weeks, over time (6 months) dual crafting positively affected happiness levels (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013). Dual crafting appeared to have a greater impact on happiness and productivity for higher-level employees, possibly because there is greater autonomy to combine the increase in job complexity with complementary personal skills learned in self-crafting (Wrzesniewski et al., 2013).

### Applying Job Crafting to Mothering

While the job crafting literature to date appears to be focused only on paid work positions, when considering mothering as work, I feel that mothers can benefit from its principles as well. While it is true that fathers can also play a crucial role in childrearing, data show that the role of primary caregiver is generally the mother (Parker & Wang, 2012). Given the amount of time mothers spend in a childrearing role, it seems that they would be in the best position to gain from job crafting the parenting role. The professional work literature specifies that positions
where tasks are less interrelated and where there is a flexible job description are more amenable to job crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Given that mothers choose how to allocate their time to various activities, the job of mother is relatively autonomous and can have a great deal of flexibility.

The motivation behind job crafting applies to mothers as well. Job crafters are motivated to create a positive self-image in their work both in their own eyes and in the eyes of those around them (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Transforming one’s identity and changing how one ascribes meaning to one’s work are primary motivators for job crafting (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2007). Baumeister and Leary (1995) point out the basic human need to connect with others; job crafting can introduce meaning into a job by changing tasks to foster new relationships as well as presenting a more positive self to those in current relationships (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Most importantly, the motivation to job craft stems from a situation in which one does not feel the current job description meets one’s needs (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Many women enter motherhood with only the media image of a “glowing mom and adoring infant” in mind, or are conditioned to believe that they will know exactly how to mother when the child is born because mothering is instinctual (Bencosme, 2005). While some elements are instinctual, there remains a tremendous amount to be learned. Society projects an image of the ideal mom as a woman who is fully devoted to her children and responsible for how her children develop (Liss, Schiffrin, & Rizzo, 2012). Given that most modern mothers are also working outside the home (Parker & Wang, 2012), the high expectations of society combined with the reality of mothering leaves many women feeling unhappy, alone, and guilty for not knowing how to be a “better” mom (Bencosme, 2005). Given that the entry into motherhood can
be an identity crisis for some women, it makes sense that using job crafting during this time could help ease this transition. Job crafting offers women a framework in which to actively shape their environment, potentially giving them a greater sense of control and thus increased well-being (Tims & Bakker, 2010).

The need for approval in a mother’s role is great, and being able to change one’s mothering identity to something more positive allows mothers to take greater pride in and savor their role as a parent. In my experience, at some point all mothers are likely to perceive the role of motherhood as one of drudgery and endless responsibilities. I believe changing this negative view to more often align with motherhood as a role in which she can assist a child to understand values and behaviors that are important to her family has the possibility of influencing a mother’s well-being. Last, but not least, discovering and nourishing positive relationships with mothers who are experiencing similar issues, along with potentially ending obligatory relationships that are no longer sustaining in the mothering role can have a large impact on the happiness of a mother.

Neither job crafting nor mothering is static. Mothering is continually evolving as children and parents develop and change; job crafting has the ability to continuously evolve over time, using the same tools in different ways depending on one’s current job description (Berg, Dutton, & Wrzesniewski, 2007). Thus as the challenges of parenting an infant transition to those of parenting a toddler or school-aged child, a woman would be able to revisit her motives, strengths, and passions, and recraft a job appropriate for both her and her child at that time.

So how does a woman cull through the myriad choices, societal expectations, personal expectations, and daily realities to construct/fashion a mothering role that is right for herself? Research has shown that when parents view parenting as a calling, they experience greater
satisfaction in parenting (Coulson, Oades, & Stoyles, 2012). Motherhood can be seen as a calling; there is no separation between work and the rest of life – mothering is 24/7 – and one does the work of mothering without being paid monetarily. There are certainly times when doing the activities of motherhood are not very enjoyable, but in the end my experience is that mothers overall see the work of raising children as valuable to society and would not choose to “quit” their work. However, people with a calling feel an intrinsic desire to participate in the work, and sometimes that motivation can be quite low for mothers. The tedium of daily tasks and expectations can be overwhelming to the point where the calling of the work can be temporarily lost.

Looking at the results from Wrzesniewski et al.’s 2013 study, it appears that higher-level employees with greater autonomy are able to maintain gains in happiness and productivity when they craft both job and self. In my opinion, this employee description and the autonomy level describe mothering as well. Therefore joint crafting, changing both the job description through job crafting and increasing skills to deal with the revised role through positive psychology interventions, is the heart of my coaching proposal. With the development of what I call “Flourishing Mothers” coaching sessions, I aim to help mothers design an ideal mother role that is right for them as individuals by using job crafting techniques and then to assist them in implementing these changes using positive psychology. My goal is to help mothers recraft their tasks and relationships and guide them in reframing their approach to parenting in a way that transforms motherhood into a calling for them.
Designing Flourishing Mothers

I believe that positive psychology and coaching are a natural fit. Positive psychology is the science of studying what makes people flourish and using the empirical results to create positive change in all aspects of people’s lives (Peterson, 2013). Coaching also is focused on creating purposeful change in individuals or teams by empowering and supporting people to question, discover, and make personal choices that improve their lives (Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, Sandahl, & Whitworth, 2011). While there are programs to help parents adjust to their new roles, for most women the only training and support for mothering is on the job. Coaching appears to be a perfect conduit through which to use positive psychology interventions (Biswas-Diener, 2010), as both areas engage with clients to assist them in achieving greater well-being in life.

While there are empirically validated parenting programs available, they are generally, for cost effectiveness and broader reach purposes, based on a group model. The Positive Parenting Program (Triple-P) is one such program and is listed as the program with the most scientific evidence attesting to its efficacy by the United Nations, which examined parenting programs around the world (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), 2009). Families in the Triple-P program have reported fewer child behavioral and emotional problems after training, as well as increased parental self-efficacy, a reduction in the use of coercive parenting methods, an increase in the use of positive parenting methods, improved parent-child relationships, and reduced parental stress and anger (UNODC, 2009). The Triple-P program’s goal is “…to empower families by building on existing parenting strengths and focusing on self-regulation of parental skill in order to enhance parents’ self-sufficiency and preparedness for future problem-solving” (UNODC, 2009, p. 5).
While this description seems to cover much of what Flourishing Mothers sessions would entail, I believe there are some key differences. The largest difference is that Flourishing Mothers is individually-based, whereas Triple-P is population based (Triple-P, 2013). A shortcoming of this approach is that the program will not have the reach that the Triple-P program does nor will it offer the social support a population-based program could. However, I feel the ability to tailor the job design and interventions to address the particular concerns of one mother and her family offer benefits that could not be obtained in a group setting. Additionally, Triple-P’s skill building primarily addresses the behavioral component of parenting, while my aim with Flourishing Mothers is also to create cognitive change in how women view the concept of mothering. The idea of job crafting and redesigning what it means to be a mother is unique to Flourishing Mothers, and in my opinion can be most successful in a one-to-one environment based on trust and an understanding of the individual challenges each woman faces.

Flourishing Mothers will be a coaching approach designed to be covered in approximately 10 sessions, but will be flexible enough to adapt to the individual client’s needs and respond as progress and challenges develop. Sessions will focus on the client learning specific positive psychology techniques to assist her as she transitions her tasks and relationships into the mother role she wants. The majority of the sessions will be structured with a check in/review of homework; the teaching of a new skill; questions, practice time and practical applications of the skill, and a discussion of homework for the next session.
Coaching Sessions

The following sessions are designed to be one hour in length. Session frequency would vary according to the desires of the individual client. Table 1 describes the topics covered in each of the sessions.

To better illustrate what sessions might look like, I have created the following composite client who I will follow through the session examples:

Anne is a 41-year-old mother of two living in a suburb of Boston. She has been married for 11 years and has an 8-year-old daughter and a 6-year-old son. She works 2 days a week and is a

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co-leader in her daughter’s Girl Scout troop. Anne has come for coaching because she feels disconnected with her children and wants to be more purposeful in the decisions she makes around interacting with them. In the past few months, Anne’s daughter, Lydia, has been exhibiting more tantrums at home and many days devolve into screaming matches. While her son Sam’s behavior has been better, he now appears to be picking up on Lydia’s behavior and is becoming easily frustrated and displaying tantrums. Anne’s husband has a busy position at his work and helps when he is home, but most of the parenting duties fall to Anne. Anne tries to manage her children’s tantrums but often ends up becoming frustrated and resorting to yelling back at them, which causes her to feel inadequate and angry with herself. She wants to deal with her children differently but is not sure how. In addition, Anne wants to try and form solid trusting relationships with her children, particularly before they reach the ‘tween years. Personally, Anne would like to enjoy her role as mom more. Currently she feels like the job is 99% drudgery and very little joy. Even when the joy does occur, Anne finds it difficult to notice and appreciate it because she feels so bogged down in everyday duties and frustrations.

Before the first session, Anne will have received information to fill out and bring to her first session (see Appendix A). In addition to completing basic demographic information, she would take the following empirically-validated tests: Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985), which measures life satisfaction; the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988), which measures the extent to which clients experience positive and negative affect in their lives; the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC; Johnston & Mash, 1989), which measures the level of parenting satisfaction and self-efficacy; and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006), which measures the extent to which a person feels she has found a purpose in life or how much she is continuing to search for her purpose. The scales will show
where Anne’s baseline is upon entry to the coaching sessions. I will ask her to take these tests again at the end of the sessions to measure whether she has seen improvements in her life and parenting satisfaction, positive affect, and sense of competence as a parent.

**Session 1 – Introduction**

This session would begin by giving Anne a basic overview of coaching and ask what her hopes and expectations are for the process. I will talk with her about how I practice, with an emphasis on collaboration and solution-orientation. I will stress that there are no right or wrong answers, only experiments to learn what works for her in her life. We will briefly review the scales she previously filled out and discuss how taking the same scales at the end of the sessions will help her measure her progress. I will then outline the upcoming sessions and the skills she will be learning.

We will work on getting a baseline of Anne’s current state by going through a modified job crafting exercise, in which she would list her daily tasks and the amount of time and energy she spends on each, as well as identifying the key relationships in her daily life. We would use the Task/Relationship list (see Appendix B) as a prompt to help her get started. For homework, Anne will try to pay attention to how she uses her time in a typical day and what relationships she encounters so that we can further refine her current job picture that we developed in this session.

**Session 2 – Job Crafting**
I will begin the session by exploring Anne’s notes and observations from her homework and assisting Anne in revising her current job tasks and relationships as needed. We will next discuss the values and passions that motivate Anne in parenting. I would then help her to design her ideal mothering role by modifying, adding or deleting tasks and relationships to reflect those values and passions. We will have a conversation about whether her ideal is realistic and/or feasible for her and her family. I will stress to her that this is a first pass and that we will be revisiting this ideal role later to modify it further based on the skills she will be learning. Given that this process is time consuming, it may need to be broken up into two sessions.

I will next briefly discuss the concept of strengths with Anne. If time permits, we may discuss which elements Anne sees as her strengths. For homework, Anne will complete the Values In Action (VIA) survey (www.viapros.org) and email me the results so that we can review them at our next session. The VIA is an online character strengths profile report that rank orders a person’s 24 character strengths based on a 120 question survey. I will also send her home with a list of VIA character strengths (see Appendix B). Last, I will ask if she had any questions or needed clarification on any of the matters we discussed.

Session 3 - Strengths

I will begin the session by asking what went well since our last session and then review the homework, which was to take the VIA survey. We will discuss Anne’s impression of the survey – was she surprised by any of the results or did she find them to be true to her nature? We will then continue the strengths discussion from Session 2 by discussing why knowing Anne’s character strengths is an asset.
While we will look at Anne’s top strengths, I will also note her bottom strengths and point out that these are not strengths she does not possess, but simply ones she may not use as regularly. Additionally, we will explore how strengths can be built through practice should she desire to use some of them more.

To see what this might look like in practice, let’s assume that Anne’s top five strengths (her signature strengths) are love, kindness, social intelligence, and gratitude, with humor, love of learning, and perspective tied for fifth place. At the bottom end of the scale are creativity, spirituality, self-regulation, appreciation of beauty and excellence, and teamwork. I will talk briefly with her about any strength she may not understand and then we would try to identify areas where Anne sees herself using her signature strengths in her daily life. If Anne has difficulty with identifying how she uses her strengths, I will ask her to do the “best-self” exercise, in which she would tell me a story of a time when she felt she was at her best as a mother.

I will assist Anne in broadening her view of how she uses her strengths in her life, and also question her about whether she has seen some of these strengths in her children. We will also explore how there can be a shadow side to strengths. Looking at kindness, a signature strength of Anne’s, we will focus on how too much kindness can lead to overextension and an inability to say “no” to others; I will then ask Anne if this is an issue in her life. If the answer is no, we will then move on to the shadow sides of her other signature strengths to see whether there are areas where she could improve the appropriate use of her strength. If the answer is yes, we will discuss specifics on how she experiences this shadow side and the effects that overuse has on her life and her perception as a mother. As needed, we will also delve into the consequences of underusing strengths.
Depending on the time available, we will try to spot times when Anne has used her bottom five strengths and then try to assess the strengths she sees in the people close to her. We will explore how these are not strengths she is lacking, but simply ones that she might work on developing more. After checking in with Anne about her understanding of the value of strengths, I will answer any questions she may have. I will then move on to the homework, which will be noticing and logging in a strengths-spotting journal the number of times she recognizes her own use of strengths as well as times she sees those around her using them. We would explore how Anne could use strengths spotting as a way to notice and point out what her children are doing right, instead of feeling that she’s always noticing the negative and yelling at them.

**Session 4 – Using Strengths to Change the Role of Mother**

I will begin by asking what went well since our last session and then review Anne’s strengths-spotting journal. We will review what she noticed, enjoyed, or disliked from doing the exercise. I will then refer back to the realistic “ideal mother” description she created in Session 2 and question Anne about what strengths she felt she’d need to use in order to move closer to this ideal. We will discuss specific areas in which she’d like to begin making changes and list the tasks and relationships in those areas. We will then break down the changes into concrete steps Anne could take to change either the task/relationship itself or her understanding of the task/relationship in order to get closer to her goal. Anne’s homework from this session will be to choose one or two of the steps discussed and begin to implement the changes.
Session 5 – Active Constructive Responding

I will begin the session by asking what went well since our last session and then review Anne’s homework from Session 4. We will briefly discuss the steps in which she’d been successful and what effect the change had made for her. We will also briefly discuss areas where she’d met with some challenges and explore how she might approach the step in a different way.

Next I will introduce the concept of Active Constructive Responding, using the literature review from the section on Applying Positive Psychology to Mothering. We will look at the ACR Handout (see Appendix B) showing how responses can fall into one of four quadrants and discuss how Anne typically responds to her family. We will focus on the other three styles and see if there are people in her life who respond in this way. We will then discuss how Anne feels when she’s with them and whether decreasing the amount of time she spends with that person or finding a different way to interact with them would help to improve her well-being.

Anne and I will then practice using ACR and identify times when she can use ACR to increase connection, such as talking with her kids when they come home from school. We will pinpoint challenges that might exist for practicing ACR in this context and work on ways to change the set of tasks at that time to increase the odds of using ACR. For example, if Anne is busy trying to make dinner when her kids come home, she may not have time or energy to interact with them using ACR. By changing her prep time for dinner to be earlier in the day and taking a brief 5-minute rest before the kids come through the door, Anne might be able to find the time and energy to connect in a different way with ACR.

In the last part of the session, we will discuss Anne’s homework, which would consist of identifying times where she felt encouraged and heard when sharing good news with someone. She will write down a brief description of how the person responded to her news and how she
felt from the encounter. She will also identify times when she was able to use ACR with her immediate family and note the results that came from these conversations.

**Session 6 – Savoring and Gratitude**

I will begin the session by asking what went well since our last session and then review Anne’s ACR homework log with her. We will briefly discuss her successes and challenges as well as how comfortable she felt using the technique. If she found the technique difficult to implement, we will try to pinpoint the elements that felt uncomfortable to her and brainstorm alternatives that she might be willing to try.

Next I would introduce the concepts of savoring and gratitude. I will engage Anne in a discussion about which style of savoring is most prevalent in her life. We will look for examples of savoring in her life with her family and try to identify opportunities where she might use savoring more on a daily basis. Additionally, we will brainstorm ways she could try to involve her children in savoring as well, such as creating a summer scrapbook together or involving them in planning an upcoming vacation.

We will also identify aspects of her life for which she is grateful. I will question Anne about whether she has any previous history with gratitude exercises and use thank you notes and Thanksgiving as jumping off points for further discussion about incorporating gratitude into her daily life. We will discuss how she might take time each day to notice things, events, or people she is thankful for.

Anne’s homework will be to notice positive or pleasant events that occurred during her day and to reflect on why she was grateful for them by journaling at the end of the day. Anne will also think about her upcoming day and choose an event or action to savor by heightening her
focus on that event and sharing the event with someone else. Potentially, Anne could also broach the subject of a savoring or gratitude project with her children to assess their reaction. I will send Anne home with some examples to introduce gratitude exercises to her children in which she could involve them if she felt it possible, as well as a Savoring Strategies sheet (see Appendix B).

**Session 7 – Mindfulness**

I will begin the session by asking what went well since our last session and then review Anne’s savoring reflections and gratitude log. We will briefly discuss what affected her ability to notice events to savor and be grateful for as well as how comfortable she felt using the techniques. We will discuss whether she was able to introduce the ideas of savoring and gratitude with her children and what their reaction was. If she was not able to, we will discuss some of the challenges that prevented her from doing so.

I will then introduce the concept of mindfulness using the materials reviewed in the section on Applying Positive Psychology to Mothering. I will ask Anne whether she has heard of mindfulness and whether she has practiced any mindfulness or meditation previously. I will then teach a basic breathing exercise with Anne and we would practice it together. We will discuss ways and times where it might be appropriate to use this attention redirection. For example, if getting the kids to bed at night is a stressor for her, she might consider taking five minutes before starting the bedtime routine to breathe and prepare herself for potential conflict with the kids. If transition times are difficult for her, she could potentially use the breathing exercise to help make the transition less stressful. Depending on Anne’s interest and ability, I might introduce a short loving-kindness meditation as well. I would illustrate ways in which mindfulness, savoring, and
gratitude are all linked. For example, we might discuss how practicing the mindfulness exercise allowed her to pay more attention and savor positive interactions with her children at breakfast, which resulted in Anne feeling grateful that she’d been able to notice and appreciate this time.

Anne’s homework assignment will be to practice mindful attention through breathing. We will discuss times during the day when this might be most valuable to Anne as well as when it would be practical to fit into her schedule. Anne will practice mindfulness for at least 5 minutes each day, but could do more as time or her desire allowed. I will send her home with a description of how to do the breathing exercise we did in session.

**Session 8 – Evolving the Role of Mother**

I will begin the session by asking what went well since our last session and then review Anne’s mindfulness practice. We will discuss how natural or unnatural she found the practice and if she found that it helped her. Additionally, we will try to pinpoint times or events where mindfulness had proved most useful to her.

Next we will review the skills we’d discussed over the last seven sessions. We will revisit Anne’s ideal mother plan and see if it still feels correct to her, adjusting tasks or relationships as needed. We will then select current tasks or relationships and assess whether the skills learned over past sessions have had an impact. We will also identify areas where she might better use these skills to modify a task to be more aligned with her ideal mother plan.

For example, Anne might want to use her love of learning strength to create a better connection with her children and build positive memories. Anne might consider volunteering for the school library on days when her children have library class; in this way she can use her love of learning as well as her kindness in helping out her children and classmates with school
projects. Additionally, using her mindfulness skills, she could practice being consciously present in the library for her shift and potentially use her ACR skills to engage the children in the class through inquiry and response to projects they may be working on.

After working on this exercise, I will question Anne about how she views her role as a mother. Does she still feel that it is mostly drudgery and does she continue to experience herself as angry and inadequate as a mother? Has the development of some skills changed her view of how and who she is as a mother? What skills has she experienced most success with and in which does she feel she needs more practice? We will focus on areas where she has seen change and list the areas that continue to need assistance so we can work on them at our next session.

Session 9 – **Reconstructing Motherhood**

In this session we will continue looking at task/relationship revision as needed but hopefully spend more time discussing how the way in which Anne has changed her reactions to events has changed her perception of being a mother. We will discuss how Anne can continue on a path of more mindful parenting. What changes has Anne made in choosing the circumstances of her life and her response to them? Is she better able to remind herself of what is truly important in her life and those of her children without getting caught up in the “shoulds” that previously drove her? Is Anne more aware of her own triggers as well as her children’s and is she better able to use her strengths of love and kindness to better connect with them? Is she able to use her strength of gratitude to recognize the positive in her current situation as well as using her strength of perspective to understand that negative moments are temporary? Given the changes that Anne has made, how does she view her role as a mother differently, and how can she best plan in order to maintain and grow this for the future?
For homework, I will ask Anne to complete the measures she took before our first session and to email me the results so that we can see whether and how much change has occurred in her well-being from our first session.

**Session 10 – Celebrating Successes and Moving Forward**

In this session, we will discuss the results from Anne’s homework, looking first at areas where Anne has found improvement, and explore which elements she felt were most helpful in creating this positive change. We will focus on how Anne can continue building on the successes she’s had both with herself and with her children. We will also look at the areas where change may not have been seen yet and examine which skills she might employ under which circumstances to move further toward well-being.

I will ask for Anne’s feedback about her experience, both positive and critical, and ask for suggestions for how to make the sessions better. I will send Anne home with the results of her tests from the first and last sessions, the list of tasks and relationships she created initially in our job crafting exercise as well as her “ideal” mother solution, and a list of books for further exploration if desired (see Appendix B).

**Conclusion**

The role of mother is a challenging one, and the pressures to be the ideal mother have increased in intensity as women try to balance their time between work outside and inside the home. Positive psychology offers scientifically validated tools with which to increase well-being. Using these tools in conjunction with the organizing principles of job crafting can help women
restructure the way in which they view their role as a mother. Consciously choosing tasks and relationships that add to personal well-being, along with rethinking the way in which she finds meaning and purpose in her work enables the mother to design the ideal mother role for herself and her family.

The personal nature of coaching, along with the ability to tailor interventions to particular mother and family needs, enhances the likelihood that a mother will be able to find skills that match her needs. Having the coach partner with the mother with the goal of enhancing the mother’s flourishing can lead to greater satisfaction for both the mother and her children.

My goal in writing this paper is to provide an overview of a method of practice I hope to begin in the near future. As I begin to apply these approaches in practice, I look forward to continuing to refine these tools and expand my perspective while improving outcomes for both mothers and their families.
Appendix A – Pre-Session Materials for the Client
About You and Your Family

Providing the following information will help me to engage with you more effectively. Please feel free to skip any questions you feel uncomfortable about answering.

Name: __________________________________  Birth Date: _________________

Address: _____________________________________________________________________

Home Phone: _________________________  Mobile Phone: _________________________

Email: _______________________________  Marital Status: _________________________

Other Parent’s Name: _______________  Other Involved Adults: ______________________

Highest Education Completed: ______________________

Work in addition to parenting (if applicable): ______________________

Employer (if applicable): ________________________________

Children

Name:_____________________ Age: ________ Gender: ______________

Name:_____________________ Age: ________ Gender: ______________

Name:_____________________ Age: ________ Gender: ______________

Name:_____________________ Age: ________ Gender: ______________

Name:_____________________ Age: ________ Gender: ______________
Additional Information You Feel I Should Know:
The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)

Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

The 7-point scale is:

1 = strongly disagree
2 = disagree
3 = slightly disagree
4 = neither agree nor disagree
5 = slightly agree
6 = agree
7 = strongly agree

Statements

___ 1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
___ 2. The conditions of my life are excellent.
___ 3. I am satisfied with my life.
___ 4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
___ 5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

The Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS)

This scale consists of a number of words that describe different feelings and emotions. Read each item and then mark the appropriate answer in the space next to the word. Indicate to what extent you feel this way right now (that is, at the present moment). Use the following scale to record your answers.

1 = very slightly/not at all
2 = a little
3 = moderately
4 = quite a bit
5 = extremely

___ Interested     ___ Irritable
___ Distressed     ___ Alert
___ Excited     ___ Ashamed
___ Upset     ___ Inspired
___ Strong     ___ Nervous
___ Guilty     ___ Determined
___ Scared     ___ Attentive
___ Hostile     ___ Jittery
___ Enthusiastic     ___ Active
___ Proud     ___ Afraid

Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC)

Listed below are a number of statements. Using the 1-6 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be honest and open in your response.

The 6 point scale is:
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Mildly Agree
4 = Mildly Disagree
5 = Disagree
6 = Strongly Disagree

____ 1. The problems of taking care of a child are easy to solve once you know how your actions affect your child, an understanding I have acquired.

____ 2. Even though being a mother could be rewarding, I am frustrated now while my child is at his/her present age.

____ 3. I go to bed the same way I wake up in the morning – feeling I have not accomplished a whole lot.

____ 4. I do not know what it is, but sometimes when I’m supposed to be in control, I feel more like the one being manipulated.

____ 5. My mother was better prepared to be a good mother than I am.

____ 6. I would make a fine model for a new mother to follow in order to learn what she would need to know in order to be a good mother.

____ 7. Being a mother is manageable and any problems are easily solved.

____ 8. A difficult problem in being a mother is not knowing whether you’re doing a good job or not.

____ 9. Sometimes I feel like I’m not getting anything done.

____ 10. I meet my own personal expectations for expertise in caring for my child.

____ 11. If anyone can find the answer to what is troubling my child, I am the one.
The 6 point scale is:
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Mildly Agree
4 = Mildly Disagree
5 = Disagree
6 = Strongly Disagree

12. My talents and interests are in other areas, not in being a mother.
13. Considering how long I’ve been a mother, I feel thoroughly familiar with this role.
14. If being a mother of a child were only more interesting, I would be motivated to do a better job as a mother.
15. I honestly believe I have all the skills necessary to be a good mother to my child.

The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ)

Please take a moment to think about what makes your life feel important to you. Please respond to the following statements as truthfully and accurately as you can, and also please remember that these are very subjective questions and that there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer according to the scale below:

1 = Absolutely untrue
2 = Mostly untrue
3 = Somewhat untrue
4 = Can’t say true or false
5 = Somewhat true
6 = Mostly true
7 = Absolutely true

1. ____ I understand my life’s meaning.
2. ____ I am looking for something that makes my life feel meaningful.
3. ____ I am always looking to find my life’s purpose.
4. ____ My life has a clear sense of purpose.
5. ____ I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful.
6. ____ I have discovered a satisfying life purpose.
7. ____ I am always searching for something that makes my life feel significant.
8. ____ I am seeking a purpose or mission for my life.
9. ____ My life has no clear purpose.
10. ____ I am searching for meaning in my life.

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Appendix B – Session Materials
Session 2

Task List

Tasks
Laundry
Cooking – planning/making meals/cleaning up
Cleaning
Transportation
Volunteering
Playing with kids
Time with husband
Seeing friends
Reading
Watching TV
Computer time (email, Facebook, etc.)
Managing conflict
Grocery shopping
Managing family schedules
Activities with family
Reading alone
Reading with kids
Task supervision
Taking care of pets
Taking care of self
Outside home maintenance
Other errands
Discipline
Being a role model – teaching kids values, behavior
Working outside the home

Other:
Session 2

Current Job Crafting Example

ON WHAT TASKS DO I SPEND THE MOST TIME & ENERGY?

Transportation
Task Supervision
Grocery Shopping and Errands
Cooking
Laundry

ON WHAT TASKS DO I SPEND MEDIUM TIME & ENERGY?

Cleaning
Dealing with Conflict
Scheduling
Volunteering

ON WHAT TASKS DO I SPEND THE LEAST AMOUNT OF TIME & ENERGY?

Time with Friends
Time with Husband
Playing/Fun with Kids
Family Activities
Exercise/Self-care
Session 2

Values, Strengths, and Passions

I Value:

Fun/Engagement

Happiness/Contentment with Family

Time Alone

Connection with Others

Making a Difference in Others’ Lives

Being Healthy

Teaching Children Good Values

My Strengths Are:

Kindness

Love

Social Intelligence

Love of Learning

Curiosity

I Am Passionate About:

Learning

Reading

Helping Others
Session 2

Examples of Ideal Mothering After Job Crafting

I WOULD SPEND MOST OF MY TIME & ENERGY ON:

Family Activities

Values: Fun/Engagement, Happiness/Contentment with Family, Connection with Others

Strengths: Love, Kindness, Social Intelligence, Curiosity

Passions: Learning

Ways to Reframe: Plan family outings/projects once per weekend– allow different family members to choose the activity and share a passion with the others (hiking, history, animals, etc.); think of this time not as “wasted” time in which you should be doing other things but as your job and necessary to feed your family connection; use the time to learn about the passions of other family members and be curious about their unique interests.

Exercise/Self-care

Values: Being Healthy, Time Alone, Teaching Children Good Values

Strengths: Kindness, Love, Love of Learning

Passions: Learning, Reading

Ways to Reframe: Learning, reading, exercising all fuel your soul so that you are able to take care of others; taking care of yourself is a good model for how you want your children to take care of themselves; spending time taking care of
yourself is an investment not only in you but also in your family as it will enable you to be more present and enjoy time with them.

I WOULD SPEND A MEDIUM AMOUNT OF TIME & ENERGY ON:

Transportation

**Values:** Connection with Others, Making a Difference in Others’ Lives

**Strengths:** Curiosity, Kindness, Love of Learning, Social Intelligence

**Passions:** Helping Others, Learning

**Ways to Reframe:** Use time in the car to connect with kids and be curious about what’s happening in their lives; discuss what they like about the activities they’re involved in and what they hope to learn; relate your own experience from childhood activities and how that may have helped shape your current interests and passions.

Cooking

**Values:** Connection with Others, Being Healthy, Teaching Children Good Values, Fun/Engagement

**Strengths:** Love of Learning, Curiosity, Social Intelligence

**Passions:** Learning, Helping Others, Reading

**Ways to Reframe:** Use cooking as a time to connect as a family; plan a menu for the week talking about healthy choices; explore cookbooks to try new recipes; use the cooking process to teach children about their health and the skill of cooking; create a family rating system for new dishes you try; allow older children to be
responsible (with some help) for creating the menu and meal for one day during the week.

I WOULD SPEND THE LEAST AMOUNT OF TIME & ENERGY ON:

Dealing with conflict

**Values:** Teaching Children Good Values, Happiness/Contentment with Family

**Strengths:** Love, Kindness, Social Intelligence

**Passions:** Helping Others

**Ways to Reframe:** Choose your battles; letting some small things go does not mean you are not parenting; identify the biggest issues between you and your children or between your children themselves and have a family meeting to agree on rules for how to deal with the situation; post the rules where they can be seen with the understanding that there will be exceptions to be discussed as they come up; when approached with a conflict, refer children to the rules; try to view your rule list as a family contract to be honored by everyone (even you!) and that by using this list you are teaching your children about responsibility and consequences rather than feeling like you’re abdicating your duty to prevent all conflict; be ok with your kids arguing – as long as there is no physical danger, the best way for them to learn to problem-solve, negotiate and compromise is to do it themselves; always let your kids know you’re available to help if needed.

Cleaning

**Values:** Teaching Children Good Values, Being Healthy

**Strengths:** Love of Learning

**Passions:** Helping Others
Ways to Reframe: Get your kids involved in small chores around the house as soon as they are able; with younger kids, make it into a game or race or listen to music together while cleaning; with older children, have them take responsibility for household tasks either on a fixed or rotating basis and explain why their help is important to the process of keeping a neat and healthy household; use the opportunity to teach them good cleaning skills; alternatively, have children take responsibility for daily chores (feeding pets, etc.) and have someone come in to do a major clean once a month; instead of viewing spending the money as a luxury, make sure you plan to use that time to do something fun with your family – by spending the money, you’re buying yourself more time to connect.
Session 3

The VIA Classification of Character Strengths

(© Copyright 2012, VIA Institute on Character; www.viacharacter.org)

1. **Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence**: Noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, and/or skilled performance in various domains of life, from nature to art to mathematics to science to everyday experience

2. **Bravery**: Not shrinking from threat, challenge, difficulty, or pain; speaking up for what’s right even if there’s opposition; acting on convictions even if unpopular; includes physical bravery but is not limited to it

3. **Creativity**: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it

4. **Curiosity**: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering

5. **Fairness**: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness & justice; not letting feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance

6. **Forgiveness**: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting others’ shortcomings; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful

7. **Honesty** [modesty]: Speaking the truth but more broadly presenting oneself in a genuine way and acting in a sincere way; being without pretense; taking responsibility for one's feelings and actions

8. **Gratitude**: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks

9. **Hope** [optimism]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about

10. **Humility** [modesty]: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is

11. **Humor** [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes
12. **Judgment**: Thinking things through and examining them from all sides; not jumping to conclusions; being able to change one's mind in light of evidence; weighing all evidence fairly

13. **Kindness** [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, "niceness"]: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them

14. **Leadership**: Encouraging a group of which one is a member to get things done and at the same time maintain good relations within the group; organizing group activities and seeing that they happen.

15. **Love**: Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing & caring are reciprocated; being close to people

16. **Love of Learning**: Mastering new skills, topics, and bodies of knowledge, whether on one's own or formally; related to the strength of curiosity but goes beyond it to describe the tendency to add systematically to what one knows

17. **Perseverance**: Finishing what one starts; persevering in a course of action in spite of obstacles; “getting it out the door”; taking pleasure in completing tasks

18. **Perspective**: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself/others

19. **Prudence**: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted

20. **Self-Regulation** [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions

21. **Social Intelligence**: Being aware of the motives/feelings of others and oneself; knowing what to do to fit into different social situations; knowing what makes other people tick

22. **Spirituality** [religiousness, faith, purpose]: Having coherent beliefs about the higher purpose & meaning of the universe; knowing where one fits within the larger scheme; having beliefs about the meaning of life that shape conduct and provide comfort

23. **Teamwork**: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share

24. **Zest**: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated
### Session 5

**Active Constructive Responding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Four Ways of Responding to Positive Events</th>
<th>Constructive</th>
<th>Destructive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active</strong></td>
<td>Enthusiastic Support</td>
<td>Quashing the event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Involved in the conversation</td>
<td>Concern, worry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Criticism of good news</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authentic Engagement</td>
<td>Wow, I hope she can do as well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>That’s fantastic! You must be really proud of her! What instrument does she play? Does she enjoy it? Was this her first concert?</em></td>
<td>next time now that she’s set the bar so high.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Passive</strong></td>
<td>Quiet, low key</td>
<td>Ignoring the event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understated support</td>
<td>One-upping the sharer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>That’s great.</em></td>
<td>Taking conversation off course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Great! Did I tell you about my son’s choral recital?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>He had a solo and was amazing!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Karen Reivich ©2008

Examples of each in responding to the following good news:

My daughter did a great job in the band concert last night!
Session 6

Ways to Introduce Gratitude to Children

Some recommendations are adapted from *The How of Happiness* and *Raising Happiness*.

1. At dinnertime, go around the table and each say something you are grateful for that happened today. Having the adults go first will provide a model for the kids to follow and it will become more natural to them as the tradition continues. If dinner is too crazed, discussing at bedtime what you are grateful for can also work.

2. If having time where everyone is together is a challenge, try setting aside one time a week (maybe Sunday dinner) to exchange thoughts about what you are grateful for.

3. Write a gratitude letter to your children. Tell them what and why you value them and be sure to include specifics (i.e., I loved how caring you were when your brother fell off his bike and you immediately went to comfort him). Set aside time for just you and the child and explain to him that you wanted to let him know how much you love him and how grateful you are that you are able to watch him grow. Read the letter to him; for older kids this may be uncomfortable, but trust me – they’re listening. Once you’re done, give them the letter to keep. Odds are good that they will refer back to it when they’re having a tough day.

4. If you’ve already done a gratitude letter with your child, suggest that they do one for someone in their life – a teacher, grandparent, friend, mentor, coach, etc. Make sure that they deliver the letter personally and read it to the individual.

5. Each month, have kids comb through their toys and pick at least one (in good shape) to give to a charity. Have a conversation with them about how others in America and around the world may not be as fortunate as they are.

6. Volunteer with your children. Having first-hand experience with people who may not be as fortunate as them will make an impression. Check out VolunteerMatch.com for kid-friendly options in your area (e.g., a food pantry, soup kitchen, packing boxes for troops overseas).

7. Split your child’s allowance into three – spending, savings, and charity. This method not only gives your child good practice in saving, but sets up the expectation that your child think of others. At certain points during the year (e.g., summer and holiday time), go to CharityWatch.org or CharityNavigator.org to find reputable charities to donate to. You’ll be able to search by area of interest, so your children can decide where the money should go.

Session 6
Savoring Strategies

1. **Sharing with Others**: Seeking out others to share experience and thinking about sharing the memory
2. **Memory Building**: Actively storing images for future recall, “mental photographs,” forming vivid images
3. **Self-Congratulation**: Cognitive basking, telling yourself how proud or impressed others are, most common in response to achievements and personal successes
4. **Comparing**: Contrasting your own feelings with what others are feeling, comparing to past experiences, upward comparison
5. **Sensory-Perceptual Sharpening**: Intensifying pleasure by focusing on certain stimuli and screening out others, concentration, positive vigilance—slowing down
6. **Absorption**: Trying **not** to think, mindfulness without cognitive reflection, intellectual association
7. **Behavioral Expression**: Laughing, jumping for joy, outward physical manifestation – speeding up
8. **Temporal Awareness**: Reminding self how fleeting the moment is, telling yourself that you must enjoy it now – bittersweet moments
9. **Counting Blessings**: Acknowledging gratitude
10. **Avoiding Kill-Joy Thinking**: Reminding yourself of other things you should be doing, upward comparisons, negative self-talk, etc.

Source: Reivich and Saltzberg, 2013; Bryant, 2005.
Session 7

Mindful Breathing Exercise

The primary goal of mindful breathing is simply a calm, non-judging awareness, allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go without getting caught up in them.

- Sit comfortably, with your eyes closed and your spine reasonably straight.

- Bring your attention to your breathing.

- Imagine that you have a balloon in your stomach. Every time you breathe in, the balloon inflates. Each time you breathe out, the balloon deflates. Notice the sensations in your abdomen as the balloon inflates and deflates. Your abdomen rising with the in-breath, and falling with the out-breath.

- Thoughts will come into your mind, and that’s okay, because that’s just what the human mind does. Simply notice those thoughts, then bring your attention back to your breathing.

- Likewise, you can notice sounds, physical feelings, and emotions, and again, just bring your attention back to your breathing.

- You don’t have to follow those thoughts or feelings, don’t judge yourself for having them, or analyze them in any way. It’s okay for the thoughts to be there. Just notice those thoughts, and let them drift on by, bringing your attention back to your breathing.

- Whenever you notice that your attention has drifted off and is becoming caught up in thoughts or feelings, simply note that the attention has drifted, and then gently bring the attention back to your breathing. It’s okay and natural for thoughts to enter into your awareness, and for your attention to follow them. No matter how many times this happens, just keep bringing your attention back to your breathing.

- Start with a goal of practicing breathing for one minute and increase the time as you feel comfortable.

Excerpted from http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/docs/MindfulBreathing.pdf
**Additional Reading**

The following books are some I have found to be effective in helping explain the ideas behind the lessons and exercises found in Flourishing Mothers.

*Flourish* – Martin Seligman

*Mindful Parenting* – Myla and Jon Kabat-Zinn

*What Your Child Needs From You* – Justin Coulson

*Paradox of Choice* – Barry Schwartz

*The Explosive Child* – Ross W. Greene

*Raising Happiness* – Christine Carter

*The How of Happiness* – Sonya Lyubomirsky

*Positivity* – Barbara Fredrickson
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