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# Back to Work: The Effects of Goal Conflict on Working Mothers

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## **Abstract**

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## **Keywords**

working mothers, goal-conflict, career, women, maternal depression, positive psychology

## **Disciplines**

Business Law, Public Responsibility, and Ethics | Labor Economics | Labor Relations | Other Mental and Social Health | Other Psychiatry and Psychology

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University of Pennsylvania

Masters of Positive Psychology Capstone

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## Abstract

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Dedication

To my not-so-perfect mother who I'm finally letting off the hook. This one's for you  
MAO.

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### Back to Work: The Effects of Goal Conflict on Working Mothers

Being a woman is not easy. According to Mental Health America (n.d.), 1 in every 8 women develop clinical depression each year in the United States, which is approximately 12 million women. Depression is one of the leading causes of disease-related disability in women, and women are nearly twice as likely as men to suffer from an episode of depression (Sassarini, 2016). Depression occurs most frequently in women aged 25 to 44 and is linked to postpartum depression, a prevalent disorder affecting many women of reproductive age (Mental Health America, n.d.). Today, many women in this age range are balancing work, family, and finding personal fulfillment. Despite the sacrifices they make to start a family, many women strive to meet their education and career goals (Gray, Ozer, & Rosenthal, 2016). For example, reducing work hours to meet family demands can result in missed promotions and salary increases. However, maintaining a full-time career can result in missing a child's first steps and soccer games. Still, the inability to fulfill one's career goals can result in feeling a lack of meaning and achievement (Gray et al., 2016). There are many opinions on what women "should" do in books and articles, and friends and family members often offer advice, suggesting the serious implications of such decisions. In fact, the conflicting goals that mothers face can cause psychological distress, depression, and anxiety (Gray et al., 2016).

Another area of emphasis in the literature on women's depression has been studies on the link between maternal depressive symptoms and developmental and adjustment problems in children. Studies suggest two fundamental pathways through which maternal depression transmits risk to children: (a) biologically, through genes; and (b) environmentally, through maternal behavior, such as deficient parenting, modeling maladaptive behavior, or marital discord (Downey & Coyne, 1990; Lovejoy, Graczyk, O'Hare, & Neuman, 2000). With such a

large population of mothers and possibly children at risk, it is an important topic of research to better understand the causes of depression and ways to support today's mothers.

This capstone will offer positive psychology tools to help mothers navigate the challenging conflicts that can arise as well as to help ameliorate anxiety and depression. In particular, I recommend that organizations offer a 4-week workshop where mothers can learn positive psychology tools and receive support to implement and apply them in real life. Each workshop will focus on a different psychological concept: a) resilience, b) thinking traps, c) signature strengths, and d) satisficing.

In the first 3 weeks, participants will be given empirically validated positive interventions to help increase well-being. The first week will address resilience based on Penn's Resilience Training created at the Positive Psychology Center. In Week 2, participants will learn how to observe their thoughts and pinpoint the thinking traps that cause stress and anxiety (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). In Week 3, participants will identify and practice using "Values in Action" (VIA) character strengths (Park, Peterson, & Seligman, 2004). The final week of the workshop will not include a validated positive intervention, but will address a psychological concept that is related to maternal well-being: how to satisfice in the face of an overwhelming array of choices. Schwartz et al. (2002) coined the term *satisficing* to describe the art of minimizing the number of decisions you need to make in a world full of options. This is so important because there are more parenting books, baby carriers, cribs, diaper brands, and breast pumps than ever before. One trip to Buy Buy Baby—the Target of baby-related gear—would make most people's head spin. Thus, the proposed 4-week workshop addresses the common psychological pitfalls during the transition to motherhood from an evidence-based, theoretically grounded perspective.

### **History of Positive Psychology**

Until recently, clinical psychology was mostly concerned with the negative—what is going wrong and how to solve those problems (Seligman, 2002). In 1998, however, when Martin Seligman became president of the American Psychological Association, he championed a new direction for psychological research, “positive psychology.” This field of psychology would focus on what is going well or, in other words, health, well-being, and optimal functioning (Seligman, 2002). Seligman’s vision was not building a life with the absence of the negative, but rather, that a life well lived requires the presence of positive elements (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). *Positive psychology* is defined as the scientific study of those elements that make life worth living (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Seligman’s theory of psychological well-being encompasses the five areas of focus in positive psychology and is often referred to by its acronym PERMA: (a) positive emotion, (b) engagement, (c) relationships, (d) meaning, and (e) achievement. People can increase the presence of these elements in their lives through positive interventions—activities that have been empirically shown to increase one or more of these elements of well-being (Seligman, 2011).

### **Historical Theorists**

Interestingly enough, early philosophers theorized well-being as comprised of some of the same ingredients as today’s positive psychology tools, formally known as *positive psychology interventions*. Aristotle, for example, stated that the world neither owes us happiness nor gives it to us freely; therefore, we must take action to live a happy life (Melchert, 2002). Taking intentional action to balance out virtues (e.g., prudence and pleasure) is key to Aristotle’s recipe for the “good life.” For example, if life was meant only for the purpose of amusement,

this would result in a pointless and childish life. If one were always brave or courageous, this could lead to death if one came across a hungry tiger and decided not to run (Melchert, 2002).

William James (1890) also emphasized the importance of building good habits and decreasing bad habits in his seminal publication, *Habit*. He would agree with Aristotle that virtues can be learned and that the good life requires taking action. First, James explained that habits are a reaction beginning within our nervous system. Exercising good habits over time simplifies the nervous system process, increases accuracy, and reduces fatigue. In other words, practice makes perfect (James, 1890). His theories on pragmatism have contributed both to the fields of psychology and philosophy. James had pragmatic theories on well-being and believed that good intentions are not enough, rather one must take action to transform one's character. James (1890) further stated that there is "no more contemptible type of human character than that of the nerveless sentimentalist and dreamer" (p. 136). Sometimes we won't take action or go down the wrong path if we allow our attention to wander too much. If William James were alive today, perhaps he would suggest that one way to avoid wandering off down a negative spiral is through positive psychology interventions. He believed people should do one thing every day, which they do not want to do to build the muscle of deliberate action (Melchert, 2002). Thus, both Aristotle and James seem in agreement that we each have the power to take action and to control our attention, two main ingredients of positive psychology interventions, which can lead to a happier life. Modern studies have added a significant list of "ingredients" to consider when attempting a happiness-enhancing activity.

### **Contemporary Theorists**

Today, James Pawelski, Executive Director of the International Positive Psychology Association and the Director of Education and Senior Scholar of the Positive Psychology Center

at the University of Pennsylvania, has established a metaphor which he threads throughout his manuscript to explain the design of positive psychology interventions. The metaphor contrasts wearing “footsie” pajamas with picking out an outfit that includes pants, a shirt, shoes, and other accessories (Pawelski, 2009). Currently, positive interventions are footsie pajamas, or a one-size-fits-all approach. One can do the Three Blessings exercise (Seligman, 2002), Gratitude Visit, or carry out another activity from start to finish (Duckworth, Steen, & Seligman, 2005). Pawelski (2009) raised the question: What if you could mix and match them and customize them like an outfit? He argued that there are many ways to analyze an intervention, as some interventions may need to be more complex and can involve multiple activities, several active ingredients, target systems, target changes, and desired outcomes. A few examples of such activities are writing, thinking, speaking, and playing; *active ingredient* examples include autonomy, mindfulness, and self-regulation; *target system* examples are memory, attention, and will; *target changes* can include increased self-efficacy and increased motivation; and *desired outcomes* may be more positive emotions, greater happiness, or better relationships (Pawelski, 2009). With the different elements of positive interventions Pawelski described, we can continue to analyze and synthesize the process of creating successful positive interventions.

### **History of Positive Psychology Interventions**

Stephen Schueller (2014) described the road to happiness as “a set of interweaving highways rather than a single interstate” (p. 385). Like Pawelski, Schueller’s article raises interesting points about the “fit” of positive interventions for different individuals, as well as questions about the combination of multiple interventions. Various personality characteristics, strengths, weaknesses, and even people’s ethnicity likely affect the benefits accrued from the positive intervention. Individual differences matter—take, for example, the working mother who

panicked at the thought of finding the time to write down three blessings every day. Modifying this intervention by e-mailing herself 10 blessings weekly instead of the recommended three blessings daily may increase the likelihood of the intervention's success for some (Schueller, 2014). Throughout the article, Schueller used anecdotal evidence to support his hypothesis on the effectiveness of making specific recommendations rather than promoting a set of positive intervention options for all people. However, more research must be conducted to develop a strong evidence-based process to promote the activity-fit model of positive interventions.

In their research, Nancy Sin and Sonja Lyubomirsky (2009) found correlations between positive interventions and well-being and relief from depressive symptoms. In sum, their research demonstrates that positive interventions can lead to moderate boosts in well-being as well as help alleviate symptoms of depression. A meta-analysis that combined the results of 51 studies with 4,266 individuals revealed a significant effect on well-being ( $r = .29$ ) and on decreasing depression ( $r = .31$ ; Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). Their findings also suggest that the delivery of the positive intervention matters. Positive interventions work best as a part of individual therapy, as opposed to group treatment, and when delivered over a longer period of time. This is important to keep in mind when creating workshops: It is suggested to limit the size of the group. Other moderators observed in the study were age, baseline depression level, self-selection to participate, and duration. Both depressed and non-depressed individuals can harvest the benefits, but the positive effects appear greater in depressed individuals (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009).

### **Mothering**

“If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands.” These lyrics play in the background while a mother is holding back tears with a forced smile to keep her toddler from noticing her

frustration. Jane quit her full-time event director job and is now working from home as a freelance writer to be there for her toddler. She is running on 2 hours of sleep, feels lonely, and misses going to work. She really loved the excitement and meaningful relationships she formed planning corporate events; however, the hours were not convenient for raising a family. There are many new mothers in similar situations as Jane. My particular area of focus is on how to apply positive psychology interventions to help working mothers.

It is difficult to accurately convey what being a working mother is like to someone without children. Many expectant mothers read books to prepare or rely on friends, family, or the media to give tips for their future as mothers. However, the training for motherhood is “on the job.” For many mothers, the reality of raising a child does not match the romanticized images of adorable babies sleeping in their shabby chic nurseries. As Betty Friedan (1963) noted, “There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform” (p. 50). This quote was referring to women’s distaste with their lives in the 1960s, yet I feel it also is relevant to the difficulties that mothers face today. In the “we can do it all” generation, the expectation is for women to work outside the home, to care for the home and family, and to be both successful and beautiful. Research has shown that having insurmountable expectations as the standard to which mothers should aspire is detrimental to women’s well-being (Maushart, 1999).

Many images of motherhood today are antiquated and no longer match today’s reality (Maushart, 1999). Before 1950, fewer women worked outside the home. However, the value of “women’s work” (i.e., maintaining the home, raising children) was more appreciated and valued by society at large (Maushart, 1999). The reality today is that most mothers (71%) with children under the age of 18 currently work outside the home (Parker & Wang, 2013). Yet, despite the



increase of work outside the home, the ideals of motherhood have not significantly changed. This ideal, referred to as “intensive mothering” defines motherhood as a role in which “mothers are primarily responsible for the nurturing and development of the sacred child and in which children’s needs take precedence over the individual needs of their mothers” (Hays, 1996, p. 46). In this parenting model, a child is someone who is shaped and developed in large part by the mother herself (Elvin-Nowak & Thomsson, 2001). Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson (2001) averred that a mother’s identity is often so attached to her child that when the child misbehaves, the mother may blame herself for the behavior rather than question the situation. Mothers experience a great deal of pressure from the pervasive expectation that good mothering will result in well-behaved children.

Mothers often have expectations of what being a mother will be like. New mothers are told that having a baby will fill them with joy and make their lives immensely more meaningful (Lyubomirsky, 2013). When this doesn’t happen, women may become anxious, disappointed, or feel guilty for feeling this way (Lyubomirsky, 2013). If one examines the positive affect of parenting alone—and particularly motherhood—it does not appear to bring greater happiness to parents (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwartz, & Stone, 2004). In a study ranking the positive affect of different activities, mothers ranked taking care of a child lower than eating and phone calls, and only slightly above housework, chores, and commuting (Kahneman et al., 2004). Other studies, however, have shown that having children actually increases the meaning and purpose in a parent’s life (Nelson, Kushlev, English, Dunn, & Lyubomirsky, 2012).

### **Women and Depression**

As mentioned in the introduction, women are nearly twice as likely as men to suffer from an episode of depression (Kessler, 2003). The difference begins in early life and persists through

to mid-life; as such, the reproductive years have been coined by some as a “window of vulnerability” (Sassarini, 2016). A number of social, environmental, and demographic risk factors are linked to maternal depression, such as marital status and discord, family income, social support, education, and age of the mother (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Goodman et al., 2011). In one study, mothers in a lower depression trajectory group were significantly more likely to have more financial resources, a better education, and a stable marriage (Campbell, Matestic, von Stauffenberg, Mohan, & Kirchner, 2007). Mothers in the groups with higher levels of depressive symptoms were significantly worse off in terms of their finances, education, and marriage stability. These findings reported by Campbell et al. (2007) are consistent with other research which demonstrates that maternal depression is commonly linked to social and economic stress (Liaw & Brooks-Gunn, 1994). When identified, postpartum depression is usually treated as major depressive disorder. However, many studies have identified the postpartum period as a time of high risk for first presentations and relapses of bipolar disorder (Thomson & Sharma, 2016).

The key risk factors linked with poorer postpartum mental health are well documented and include: (a) a past history of depression and/or anxiety, (b) relationship problems, (c) domestic violence, (d) lack of social support, (e) stressful events, (f) isolation, (g) negative attitude toward pregnancy, and (h) personality vulnerabilities. Further, mothers of infants with medical conditions, who are born prematurely, or have a difficult temperament are more at risk of postpartum depression. Additionally, physical health problems, and low acceptance of one’s bodily changes and body weight are also associated with postpartum depression in women from both industrialized and developing countries (Palumbo, Mirabella, & Gigantesco, 2017).

Depression is a highly recurrent disorder, with the recurrence now understood to be at least partly due to the consequences of prior episodes (Olino, Klein, Lewinsohn, Rohde, & Seeley, 2010). Moreover, more than 80% of depressed individuals have more than one episode, with about 50% experiencing a reoccurrence within 2 years (Belsher & Costello, 1988) and relapse rates increasing with the number of previous episodes (Olino et al., 2010).

Despite increasing public awareness, it is frequently underdiagnosed and undertreated, leading to significant maternal morbidity and adverse child outcomes (Goodman et al., 2011). Numerous studies also link maternal depression to adverse child outcomes from infancy through adolescence, including disruptions in the caregiver attachment system, academic challenges, as well as social and emotional regulation problems (Campbell et al., 2004; Campbell et al., 2009). “As a general rule, whether implicitly or explicitly expressed, we hold mothers responsible for their children’s outcomes. This presumption of maternal guilt is not merely a social phenomenon, but an academic one as well” (Heinz, 2015, p. 2). In the past 25 years, there has been almost no research on how children’s behavior affects their parents. In her study, Heinz (2015) invited researchers to examine the other factors that account for children’s behavioral problems besides consistently linking the blame back to the mother.

### **Career: Historical View, Motherhood Penalty, and Wage Gap**

World War II started a new era in women’s career opportunities when men left their jobs for the war effort and women filled men’s roles such as accounting and administration. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s propelled women’s issues to the forefront of the American consciousness. The shift in gender roles continued once the birth control pill was developed and readily available in the 1960s. Women were now able choose to delay motherhood in favor of education, and with education they were free to choose careers, further

delaying the traditional motherhood role and setting the stage for a dramatic increase in women's participation in the workforce, from 34% in 1950 to 60% in 2000 (Toossi, 2002).

As the number of working women increased, women's health issues increased as well (Faludi, 1991). This is one of the reasons my targeted audience for this capstone was working mothers. Hauenstein, Karl, and Harburg (1977) found that women over age 40 who were highly committed to their jobs were found to have higher blood pressure and feel more stressed than those who were less career committed. While a 1986 *Fortune* magazine article noted several reasons why women leave the corporate world, ranging from competing family demands to discrimination, the underlying message was that mothers must choose between children and career and that the business world is too cold, uncaring, and tough for women (Catalyst, 2011). A litany of such articles have appeared in the popular media warning against the dangers of career commitment for women, which are said to include everything from burnout, infertility, alcoholism, and heart attacks to terminal spinsterhood (Faludi, 1991). Stress may become more intense for working women with children. Many other studies have found a relationship between parenting and various forms of strain for working women (Cleary & Mechanic, 1983; Lewis & Cooper, 1987). Furthermore, Walford-Kraemer and Light (1984) studied the connections between employed women's anxiety, depression, and hostility levels and their perceived career and family role commitments. The research found that women who placed career roles over family roles reported significantly higher anxiety and hostility levels than women who primarily focused on family. It is theorized that it is the women committed to their careers and have children who are most at risk for anxiety and depression (Beatty, 1996).

Nowadays, although it may be more socially acceptable for women to temporarily prioritize career objectives over motherhood, it remains unlikely that a working woman will

achieve the same level as a similarly educated and experienced man. As of 2017, less than 6% of S&P 500 companies have female CEOs and only 9.5% are reported to be among the top earners (Catalyst, 2011). Gender-based pay gaps continue, with the disparity wider in some industries that compensate those who work longer hours than others (Beatty, 1996). A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center (Patten, 2016), asked Americans what they thought was the reason for differences in wages between men and women. The most common explanation selected by over 60% of women was “different choices about how to balance work and family” (Ekins, 2017). Pay gap reasons such as these, as suggested by Burden and Shepardson (2013), are related to the competing demands of career and motherhood. Several studies examined in this proposal identified hardships associated with motherhood, including difficulty obtaining a job, reduced compensation, and lack of advancement opportunities.

These combined challenges led to the coinage of the term “motherhood penalty,” a situation that keeps working mothers from earning their full pay or advancing their careers to executive positions (Staff & Mortimer, 2012). Another survey found that about 20% of women say they have faced gender discrimination at work, including 12% who say they have earned less than a man doing the same job. In 2016, women held 25.1% of the executive officer positions of S&P 500 companies, yet represented only 9.5% of the top-earner positions (Catalyst, 2017). Catalyst (2017) also reported that 61.5% of all mothers with children under the age of 3 are in the labor force. In 2015, the labor force participation rate of parents with children under the age of 18 was 69.9% for mothers and 92.7% for fathers (Catalyst, 2017). Even as recently as today, a startup hedge fund in New York City currently does not offer paid maternity leave (Ekins, 2017). Not receiving paid leave after pregnancy, lower salaries, and fewer management opportunities are a few of the motherhood penalties working mothers are faced with.

### **Working Mothers Workshop: Theoretical Underpinnings**

So far, I highlighted the importance of women's well-being and the risk factors that working mothers face. In addition to being prone to depression, we cannot allow women to believe that their success and pay is out of their control and that they are systemically undervalued (Ekins, 2017). This may undermine their ability to have hopes, take initiative, and set clear goals for their future (Lyubomirsky, 2013). The next sections will focus on the both importance of settings goals and the risks associated with having conflicting goals (e.g., career and motherhood). Findings suggest that being able to juggle two goals can serve to decrease the depressive symptoms with which working mothers are challenged.

### **The Importance of Goals: Goal-Setting Theory**

The pursuit of personal goals can lead to psychological fulfillment by providing meaning and structure to one's activities and identity. In fact, the sustained pursuit of meaningful goals has been associated with increases in psychological well-being (Koestner, Lekes, Powers, & Chicoine, 2002; Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001). Goal setting and goal pursuit have also been associated with increased school performance (Covington, 2000), work performance (Locke & Latham, 2006), and increased physical well-being (Ratey, 2008). Setting personal goals helps the individual identify what is important and what outcomes are desirable and undesirable to pursue (Emmons, 2003). Goal setting can lead to achievement, which involves pursuing mastery or accomplishments for their own sake (Seligman, 2011). Achievement, in turn, increases grit, resilience, and *self-efficacy*, or confidence in one's ability to achieve a task and master goals (Locke, 1996). Self-efficacy is also linked to *grit*, or one's "perseverance and passion for long-term goals" (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007, p. 1087). Lastly, *resilience*

involves the ability to bounce back after faced with adversity and difficulties in life (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

*Meaning in life* is defined as the extent to which people see significance in their lives, accompanied by the degree to which they perceive themselves to have a purpose, mission, or overarching aim in life (Steger, 2009). Setting life goals and achieving them are key ingredients to overall well-being. Positive interventions are activities that will help people take action, create goals, and accomplish them. The difference between positive interventions and self-help is that positive interventions have been studied and tested. They demonstrate the positive effects on various areas of well-being, such as meaning, accomplishment, and emotions. Positive interventions are necessary to create a healthy mind and body, before one is ready to take action toward chosen goals.

Positive psychology practitioners should continue to help individuals build goals as “hope is a human strength that fuels our pursuit of the good life” (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015, p. 500). Along with hope, motivation is also a vital component of goal achievement. If hope is the ability to think of multiple ways to reach a goal (pathways), motivation is the agency to use the pathways identified (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015). Motivation allows people to pay attention to the right things, exert effort, and persist until the goal is achieved (Locke, 1996). The goal-setting theory proposed by Professor Edwin Locke suggests that people who have more difficult but attainable goals perform better than people who have less difficult goals. In other words, if the task were not difficult, there would be a lack of motivation to perform. The theory states that motivational goals need to have the following five dimensions: (a) clarity, (b) challenge, (c) commitment, (d) feedback, and (e) complexity.

Long-term goals in combination with self-efficacy can mediate the sometimes negative effects of personality traits, feedback, and money incentives. Because everything is not possible for everyone, a key principal here is personal context. Life goals must be based on what a person really wants and based on their capabilities (Locke, 1996). Similar to the hope theory, goal theory also points out the importance of a feedback loop to determine progress toward long-term goals. Both theories use positive intervention strategies to improve people's skills, overcome barriers, and increase self-efficacy.

We need a healthy mind to exert the effort needed to reach our goals. A negative mindset will make it almost impossible to achieve life goals. Thankfully, there are positive interventions that help us strengthen our mind. Hope interventions can identify pathways to help people reach goals (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015). Elements of goal theory facilitate the motivation required for the pathways identified (Locke, 1996). We must also remember the importance of physical activity and incorporate these concepts into goal-based, positive interventions. We have the freedom to set goals for ourselves, but keep in mind research suggests that they must be difficult, specific, and achievable.

### **Too Much of a Good Thing?**

In today's world so many things are competing for our attention. In the United States, it seems the work days are growing longer and we have technology to keep us plugged in to a never-ending stream of news feeds, television, and social media. We can see positive trends from the strong American work ethic; our rising gross domestic product, rising minimum wage, decreasing poverty levels, and unemployment rates (Patten, 2016). However, we have also observed a rising rate of anxiety and depression diagnoses in the United States (Mental Health America, n.d.). We have more choices for just about everything, from breakfast options in the



cereal aisle to finding a mate online. The vast amount of choices and activities competing for our attention can negatively affect our well-being and psychological health (Kahneman et al., 2004). One way to mitigate the overwhelming feelings that come with living in a modern society with an overabundance of choice is to use techniques and habits that limit our need to choose from too many options. Barak Obama famously had his clothes selected for him the night before in order to minimize the number of decisions he made in a day so that he could focus on the ones that were most important to the governance of our nation (Lewis, 2012). If we focus our attention on well-being and exercise self-control, we can change our lives as well as the lives of others.

Past and present research suggest that self-control skills can be developed. These skills can be strengthened like a muscle. Three valuable perspectives on self-control are self-regulation, self-efficacy, and emotional intelligence. Self-regulation is an important human trait that allows us to choose how we respond to stimuli. The term is often used synonymously with self-control because it gives us control over our thoughts, feelings, and actions (Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall, & Oaten, 2006). It gives us the power to focus our attention on positive outcomes, such as successfully reducing alcohol and caffeine consumption. People who demonstrate behaviors of self-regulation, such as delayed gratification and conscientiousness, appear to be more successful in life. However, we have a limited amount of self-regulation energy in our tank. When we are running low on regulation fuel, we can make poor judgements and decisions. This is defined as *ego depletion*. We can think of ego depletion as weakened state of self-control. In this state, people typically spend money lavishly, respond aggressively, and eat or drink compulsively. These types of decisions will not help one's overall well-being.

We must strengthen our self-regulation muscle to maintain our ability to act in alignment with our goals of well-being (Baumeister et al., 2006).

We can harness the self-regulation powers from within to create the life we desire (Brown & Ryan, 2015). This concept is further illustrated through the motivational orientations in the self-determination theory. This theory argues that there are two main types of motivators that guide our behavior. These types (i.e., extrinsic and intrinsic motivation) have heavy consequences for our self-regulation and well-being (Brown & Ryan, 2015). *Extrinsic motivation* involves ego and external rewards such as wealth, popularity, and pride. *Intrinsic motivation* is associated with internal satisfaction, autonomy, and enjoyment. While extrinsic motivation can be useful in some circumstances, such as threats, deadlines, and performance evaluations, it is associated with “greater stress, anxiety, self-handicapping and unstable persistence” (Brown & Ryan, 2015, p. 141). For psychological and physical well-being, it is important to foster our intrinsic motivation. Three ways to strengthen intrinsic motivation are through autonomy, social support, and mindfulness. We can think of mindfulness as windshield wipers that help reduce the volume of choices that are imposed on us. Reducing mind clutter can increase our autonomy or freedom to choose how we wish to live our life and to what we choose to pay attention. In addition, embracing social support from people, we feel a strong connection, which is crucial for our psychological needs and happiness (Brown & Ryan, 2015).

Developing positive qualities and traits is key to our well-being. The strong belief that we are able to develop and strengthen self-control leads us to the self-efficacy theory. This theory states that one’s belief in her ability to achieve a desired outcome often determines the outcome. Simply stated, she thought she could and she did. Self-efficacy influences the behaviors people chose and their ability to persevere when faced with challenges. These self-

efficacy beliefs stem from a social cognitive theory principle that states “We are capable of self-regulation. We choose goals and regulate our behavior in pursuit of these goals” (Maddux, 2009, p. 4). We use past experiences to form beliefs about future outcomes and our abilities, hence it is important to avoid self-defeating behaviors. When we have high self-efficacy, we are calm and are less distressed about the future. To treat people with anxiety and poor performance, therapists use strategies to enhance self-efficacy, such as hypnosis, relaxation, and meditation (Maddux, 2009).

### **Goal Conflict and Psychological Distress**

Although goal setting can promote achievement and self-efficacy, problems can arise when an individual holds multiple goals at the same time. When two goals lead to incommensurate outcomes or compete for the same resources, for example, goal conflict arises. A meta-analysis on goal conflict provided evidence on the negative impact goal conflict can have on psychological well-being (Gray et al., 2016).

Goal conflict is present when the pursuit of one valued goal hinders the pursuit of another valued goal (Austin & Vancouver, 1996). Despite their theoretical differences, Maslow (1954), Lewin (1935), Hull, and Freud (Buel, 1938) all described the negative psychological implications of goal conflict. Moreover, contemporary theories of motivation also include goal conflict as a potential source of psychological strain (Carver & Scheier, 1982; McNaughton & Gray, 2000). Nonetheless, despite a clear theoretical consensus regarding the effects of goal conflict on psychological well-being, there have been contradictory and inconsistent findings in the literature and thus, a quantitative review of the association between goal conflict and psychological well-being is warranted.

Goal conflict can arise for a number of reasons. Some goals conflict because simultaneous pursuit of both goals involves incompatible strategies (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006; Wilensky, 1983). Such goals as “be more assertive” and “be well-liked” may be incompatible with one another, as making progress toward one of these goals may undermine progress toward the other (Boudreaux & Ozer, 2012). This type of inherent goal conflict should be distinguished from other forms of goal conflict that may arise because resources are finite and the individual must choose which goal to pursue and which one to set aside (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006). Resource conflict arises even when goals are not necessarily incompatible, but draw upon the same finite resources. Goals such as “get promoted at work” and “spend more time with my baby” are not inherently incompatible, but both require significant amounts of time to be achieved.

The goal conflict that working mothers often face can hinder their ability to pursue goals because the pursuit of one goal comes at the expense of another goal. Pursuit of a successful career can cause feelings of guilt and a strong belief that working may hinder the development of their child (Beatty, 1996). A goal which is obstructed or constrained is linked with decreased psychological well-being (Sheldon, Jose, Kashdan, & Jarden, 2015). Previous research has demonstrated that higher levels of goal conflict are associated with increased rumination about goals, more inhibited goal pursuit, and decreased goal progress (Boudreaux & Ozer, 2012; Kleiman & Hassin, 2011). Boudreaux and Ozer (2012) found that the decreased goal progress associated with goal conflict should lead to increases in psychological distress, and may actually serve as a call for one to modify their goals or strategies. The following section will describe how positive psychology interventions may help reduce unhelpful rumination and negative emotions, and increase goal achievement for working mothers. With the support of

organizations and the research of positive psychology, it may be possible to slow down the rate of women with depression and anxiety.

### **Applying Positive Psychology to Working Mothers**

Organizations, marriages, and children depend on the well-being of working mothers. Therefore, it is not a stretch to say the world depends on women being successful both in the office and at home. I recommend that organizations teach positive psychology tools as an ongoing workshop for women's well-being, both professionally and personally. The tools of positive psychology have infused the lives and careers of thousands of people with greater joy, meaning, and love, including troops in the U.S. Army (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2011). This proposed workshop is a smart investment to retain female workforce as well as bolster employee performance. According to a recent Google study (Johnson, 2017), it costs on average \$4,000 and 52 days to recruit a new employee, in addition to the costs to train a new hire. As the workshop gains momentum, there are other topics to add, such as vitality and mindfulness, which are also linked to increased well-being. Because mothers are already too busy, the workshop is 4 weeks long and 2 hours per session. Based on research, the tools highlighted below may have the most immediate positive effect on working mothers as they help alleviate psychological distress, an effect of goal-conflict. These topics will help provide working mothers with a few tools to help them navigate through the challenges they face trying to do-it-all, and the myriad of decisions they make on a daily basis.

#### **Sample 4-Week Workshop**

- “Resilience and Optimism”: These fundamental positive psychology skills will be critical to working mothers to help them bounce back from the myriad of challenges they will face with competing goals. Finding your way out of crazy town is not about smoothing

everything out at once. It's about riding the twists and turns of the bumpy road called life (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

- “Thinking Traps”: It is very common to fall into negative thought patterns when mothers encounter adversity (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Negative thinking often yields negative results. A tiny change in thought patterns can help mothers stay motivated and optimistic about achieving multiple goals.
- “VIA Character Strengths”: The VIA survey has been taken by well over 2 million people in over 250 countries and gives the user immediate feedback on their top strengths of character (Niemiec, 2013). Individuals who use their top strengths tend to experience less anxiety and less depression (Park et al., 2004). Working mothers will learn to use their strengths both at work and at home to achieve goals and increase their well-being.
- “Minimizing and Satisficing”: Roets, Schwartz, and Guan's (2012) strategy for struggling during challenging times in life involves reducing the number of decisions made on a daily basis, anywhere from food to clothes. For example, one's child will get the same three snacks, or one can decide to limit oneself to shopping at only two stores. In the myriad of difficult choices a working mother must make (e.g. stay late at work or spend time with child), satisficing limits the less important decisions to make (e.g. apples or plums).

### **Week 1: Resilience and Optimism**

In the first week of the workshop working mothers will be introduced to a broad and important positive psychology topics, resilience and optimism. With the challenges that come with having competing goals, building resilience through increasing optimism will help working

mothers stay motivated through setbacks (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). As mentioned, women have an even higher risk of depression, especially after having a child. In the United States, 1 in 4 women are diagnosed with postpartum depression, and that statistic is only measuring those who seek help (Mental Health America, n.d.). While some thrive in the face of hardship or potential hardship, others falter with setbacks such as addiction, marriage obstacles, and anxiety that become devastating to their overall well-being (Shiner, Masten, & Tellegen, 2002). The resilience of working mothers plays a role in enabling them to overcome such setbacks (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

By teaching mothers about resilience, they will be given tools that enable them to rebound from negative events and grow despite the challenges they face (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Reivich and Shatte (2002) noted a key resilience “competency” to develop, which is optimism. Optimism can help mothers to increase self-awareness, control impulses, build mental agility, and form stronger connections. Simply put, it is important to develop optimism in order to become more resilient (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). To develop optimism, the workshop will incorporate elements from the *hope theory* framework. According to the hope theory, individuals can accentuate their ability to remain hopeful by a) clearly conceptualizing goals; b) develop strategies to reach those goals; and c) initiate and sustain motivation for using those strategies (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015). Hope and optimism has been studied for the past century because studies show is in an agent in change (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015) and increasing resilience (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). It is theorized the more hopeful one is, the more chance one has for creating a good life (Magyar-Moe & Lopez, 2015). The workshop will help working mothers conceptualize their goals (e.g. obtain the promotion at work and attend daughter’s recital); develop strategies (e.g. ask for social support); initiate and stay motivated (e.g. ignite the

spark to make changes to increase well-being). Attendees will also start a journal using an *optimistic explanatory style*—describe what is going well and what is controllable in their lives, and to focus on what can be changed versus what cannot be changed (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Optimism skills will be critical to working mothers to help them bounce back from the myriad of challenges they will face with competing goals. Another important resilience skill is Thinking Traps which will be highlighted in the next workshop.

## **Week 2: Thinking Traps**

It is very common to fall into thinking traps when we encounter adversity (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). A *thinking trap* is when we are stuck in a pattern of feeling upset, even when the situation doesn't warrant this reaction anymore. For example, we feel equally on edge when there is no traffic because there could be an accident ahead. There is no break from worry. A busy working mother can expect constant challenges to arise. For example, one's child may catch a cold, making one late to an important meeting. It can be valuable and realistic to evaluate negative thoughts to help mothers understand or think through situations (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Nonetheless, negative thoughts can also be harmful and illogical, causing people to spiral into negative thinking patterns. For example, attributing little Billy's cold to the thought that one's husband never zips up his coat will only make a mother angry at her husband. Arguing with one's husband will likely make one feel worse rather than help the situation improve. This is an example of the harmful thinking pattern known as *externalization*, which is one type of thinking trap where the blame is placed on others (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

Other common thinking traps include: (a) jumping to conclusions, (b) mind reading, (c) overgeneralizing, (d) personalizing, (e) all-or-nothing thinking, (f) emotional reasoning, and (g)



tunnel vision (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). By avoiding thinking traps in times of high emotion, mothers will be more capable of weighing possible outcomes and making rational decisions (Reivich & Shatte, 2002). Practicing exercises, such as reframing negative self-talk and taking others' perspectives, can help women overcome negative thinking habits. Workshop participants would review the "Thinking Trap Summary" (see Table 1) and consider which traps they believe they fall into regularly by monitoring their thoughts for a week and jotting them down in a notebook. During this session of the workshop, they will identify some recent hot-button adversities that set them off. Then, they will reflect on the different types and patterns of adversities they face at work, at home, and in their social life.

One example shared in a previous workshop was an argument between a married couple, Andy and Valerie. Andy is responsible for taking out the trash, while Valerie is responsible for the laundry. After a long day at work one day, Valerie comes home to discover the trash bins were never taken out to the curb.

Table 1

*Thinking Traps Summary*

Trap Name	What it involves (recognizing the trap)	Consequence	Reminder (say to yourself)	Ask Yourself (to get out of the trap)
Jumping to conclusions	Ready, aim, fire: Believing one is certain of the meaning of the situation despite little or no evidence to support it.	Impulsivity	Slow down	What is the evidence?
Overgeneralizing	Character assassination: Settling on global beliefs about one's general lack of worth or ability on the basis of a single situation.	Quitting	Look at behavior	Is there a specific behavior that explains the situation?
Personalizing	Me, me, me: The tendency to automatically attribute the cause of an event to one's personal characteristics or actions.	Sadness, Guilt or Withdrawal	Look outward	How did others or circumstances contribute to what happened?

Externalizing	Them, them, them: The tendency to automatically attribute the cause of an event to other people or to circumstances.	Anger and Aggression	Look inward	How did I contribute to what happened?
Mind reading	Assumptions Believing that you know what the other person is thinking, or expecting others to know what you are thinking.	Decreased Communication	Speak up	What could you say or ask to increase understanding?
All or nothing thinking	Extreme views Thinking in extremes and seeing situations as either / or	Perfectionism	Shades of grey	What nuance am I missing? Is it really black and white?

*Note.* This table is based on information from Karen Reivich's MAPP lecture, March 2017, University of Pennsylvania.

She angrily drags them to the curb thinking, "I have to work full-time, cook dinner, and do all of the house chores. It is not fair. My husband has no respect for me." She then stormed into the house and started an argument with her husband which caused him to leave to blow off some of his steam. Words have a lot of power—both the ones we tell ourselves and the ones we speak to others. The next day when they were both more relaxed, Andy explained that he was laser focused on submitting a grant proposal that was due by 6:00 p.m. and completely forgot that it was garbage night. Valerie's belief that she always has to do everything caused her to have a strong emotional response whereby she became very angry. After having a conversation about it, Andy was able to understand why Valerie felt that he was being unfair and they both apologized to one another. Thus, detecting these thinking traps, such as jumping to conclusions in Valerie's example, can help individuals identify beliefs that prevent them from responding effectively to conflicts. If you are able to identify them, you can start changing your belief patterns and prevent them from causing a downturn in your mood (Reivich & Shatte, 2002).

### **Week 3: Character Strengths**

Using one's character strengths has been shown to have many benefits. Individuals who use their strengths tend to experience less anxiety, less depression, and an enhanced sense of well-being (Park et al., 2004). Based on research, there are 24 character strengths which are morally valued across cultures (Park et al., 2004). They are the basic building blocks of human goodness, individual fulfillment, satisfaction, and flourishing (Niemiec, 2013). For example, strengths such as bravery, humor, kindness, and spirituality are associated with resilience from an illness or trauma, while the character strengths of hope, love, gratitude, zest, and curiosity are associated with greater life satisfaction (Park et al., 2004). In order to use these strengths, one must be able to identify and apply them when faced with stress or hardship. Fortunately, character strengths can be developed and most people can enhance their capacity to express each of the 24 character strengths through their use and practice (Niemiec, 2013). By identifying signature strengths and suggesting ways to develop these traits, the VIA Classification System (see Appendix) can be an effective tool that positively affects well-being (Park et al., 2004).

In order to use these strengths, however, one must be able to both identify the strengths themselves and know how to apply them to problem solve or boost personal functioning (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2011). In their study, Biswas-Diener et al. (2011) offered a concept they called *strength development*, which refers to understanding when the use of strengths is advantageous and when it is not. Part of the concept of strengths development is the idea that strengths are not static entities, but rather are traits which have a "golden mean" (Biswas-Diener et al., 2011). In other words, one should not overuse or underuse strengths, there is a balance that gives optimal results (see Table 2).

Table 2

*The Golden Mean: Finding the Right Balance Among the Overuse and Underuse of Our Core**Strengths*

Strength	Overuse	Underuse	Core
Creativity	Eccentricity	Conformity	Originality that is adaptive
Curiosity	Nosiness	Disinterest	Exploration/seeking novelty
Judgment	Narrow-mindedness, cynicism	Unreflectiveness	Critical thinking & rationality
Love of Learning	Know-it-all	Complacency	Systematic deepening (of knowledge)
Perspective	Overbearing	Shallowness	The wider view
Bravery	Foolhardiness	Cowardice	Facing fears, confronting adversity
Perseverance	Obsessiveness	Fragility	Keep going, overcome all obstacles
Honesty	Righteousness	Phoniness	Being authentic
Zest	Hyperactive	Sedentary	Enthusiasm for life
Love	Emotional promiscuity	Emotional isolation	Genuine, reciprocal warmth
Kindness	Intrusiveness	Indifference	Doing for others
Social Intelligence	Over-analyzing	Obtuse or clueless	Tuned in, then savvy
Teamwork	Dependant	Selfishness	Collaborative, participating in a group effort
Fairness	Detachment	Partisanship	Equal opportunity for all
Leadership	Despotism	Compliant	Positively influencing others
Forgiveness	Permissive	Merciless	Letting go of hurt when wronged
Humility	Self-deprecation	Baseless self-esteem	Achievement does not elevate worth
Prudence	Stuffiness	Sensation seeking	Wise caution
Self-Regulation	Inhibition	Self-indulgence	Self-management of vices
Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence	Snobbery or Perfectionism	Oblivion	Seeing the life behind things
Gratitude	Ingratiation	Rugged individualism	Thankfulness
Hope	Pollyanna-ism	Negative	Positive expectations
Humor	Giddiness	Overly serious	Offering pleasure/laughter to others
Spirituality	Fanaticism	Anomie	Connecting with the sacred

In addition to deploying one's signature strengths in an optimal way, research has found that using them at work is linked with greater work satisfaction, greater well-being, and higher meaning in life (Niemic, 2013). The organization can also benefit from this workshop as two of the most important predictors of employee retention and satisfaction are (a) reporting you use your top strengths at work, and (b) reporting that your immediate supervisor recognizes your top strengths (Niemic, 2013).

#### **Week 4: Minimizing and Satisficing**

Minimizing and satisficing are strategies to facilitate decision-making during a challenging time in life, such as new motherhood. Minimizing involves reducing the vast number of decisions we need to make on a daily basis, which can range from food choices to options for soaps to clothing options. This can help dramatically reduce the number of choices one must make per day. For examples, one may opt to purchase the same kind of soap and shampoo every time or only shop for clothes from two stores.

Roets et al. (2012) argued that in societies where individual choice is highly valued and considered the ultimate route to personal happiness, also known as maximizers' dissatisfaction with imperfect choices, can be detrimental to well-being. By contrast, less-than-perfect choices may be a much less crucial determinant of well-being in societies that place less emphasis on choice as the means to happiness.

Previous research suggests a link between a stronger desire to maximize the number of options and worse life outcomes (Parker, Bruine de Bruin, & Fischhoff, 2007). Here, we examine whether this finding may be explained by maximizers' decision-making styles. Expanding on Schwartz et al.'s (2002) work, Parker et al. (2007) found that self-reported

maximizers are more likely to show problematic decision-making styles, reporting less *behavioral coping* (use of mental effort to tolerate stress), greater dependence on others when making decisions, more avoidance of decision making, and greater tendency to experience regret after having made a decision. Moreover, maximizers were also more likely to report spontaneous decision making. Further, the relationship between maximizing and worse life outcomes remained largely unaffected even when controlling for other decision-making styles, decision-making competence, and demographic variables (Parker et al., 2007).

The question remains: Can people feel worse off as their options increase? The present studies suggest that for maximizers, the answer is yes. One study conducted by Schwartz et al. (2002) utilized a maximization scale, measuring individual differences in desire to maximize. Seven samples revealed negative correlations between maximization and happiness, optimism, self-esteem, and life satisfaction, and positive correlations between maximization and depression, perfectionism, and regret. Another study found that maximizers were less satisfied than non-maximizers (i.e., satisficers) with consumer decisions, and were more likely to engage in social comparison. Study 3 found maximizers to be more adversely affected by upward social comparison, and Study 4 found that maximizers were more sensitive to regret and less satisfied in an ultimatum bargaining game. Thus, the interaction between maximizing and choice is often experienced in terms of regret, adaptation, and self-blame (Schwartz et al., 2002).

In Marie Kondo's best-seller (2014), *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, she provides the reader tips based on the Japanese culture of efficiency on how to declutter our homes, drawers and closets. But what about decluttering our minds? As of today, there are no minimizing and satisficing interventions and I recommend that the field of positive psychology conduct more research on the benefits of limiting decisions. Working mothers are constantly

making tiny decisions throughout the day, like what to eat, what to cook, what to wear, which route to take to work or when to respond to an email. Individuals process approximately 35,000 tiny decisions daily, which can cause decision fatigue and prevent us from doing our best work and achieving goals (Parker et al., 2007). Therefore there needs to be more research on satisficing and minimizing to create a tested positive intervention around this topic. However there are plenty of books and blogs on how to practice minimizing and reduce decision fatigue such as a) make larger decisions in the morning and stick to the plan; b) limit the number of options; c) done is better than perfect; d) avoid distractions and e) if it wasn't on your morning plan say no (Rochino, 2015). I would like to see if practicing these minimizing techniques can help working mothers have more mental energy to stay motivated and achieve their goals—both at work and at home.

### **Conclusion**

This capstone's aim was to illustrate the underlying theories of positive psychology and apply them to improve the quality of life and well-being of working mothers. One of the main causes of distress for working mothers is goal conflict. As research suggests, goals are important for numerous reasons such as boosting self-efficacy, meaning, and fulfillment (Steger, 2009). Not being able to pursue goals has a direct impact on one's mental health. Encouraged by the use of evidence-based interventions, working mothers can be successful both at work and at home; however, this is no small feat. Mothers need both a strong and healthy mind to exert the effort needed to reach goals in both their professional and personal lives. A negative mindset will make it almost impossible to achieve life goals. Thankfully, there are positive interventions such as resilience training, character strengths development, and thinking-trap exercises to help us build a healthy mind. In the "we can do it all" generation, we have the freedom to do

anything we want, but keep in mind research suggests that minimizing decisions may be the secret to a happier life. Future applications and research are needed to help practitioners identify the most effective components of positive psychology to combat goal conflict. To propose more solutions to this conflict, more research on child development that is not linked back to the mother needs to be conducted. There are many other environmental and dynamical factors that can cause behavioral problems in children.



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## Appendix: VIA Classification of Character Strengths

1. **Wisdom and Knowledge** – Cognitive strengths that entail the acquisition and use of knowledge
  - **Creativity** [originality, ingenuity]: Thinking of novel and productive ways to conceptualize and do things; includes artistic achievement but is not limited to it
  - **Curiosity** [interest, novelty-seeking, openness to experience]: Taking an interest in ongoing experience for its own sake; finding subjects and topics fascinating; exploring and discovering
  - **Judgment** [open-mindedness, critical thinking]: 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
  - **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
  - **Perspective** [wisdom]: Being able to provide wise counsel to others; having ways of looking at the world that make sense to oneself/others
2. **Courage** – Emotional strengths that involve the exercise of will to accomplish goals in the face of opposition, external or internal
  - **Bravery** [valor]: 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

- **Perseverance** [persistence, industriousness]: Finishing what one starts; persevering in a course of action in spite of obstacles; “getting it out the door”; taking pleasure in completing tasks
  - **Honesty** [authenticity, integrity]: 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
  - **Zest** [vitality, enthusiasm, vigor, energy]: Approaching life with excitement and energy; not doing things halfway or halfheartedly; living life as an adventure; feeling alive and activated
3. **Humanity** – Interpersonal strengths that involve tending and befriending others
- **Love** (capacity to love and be loved): Valuing close relations with others, in particular those in which sharing & caring are reciprocated; being close to people
  - **Kindness** [generosity, nurturance, care, compassion, altruistic love, “niceness”]: Doing favors and good deeds for others; helping them; taking care of them
  - **Social Intelligence** [emotional intelligence, personal 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
4. **Justice** – Civic strengths that underlie healthy community life
- **Teamwork** [citizenship, social responsibility, loyalty]: Working well as a member of a group or team; being loyal to the group; doing one's share
  - **Fairness**: Treating all people the same according to notions of fairness & justice; not letting feelings bias decisions about others; giving everyone a fair chance

- **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
5. **Temperance** – Strengths that protect against excess
- **Forgiveness** [mercy]: Forgiving those who have done wrong; accepting others' shortcomings; giving people a second chance; not being vengeful
  - **Humility** [modesty]: Letting one's accomplishments speak for themselves; not regarding oneself as more special than one is
  - **Prudence**: Being careful about one's choices; not taking undue risks; not saying or doing things that might later be regretted
  - **Self-Regulation** [self-control]: Regulating what one feels and does; being disciplined; controlling one's appetites and emotions
6. **Transcendence** – Strengths that forge connections to the universe & provide meaning
- **Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence** [awe, wonder, elevation]: 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
  - **Gratitude**: Being aware of and thankful for the good things that happen; taking time to express thanks
  - **Hope** [optimism, future-mindedness, future orientation]: Expecting the best in the future and working to achieve it; believing that a good future is something that can be brought about
  - **Humor** [playfulness]: Liking to laugh and tease; bringing smiles to other people; seeing the light side; making (not necessarily telling) jokes

- **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

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